

MONEY, MONEY, MONEY

Words are wise men's counters, they do but reckon with them, but they are the money of fools. Thomas Hobbes

It is one thing to have a right to the possession of money, and another to have a right to use money as one pleases. Pope Leo XIII

If a man is wise, he gets rich, an' if gets rich, he gets foolish, or his wife does. That's what keeps the money movin' around. Finley Peter Dunne

Certainly there are lots of things in life that money won't buy, but it's very funny -- Have you ever tried to buy them without money? Ogden Nash

I have an odd tale to tell. As is my custom, I usually go for a brief drink at my neighborhood pub after work each day. Of course, I am familiar with all its habitual customers. Yesterday, however, I found a stranger at my usual place nursing a drink. I sat down beside him and introduced myself.

"I am James Magruder and this is my usual spot." He immediately arose and apologized. "I am truly sorry but I was not aware of that. My name is Charles Smith. I wandered in here seeking a friendly bar and I seem to have found it."

"That is perfectly all right," I replied. "May I offer you a drink?" He accepted graciously. He appeared to be around forty, was well dressed, spoke with a slight accent that I could not place and seemed to be a well educated gentleman. We chatted for about another fifteen minutes, when he made two startling revelations. It was in response to my query of what is or was his profession or what had or did he do to earn a living.

"I am currently a teller of tales, which provides me with the means to survive. I used to be a space explorer in the employ of the government's space agency. My tales are all based upon my past experiences in space. Most, if not all, have been classified as 'top security'. To say the least, our security apparatus is not very happy with me. In fact they are constantly hunting me. I endeavor to remain one step ahead of them and so far, have been quite successful. They have also attempted to quash all my stories and to some extent have succeeded.

One reason they have not found me is that I do not use credit cards, and the payment I receive for my narratives is never money. For example, I am willing to tell you a story if you would buy me dinner. I am quite hungry since I have not eaten anything today."

"You are putting me on. What about all the necessities of life? How did you acquire your clothes which seem to be quite new? You are well groomed. Who provided you with a haircut and a shave? Where do you sleep at night? In other words, what sort of shelter is provided for you?

His answer was extraordinarily simple. "I am a minimalist. I have learnt to live on very little. There are all sorts of public shelters readily available. During clement and warm

weather, I have discovered a number of natural habitats, such as caves, rivers and lakes that provide me with shelter and the means to keep myself and my clothes quite clean while also furnishing me water to drink, a most important necessity to sustain life. There are fish and other forms of life that are quite nutritional. For a decent meal, my stories seem to do the trick. As for these clothes, they were provided by a wealthy lady whose husband had recently died, leaving behind an extensive wardrobe. Her generosity to me was all-embracing as it also included a stay in her bed. At some point I felt that I could not take more advantage of her munificence. It had become apparent that she wanted to keep me around as a lover. This would have been impossible. I had no desire to be tied down, especially since I was always on the run. One day I simply disappeared from her life. I wish her well and hope she finds what she so desperately seeks. Finally, I wish I could buy you a drink, but I cannot since I have no cash. However, I am quite willing to tell you a tale."

"I agree. I will buy you dinner, on one condition. You have not really explained why you do not want any money for your tales. Please recount the reasons in a manner that will both edify and entertain." What follows is his tale.

"As I mentioned, I was a space explorer. There weren't many of us. Perhaps it was because of the very special skills required and of the associated risks. Any travel into the unknown areas of space was a voyage that nearly always was fraught with dangers that were totally unexpected. We never knew what we were going to face, whether our technology would be able to withstand the rigors that had never been foreseen and whether we would be able to cope with strange phenomena and aliens. My tale, one that I have never recounted, will account for what you deem is my odd behavior. It was my final trip, mainly because after being debriefed, the space agency characterized me as being too unstable to continue as a space explorer. Another reason was that after my experience, I no longer wished to engage in space travel. I wanted to bring what I had learnt to my fellow humans.

When I embarked on my last voyage, what I had not realized and neither did all the medical experts who had given me a thorough health check, was that I was infected with a low grade viral disease. After about two to three weeks in the confines of my space module it blossomed into a high fever that rendered me totally useless. I lost complete control of my vehicle and warped into a section of space never before explored. I blacked out. I awoke to find myself in a hospital bed, bereft of my illness. I felt fine. When I tried to get out of bed I was gently held back and told to continue to rest by a beautiful humanoid looking alien, whose sex I later determined was female. 'My name is Lota and I am your nurse. For sound medical reasons, we would like you to sleep for another number of hours. When you reawaken you will be fed and will exercise enough to regain your strength. We will then answer all your questions.'

The food provided was ample, delicious and apparently very nourishing. I quickly found that my physical well being was far better than it had ever been. Before I had a chance to satisfy my curiosity, Lota recounted what had happened.

'The technology of my world detected your space ship and that it was in great difficulty. It also allowed us to determine that you were quite ill. We could not let you flounder to your inevitable demise. We have medical knowledge far more advanced than yours. We brought you here and treated you. We were also able to determine where your home

world is. It did not take us long to learn your language, a good deal of your culture, your scientific and technological expertise and your history. As you will find out, our world is radically different than yours.'

During the ensuing weeks and perhaps months, I found myself inhabiting a world that was nothing short of a paradise. I was free to roam as I wished with Lota always at my side. 'I hope you do not feel constrained by my presence. I am with you solely as a guide, to provide you with any explanations you deem necessary.'

The first thing I noticed was the general atmosphere of a lack of tension and an abundance of civility and cordiality. No one seemed uptight about anything. They all appeared to be in good spirits, in excellent health and were striking in appearance. Another notable thing was the lack of traffic. There were no private means of transportation. One simply had to get on a moving sidewalk of variable speed.

Perhaps the most striking phenomenon was that there was no apparent transfer of money in the shops that provided goods and services. Lota explained in some detail.

'To anyone younger than a certain age, anything they desire is provided at no cost to them. After they reach the age of maturity, a special device is implanted in their body, which registers all the purchases they make and which transmits the data to a central computer. All necessary foodstuffs, medical assistance, shelter, clothes and educational items are provided free of charge. The populace is charged for what is judged to be luxury items or excessive amounts of whatever. The critical thing is that each person is deemed to have a certain worth, based upon their productivity, the importance of their work efforts, the innovative and aesthetic aspects of their endeavors, the role they play in the community, the examples they set, etc. This reflects their earning power and is credited to their worth. We have no idea what unit is used by the robots to measure the worth against which purchases are charged. If by chance the people spend more than they are worth, they are not allowed to spend until they make their debt disappear.

I know what you must be asking. Who decides upon the value of any activity? The answer is quite simple. Many years ago, one of our geniuses devised a computerized robot that had mental powers far superior to ours. We had always been a people with a democratic form of government. After lengthy deliberations we decided to let a panel of these robots make all major decisions for us. It was the wisest thing that we had ever done. Ever since, we have lived a charmed life. Our robots got to know us better than we knew ourselves. We do have the right to make suggestions, yet the final decisions belong to them. It is they who decide on the quasi monetary worth of each of us and it was their decision to abolish money as a unit of exchange.

While they are often in accord with our inputs, they are responsible for all matters pertaining to legal, judicial, law enforcement, civil disputes, social and economic requirements, and any other areas where authoritative actions are required. For example, it now is impossible to commit a crime and get away with it. Since we are all constantly monitored, any felon is immediately caught. The punishment usually fits the crime. Thus criminal behavior is extremely rare.'

"This is fantastic. How reliable are the robots?"

'Since they are not contaminated by emotions, they are totally objective, and perfectly reliable. They have never showed any bias in any of their decisions. They are simply ruled by doing what is best for our world.'

"I have one more question. I notice that there is an abundance if not a surplus, of all goods and there seems to be an endless provision of services. How do you manage to achieve such an ideal economic state of well being?"

'Again the answer is actually quite simple,' Lota replied. 'The most important requirement for any economy is energy. We have a supply that far surpasses our needs. That supply is ecologically sound, with no harmful effects. Using it, we are able to agriculturally produce all the nutrients we require and to manufacture all desirable goods. We were very fortunate. Another one of our scientific geniuses figured out how to obtain this abundance of benign energy. Our world, like yours, is inhabited with nearly an infinite amount of micro organisms. Most of them lie dormant yet are crucial to our ecology and our well being. He worked for many years to alter their genetic make-up. He finally succeeded. We used to suffer from many diseases similar to those in your world. Organisms harmful to us were quickly eradicated by the new ones. That was a great boon to our health care system. However, of equal if not of greater significance was the creation of viruses and bacteria that fed on both cosmic and solar energy. In turn, these organisms now emit desirable forms of energy such as mechanical, thermal and all forms of the electromagnetic variety. Since there is an infinite supply of cosmic and solar energy, the microorganisms involved are constantly being revitalized and replenished. Perhaps it is this that makes our world such a beautiful and bountiful place.'

"I was stunned by these revelations, namely about the wise robots and the role of micro organisms in this world. I was anxious to return to my home world to see if I could make good use of what I had learnt. Lota informed me that I was always free to leave, with one caveat. I would never know where in the myriad of galaxies I happened to be. I would be put to sleep in my spacecraft and be awakened within close distance of Earth. As you can gather, I have been a total failure in trying to ameliorate the human condition. That is my story.

I found his story fascinating. In my estimation it merited a five star meal with all the accompanying delights of the best of wines and digestifs. Much to the depletion of my wallet I provided him with one such repast. I could not help but remark that, "If there is any truth to your tale then it is the best example of 'Intelligent Design' ever. If it is nothing more than a fable I wonder what I could get for it in a trade with no cash involved.

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