Chapter V

HERZOG
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Herzog was published in the year 1964 by Viking Press. And in the year 1965, for this novel Saul Bellow was awarded National Book Award for the second time and also he was awarded the Prix Litteraire International.¹

Herzog, a college professor who has divorced twice reviews his life while living as a bachelor in his rundown house. Herzog also reviews his return to the Berkshire town of Ludeyville and to a house he had abandoned to his second wife Madeleine, who is living in Chicago with his friend Valentine Gessbach along with his daughter Junie. He spends sometime with Ramona and his decision to return immediately to New York, where he continues the letter writing which later becomes his compulsion. He tries to see his lower Harvey Simkin to gain custody of Junie. In the courtroom, his mind is diverted by a series of hearings in the court. A wild thought crosses his mind in the court, the thought of killing his ex-wife Madeleine and her lover Gersbach to save his daughter. This he plans to do with the help of his deceased father’s pistol. When he arrives near his home and has a view of his house from some hidden vantage point he sees Gersbach giving Junie a bath. His plan crashes at the sight of Gersbach’s tender treatment of Junie. He fails to kill anybody. Next Herzog arranges a trip to take Junie to an

* Herzog, New York, Penguin Bok (Re). 1964. All further references to Herzog are to this edition of the work and the title will be abbreviated as H.
aquarium. Junie meets with an accident and he is charged by the police with carrying a pistol. His brother will meet him in the police station and a bond is signed for his release and Herzog returns to Berkshires.

Herzog is not just a novel but an educational treatise. It comprises, as has often been started, the whole of the Bellow cosmos: the characters, incidents, ideas, stylistic idiosyncrasy, the seemingly casual form, the intense authorial presence, the Jewishness, the humour, the city background, an erudite, elegant and restless mind. Herzog thus contains the final synthesis of what Bellow has learned as a writer. He himself states that in writing this novel he was completing a development, "coming to the end of a literary sensibility. This sensibility implies a certain attitude toward civilization – anomaly, estrangement, the outsider, the collapse of humanism." Herzog is no less than a fervent defiance of pessimism concerning the human condition in the present time. Herzog is a representative book, in another sense of the United States during the 1960s the study of Herzog will provide a most rewarding and amazingly comprehensive introduction.

In this novel Saul Bellow presents once again some of the important events/themes from a humanistic point of view which will be discussed in detail in section III.

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4 Ibid. p. 94
Herzog is a realistic word and psychological novel. It is also a novel of ideas and is partly an epistolary novel. The narrative perspective is difficult to understand because Herzog is in a contemplative mood with himself as the object of contemplation. He is not only thinking but thinking his own act of thinking. What possesses in his mind during his reminiscing is the content of the novel. But this content throws important light on Herzog’s character and situation.

The novel relates to how Herzog faces the world with its negative sides. Time and again, Bellow’s protagonist finds himself face to face with the unpleasant and harsh reality as when he discovers the affair between Gersbach and his wife, or again in the court room scene when as a casual observer he leaves the room in a sickened state because of his insight into man’s inhumanity and into the essential unconcern with which the machinery of law works in the world.

Almost every character that Bellow introduces into his work gives for Herzog of a new but painful illumination. Herzog deals with the theme of innocence versus worldliness. As such resolution of the conflict does not indicate a clear vision of life but a partial one or worse a distorted one. This theme bypasses the storm that rages within Bellow’s protagonist — and this storm is what the novel is about. Such a theme ordinarily emerges from the struggles of the protagonist with the world; in Bellow’s novel that struggle fails to lend itself to any sustained development. The reason is simple though Herzog is innocent and

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though he does confront reality, the confrontation takes place within the protagonist himself.

One of Bellow's meanings, then concerns the intellectual who lacks confidence in the value of the self. By nature, Herzog is passive, unable or unwilling not only to express his own importance to himself in meaningful terms but to define his value in a society that does not pay him what he feels to be his due respect. All of his work and all of his ideals seen at odds with the activity and the facts of the world about him.

Bellow's novel may be understood as a work stressing the need of the human being to know himself. Bellow's purpose seems to hurt at the idea that it is also the duty of the human being to explore his self within and not merely outside of himself in relation to his fellow beings. By knowing both the dimensions of his life man can have a better grasp of reality. Otherwise he would know the reality only partially and superficially like the actors on the stage. Of Faust, which allows us to interpret Herzog's experiences and dilemmas through the Faustian myth and further, to see Herzog as representative of the intellectual development of man since the Renaissance.

That Bellow puts his personal ideas into the reflections of Herzog may be seen from the content of some of his critical essays and reviews. In 1956, Bellow took a positive stand against philosophical pessimism.\(^6\) In the following years, especially during the time of the writing of Herzog, he rarely an opportunity to decide the false Cassandra of the Western world. In a short piece entitled "A comment of Form and

Despair" diatribes against the doom of the west as being “the Established Church in modern Literature."  

In his essay “The Future of Fiction” Bellow gives hints on his next work Herzog regarding the style of Herzog. The function of great fictions, even if it concerns itself with such topics as hate and despair will always be to create scale, to order experience, to giver value, to make perspective and to carry us toward sources of life, toward life-giving things.”8 “Where Do We Go From Here: The Future of Fiction” also contains one of the basic tenets of Bellow’s code as a writer: “The imagination is looking for new ways to express virtue.”9 Herzog’s “virtue” is the main issue of Herzog. The novel also presents many ideas, which reveal a great deal about the depth and maturity of the character.

The development of Herzog’s mind is seen in the way he touches upon various ideas and then tries to put them. More often than not he rejects these act accordingly. The main interest of the novel lies in Herzog’s description of his former selves, his mild comments on what he calls the “earlier avatar of his life”10 He also enlists his various positions in which he had gone through different experiences as victim, lover avenger, scholar, saver of mankind. While he describes these various experiences he shows that he does not remain confined to one particular position but moves away progressively from one to the other and advancing towards. He feels having become like “Moses, the old

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8 ibid. p.33.
9 ibid. p.33.
Jew-man of Ludeyville, with a white beard, cutting the grass under the washline with my antique reel-mower, eating woodchucks.”

Yet Herzog does not think that by acting the role of a victim he is precisely like other victims found in the works of other writers. He shows that he is different. Bellow does make the novel as a break away from that kind of tradition. The novel seems not precisely and in tone but somewhat moving partly pathetic and partly comic. Herzog, in his own words, “makes comic use of complaint” Herzog, who says about himself that he “hates the victim bit” and comes to see suffering as “another bad habit” or simply a waste of time. He takes a fresh look at his own situation and moves forward, Bellow does not talk in terms of theatrical language indirectly. He becomes forthright and direct in his use of the theatrical language. “All the main figures in Herzog are at one time or other directly called actors; there is much talk about putting on shows, changing roles, performing, and clowning. Madeleine’s character seems to drawn in a somewhat dramatic fashion because she acts a little less than rationally. Herzog has a gift for concerning things visually and invents fantastic imaginary ‘back drops’ as settings for the ranting of his emotions. Again in style Herzog combines the two main impulses of Bellow’s fiction: realism and romance. Like Dangling Man and The Victim, Herzog too conveys the sense of a real sufferer caught in

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11 Boroff, D. op. cit. p. 38
13 H
14 H
15 H
difficult circumstances and neurotic attitudes. Like Augie March, Herzog displays an exuberance and a sense of infinite possibilities.

As Bellow dramatizes Herzog’s consciousness his mind is a huge battlefield upon which many skirmishes and combats, intellectual and emotional, comic and tragic, take place. Everything in this novel is presented through Herzog’s eyes and stream of consciousness, so that there are dramatic changes in pace and tempo. 17

The device of the mental letters that are at times jotted down but never posted was done in the manner in which it was used in the 18th century. 18 The device is seen as providing the novelist to rove freely back and forth in time and have a wider range or canvas for his narrative. It gave Bellow a good opportunity to modulate the novel’s rhythms. As a form of punctuation, it broke up what could have been long, monotonous stretches of brooding and meditation. With the use of this device Bellow can explore the deeper the hidden recesses of Herzog’s psyche. Besides, it enabled Bellow to easily introduce his ideas in his fiction.

Again, because of Herzog’s intellectual bent of mind he finds Banowitch’s theory that all struggles for power have to be understood in terms of paranoid mentality and that madness rules the world very interesting. 19 Herzog accepts Nietzsche’s insistence that one has to ask the most piercing questions “into evil, through evil, past evil”. 20 But he

17 ibid.
18 ibid. p.174
19 Scheer-Schazler, Brigitte, op. cit. p.100.
rejects Nietzsche’s belief in the power of the Dionysian spirit to recover after witnessing Decomposition, Hideousness, and Evil.

The novel has some of the elements/events/themes which can be better understood from a humanistic point of view which is discussed in the next section of the research study.

III

As stated earlier in section I and II, Herzog is a novel by Saul Bellow which presents more emphatically the humanistic elements in terms of its theme, character and even some important critical observations on Jewish situation that is done in the earlier novels. In this novel, Bellow seems to be deeply involved in portraying the situation of an American Jew living in the modern world.

Herzog’s ethical attitude is evident in some moments of cool thinking. He is greatly distressed and disillusioned by the world of those people around him who had made human life a purely commercial affair. To him human beings ought to preserve the sanctity of life and not reduce it to a business transaction. The following remarks are clearly expressive of his essential humanistic thinking which looks down upon such shameful commercialisation. He finds it to be especially true of the lives of people living in metropolitan areas:

21 H(11)
The life of every citizen is becoming a business. This, it seems to me, is one of the worst interpretations of the meaning of human life history has ever seen. Man's life is not a business.\footnote{22}

Herzog is flighty. In the train to Vineyard Haven he experiences "his eager, flying spirit storming out, speaking, piercing, making clear judgements, uttering final explanations, necessary words only. He was in a whirling ecstasy".\footnote{23} His muddied spirit is also present: "He felt at the same time that his judgements exposed the boundless, baseless, bossiness and wilfulness, the nagging embedded in his mental constitution".\footnote{24} Herzog is driven to write mental letters because he is tormented by a voice written him: "There is someone inside me. I am in his grip when I speak of him I feel him in my head, pounding for order. He will ruin me".\footnote{25} Herzog writes a letter to Madeleine's aunty Zinka, about his dream that the world is full of sadness and sorrows and there is no stability anywhere. He thinks of the de-humanization of the weaker sections and hates corrupted and fundamentalist people. He believes in humanity, tolerance and peaceful co-existence, man's earthly life, moral philosophy and dignity of man. He argues against medieval asceticism and monasticism.\footnote{26} He feels he has travelled for and wide and known the situation of the people around the world.

\footnote{22}{\textit{ibid.}}
\footnote{23}{ibid.}
\footnote{24}{\textit{ibid.}}
\footnote{26}{H(67)}
"The year I covered half the world, and saw people in such numbers — it seems to me I saw everybody but the dead."27

Herzog's mind is working towards creating a pattern of life which is 'meaningful'28 and he looks forward to Madeleine's co-operation in realising his perception. It is a vision of life which would ultimately benefit 'everyone'.29 This is the reason why Hegel's philosophy is so significant to him. It is no doubt idealistic compared for instance, to another philosopher Spinoza's simpler proposition that man should have a "desire to have other rejoice in the good in which he rejoices, not to make others live according to his way of thinking — ex ipsius ingenio".30 Herzog dreams of recreating symbolically the vision of Versailles and Jerusalem in his own house at Ludeyville:

"Herzog, mulling over these ideas as he all alone painted his walls in Ludeyville"31

However his idealistic, visionary perception reflecting the desire of his heart is shattered by the stark reality with the ringing of the telephone repeatedly bringing the news of the bouncing of checks issued by Madeleine:

Time and again he was brought down from the ladder to the telephone. Madeleine's checks were bouncing.32

The conflict between Herzog and Madeleine is the conflict between desire and reality,33 between the desire for living an ideal life

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27 H(123)
28 ibid.
29 ibid.
30 ibid.
31 H(124)
and the practical need for having to cope with the mundane reality of human existence. Madeleine is not wrong but under compulsion of necessity to spend Herzog’s father’s money on buying the bare necessities of life;

“the commodes, these spinning wheels”\textsuperscript{34}
“a maternity outfit”\textsuperscript{35} etc.

His high and impractical intellectual goal of achieving a better life notwithstanding, Herzog fails to see the practical, human reality. He confesses, even though ironically he has to learn “the lessons of the Real”\textsuperscript{36} from his close friends and even from Madeleine.

Bellow draws attention to the social need of a human being. A human being cannot stand loneliness for long, however much one might pass life in hours of loneliness. It is only quite human that man should have the company of a partner, a paramour or another human being. Herzog had suffered “the privations of a scholarly isolation”\textsuperscript{(203)}. Besides,

He had read lately that lonely people in New York, shut up in their rooms, had taken to calling the police for relief, “Send a squad car, for the love of God! Send someone! Put me in the lockup with somebody. Save me. Touch me. Come. Someone — please come!”\textsuperscript{37}

\textsuperscript{33} H(122)
\textsuperscript{34} H(123)
\textsuperscript{35} H(125)
\textsuperscript{36} H(203)
\textsuperscript{37} ibid.
In order to be in some human company he experiments with the idea of becoming a florist and getting an opportunity to enjoy different "odours of soil and flowers".38

To overcome the tormenting feeling of loneliness Bellow’s protagonist is given to courting one woman after another. But each tie he is in a woman’s company he either fails or begins to philosophise on the nature of love. Yet in the process he becomes more and more a seeker after physical, amorous relationship with women – whether it is Sono, Daisy, Madeleine, or Ramona. Bellow’s frequent recourse to portraying scenes of sexual relationship between Herzog and his different paramour represents his unchanging and unfailing emphasis on the human need for biological relations.39 In one such moment of fulfilment of this need he feels being in mental agreement with Ramona because like himself she too believes that sexual solution could perhaps solve a lot of problems; He regards and exalts her as a prophetess who had also read “Marcuse (the philosopher), N.O. Brown, all those neo-Freudians”.40

But then is the physical act of love the real solution to the problem of boredom in individual existence? “Was this perhaps the way to live? He wondered”.41 The crux of the matter for Herzog is to know who one might live whether living means one’s life individually or living in society with wife and children. Obviously, Herzog is in a dilemma and he cannot clearly understand the nature of human

38 ibid.
40 H(208)
41 H(206)
existence. On Lenington Avenue Herzog and Ramona passionately kiss each other, which gives the former “a taste of the life he might have led if he had been simply a loving creature”. But contrary to this mood, when he is alone in the rattling cab he is back into his introspective mood, recalling the English poet, P.B. Shelley.

“Oh, what a thing I am – what a thing! ... I fall upon the thorns of life, I bleed.”

He finds gratification in his mental suffering by suffering in loneliness.

But then he also meditates on one essential question which presents itself before him:

“And what about all the good in my heart – doesn’t it mean anything? Is it simply a joke? A false hope that makes a man feel the illusion of worth?”

While Herzog struggles to know the meaning of human existence yet he displays a strong conviction that the essential goodness in human heart is the secret of humanity:

“But this good is no funny. I know it isn’t. I swear it.”

As his layer Simkin says Herzog is in search of “the true, the good and the beautiful like — Herr Goethe”. Herzog realises that there are many kinds of impulses in man which produce all kinds of disorderly emotions and disturb one’s mental balance. But through

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42 ibid
43 ibid.
44 H(207)
45 ibid
46 H(213)
“brotherhood”, social action and physical and emotional act of love, sympathy, etc. it is possible to obtain a greater harmonization or organisation of emotions and overcome those disintegrating emotions:

“His night with Ramona had given him new strength”.

But Herzog is afraid that the new strength obtained from his act of love with Ramona could revive his fear which may cause his mental ‘breakdown’ and “disorganize him utterly”. At such a time his strong conviction of the goodness in his heart wavers. The fear of conscience is aroused in him and he does not understand how he will explain his past;

He had two wives; there were two children; he had once been a scholar and in the closet his old valise was swelled like a scaly crocodile with his uncompleted manuscript. While he delayed, others come up with the same idea.

Herzog feels guilty on three counts. He does not understand how to explain his position “at the bar of judgement”. He is in some kind of a prufrockian situation of having delayed appropriate action. He has too long been contemplating only the larger question of “giving the world an example or order ... a grand synthesis”. A contemporary Berkeley Professor Marmelstein had come out with the same ideas and had achieved his objective while Herzog is yet thinking of publishing his own and has nearly failed.

48 H(207)
49 ibid
50 ibid.
51 ibid
53 H(207)
He watched the coffee beating in the cracked dome of the percolator (comparable to the thoughts in his skull). That is precisely what happens to Prufrock when he is faced with the overwhelming question. And as if reminding of Prufrock’s situation in precisely the same word, Herzog feels, “Enough malingering”.

The next important thought that intrigues Herzog’s attention is the question of justice — human justice. Can human beings get justice in life. His own situation throws up the question of his underserved and unjust betrayal by his wife Madeleine and by is most trusted friend Valentine — and what kind of justice should he get? When he discusses the matter with his lawyer Hawey Simkin the latter advises him first to engage a private detective to establish exactly when Madeleine and Valentine had started their adulterous and clandestine relationship behind his back. Herzog finds the idea worth exploring.

But Simkin underlines a very crucial point; getting justice is expensive, particularly for low-income group of fellows, to which even Herzog belongs.

“Private investigation costs a tremendous amount.” Simkins therefore advises him to

“Get a clean-cut gentile lawyer from one of the big firms. Don’t have a lot of Jews yelling in the court. Give your cast dignity . . .”

54 H(209)
55 ibid
57 H(212)
After arranging a good lawyer Herzog would require to prove in the court that Valentine and Madeleine had an adulterous relationship “to which the child was exposed”.\(^5^9\) That alone might perhaps invite some positive judicial gesture towards his case as the judicial process itself could not be expected “to stop the whole sexual revolution of our time”.\(^6^0\) The point then is that obtaining justice is not such a simple thing, but a very difficult matter.

Herzog’s emotions work up when he understands the practical implications of seeking justice in the courts or fighting one’s betrayers and enemies. At one such moment of confusion and helplessness and experiencing “the extreme violence of thought and feeling”\(^6^1\) an intellectual like Herzog cannot but go into the bathroom and let cold water pour on his scalp and neck “to recover some degree of calm” under the pressure of cold water the raving philosopher might regain his emotional stability:

“This going into the bathroom to pull himself together was one of his habits. He seemed to feel that here he was more effective, more master of himself”.\(^6^2\)

His mental quest for stability brings into his mind an idea of Professor Hacking’s in his latest book “Whether justice on this earth can or cannot be general, social, but must originate within each heart”.\(^6^3\)
Herzog takes into account the human right of each individual to decide for himself or herself what he or she will choose. He argues within his mind as to how he might crystallise and bring to a head the issue of the secret relationship between Valentine and Madeleine:

“They have a right to each other; they seem even to belong together. Why, let them alone. But what about justice?”.

Despite all this knowledge Herzog cries aloud at the top of his voice that he must get justice. It is his human and moral right, to get justice as an “Innocent Party”.

Herzog believes that by the very fact of his having taken birth in the world as a human being he wishes to survive. That is, he would prefer his extinction from this world if he was denied the life that a human being should live. Being human is no doubt being mortal like other living beings but to be human is a matter of longing, a matter of acting, behaving as a human being and not just being simply genetically born a human. One may be born a man but being human is a matter of this longing, acting and behaving a civilised social person:

Not human of itself. But has the longing to be human? And like a troubling dream, a persistent vapour. A desire. Where does it all come from? And what is it? And what can it be? Not immortal longing. No, entirely mortal, but human.

Bellow makes a high – pitch pronouncement on the human right to justice. Herzog’s cry for justice naturally awakens in him his own sense of responsibility to give the same justice to his son Marco. He

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64 H(220)  
65 ibid  
66 ibid
immediately feels impelled to write to Daisy, his first wife, that he would go to meet Marco on this Parent’s Day at his school to make him feel that he is a loving son of a caring father.

Looking for justice Herzog has an interesting experience. On the advice of his lawyer friend Simkin Herzog wants to consult a lawyer’s hacks to seek legal justice Simkin asks him to wait in the courtroom till a jury trial being conducted was concluded.

The trial proves interesting. A young couple from Trenton were being tried for the murder of the wife’s son, a child of three, by another man. The medical and psychiatric records showed that the woman suffered from “violent epilated rage”\(^{67}\) and could not control her emotions. Being a crippled creature she was also sexually abused by some adolescent boys for which act of defilation she was renounced even by her own mother. A married man who lived with her for three months had made her pregnant and later gave her up and went back to his wife and family. The woman later married another man, a porter in a lunchroom on the Columbus Avenue and lived with him in a shabby hotel. The woman and the porter were now the defendants in the trial.

During the trial, the medical examiner reported that their child ‘seemed to have suffered from malnutrition’\(^{68}\) and was repeatedly beaten on the scalp and the abdomen. The beating had caused fracture in his liver and in the part around his genitals. Two ribs had been broken. There was brain injury too. Two witnesses made their submissions in the case. One stated that the child was often ill-treated and left unclean

\(^{67}\) H(236) 
\(^{68}\) H(237)
and starved. The second stated in great detail what he had witnessed on the day of the boy’s death. The mother screamed too much and finally getting annoyed that perhaps stamped his shoe heels upon his face as if “She would go for his eyes with her nails” and threw him against the wall while the second defendant, her husband, was lying on the bed, smoking. The witness hearing the noise “knocked at the door . . . opened and stepped in”. This was an act of cruelty to the murdered child. The scene was shocking enough to arouse in Herzog the thought of human right to justice. He was alarmed to think of the situation of such a child at the hands of an uncaring other and a callous stepfather. He was horrified by visualising the scene and wondered if his child too might be ill-treated in a similar manner should Valentine Gersbach succeed in swindling him of his wife Madeleine? He ponders whether he could “obtain something for the murdered child” but felt that he could do nothing except having “human feelings” aroused in him “in which he found nothing of use”. The most crucial question therefore that haunts him is whether post-Christian America can give justice and mercy?

Provoked to think in this manner by the same worry Herzog is anxious to obtain justice to his daughter June who as become a victim of unfortunate circumstances created by Madeleine and Valentine. And seeing that justice is not easy to obtain he becomes irrational and tries to take law into his own hands. He rushes to his father’s house in Chicago to obtain his died father’s pistol with which he might kill both Madeleine and Valentine for destroying his family life and depriving

\[\text{[Footnotes]}\]

69 H(239)
70 ibid.
71 H(240)
72 ibid
him of his own child, June. Having obtained the loaded pistol Herzog rushes to the Harper Avenue house of his where Mady and Valentine and June continue to stay. But to his astonishment there he finds June happy and comfortable in the company of her step-father and other and treated so well that his anger cools down and he is left with no motive to use the pistol on his betayers. The impulsive, suffering Herzog concludes that like his father he cannot use his pistol except for holding out a threat.

A poor intellectual like Herzog cannot do such a thing as kill any human being even if he hates him. He can only use his intellectual strategy to convince Valentine’s wife Phoebe that her husband had swiped his wife Madeleine. The long discussion with Phoebe brings Herzog to conclude that the story of a man’s life is nothing but an odd mixture of truths, friendship, humiliations, lies, potato love, etc. what he calls “The emotional goodies’.73 As he observes:

So much we know now. But this – even this – is not the whole story, either. It only beings to approach the start of true consciousness. The necessary promise s that a man is somehow more than his ‘characteristics’, all the emotions, strivings, testes and construction which it pleases him to call “My life”. We have ground to hope that a life is something more than such a cloud of particles, mere tactility. Go through what is comprehensible and you conclude that only the in comprehensible gives any light.74

This is nearly a full definition of life according to Herzog’s or Bellow’s perception of things; life is a blend of the comprehensible and the incomprehensible elements.

73 H(266)
74 ibid
Discussing life, Bellow’s protagonist is as much concerned with another important human concern — the issue of death. He finds that human beings do not take death seriously when talking of the death of others to whom they may not be related in any manner. But if anyone’s pet animal dies one becomes intensely concerned. Herzog’s friend Lucas Asphalter is “so hard hit”\textsuperscript{75} by the death of his monkey. He wonders “whether the death of my brother would have shocked me up half as much. I think not”.\textsuperscript{76} Commenting on Herzog’s laughter Asphalter observes:

“I have been horribly depressed,” said Asphalter. “It is better now; but for about two months I did no work, and I was glad I had no wife or kids to hide these crying jags from”.\textsuperscript{77}

Continuing further, he says –

“I stopped going to the lab. I doctored myself with tranquillisers, but that couldn’t continue. I had to face the music finally”.\textsuperscript{78}

Bellow seems to hint that of the serious issues of life that man needs to grapple with is the issue of death. To be aware of death, to experience the dread of death, makes man’s life authentic. The German existentialists believed that a man’s awareness of Death gives him freedom from distraction, from living in a false world of happiness. The existentialists “introduce the tension of guilt and dread as a corrective”.\textsuperscript{79} But the Bellovian protagonist turns down this Christian

\textsuperscript{75} p.265
\textsuperscript{76} p.268
\textsuperscript{77} xxx 269
\textsuperscript{78} ibid
\textsuperscript{79} p.271
existentialist\textsuperscript{80} view by stating that "human life is far subtler than any of its models even these ingenious German models".\textsuperscript{81} This statement hints at the pure humanistic view of life which Bellow's protagonist seems to point to.

Clearly Bellow's humanistic ideas are more explicit in the words of Herzog on the attitude of modern philosophers to death:

Modern philosophers would like to recover the old-fashioned dread of death. The new attitude which makes life a trifle not worth anyone's anguish threaten the heart of civilization.\textsuperscript{82}

Intellectuals may carry on discussing various ways in which the essence of humanism may be adequately defined. But instead of using the words "dread of death", Bellovian protagonist's word is 'conscience'.\textsuperscript{83} He admits that the word 'conscience' can create a powerful impact in an erring human being. Conscience in man is something "without which human beings can no longer be called human".\textsuperscript{84} Herzog's situation could perhaps be redeemed if Madeleine and Gersbach were forced to turn to their conscience which they must possess if they are human beings. A last word that this Bellow novel emphasizes to give the defining characteristic of human beings is that they should possess conscience. "There is a word for you"\textsuperscript{85} and, then another word which extends the definition of human is 'brotherhood':

\textsuperscript{80} Wilson, Jonathan. \textit{op.cit.} p.42-43
\textsuperscript{81} H(271)
\textsuperscript{82} H(272)
\textsuperscript{83} ibid.
\textsuperscript{84} ibid
\textsuperscript{85} ibid
I really believe that brotherhood is what makes a man human. If I owe God a human life, this is where I fall down. "Man liveth not by self alone but in his brother's face. Each shall behold the eternal Father and love and joy abound. "The real and essential question is one of our employment by other human beings and their employment by us. Without this true employment you never dread death, you cultivate it. And consciousness with it doesn't clearly understand what to live for, what to die for, can only abuse and ridicule itself." \(^{86}\)

Bellow's pre-occupation with the nature of thinking of the modern generation is reflected in Herzog's apprehension that human beings have lost faith in God altogether. They have gone beyond Nietzschean's conception\(^{87}\) of the extinction of God and see the supremacy or reality of death everywhere:

"But what is the philosophy of this generation? Not God is dead, that point was passed long ago. Perhaps it should be stated. Death is God. This generation thinks — and this is its thought of thoughts — that nothing faithful, vulnerable, fragile can be durable or have any true power . . ." \(^{88}\)

These echoes are heard in Herzog's head during the interval of his interrogation by the Negro police when he is caught in a car smash with a truck and subsequently found to carry an unlicensed loaded pistol and booked for it.

However, Bellow's protagonist does not subscribe to this modern post-Nietzschean notion of the supremacy and the pervasiveness of

\(^{86}\)H(272-273)
\(^{88}\) H(290)
death in the world.89 As a good man at heart and a man who is exposed to the evil suffering because of his excessive ideals (which is, for instance, unacceptable to Madeleine) he has not lost faith in God.

There is a genuine conflict and contradiction between his notion of humanism in its ideal form and the humanism of daily, practical life as represented by Herzog and Madeleine respectively. However Herzog ultimately accepts the needs of actual, practical reality. He feels disturbed at his betrayal both by his wife Madeleine and his intimate friend Valentine but he accepts the sad situation without yielding to any violent emotions which he certainly betrays when he collects his father's pistol to shoot the lovers. But he is not so sure whether or not his innocent daughter June is treated well by her stepfather. He can go to the extent of thinking of killing both Madeleine and Valentine if he gets any proof of her ill-treatment. His loss of cool-headedness is a clear evidence of his wild fatherly emotions at the mere contemplation of possible suffering of his child at the hands of his personal enemy. Aware of his occasional bad temper Madeleine confronts with Herzog in the police room by telling him that he might have collected the pistol with the intention of using one of the two bullets in the pistol to murder her, and obviously the other one to murder Valentine. As Madeleine says, ‘. He’s jealous and a troublemaker. He has a terrible”.90

Despite the act, Herzog is cool-headed. He understands the practical necessities of life. It is evident from the fact that he looks after his daughter even though she is separated from him. He had never failed in discharging his responsibility of sending money for her maintenance:

90 H(301)
'Sergeant' said Herzog. "I told you there was no complaint. Ask her if I've ever missed a single support check".  

One more important thought central to humanism in the thought that haunts Herzog's mind — the question of human goodness or whether the evil in man's heart is the consequence of the primal (Adam's) sin. The Bellovism protagonist does not clearly believe in this biblical concept. He dismisses the possibility of his having blundered into contemplating. The murders of Madeleine and Valentine as a result of his inheriting the original sin. "I can't truly feel I can attribute my blundering to this thick unconscious cloud. This primitive blood-daze". On the contrary, Herzog believes in the possibility of man fulfilling his desire to achieve the goodness that he aspires for and know justice and truth that always elude him:  

The dream of man's heart, however much we may distrust and resent it, is that life may complete itself in significant pattern. Some incomprehensible way. Before death. Not irrationally but in comprehensibly fulfilled. Spared by these clumsy police guardians. You got one last chance to know justice truth.  

Herzog is not able to reconcile the ideal and the practical human reality. Dangling midway between the two he yet realises the real malady of the elite, the educated, the intelligentsia of the society. The middle class intellectuals like to believe in the human reality as created by their own illusions or aspirations. "What they love is an imaginary human situation invented by their own genius and which they believe is the 

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91 H(300)  
92 Goldman, L.H. op. cit. p.150  
93 H(303)  
94 ibid
only true and the only human reality. How odd! Such people are always ungrateful to the civilization that "makes their lives possible." ‘Ingratitude’ is their social function. Madeleine too belongs, as Herzog thinks, to this class.

The humanism of Bellow seems to be more optimistic than the humanism preached by some contemporary intellectuals usually known as the prophets of doom who believe that the world will soon perish. On this question Bellow seems to put forward his view even directly:

We must get it out of our heads that this is a doomed time, that we are waiting for the end, and the rest of it, mere junk from fashionable magazines. Things are grim enough without these shivery games. People frightening one another.

Bellow is optimistic. He does not advocate the thought that suffering can show the way to truth. Even though suffering is prevalent everywhere. Yet according to Herzog, one ought not to exalt suffering as a positive way to lead one to understand the ultimate truth of life or solve one’s problems. Suffering by itself is painful. It has a negative effect on the mind. It demoralise and cause human beings to lose their humanity before anything else. One ought not to support even the religious minded people who believe that suffering well “giver them an experience or an opportunity to experience evil and change it into good”. Bellow’s humanism tends toward removal of humans suffering and promotion of human happiness.
Bellow them neither advocates any belief in suffering nor invokes Hell "to make us serious and truthful".\(^9^9\) Human beings should be treated as human beings pure and simple and not as anything else and they should not be taught to believe in such abstruse theories of suffering of souls as monads "Isvosky".\(^1^0^0\) He believes such ideas can only land them in "suffocating churches and synagogues".\(^1^0^1\) Herzog meditates upon all the current intellectual thought to explore how human beings might integrate themselves and make life worth living. His conclusion is that he would prefer integration with the common life of humankind:

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\text{"... Anyway the intellectual has been a separatist. But what kind of synthesis is a separatist likely to come up with? Luckily for me, I didn't have the means to get too far away from our common life. I am glad of that. I mean to share with other human beings as far as possible and not destroy my remaining years in the same way."}^{1^0^2}
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Bellow seems to hint at the need for reconciling the ideal with the practical, the mental or intellectual with the real. Herzog is aware that synthesis or integration of this kind was achieved in the seventeenth Century. Because of this achievement of synthesis the passionate search for absolute truth stopped so that mankind might transform the world. Something practical was done with thought. The mental because also the real. Relief from the pursuit of absolutes made life pleasant\(^1^0^3\).
But the synthesis of that life did not continue. There was a class of intellectuals and revolutionaries who still pursued the absolute, brought the practical activity to an end and emphasised "the metaphysical dimension".\textsuperscript{104} Realising the new development Herzog remarks that "All practical activity has reached this culmination. Everything may go now - civilization, history," meaning, nature - everything".\textsuperscript{105} However, Herzog is also for the common, ordinary, pure humans and practical life. He desires to identify his humanistic thoughts and is piqued by the excellent article of the psychologist Dr. Waldemar Zozo which he acknowledges in me of his last letters addressed to the doctor in the article, "Existentialist Unrest in the Unconscious".\textsuperscript{106} He believes like the doctor himself that the unconscious must be freed of its restlessness or anxiety and a true human being must believe in the "free condition of mind"\textsuperscript{107} and be most natural. He appreciates Walt Whitman for having given expressed on to his thought — "In paths untrodden Escaped from the life that exhibits itself"\textsuperscript{108} — of this freed, unconscious mind.

Here, then in Herzog also Bellow is concerned with Herzog's ethical attitude, with his flightily nature, his mental letters, his dreams of sadness and sorrows, his conflict between desire and reality, between the desire for living an ideal life and the practical need for having to cope with the mundane reality of human existence — his scholarly isolation and sexual relations with different types of women, his sense of human existence but his prufrockian situation and the central question of human

\textsuperscript{104} ibid
\textsuperscript{105} ibid
\textsuperscript{106} ibid.
\textsuperscript{107} H(323-324)
\textsuperscript{108} H(324)
justice and his thinking on death and love of animals. In this novel also Bellow shows his contradiction with the Christian existentialists. He does not believe in the biblical concept of original sin. His sense of Jewishness with his belief in Judaism is manifest making his humanism more optimistic and practical. The feeling of conflict over the Jewish-Gentle conflict his psyche once again and creates a feeling of insecurity and injustice in his mind. It makes him think whether the Jews would be treated fairly in America since they have not been treated fairly in many countries. Humanistic views can also be focussed upon his next novel, Mr Sammler’s Planet.
Discussing life, Bellow’s protagonist is as much concerned with another important human concern — the issue of death. He finds that human beings do not take death seriously when talking of the death of others to whom they may not be related in any manner. But if anyone’s pet animal dies one becomes intensely concerned. Herzog’s friend Lucas Asphalter is “so hard hit”\textsuperscript{75} by the death of his monkey. He wonders “whether the death of my brother would have shocked me up half as much. I think not”.\textsuperscript{76} Commenting on Herzog’s laughter Asphalter observes:

“I have been horribly depressed,” said Asphalter. “It is better now; but for about two months I did no work, and I was glad I had no wife or kids to hide these crying jags from”.\textsuperscript{77}

Continuing further, he says –

“I stopped going to the lab. I doctored myself with tranquillisers, but that couldn’t continue. I had to face the music finally”.\textsuperscript{78}

Bellow seems to hint that of the serious issues of life that man needs to grapple with is the issue of death. To be aware of death, to experience the dread of death, makes man’s life authentic. The German existentialists believed that a man’s awareness of Death gives him freedom from distraction, from living in a false world of happiness. The existentialists “introduce the tension of guilt and dread as a corrective”.\textsuperscript{79} But the Bellovian protagonist turns down this Christian

\textsuperscript{75} p.265
\textsuperscript{76} p.268
\textsuperscript{77} xxx 269
\textsuperscript{78} ibid
\textsuperscript{79} p.271