

History Revisited

Anybody can make history. Only a great man can write it. Oscar Wilde

Fellow citizens, we cannot escape history. Abraham Lincoln

The happiest women, like the happiest nations, have not history. George Eliot

My argument is that War makes rattling good history, but Peace is poor reading. Thomas Hardy

I am a member of a rather unique band of persons. The odd thing about it is that I have no idea how many others belong to it or who they are. We were all approached by an extra terrestrial alien whose home planet was never revealed to us. While what was disclosed was unbelievable it turned out to be true. It may be the only valid point in what I am about to reveal.

When I first encountered the alien, I was sure I was having a nightmare or, at the very least, a shocking dream. He, or it, looked like a normal human until he convinced me that he was far from that by shifting his appearance and by recounting to me personal facts that nobody could have possibly known. I was then informed about the other members of the ensemble. They represented every racial and ethnic class that exists in our world. Its purpose was explained.

“We have been monitoring your world since life first appeared here. Initially we did not take much interest because of the very primitive nature of these life forms that biologically evolved rather predictably. Much to our surprise and for reasons that are inexplicable and after a lengthy period of time, they developed into higher forms of beings especially when they discovered agriculture. This in turn obliged them to evolve from lone feudal hunters into social groups which, in turn, caused them to create spoken language followed quickly by forms of the written variety. It did not take them too long to become rather sophisticated. We became cognizant of their potential. Indeed so much so that about twenty thousand years ago we recorded everything that they did. In other words, we procured a history of every single one of them so that we could study humans in depth and try to predict what their future held. The amount of information thus garnered was immense. Fortunately we had and have the technology that not only allows us to do this but also to retrieve any particular gathered fact that we desire. What we cannot do is to ascertain what the various personages were thinking or feeling. We can only infer some of that from their actions.

Since we had never accomplished such an undertaking we were in a sort of quandary. We simply did not know how to experiment with this mass of knowledge or what to do with it. One of our brighter savants then came up with a superlative idea. Let us select a small group of these humans from a variety of ethnic, racial, nationalistic, sexual and cultural collections and see what they come up with, if anything. If we have a problem all we have to do is to send our thoughts travelling back to our world for clarification. A response will be immediately forthcoming.”

I simply could not believe what I had been told. I decided to test their assertions by merely calling for my biography. Regrettably, it featured many errors such as my time and place of birth, the fact that I spent many years in an orphanage, the university that I attended and the advanced degrees I attained. While there was a semblance of truth to them, none were accurate to the extent they were supposed to be.

I then gave serious thought to the aliens and to my surprise they immediately responded by inquiring as to the nature of my problem. I explained that my bio, as they had recorded it, was full of falsities and distortions. Somewhat shame-facedly they proffered an explanation.

"We deliberately misled you. We do not have the technology that would allow us to record your history as we suggested. All the others we contacted have the same difficulty as you. It seems that there is a vast number of universes each with a unique history. We desired to learn the history of the universe as we perceive it and surprisingly discovered that we had the same problem as you did. When we accessed many of these histories, both yours and ours, we astonishingly learnt that each had been written by something or someone that did not resemble the others. In other words we never found two identical histories. We tried to find a universe with a history that you could relate to. Obviously we did not succeed. We wonder if you will attempt to author a history that you could feel comfortable with. It does not have to be either truthful or valid since all the others we have read seem to be the products of various imaginations. In other words these histories are all fictions. As such, some are really quite ingenious and make for fascinating reading. Others are simply plebeian and poorly written. Any fiction that you may come up with will represent a possibility. We are amenable for you to communicate with the other humans that we also approached. Some may be of assistance."

I could not believe my ears. What they were suggesting is that I could and should create a universe with a corresponding history that would represent a supposed reality but would simply be nothing more than a piece of literature. I would become a creator, an entity that has always been totally alien to me. Most of the other humans I contacted felt the same way although some suggested that such a piece of literature already exists in their world or in their minds.

A far more disturbing thought then plagued me. Do I exist or am I a figment of an alien imagination or of my imagination. If life is a fiction how can I exist within it? Am I alone in my reality? This filled me with dread and existential despair which was compounded by my inability to write my own piece of fiction. My mind is as blank as the first page of my epic. Again, are all my thoughts someone else's or uniquely mine? Is there such a thing as truth? If there is, where is it? The old conundrum as to whether truth is discovered or invented becomes meaningless if truth is nothing more than a fiction. It may be that existence is also nothing more than a fiction. Who or what is responsible is a mystery and will probably remain so.

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