

HEALTH CARE

I am writing this to explain my recent action which must be very difficult for most of you to comprehend. The experiences I will describe are familiar to all of you, or, at least, to those of you who are citizens of our nation. It is my personal reaction to them and what I subsequently learned that is distinct and dissimilar. Yet, these experiences and their roots are never discussed. It is either too personal a matter for polite society, or simply a question of public inertia to authority. Well, I apologize for any feelings of discomfort that my revelations may cause, but I must convey the 'why' of my deed.

As has been the case for as long as I can remember, I was reminded of my need to go for a health checkup a number of weeks ago by feelings of discomfort, e.g. nausea, headache, coughing, stomach upset, aching muscles, insomnia, nervousness, sweats, fever, chills, etc. In other words I was feeling terrible. It is a familiar feeling. We all go through the same experience on a regular basis every six months.

At the onset, the symptoms are quite mild. However, in a very short time, after about twelve hours, and if not treated, they became intolerable. I know, for I have often tried to deal with them alone by resisting our medical technology as long as I could. (Being someone of modest intellectual means but with an immense curiosity, I wanted to discover if there was a relationship between our maladies and our need for periodic assistance at the clinics.) I was not able to endure even for the briefest of time. I always found myself scurrying as fast as possible to the health clinic for relief which, as you all know, is always immediately provided.

For those who may be unfamiliar with our health care system and for future historians, I include a brief description to the extent that I know it, including what I subsequently learned about it.

Well, as I was saying, the last time the usual severe symptoms occurred I resignedly made my way to the clinic, which is located in a very impressive edifice. (Presumably in homage to past medical practitioners, who for obscure reasons were regarded with great esteem, and to those whose pioneering efforts led to our current system.) I entered through two huge portals into a small antechamber and then through an electronic gate of sorts (which served to identify me) into a large waiting room. I was the only one there. I did not have long to wait when a disembodied and yet soothing voice enjoined me to follow a series of blinking arrows that had suddenly appeared on the floor. I dutifully obeyed and shortly found myself in a room with all sorts of electronic paraphernalia and robotic devices. The same tranquilizing voice invited me to remove all my clothing and lie on the table. I complied.

The next thing I remember is waking up in a different room to the sound of calming music. My clothes were neatly laid out on a chair besides the bed. I had and never have had any recollection of what transpires between the time I lay

down on the table and the time I wake up. The same becalming voice then asked how I was feeling. My response was, as usual, "Great! Not only do I no longer have any feelings of discomfort, I feel exhilaratingly high."

The voice then inquired if I had any questions. I later learned that when this program was initiated, it had been felt that the answers to questions about it would alleviate doubts and would provide the public with some peace of mind. Evidently, all government-run programs were much more publicly accountable than they are today. Thus, this procedure was a vestigial attempt to forestall any potential psychological problems and to respond to the political realities of long ago. Today, the question is really nothing more than a formality since I and all others have always responded to this request in the negative because of the euphoric state we usually enjoyed.

I was about to respond as I had always when a disturbing buzzing sound was heard. It must have been due to a small short circuit in one of the devices. It disturbed my reverie. "What is that?" I hesitantly asked. "What is what?" the voice replied as if there had been no sound. It had stopped. However, my state of bliss had been unsettled by the buzzing noise and by the apparent attempt to soothe me by the suggestion that there had been no distraction. Well, it served to remind me about all the questions and doubts I did have but had never posed and raised.

"I have a number of questions I would like answered," I then stated. This request had never been made before. "What sort of questions?" was the rejoinder. "I would like to know what transpires when I am sedated and why. I would also like to know more about the history of this establishment. Finally, I would like to continue asking questions based on the answers I am given." There appeared to be an embarrassed silence. It was as if a number of bodiless and voiceless entities were discussing how to deal with this novel event. After all, it had never occurred before. Finally, after an interval of about ten minutes, a frazzled voice urged me to reconsider and return home.

While I was adamant about wanting answers, I was also getting increasingly apprehensive. What if the treatment that had sustained me for as long as I can remember was to be withdrawn because of my stubbornness? Could I withstand the pain and/or survive without it? Just as my resolve was about to disappear, leading me to repentantly hurry home, a very different voice came on. It was not a machine generated voice. There was also an undercurrent of brusqueness and impatience evident beneath the professional style. I was sure that, for the first time, I was communicating with a live human in these clinical surroundings, one who was not readily prepared to answer questions from a source such as myself.

For the sake of brevity, what follows is a summary of all that was disclosed to me by this new disembodied voice.

“First, I must tell you that I will not identify myself. I am a qualified expert in the field of diagnostic, prognostic, therapeutic and preventive health care. Second, you must not go public with this exchange. If you do, the Ministry of Health will categorically deny that it ever occurred and state that whatever you disclose is nothing more than the ramblings of one of our very rare failures, an incurable paranoid schizophrenic.

Now as to your state of health! You are in excellent shape. For a man of fifty, all your organs, your musculature, skeletal, digestive, pulmonary, serological, chromosomal, circulatory and sensory systems, are those of someone half your age. In other words, you are in just as good a shape as you were twenty-five years ago. Psychologically, while you are well within the bounds of normality, you have a very active imagination, coupled with a degree of curiosity that leads to infrequent bouts, at a profounder level, of existential apprehension about the meaning of everything and at a more superficial plane to fear about your capability of maintaining your professional and financial status. This leads, in turn to occasional minor bouts of hypertension with corresponding heart palpitations and a small rise in blood pressure. Summarily, you are a normal human being who still has a long and fruitful life ahead of him.

A number of things occur during the time you are sedated. First, you are given a thorough examination that carefully inspects all the systems just mentioned and diagnoses any real or potential health problem areas and compares current results with past ones. Our very sophisticated apparatus allows us to do this in a very short period of time.

Second, any deviations from the norm regarded as likely causes of problems are immediately rectified in order to prevent serious traumas from occurring. These therapeutic measures may include micro-laser surgery, the implantation of time released pharmaceuticals and/or other devices of a biological or mechanical nature, and, via post-hypnotic suggestion, commands obliging you to engage in appropriate behaviour, such as exercising in a particular manner, eating certain foods and avoiding others on a regular basis, refraining from certain activities or practices and partaking in others that are deemed appropriate. In other words, we have learned how to regulate your life style to ensure that you will maintain a healthy regime. You must realize that this control over you is for your benefit.

Despite what you may think, we do not have the power to prolong life indefinitely. Also, we cannot predict when any individual will expire. We do promise that as long as you live, you will be in good health and enjoy life, except for those brief periods of pain just before your regular medical audits. We are aware of the discomfort experienced by all. It is deliberate for obvious reasons. Without it, most people would likely not come. We would lose control and the general level of health would then most certainly deteriorate. When it is your time to die, it will come suddenly. There will be no protraction of the life ending symptoms that plagued our ancestors.

How did this all come about? Well, many ages ago the practice of medicine was mainly concerned with the treatment of manifest disorders and diseases, that, for the most part, could have been prevented. The universality of health care and the attendant rising costs threatening the economies of most nations caused a frantic search for means to reduce those expenditures. While prevention was in its infancy, it quickly dawned upon the more enlightened that it was the way to go. Massive research was initiated and continues to this day. We are able to spot a potential disorder before it can do any real damage and eradicate it at a very low cost. There was also a realization that good health is deeply rooted in life styles. Educating people to do the right things for their health was tried and for the most part failed. Slowly, by the use of various forms of hypnosis and through the approval of the legislature, we succeeded in conditioning the populace to live soundly. Today, we have, for the most part, the healthiest population in history, as measured by all acceptable health statistics.

We have now answered all your questions. We suggest you retire to your residence and think about your good fortune. Goodbye!

Thus ended the most bizarre and disturbing event in my life. I did go home to reflect about what I had been told. The more I thought about it, the more saddened I became. Whatever happened to freedom of choice? When I realized that the state had turned us into health addicts, not so different than the once prevalent dope addicts, I fell into a state of depression from which I never recovered. It seemed to me that for reasons of economy, the state had decided to regulate our existence to an extent never conceived possible. Everything we did, both in our personal and professional lives was controlled. We had become automatons. I resolved that I was going to commit one totally voluntary act as an expression of free will. The only one I could think of, which, ironically is the most economic health measure of all, was the taking of my own life. This note is my suicide note to you all. Adios!

Epilogue:

I could not believe what was happening. I found myself regaining consciousness in the very same room of the clinic where I had received all my treatments. "This cannot be," I exclaimed. "I am supposed to be dead. I made sure that my suicide would totally destroy my body. Is it possible that there is life after death as many have proclaimed?"

As if to answer my questions, the same familiar voice that had provided me with a nightmare scenario of my existence then spoke.

"We are very disappointed with the course of action that you undertook. Our conditioning methods were simply not strong enough in your case and we totally failed to recognize the depth of your feelings.

There is one bit of information that we did not provide when you were questioning us. This was because of the sensitivity of the research involved, which has not, as yet, reached its culmination. In other words we have not yet achieved the results we are striving for.

You did succeed in killing yourself. For lack of a better term, you now exist as a holographic clone. You are an exact replica of your former self but you exist only as an energy form and have for the last ten years. During that time you have been kept in a comatose state. One of the breakthroughs we achieved is that you, a holograph, can have an existence, independent from your source. Another is that you exist in an extremely stable state, that is the total amount of energy with which you are comprised has remained exactly the same over the last ten years. We have no reason to believe that it will ever dissipate on its own.

Our goal was and is to take any part of you and convert it into its material form so that it could be transplanted into your former self when that part became irreversibly damaged due to age and/or traumatic experience. We awakened you with the hope that you would stay with us and assist us in our efforts. However, because you are pure energy, there is no way we can constrain you. You are free to go wherever you wish. You finally achieved the freedom you so desperately sought. Please remain with us. We need you.”

I could not refrain from breaking into hysterical laughter, causing some alarm in my hosts. I had the freedom of all the ghosts I had ever read about. I was damned to an eternity of causing fear in all humans I would encounter, of seeking meaning where there is none, of a never ending awareness of the futility of the human condition, and of a ceaseless and unrelenting existence bereft of any sensation of joy or pleasure; in other words, ‘hell on earth’.

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