

THE ALIENS ARE US

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Freeeditorial 

So great is the media pressure focusing on health and body image these days that finally, after giving it a lot of thought, I decided to spend some time in one of those beauty spas that promise to cleanse every toxin out of your body, leaving you brand new and a few years younger, almost as if they were talking about a tune-up for a luxury car. I say “luxury” because of the price they charged me.

There were a lot of people there in white coats, who starved me so brutally that I no longer have any desire to visit Africa. Why bother, when I’ve experienced such deprivation right here at home?

When I finally got back from the spa, where I had paid a fortune to be subjected to misery and boredom, I called Zoilo to talk about my experience.

“I decided to go there,” I explained, because he didn’t know the story, “because they told me that they can change your life in two weeks.”

“And how long were you there for?”

“Six.”

“And did it change you?”

“Yes, in two ways: my body weight has been severely reduced, and my bank account even more so.”

He laughed; I’m not sure if he was laughing with me or at me (I’m never sure of this with Zoilo). And then he said goodbye.

After the call I sat down to contemplate eternity from the terrace on the roof of my house, and my thoughts turned to my recent experience. *Had it been any use?* I asked myself. Of course, as far as the weight loss was concerned it hadn’t, because I gained it all back in no time; what I didn’t gain back was my previous bank balance. *So why did I do it?* I kept asking myself. *Perhaps,* I responded, *the answer lies in the nature of our own nature.* Good

heavens! Looking back on that sentence I've just realized how intellectually profound it is!

It just shows that I have learned something from my conversations with Zoilo, because in the sports news – which is the only thing I read, and even then just the headlines – you don't generally come across such brilliant observations. Or at least, I don't remember ever seeing any.

But again I asked myself the burning question: *Really, why did I do it? To please someone, perhaps?*

Most people would probably answer this question with the old cliché that “*it wasn't to please others, but to please myself.*” But they're shameless liars, because if they lived on a desert island I doubt they'd be that worried about their body shape or their image.

The truth is that we human beings are a pack of compulsive fibbers; we tell one whopper after another. To begin with, everyone lies to themselves; and then, husbands lie to their wives and wives to their husbands; parents lie to their children and children to their parents; friends lie to each other, and politicians lie to everybody.

This is our way of feeling safe. Let's be honest: the *truth* is of no use at all in spite of the good press it gets, because we have to lie to succeed, or at least to survive. Zoilo has even told me that this was the reason behind what we call manners and etiquette, which are just another form of lying, but in a more refined way: *Hello, madam, how slim and young you look today.* This is what we would say even if the good lady resembles a shriveled-up whale. *What a cute little monkey!* This is what we would say to parents upon seeing their baby, even if the description – the monkey part, I mean – is literally true. What all this points to is that the truth is a virtue that is widely praised but rarely put into practice.

But I'm afraid I have digressed, and now I don't know what I was talking about, or why my train of thought has taken this winding track.

Ahh, now I remember! I was saying that people are lying when they claim that their efforts to look good aren't for others. And that the truth is that we all

care what others think about us, and we all go out of our way to make ourselves as presentable as possible. This was the reason for my six-week stay at that over-priced beauty spa, albeit without results, because all I achieved was a loss of savings and of six weeks of my life.

But I certainly succeeded in boring myself silly, and in such situations my agile mind (as you are no doubt already aware) tends to be besieged by conflictive thoughts. On this occasion, however, I must confess that all my philosophical doubts arose in response to the prohibitions imposed by those men in white coats, who insisted that I had to deprive myself of things in order to live longer.

The first thing they taught me was that everything good and fun is harmful to human health. Specifically: chocolate, seafood, wine, sex, relaxing in a comfy sofa; tobacco, soft drinks, candies, popcorn, hamburgers, pizza... in short, all we're left with is Swiss chard, spinach, apples and water.

The first question that immediately arose in my mind was: *Is it worth having a longer life only to enjoy a few wilting spinach leaves?*

But my reflection went much further, because at the spa, as I mentioned, I had a lot of time to be bored, and a lot of hunger to forget. This was why my mind began wandering around the idea that in reality we are a bunch of misfits on our own planet, because everything good is bad for us.

Delving more deeply into this question of our maladjustment, it occurred to me that one good piece of evidence for it is the fact that we can't go around naked, because we would get cold; another is that we have to build houses for shelter from the rain, the sun and any other atmospheric phenomenon; and the fact that three quarters of the Earth is water, in which we can barely survive for more than a few seconds. And to cap it all, we are the animal that has the biggest dose of pain in child birth, as if Nature were pointing out to us that it isn't natural for our bodies to conceive and bear offspring. *Probably that pain is the punishment that God sends us for enjoying sex*, I thought.

But I don't know, because now that I think about it that can't be right, given that God is not a misogynist, and the only one who suffers the pain of labor is

the woman. The man does not, at least not physically. So the explanation for our maladjustment to the planet must be found somewhere else. In short, these are the complex issues that occur to you when you've got a lot of time on your hands...

When I left (or, more accurately, fled from) the spa, these confusing and troubling ideas made me realize that I needed Zoilo's help. Such problems are too big to solve without the aid of his insight.

So I invited him over to my attic, and before dinner I explained to him the details of my disconcerting reflections.

What follows is a word-for-word transcription of his answers, so that you can draw your own conclusions, because I didn't entirely understand them myself.

"Man has always believed that merely by giving something a name," Zoilo began, "he has worked out what that something is."

Great Scott! I thought.

I'm sure you'll agree with me that this was a pretty good beginning. I turned all five of my senses to the effort to understand him, albeit with dubious success.

"Thus, for example," Zoilo went on, "Man came up with the name 'Big Bang' for an explosion, and thought that in so doing he had worked out how the Universe began." And after a pause, he continued: "He gave the name 'Evolution' to the transformation of living beings and believed that with this he now understood the origin of the species. The trouble is, the Big Bang isn't the beginning of anything, because it might just be the manifestation of one of the many parallel universes in one of its cycles of contraction and expansion. And the Theory of Evolution doesn't really explain the evolution of the species, because species are born as a product of the chance combination of particles, and they will only prosper if they have the qualities that enable them to survive in a specific environment from the beginning."

Jesus Christ, what a beginning! I thought again, and then aloud I said:

“Ahh! And by all of this you mean...?”

“That if the gazelle hadn’t been born with speed as a defense mechanism, it never would have prospered and it would have disappeared, because the lion would have finished it off in the first phase of its appearance as an animal species and it never would have had time to evolve.”

“Ahh!”

“Well, man is the same. If he hadn’t arisen at the beginning of time with the same level of intelligence he has today, you and I wouldn’t be enjoying this cognac here today, because wild beasts would have exterminated us since we’re physically very weak compared to most of them. We have an intelligence that just barely enables us to create tools to defend ourselves, but not enough to understand the Universe in which we live, and that is why we create hare-brained scientific theories and even more hare-brained religious philosophies. It’s an intelligence that allows us to realize that emotions are the spice of life, but not that reason should direct them.”

After thus beginning his talk – or lecture if you prefer – we decided to take a break for dinner, and above all to take a breath, because I really hadn’t understood a thing.

After dinner we watched an old movie, and then we sat down in a pair of comfortable armchairs to enjoy a peaceful and relaxing conversation, each with a cigar and a tumbler, enjoying an excellent Napoleon cognac.

I have to confess that I’ve always loved these moments, because I’ve always found it amazing that they can even happen, given how different Zoilo and I are. Indeed, he is intelligent, well-read and pensive, while I am...

What I mean is that I think highly of him, in spite of the fact that sometimes I don’t entirely understand what he says. But still more astounding to me is the fact that he thinks highly of me. But that’s how it is. He is actually a man of little patience, yet with me he never reveals this facet of his character. On the contrary, he manages to make our conversations flow without making too much show of all those obscure words he has picked up from reading so many books.

But it seems that I have digressed once more and lost the thread, dear reader. So I shall return to the story. As I was saying, Zoilo and I were chatting peacefully with our cigars and cognacs. It was a pleasant and tranquil night. Perfect for fulfilling one's needs for human communication.

We had been watching the classic film *2001 - A Space Odyssey*, which then became the starting point for our conversation. We exchanged various observations about the movie. The first was that the author should have called it *2111*, and indeed had shown a lack of foresight in naming it *2001*, because that year was long past now and yet the technology described in the film still doesn't exist even today.

Furthermore, I suggested that the first part was reasonably entertaining with its depiction of the origins of man, but the second part was an incomprehensible bore with all the lights set to the tune of the "Blue Danube". I know that the director was one who the "experts" classify as a "thinking man's director". But if he was such a good thinker he should have worked out that in the year 2001 we wouldn't be making trips to Mars and other planets as easily as a trip to the mall, as the movie suggests. I don't know how well he did as a film director, but as a fortune teller he would have starved like I did in the beauty spa.

I have to confess that I fell asleep during the interminable scenes with abstract lights, rocked by the rhythm of the waltz that accompanied them. "*What did all those scenes in the film mean?*" was the first question. And the answer was clear: *I don't know and I don't care*. In short, I couldn't give a fig what they were supposed to mean, even though the snobs say that those bits are the essence of the film and that it's a masterpiece. It's all yours, snobs! Hope you enjoy it! It may be boring as hell, but it's highly recommended for the all-important nap time. Between the waltz and the colored lights you'll sleep like a baby.

What's great about Zoilo is that as knowledgeable as he is (and he could show it off if he chose to), he is no snob. If he doesn't like something he says so without pretense; and on this point we were in total agreement, so we promptly forgot about that part of the film.

But the first part, which offers a cinematic depiction of the origins of man, did strike me as interesting, and so our conversation took that direction.

I should explain something of which you may be unaware. Zoilo is one of those people who questions the reliability of science and gives his reasons for doing so. He asserts that the unquestionable scientific truths of today are no more than the failed theories of tomorrow. He therefore has no faith whatsoever in the theory of man posited by anthropology, among others. He says that anthropologists are a bunch of highly imaginative characters, who dig up a little bit of a caveman's femur and claim that from this they can tell what color eyes he had, what toothpaste he used, the name of his mother-in-law and the number of kids his wife gave birth to. In other words, the conclusions of these experts consist of one percent science and ninety-nine percent fantasy. But that fantasy is what the media like and they spread it around the world as absolute truth.

Zoilo claims that our intelligence has not evolved. We are no smarter than our caveman ancestors; it's just that because there are more of us on Earth now we have greater contact with each other, and this accelerates the spread of knowledge because it can be shared quickly, which didn't happen in ancient times because the different human tribes were very isolated; and it was better that way because when they met they weren't generally very friendly to each other.

Out of this reflection came my chance to raise the burning question, the one underlying all the questions that had occurred to me during my long hours of boredom and hunger in the beauty spa. *This is my chance*, I thought, and I asked him the questions that had been bothering me.

"Why do you think we are so maladjusted to this planet? Why is everything good and enjoyable bad for our health? Why do we have to wear clothes and build shelters, and why is childbirth painful?"

"There is one very simple reason," Zoilo answered calmly. "For centuries, man has been wondering whether aliens have come to Earth. And of course, they have, and they are us. That's why we're so maladjusted."

I sat silent with my tumbler held halfway between the table and my mouth,

which hung open until, a few seconds later, I realized and I shut it.

He had said it as casually as if he were talking about the weather. Without blinking. Without fuss. Without any hint of gravity, as if it were obvious.

I could only manage to say:

“What??”

I stared at him looking placidly out the terrace window at the lights of the night, savoring his cognac and cigar. I got the impression that he had no intention of pursuing the topic. As if the assertion he had just made were so simple and self-evident that it didn't even merit any clarification. But the truth is that he had me on pins and needles, because if anyone else had said it I would have laughed and retorted with some kind of ironic joke. But Zoilo had said it, and Zoilo is the very soul of sanity and sense. So as he didn't go on I was compelled to press him on the matter.

“Are you saying that we are a bunch of little, green, pointy-eared men?”

“No, I don't think we were ever like that,” he answered. “The truth is, I have no idea what our ancestors who arrived here from outer space looked like.”

I was beside myself. I know that expression comes from some ancient character (I don't know if it was a Roman general or priest), but it perfectly describes my anxious reaction to the importance of the information I had just received.

“But how could this have happened?”

“Very simple,” he replied calmly. “Intelligence appeared suddenly back in ancient times and we can prove that it hasn't increased, because it's obvious that we are no more intelligent, for example, than the Greeks or the Romans. So it's reasonable to assume that a group of geneticists from another planet, who were much more intelligent than us, were experimenting more than a million years ago, as if this were some kind of laboratory, mixing their genetic load with different species of primates on this planet, and thus the first subspecies of hominids were born. Some, like Neanderthal man, are now

extinct, while others, like us, have survived. This is why we are so maladjusted, because a significant proportion of our genes are not from this planet that we call Earth. The animal that was born out of these combinations – that is, us – bears parts of the two genetic branches from which it comes, but it is not fully adapted to Earth and thus much of what pleases our simian side harms our alien side. It's that simple. The truth is, the results of the experiment were not that great, because the outcome was an animal, Man, who lost some of the physical qualities of the simians and some of the intelligence of the aliens. And yet, nevertheless, here we are, still around..."

Three hours later, I was lying in bed with my eyes wide open, going over the idea in my head. Me? An E.T.?

So all this time we've been wondering about the existence of alien life, and it turns out we're it. All this time imagining them to be green monsters with antennae, when in fact even Scarlett Johansson is an extraterrestrial. All this time thinking that they would attack us and wipe us out, and now it turns out that the aliens are us.

I don't know when I finally got to sleep that night, but I do know that I dreamed of aliens... because I was dreaming of Scarlett.

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