

HISTORY

My family history begins with me, but yours ends with you. Iphicrates

There is properly no history; only biography. Ralph Waldo Emerson

History, that excitable and lying old lady. Guy de Maupassant

All history is modern history. Wallace Stevens

History, Stephen said, is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake. James Joyce

Those who ignore History are condemned to repeat it. Variation of a popular adage.

In all truth there are some lies. In all lies there is some truth. An old Proverb

I am a historian. I research, interpret and teach it at a rather prestigious university. If the truth be told, I am obsessed with the past and in particular with what I call the 'What If Syndrome'. It is axiomatic that the present molds the future although our predictions are usually wrong and that the past has shaped the present in ways that frequently give rise to much debate.

There are two complementary aspects to examining history. The first is not as contentious as the second. It is simply a straight forward factual record. For example, "There was a war between two specific nations that started and ended on certain dates and that the victor was or There was a natural calamitous event such as an earthquake, volcano and a raging storm of unparalleled magnitude that cost a great deal in terms of property and lives lost, or a momentous scientific and technological breakthrough occurred that had a significant social, economic and political impact." This does not mean that these so-called facts cannot be disputed. They can and often are, the further back in time one goes. So called Biblical History can serve as a case in point.

However it is the second facet of history that is far more fascinating. I am referring to an interpretative approach, that is, why did something occur; how significant was it; and how the future would have been affected if it had not taken place or something radically different had. This approach frequently led me to ask what I had previously labeled the "What If Syndrome". What would the present day be like if either event A had not occurred and or event B had? Is it possible that there could be an infinite number of histories leading to a similar number of contemporary worlds on our planet? This is a beguiling question that has plagued me for as long as I can remember.

An impossible corollary thought is, 'If I could go back into the past and change it, what alterations would I effect and what would be the result on our present day world?' After all, with hindsight, we are reasonably well acquainted with a past that has had many artificial disastrous events that I would like to eliminate. Thus, I am enamored with the notion of time travel. A good friend, Mitch, a quantum physicist, also has speculated about it. According to him there are a number of physics equations in which time is a variable that can be positive or negative. We normally think of time as positive linear always marching into the future. Since the future has not occurred it is impossible to

travel into or easily predict it. Mitch has pondered about the possibility of making it negative linear so that it would regress into the past.

He felt that since the quantum equations were inviolable all that was necessary was to change the positive or negative signs of a number of factors so that to keep the equation as before, the time factor would automatically be changed from positive to negative. Using this technique and after much effort he managed to go back by a few milliseconds. A few years later he succeeded by about ten seconds and shortly after that by close to two minutes. Of course, I was following his effort closely and becoming impatient. I wanted him to try his experiments on me. He agreed but only after using a guinea pig as his first organic trial pigeon. He put a time piece on the animal and noted that he had successfully returned it five minutes in the past. I implored him to use it on me. He made me sign a document attesting to my willingness so that if something went badly awry he was in no way responsible. Again he insisted on trials with other test animals. The results were nearly always identical. He then had to reconstruct the apparatus so that it would fit me. That took him about another year.

The big day finally arrived. As can be imagined I was quite nervous. I took a strong tranquilizer. I was hardly aware of entering the device or the subsequent machinations. When I came out of my stupor I soon ascertained that I had not really traveled into the past. I had no idea where I was. I was not in the past, present or future. It appeared that I was in a sort of limbo in which I could view events of the past. I quickly realized that I was witnessing events from my youth, e.g. my first date, my relations with family and friends and the thing that most interested me, namely history.

I then learnt that I could select any part of my previous life and observe it in detail. This was followed by an ability to fast forward to the time that I entered Mitch's device. In other words I was able to select and view any part of my past life right up to the present. However it was like I was in a theater viewing my life as a theatrical production. This was most disconcerting since the "I" who had wished to travel into the past now appeared to exist as a non-corporeal entity.

Much to my surprise I discovered that I was not restricted to my personal history but also could access the history of our world. I chose to observe the assassinations of Caesar and Lincoln, the events leading up to a number of major wars, some of the major advances in the sciences, technology and the arts, and some horrific natural disasters. I took a vicarious trip with the astronauts on their voyage to the moon.

This led me to wonder once again about my 'What If' syndrome. If I was attending a theatrical performance that encompasses 'History', is it possible that History has been scripted and if so might it be possible for me to rewrite it? A sobering thought was if history had been scripted then who wrote it and did that not mean that the past present and future were and are all fictions. Despite these questions I decided to continue and test my hypothesis.

I chose to eliminate my first wife from my life. I wondered whether this would alter it to such an extent that I would no longer be a father and would never have met my second wife. Much to my surprise and delight I was successful in my test: Yet my life did not largely change. I still met my second wife and we have three children as before.

I then wondered whether the history of Rome would have dramatically been changed if Caesar had not been assassinated. I made sure that he was not. On that fateful day he died a natural death so that nothing much changed. This was true when I decided to foil the killing of the aristocrat that ostensibly led to World War One. That calamitous war still occurred. I eliminated Napoleon. However he was quickly replaced by another ambitious soldier and tyrant so that the history of Europe was not really altered. It was as if there was a force at play not allowing me to radically alter history. I tried to eradicate the 'Cold War', all the problems of the Middle East' the horrendous inequities that currently exist, slavery, etc. I failed completely.

I came to appreciate that my single incident alterations were not sufficient to make much of a difference in the historical course of events. I would have to come up with a much more extensive rewrite. I went back to the event credited with the manifestation of the universe, namely the 'Big Bang'. I knew that there were very few that understood it or understood other theories that attempted to explain 'Existence'. I also felt that the scientific foundation for it was very dry and prosaic. It needed some color. I don't claim to be all that original so I plagiarized and after some editing rewrote the history of our origins. Its genesis follows. It came to be the basis for a new religion despite it being an elaborate piece of fiction.

"In the beginning a spirit created the heavens, all the galaxies with all their stars and all the solar systems, one of which contained the planet Earth. The Earth was without form and empty, with darkness on the face of the depths, but the spirit moved on the water's surface and said, "There shall be life and so it came to pass....."

The rest is History!

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