

DEMOCRACY

Democracy is still upon its trial. The civic genius of our people is its only bulwark.

William James

Democracy is the recurrent suspicion that more than half of the people are right more than half of the time. Elwyn Brooks White

Democracy means simply the bludgeoning of the people by the people for the people.

Oscar Wilde

As citizens of this democracy, you are the rulers and the ruled, the lawgivers and the law abiding, the beginning and the end. Adlai Stevenson

Democracy cannot be saved by supermen, but only by the unswerving devotion and goodness of millions of little men. Adlai Stevenson

I was a space traveler. Let me correct that. I, and a small group of others, were an intrepid band of space explorers. The difference between the two is that space travelers are essentially tourists who travel in comfort with little or no risk involved during their voyages. Explorers are akin to the pioneers that discovered America, and to the hardy folk that risked everything when they traveled and opened up the western part of America. I could cite many other examples.

Essentially we go where no one else has ever gone in the Universe. We cover vast distances that, until recently, no one could have conceived possible. Being a senior citizen, please allow me to briefly digress from the main point of my tale. I apologize for any inconvenience for the reader.

Simple physics teaches that when traveling between two locales, there are three factors that need to be considered, namely, the distance between the two, the velocity of the traveler and the time it takes. Knowing any two, one can easily calculate the third. Usually the factors that are considered are the distance and the velocity. For the most part the one variable that is selected is the latter. However when distances are enormous, such as those between any two objects in different nebulas, velocity becomes inconsequential. Even if the speed of light, the limiting universal speed, were attainable, according to the Theory of Relativity it would take an enormous amount of earth time to get there and back even if time for the travelers were relatively short. Somehow, distances therein had to be compressed to make outer space travel feasible. Recently this has been successfully accomplished. Not being an Astro-physicist and without any real knowledge of space's characteristics I cannot explain how the compression of space was achieved. I do know that it had nothing to do with the concept of space warps.

I take some credit for being amongst the first to make use of this new technology. The risks are great and will remain so for at least many more years. However my first and so far only voyage made it all worthwhile.

After being launched and in what appeared to be several minutes, I found myself in a completely unfamiliar part of space. I was supposed to have traveled into a nebula known to us, having recognizable characteristics. I had absolutely no idea as to where I was. This was somewhat disconcerting since I also did not have a clue as to how I could return to Earth.

While considering my options, however few they were, I started to feel euphoric and then fell into a deep sleep. I awoke in a completely alien surrounding with two very strange beings hovering over me. It became apparent that they meant me no harm since they showed concern for my welfare. Much to my surprise I found that we were able communicate mentally in the English language. They assured me that my spacecraft and the technology

that brought me to this unusual place were in good hands and that shortly all would be explained. They sensed my need for food and liquid refreshments and both were immediately provided. My other biological requirements were also taken care of.

I wanted to ask all sorts of questions. I was reassured by my two hosts that all would be answered. After a few more minutes another being entered the chamber. "My name is Morad and I am here to enlighten you."

Morad was quite different in appearance from the two entities that had greeted me. He introduced them. One was called Tobor and the other Rotob. "The difference in our appearance will shortly be made clear," he stated. Apparently he was able to read my mind. "Let us go for a walk outdoors. Enclosures such as this room make me feel uncomfortable. During our walk I will give you an outline of what has happened, whereupon you will be free to pose any questions you desire."

I followed Morad out to a landscape that was sublime in its beauty. The temperature was perfect and the air more breathable than any on Earth. Morad pointed out that the edifice we had just exited was part of an urban center yet each building in it was located in a manner that didn't disturb the natural environment and ecology. This was my introduction to this startling Paradise.

We walked in silence for about fifteen minutes and then sat on very comfortable benches. He then recounted the following.

"First let me assure you again that you will be treated with the utmost courtesy and that anything that you will require or want will be provided. We have been monitoring your planet for about the last twenty thousand years of your time and are quite familiar with human needs and pleasures. During that period we learnt a great deal from you, especially what we should not be doing. Your history is replete with both great accomplishments and even more horrors. It taught us what to avoid and what to use. We think we have accomplished what is close to being a perfect society. We feel that we owe you a debt of gratitude. We planted the means of acquiring compressed space in your scientific and technological circles thus enabling you to venture into the deep regions of space and allowing us to bring you here. We feel that if you learn something of our world you might be able to effect some beneficial changes in yours. I know that you are wondering why we did not contact the powers on Earth or why we did not bring far more of you here. The answer is very simple. We do not trust the so called human race. We are a peace loving people and violence of any sort is, for us, unthinkable. It is not that we do not have the means of defending ourselves. We certainly do, but we feel that if we engage in such notorious activity we will be corrupted by it. If you think that you will be able to come back here, I suggest that you think again. You do not know, nor do you have the means of finding out where you are. You will be returned to Earth when it is deemed advisable. Further, the technology your scientists used to compress space has a very limited life which will expire once you are back on Earth."

"Morad, while I can appreciate the beautiful scenery and the pristine air, you really haven't told me anything. What makes your world so much better than ours?"

"The question of whether our world is better than yours is highly subjective. I certainly think so. You might not. However, I am reasonably sure that you will come around to our way of thinking.

Our world consists of two types of beings. You have met both. There are the biological beings whose physiology and biochemistry are not too different from yours. I belong to that category. Then there are the quasi-mechanical ones, in other words robots. Tobor and Rotob fall into that grouping. They are endowed with infinite memory and analytical abilities far beyond ours. We are their 'raison d'être' and they are the means that keep our world as benevolent as it is. In other words they are the glue that keeps our society stable. Without them our world would just fall apart. Without us they would be purposeless. In essence, we

have a symbiotic relationship. First of all they are responsible for endowing us with all our goods and services requirements. Ours is an economy of plenty. There is no need for economic competition. Anything we want is usually immediately provided. This has had a profound effect on our social structures. I will return to that shortly.

Of equal importance are all the services they provide. Health Care, Education, The Legal and Judicial Systems, Information, Transportation, Entertainment, Recreational, and Infant Care are some samples. Perhaps the most telling one is Government. We have no formal administration, government structures, and nationalistic symbols such as flags and anthems. Political parties do not exist. Each individual is their own political party. No one individual has more power than any other. We do not allow any individual to be coerced or overly influenced by any identifiable group. We do not accept a tyranny of the majority or by any assemblage.

A citizen can propose a new law or regulation. Our robot friends then carefully review it, comparing it to all the rules already on the books to ensure that no redundancy or contradictory set of laws would occur and that the proposal, if enacted, would benefit all and be harmful to no one. If approved, it is then subjected to a referendum. At this point discussion and debate take place with everyone being given an opportunity to voice their views. If the people approve, our robot friends take over and implement this new piece of legislation with complete impartiality. This, as far as we are concerned is the ultimate 'Democracy'. It has worked successfully for the last five thousand years.

In the same light, we also discourage the formation of any organization that obliges its members to either adopt a rather rigid set of beliefs or to behave in accordance with a prescribed fixed fashion. Organizations such as Trade Unions, Industrial and Professional Associations, Nation States, and Organized Religions are taboo. The first three are irrelevant since our Robot friends are responsible for providing us with goods, services and labour.

It is the latter two that gave us some difficulty. Everyone has the right to believe whatsoever. However we removed from them the right to proselytize or to use any form of coercion to get anyone to accept their set of religious or non-religious beliefs. On the other hand a small group of individuals can share common cause and meet occasionally for discussion purposes, as long as they do not break the previous rule. Temples of worship are prohibited, because it was felt that they could become very persuasive icons. We noted the number of religious wars that take place on your planet. We did not want to fall into that trap.

The question of the Nation State was equally difficult. Again from the experience on your planet we perceived that nearly all wars are between Nation States. In tracing their origins we felt compelled to eradicate their prime cause. Firstly, we deemed it necessary to eliminate the family. In any case it was no longer needed as an economic unit. Marriage became a contractual arrangement, with each contract having to be renewed on a yearly basis. With no children involved they usually did not last longer than two or three years. We also learnt that infants could be far better nurtured by Robots specially programmed than by biological parents whose psychological makeup was often detrimental for parenting. Permission was granted to biological entities who wished to participate in nurturing infants and children, with one caveat: They were not allowed to take care of their own off-springs. Elimination of the family led to the disappearance of the tribe which in turn caused the Nation State to become obsolete. By eliminating organized religion and the nation state, all violence on a grand scale vanished."

Morad paused. I then jumped in. "I am amazed that you and yours have been able to accomplish what you have. If all that you say is true then, indeed, you have created something that probably does not exist anywhere else, certainly not on my planet. You appear to have a paradise. While I can pose a myriad of questions, there is one that I feel is

paramount. How did you manage to get the populace of this world to accept your rules? How was violence eliminated?

“That is a simple question to answer. We used genetic engineering to eradicate all physical and mental traits that were deemed deleterious. This was done a long time ago so that there is no one left with a predisposition towards any sort of anti-social behavior. In connection with this, I must emphasize that we are not clones of one another. Individuality remains paramount and everyone remains free to pursue their interests in whatever area they choose, be it the Arts, and Sciences, Sports and other pastimes, Culinary Skills, Parenting as previously mentioned, the Social Sciences, the Humanities and especially the Computer and Robotic arenas. While we appreciate competition in any particular area, winners are never acknowledged. Our approach is that the result is always a win-win situation. After all, the losers provided the so-called winner an opportunity to win. A one horse race is neither a race nor a worthwhile spectacle.

“Please explain how, in this paradise of yours with no real apparent conflict, how do your artists, playwrights, poets, and novelists find anything to write or create? After all, disagreement, battles, arguments, divergences and especially tension are the frequent stuff of drama.

Morad responded with a smile. “Our artists deal with what could have been. All they have to do is study the history of your world. We could have gone your route. Luckily we did not.

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Then very regrettably, my alarm clock rang and woke me up from the best dream I have ever had. All the preceding was a fantasy aspiration in the form of a dream. As a contemporary journalist I now had to face the nightmare reality of this world.

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