

Some Personal Impressions of Wilfred Puttkammer as Teacher and Colleague

Walter J. Blum†

It was my second year in the University of Chicago Law School, autumn of 1938, that I was enrolled in a course taught by Wilfred Puttkammer. The course, which ran for several quarters, dealt with criminal law and procedure and the problem of crime in our society. For most of the class, crime was somewhat remote from our personal lives, yet a continuing presence of which we were reminded by the daily newspapers. Though few of us expected to deal with criminal affairs in our work as lawyers, all of us were aware that they constituted a most significant part of the legal system. Putt, as he was always called, was admirably suited to guide us through and nourish our interest in this area of the law.

The course was a combination of a rigorous exercise in defining various crimes and a wide exposure to the practicalities of the criminal justice process. It succeeded admirably in impressing upon us a unifying approach to the whole of criminal law. The success of the course was in part due to the teacher's great knowledge of his subject. It was also due to his personality and style. When he lectured, his thoughts were flawlessly communicated in artfully constructed sentences, each neatly tailored for the context. These sentences invariably were combined into well-organized sequences, so there was no mistaking the structure that he had designed. Listening in the class was not unlike hearing a superbly crafted essay being read. When Putt asked questions, they were put crisply and succinctly. They almost obliged the student to attempt a response in a similar fashion.

† Wilson-Dickinson Professor of Law, The University of Chicago.

At all times in class Putt was dignified and yet not distant from his students. In carrying on discussion, he was always patient and gracious—putting students at ease. Even his mannerisms, including some arm motions that may have been derived from watching baseball players in action, were comforting. The concept of old-world courtliness best captures the ambience that Putt generated in the classroom.

In my senior year I became further acquainted with Putt through contacts arising out of my position as Editor-in-Chief of the *Law Review*. Putt was then faculty adviser to the *Review*, as he was for the first 23 volumes, and he continued to take an interest in its development. (In fact, during some of the lean and difficult years for the school in the World War II period, when the staff at one time was only two students, Putt almost alone kept the *Review* going.) When I was editor, Putt still engaged in the practice of giving the proofs a final inspection—largely, I think, because of the great pride he took in the enterprise. His attention to detail again was evident. There never was a set of proofs on which Putt did not discover printer errors that the rest of us had let go by. The present suite of offices that houses the *Law Review* is most appropriately named in his honor.

All of these early impressions as a student were strengthened when, soon after the close of World War II, I became a member of the Law School faculty and could enjoy having Putt as a colleague. In faculty meetings Putt was ever a model discussant. He expressed his own position skillfully but gently. Whether he was with the majority or minority, his conduct tended to keep the exchange of views on a high level of civility. But what distinguished Putt most as a colleague was his attitude toward the Law School. He was impressed with the background of the institution and understood the sources of its strength. He was both enormously appreciative of, and dedicated to, the ideals and aspirations of the school. Clearly, he saw himself as carrying on its traditions.

All these qualities of mind and character can be readily detected in reading his most durable work—his book *Administration of Criminal Law*. It is a splendid amalgam of critical analysis, sound policy orientation, humility in the face of difficult problems, and moderation in pressing a point of view and offering a prescription. The book is pervasively marked by prudence and balance. Its author comes through as the Putt I knew: a very knowledgeable man trying to be helpful in solving important problems in a disciplined and decent manner.