

HOMO-POSTERUS

One thing which used to attract me quite a bit was a cartoon of 'Dennis the Menace', where he says 'the main difference between them, grownups, and we, kids, is that the grownups take things which are meant for fun, very seriously', unlike kids. I also found, the grownups sometimes take things meant to be of utmost importance, not at all seriously. And there was no predictable pattern. As I was growing up, in each and every stage of my growth to a young man, I experienced many embarrassing moments, due to the delays in appreciating the true meaning that hid the intent behind what the grownups say.

Notwithstanding best efforts, I couldn't find an answer to these questions and so far, all my efforts yielding no results. And I always thought of myself as fairly intelligent. I therefore thought I would travel in time, and ask the other generations, whether anyone did succeed in solving this. I now thought of the great Albert Einstein, my idol since childhood, who theorized that time travel was possible by bending time and space via the means of gravitational forces, and I had implicit faith in that. One way, I know, is to travel back in time, and to meet with all that you are already aware of from various sources, and perhaps discover the source of such a duality, the one between our true intent and what we actually say. Another way, which I found more interesting, is to travel ahead in time to see what others are going to see in due course. What is this duality, leading us to? From which, by induction, deduce the cause? I chose the latter, a journey

to the future. As I haven't come across a device that enables such a journey, I started from scratch, the making of my vessel, the time module.

I succeeded in harnessing the weak force for creating a virtual gravitational field and thereby cause distortion in space-time. This I could achieve after years of experimenting with quarks, leptons, and other sub-atomic particles, when I found certain flavors of quarks acting differently and in a non-intuitive manner, while colliding with neutrinos. While continuing research on quantum particles, I fell upon the possibility of linking Casimir force with quantum particles of gravity, which led to the possibility of balancing a thin plate vessel in a moving field. The ultimate result was that I could perfect a machine that could travel through the dimensions of time and space, utilizing virtual fields and abstract interactions. I was so excited that without even waiting to conduct a public demonstration or to acknowledge the bulk of good wishes from all, I began the ultimate test by sending a guinea pig to the future. And I chose myself as the guinea pig, of course, since I would not allow other beings to risk their life (or enjoy the fruits!).

But what did I find? Since we are a weak species and seek power over those who are of a meek nature, we tend to destroy what we cannot dominate. All I could find in the future, and all I have witnessed, disclosed nothing else, but what horrendous days are there, waiting to witness the end of the human race. But I am getting ahead of myself. I must start at the beginning.

I am a peaceful person. I could never tolerate the human society always at war with itself. A cursory study of our history (this has been my pet hobby for long) made

it quite clear to me that war is never a good answer, and longed to find a way to prevent it. I'd invented my time machine specifically with that idea, since I wanted to give a real taste of the aftermath of war to all who would take a trip with me.

After many years of trial and error I had finally perfected a machine. And I was at the point where I could put it through. The date I chose was January 12th 3117. I'd decided that this was the hour I would like to witness, to get a good idea of our future prospects. I was very excited, but a little anxious about what mankind was going to be surprised with.

I entered the time machine, and had a swift look at all those who came to wish me good luck. I sat down on the seat, taking care to close the door behind me and went through the checklist. I pushed the buttons in the preset pattern, and there continued the operating procedure as designed. The time machine shuddered, but nothing appeared to happen at first, perhaps the conversion of weak force into gravity and its deployment for time compression took place rather imperceptibly. All of a sudden, I saw a blinding, white light that seemed to appear from nowhere. It spun faster and faster. A tremendous pressure built up inside the cabin. I could barely read the dial that measured the years flying past. 2025, 2030, 2040... I finally forced my hand up to the buttons and pushed them. The years slowed and the machine finally stopped. The dial was showing January 12th, 3117. Over two thousand years had elapsed.

With a pounding head, an equally frightened heart and a shivering hand, I grabbed the lever to open the door. And my ears were feeling a deafening thunder. My body

felt even more miserable as though it had just come out from a centrifuge. Weak at the knees, I stumbled out into the open. The lab still stood there, its walls could be made out, though, were hardly recognizable, but for its skeletal frame. Tables were covered in dirt and debris that had fallen from what was left of the false ceiling. The laser machine, though bent and broken, could be recognized as my chosen model. This didn't present a problem as the present machine had been stored with sufficient material to provide a way back to my era many times over.

I walked over to the lab door. Thankfully, my old door was still standing. I unlocked the rusted bolt and stepped out into the hallway. The stairs were in complete disrepair, but I could manage to maneuver. I made my way up to the grand foyer, walked past the secretarial station to the front doors, and shoved against them. What greeted me was a totally new world.

The roads looked as though unused for centuries. There were plenty of cracks filled with sprouted weeds and flowering shrubs. It seemed mankind had stopped using road transportation and taken fully to the air. I could see specks in the distance that I assumed were flying vessels. Many of those were speeding to and fro as if on an invisible highway. Skyscrapers soared little higher into the heavens. I sat down on a curb, to reflect, engage and to take it all in. It was an awesome sight. I reached around to my backpack to grab my notebook and pen. My sensations started to pour down as words.

The thing that was noticeable by its absence in the nearby environment was a human being. Perhaps none of them lived on the surface, but stayed high above it, as

was the practice with us. To find out more, I got up off my haunches, grabbed my diary and started on my journey.

I'd walked for the better part of the day and continued on the outskirts of the city. I crossed many abandoned buildings. After a few hours, I finally reached a new area, a portion of the city that appeared to me as an important area. I walked to one of the buildings. I tried to push against a door. Before I could actually apply pressure, the door opened in a slow and silent move. The huge concourse was fully lit with bright lights. It appeared that electric supply was never short. The hall was huge, and covered the full floor. This of course, occupied the entire length and breadth of the building. I went to the elevator bay, took one at random, climbed in, and punched a button. The doors opened in a jiffy, smooth and without bumps. I entered. There was a keypad, filled with numbers rising to many hundreds. I chose the button for the 200th floor. The doors closed equally smoothly as it opened and the lift moved. It must have been really fast, I reached my destination before I could reflect on what all has happened so far.

The doors opened. I peeked out with great feelings. I could see the descendants of my peers bustling about the courtyard in a hurried state. I came out of the elevator and looked around. One glance came my way, but the work continued with no regard to my presence, with great concentration and deep involvement. I was wondering. "Why he hadn't stopped and asked about my ancient clothing?" For, his was entirely different from mine. No suits, ties or designer dresses; everyone was dressed in the same white jumpsuit from head to toe. No one paid any attention to me as I wandered about.

I stopped and stood behind a woman. She was punching wildly at a keypad and seemed oblivious of my presence. Still, I asked her if there was anyone in charge of this work area, whom I could speak to. She responded without hiding her annoyance, but her eyes were glued to the keyboard. "Haven't you hooked up to the system and recharged yourself this morning?" she asked.

"What system?"

She now looked up. Her brows rose quizzically, when she noticed my attire. She grabbed a phone and spoke some words. I could not hear what was said, I was watching her referring to something like a lookup table on her computer. Not a minute had passed before two guards appeared with a whole chain of attendants, armed with some sort of weapons, grabbed me, and escorted me back to the elevators. The lift rose, stopped, and the doors hissed open. The attendants took me to a desk. "We've got another one from the super-race," one of them said, handing me over to the person seated behind it. The man pushed a button and I could hear hushed discussions. I was finally pushed into a tastefully furnished room and told to wait. The guards exited the room with whatever belongings I had. It seemed I had no choice but to enjoy the hospitality.

There was nothing to occupy my mind other than glancing through the odd collection of magazines, as the minutes ticked by. There was a single chair in the middle of the room. There were many magazines with articles about human races, where the races are mentioned as human-superior and humans. I was at a loss. The superior-humans, as I could make out from a few articles, are far superior to humans in brain power and lives in a

world entirely of his choice. I was lost in thoughts when a tall man walked in, regarded me silently as he circled my chair and asked, “Why didn’t you attach yourself this morning?”

“Attach?”

“Yes. Attach. You know it’s the first job of the day.”

“As I’m not from here, I won’t know what you mean. I’m a visitor to this area and not familiar with the local formalities.”

“You must need a reset.”

“Reset?”

The man went to the door and signaled for the attendants. “Take him to the resetting bay.”

The men grabbed me. I had to get up from my chair and follow him. With no clue regarding what was going on, I could not resist. We went into the elevator again and the doors slammed shut. In a moment, the doors opened, and a large room filled with chairs that were bolted to the floor, came to our sight. Bundles of wires could be seen connected to an enormous computer. They escorted me over and guided me into a chair, strapping me down. They spoke something to a woman who I assumed was a technician. She walked over to the chair, had an overall look and noticed I wasn’t wearing a jumpsuit. “How can I proceed to download if he’s not wearing his number?” she grumbled. “What is your identity number,” she asked me.

“There seems to be some kind of confusion. I am a visitor---,”

“All right then, she sighed. “I’ll just assign you with a temporary number. Hook him up while I report this to the super,” she instructed an assistant.

The young man came over and tilted my head forward, looking for something. He was having a thick cable with an attached connector. He probed my head, his hands running through the roots of my hair. I felt he was looking for something. He continued his search for some time, but then sighed in extreme frustration. “I can’t find any receptacle.”

“Like always” the woman grinned. She took over the search, continued for some time and exclaimed in surprise, “He has no access!”.

“I’ve been trying to tell everyone that I’m only a visitor, but no one will listen. I assure you that I have no such arrangements on my body and whatever you’re trying to plug will be of no use.”

“This is beyond me,” she stated in reply, “Take him to the Administrator.”

“I am the Administrator,” the confident voice said as I sat strapped to a chair in another room. “They tell me that you could not be attached. Did you have your signal input receptacle surgically removed?”

“I don't have any idea about attachments or receptacles. I have been telling everyone that I do not belong to your city. I'm just a visitor here.”

“Where have you come from?”

“I do not come from here and have never had the need to be plugged in, whatever that is. I come from---,” I stopped.

“Come on, continue, from where?”

“There is no easy explanation. In fact, I can only say that I came from beyond the borders of your city.”

“How did you come here. What transported you?”

“I made a time machine and that transported me here”, I proudly replied.

“Good”, The administrator spoke, “I have seen your machine. You have chosen to use weak force and gravity interactions, Isn't it so” He asked.

“Yes”, I was feeling great, “But, how did you make out?” I asked.

He didn't say anything. He seemed to have lost in thoughts.

And an uncomfortable silence hung in the air. After a few moments the confident voice continued, “You must be a mix between humans and super-humans.”

“And you look more intelligent and smarter than humans.”

I didn't utter a word.

After another bout of uneasy silence, the voice spoke again. "Why are you under the impression that you are a human?"

"That's what I am and that is what I've been trying to tell you."

"Let us see! Guards," the voice was all excitement. "Take this unit to the detention center for experimenting. We need to download his raw data. I think this can give some more insight into the working of the ancient human minds. Nobody to attempt further reprogram or other kinds of repair."

The guards rushed over and took possession of me. I thought of freeing myself, but it would have been pointless. Their grasps on my arms were, though soft, unyielding.

*

I was given a cell, a tastefully furnished one, in the detention center. I wondered what kind of world is there for the days to come. Why did this Administrator think I was fit for experimentation? I couldn't for the life of me understand his priorities. "Wait" I thought, "Let us see what turns out of this". I wished I still held on to my backpack. My all purpose gun was hidden deep within and I could have used it to try and escape -if escape becomes a necessity, that is. It didn't seem very likely.

Time seemed to stand still. It seemed a long time before the door was finally opened. Two armed guards hurried in and attached many probes to my hands and

feet and some around my chest. Some more people, who I thought were scientists, along with more sophisticated equipments came in thereafter. They started to connect the paraphernalia with utmost care. I could make out recordings going on at many of the instruments, and in a short while, the scientists' team completed their work, collected the recordings and guards took over. Before I had the chance to see any of the recordings, or make an inquiry, the experimentation team left the place.

Very soon, I was rushed back to the same place, I think. The administrator met me with the results of my experiment. Few of the scientists involved in the experiment were there along with some more experts. One of the experts spoke. "Do you think you belong to human species?"

I couldn't contain myself and shot back, "Yes, of course, I am sure you can make out too"

The administrator had a close look at each scientist's face. He was trying to gauge their expressions, I felt. The scientists were clearly lost in thoughts. I was feeling more and more ill at ease. After some time the administrator spoke, "We will meet tomorrow and formulate a plan. In the meantime, you may do some homework regarding how, this apparition shall affect our ongoing research on 'auto eugenic groups'. Let me now do some questioning".

All scientists left. I was waiting for the next instruction.

"Call me John," he said, "Now that all are left, let us do first things first"

"Very nice to meet you, I am Murray, " I was eager to respond.

"You say you are from the human stock, but aren't you aware that the human race was wiped out in 2200?"

I wanted to act smart, without disclosing my origins which would have made me naturally unaware of this, and I blurted “Or so I heard, have no clear information”.

“It went like this” John took a pad from the computer table, kept in front of me and continued, “Human race, towards the middle of the second millennium started showing clear signs of a drift, a highly intelligent stream having a low rate of reproduction and a dull stream of fast multiplying human forms started to appear.” As John spoke, the salient points of his speech were also appearing on the pad in front of me. “May be there was instigation, or there was genuine reason, humans of the fast multiplying stream was always at war among themselves and in a few decades managed to get eradicated completely. The highly intelligent ones I think, successfully reinstated their subsequent generations as super-humans. The sub-humans of today perhaps are descended from the left over, of those dull humans. And all these need to be supported with solid evidence.”

He turned to me and said with a twinkle in his eye, “You look to be one from that group perhaps of above average stature. You join me as a specimen; I’ll permit you to stay here, and enjoy super-human comforts.”

My mind worked fast. “Join him, earn his trust, and get help for my return journey?” “Displease him, and jeopardize my future?”

I chose the former. John perhaps read from my eyes. “Welcome to super-earth” He gestured with open hands. “I am doing a project. A journey into the origins of super-humans.” He started to explain his plans. “The theories in vogue do not describe this in full, I believe” After a short pause, he continued. “My particular query is about the mechanism of breaking humans into two, the super-humans and the sub-humans”, “How exactly that could have happened, especially, what the basic humans

thought, and how early, you were aware of such possibilities.” He turned, and said “This is where you come in, your appreciation of the times, the main concerns that motivated the people of the times, and the events if any, of significance shall be of help to me”.

I looked at him in silent agreement.

“The scientists will visit you every day” He started with the actual plan. “Though I have informed them that you are under close observation, they may conduct their own investigations. Please co-operate, of course, without exposing our research” “And your successful departure rests on that” He took a deep breath.

From what I just heard, my willingness to undergo any experiments only became stronger.

“Whatever you want me to I do” I replied in earnest.

He took a small device which looked like a miniature cell phone and kept it close to the right side of his temple. After a few seconds he spoke. “First, I will update you with the history of super-humans and sub-humans. Thereafter, we will go around this center, meet with people, both humans and sub humans. I will then administer you the automatic memory interface builder, which will take a few days.” He paused. “That is all?” I couldn’t hide my glee. “No, no,” He said “The last and the most interesting part will come now. We will download from your brain, the final interface, superposition of archaic data from your past with, your impressions of the present, which in all probability shall support my theories”.

As he was speaking, I could see that a small team, of scientists I thought, was approaching. Three gentlemen and one lady.

“Meet Joe, Keenan, David and Tanya” John was exuberant, “they will form our team in full”. “And note” he continued, “Each one of them is an expert in one's own field and will feed you with all necessary data.”

John then took out the 'miniature cell phone' and kept on the temples of all four of us, each, for a period two to three seconds. I could feel as though I am attending a project presentation.

"I have updated you with the plan. Think over the proposed actions and come back to me with your queries" John told all of us.

I found myself filled with a swarm of experiments and was trying to figure out my role. And so were others. Each lost in contemplation.

Any questions, gentlemen" John's voice shook all of us.

"None at all," said Joe, Keenan and David.

Tanya didn't say anything, kept her gaze quizzically at John.

He turned to Tanya. "I am including you specifically to establish the role of performance anxiety in modulating the social, behavioral pattern of the past generations, especially of the archaic period up to the great divide by 2200. And you being an expert in this field, kindly update all of us with our past and enlighten this crowd with the interesting features of human history, "

Tanya took out from her handbag, a device quite similar looking to the miniature cell phone.

"This is an atomic mouse that is also a side-kick" She said, sensing the quizzical look on my face. As before, the 'side-kick' was placed on the temple of each of us for a few seconds, satisfied herself that the update and transfer is over by the iris size, and declared aloud. "Now I will give a brief overview of our past, which will help you in assimilating the full history in the correct perspective."

"Take your side-kick"

Noticing that I do not have one, she turned to John, who, by that time had already signaled for one. One of the guards surfaced with an atomic mouse, which she took,

turned to me, and said “Hold on to this, this is already loaded with required data. If during my lecture, you face any questions or need greater elaboration, just enable this by pressing the button sign. The question will get stored along with the explanation from its memory. If an answer does not exist in memory, this will automatically refer to me and update itself.”

“When will it update me?” I couldn’t contain my excitement.

“The tip end of the side-kick turning green is the indication, that it is ready to update you.” After a brief pause, she asked “Shall I start with a lecture? Ready?”

We all agreed and she began. “About 4.6 billion years back the Sun formed from the gravitational collapse of a region within a large molecular cloud. Most of the matter gathered in the center (Sun), while the rest flattened into an orbiting disk that became the Solar System (Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune). Collisions with other planets and meteorites made many changes like bringing water to earth. About 3.6 billion years back were formed, the first simple cells, oxygen producing bacteria, followed by complex cells. About 1 billion years back multi-cellular life started appearing and about 650 million years back started the first known identifiable division of time span, the ice age. In millions of years, the ice age gets over. And with the formation of the ozone layer, more forms of life start to appear. Fish, amphibians, crab, reptile and finally around 200 million years back mammals appeared, and the earliest humans started appearing about 4 million years back. Evolution took a more discernible path hereafter. Tool making humans and the Stone Age began about 2 million years back. About 7000 years back were the bronze age, followed by the Iron Age (5000 years back) and the great

industrial revolution began about 2500 years back. Human progress was at its peak, they attempted to conquer their own and other planets till they almost completely disappeared about 500 years back.” Tanya paused.

“What matters to us more”, Tanya continued, “in this long history is the possibility of identifying various time spans, each with a predominant direction or style of growth. Rightfully termed as ‘ages’, we already can identify the Ice Age, Stone Age, Bronze Age, Iron Age and what used to be known as The Modern Age.” She briefly touched her temple with a side-kick and continued. “Now gentlemen, I come to the more interesting parts of this talk.” Giving a close look at the small audience once again, she went on “What is known to us as Modern Age, in fact, is a mix of two separate intervals, each distinguishable by the interest or the lack of it, in a rational approach. Since its beginning in the fifteenth century till about a century short of its end, rational thought flourished in the Modern Age. The last years of this age, however, is clearly noticeable by the proliferation of the irrational.”

“Our task” John’s voice rose, “is to find a scientific explanation for this phenomenon. Remember, if it could happen to humans, It can happen to us too. And, forewarned is forearmed” John briefed us about his plan. “We will divide ourselves into smaller teams and delve deep into human life in its entirety, to learn about them.”

“I am interested in the environment” Joe said, “the surroundings as well as the living conditions interest me a lot”.

Keenan immediately volunteered, “I will deal with the physiological aspect, which will suit my medical background”.

David turned to me, “What about you, Murray?”

Though I couldn’t catch how, he knew my name, I said “History is my favorite subject and I would like to trace their path across the last few millennia”.

“Everything else, I will look after” David rose.

John began his instructions “There will be a computer user interface in all locations. Whatever information you want, keep your side-kick on the terminal and think about the data. The side-kick will get appropriately updated. You can then download the data to your minds at your convenience. Remember, if you collect unnecessary data, the relevant agencies shall be immediately notified. Action also shall follow immediately, and in many cases, I may not get the time or opportunity to intervene. So be careful. For your safety, I have programmed your side-kicks to ignore all forms of thought other than those about your selected subject area. All the best. Get updates and think of a complete plan of going ahead with our hunt. We shall meet again after 4 hours.”

I thought a cup of coffee will be refreshing and went to a bustling corner that looked like a café. I found the tables and chairs neatly placed with various types of utensils and pretty looking containers filled with some liquid. Each table also housed a collection of snacks, I think, in temperature controlled boxes. I looked around, but couldn’t find someone to serve. I waited, thinking that someone will come. In a few minutes, a couple of people walked in. They sat on chairs and drank from the liquid

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