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Dear Calhoun25,

Thank you, ever so much, for continuing to respond to my posts. Trust me when I tell you that prison's a wretched place, devoid of so many of the things we take for granted. With that said, hearing from someone in the outside world is kind of like finding a rare flower blooming in the middle of a dump. A thing of beauty, even under the best of circumstances, but somehow, seeing it surrounded by such squalor makes it even more rare and precious.

Yes, Dix was indeed a true role model, albeit pretty intimidating to a kid of 17. Here I was, ignorant and naive in the ways of the world, my only real experiences being a mother who spent more time trying to evade work than actually working, and here was a man completely incapable of wiping his own butt, yet he often did more before breakfast than most people I knew, combined! To this day, I don't know how he ever managed to find the will to live, but he didn't just find the will to live, he discovered a drive and determination within himself to surpass everyone's wildest expectations.

Interesting, that you mentioned the ghettos of Chicago. I just seen a special on PBS the other day. I came in when it was almost over, so I didn't happen to catch the name, but one of the issues it dealt with was Welfare's Back to Work Program. Basically, what they do is gather up all the welfare recipients in a given location and tell them that they're either going to get a job, and pay welfare back, or they'll lose their welfare benefits altogether. On paper, it sounds like a good idea. After all, if people are capable of working, then shouldn't they be working? However, in practice, as is so often the case, things worked out horribly.

The first problem was a complete lack of employment opportunities in their home area, but the government refused to let a little thing like that stop them, so they brought in these buses and started shipping these people 40 to 80 miles a day to work. Again, on paper, it sounds like a good idea, but when you start factoring in everything that accompanies it, it's anything but practical for anyone except the government and the employers. One woman they interviewed spent so much time on the bus traveling back and forth to work that she never got a chance to spend time with her family, literally, and the cost of making the trip was so expensive that she actually ended up losing money, rather than finally making enough money to get off welfare. However, her story wasn't by any means unique, this was the norm, experienced by just about everyone involved in that particular area.

The people who profited, however, by which I mean the government and the individual corporations, seen no problem with it, and why should they? The government was able to start collecting on what they'd been paying welfare recipients for years now, while at the same time reducing the amount of resources diverted to them. The various corporations also seen a sudden influx of inexpensive labor, labor they could exploit almost any way they saw fit because these new employees knew, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that they literally had no other options. Complain about what was being done to them and they could lose their job, which in turn meant problems from the government about the few benefits they still received. Getting fired wasn't an option,

either, for the same reasons, so all they could do was work their collective butts off, while being fleeced by every Tom, Dick and Harry that came their way. At the end of the day, people complain about how welfare recipients refuse to "get off their butts" and get to work, but for the most part, it's not a matter of people not wanting to work, it's a matter of it not being economically feasible to work, hence, the contrived excuses to continue dodging employment.

Of course, this doesn't mean that some people aren't simply lazy. As I mentioned earlier, I witnessed my mother, a term I use loosely, coming up with every excuse in the book to avoid getting a job, and later, her excuse for a husband. Fortunately, those portions of her life were temporary, for whatever reason, and she's now working to support herself.

I probably shouldn't point too many fingers, though, seeing how I tried to avoid work while at the California Men's Colony (CMC) for the first couple of years I was there, but in my defense, why not? In prison, most jobs don't pay anything, and those that do see their pay measured in pennies per month, not dollars per hour. If you're really fortunate, like I was, then you've got a technical skill that you can employ for as much as \$0.95 an hour, although it usually takes years to reach that rate of pay. When I left the CMC, I was earning \$0.85 per hour. By the time the State finished taking everything they claimed I owed them, I'd have maybe \$20 to my name, which I had to spend on everything from postage to toothpaste, shampoo to deodorant, paper to pen. If you didn't have a job, on the other hand, then you were at least guaranteed 5 postage paid letters per week, plus some generic toothpowder (think "minty Ajax"), a toothbrush once a month, 10 floss picks per week, 5 sheets of paper per week, and a pen filler. More often than not, you discovered that you got paid more for not working, in the form of free goodies supplied by the State, then you did by working your tail off for 40 hours, or more, per week. I personally witnessed many an inmate putting in 16 hour days, 7 days a week, only to take home \$10 to \$20 a month, but under the 13th Amendment of the Constitution, it's perfectly legal to enslave a convicted felon.

The really sad thing is that this only serves to perpetuate the endless cycle of poverty which exists in this country, but who cares? After all, we're only talking about criminals. They're not even people.

Funny. The same thing was said about Native Americans and Africans, wasn't it? I guess it just goes to show that, the more things change, the more they stay the same, which is why many are arguing that the criminal justice system isn't the attack on race, as many have tried to argue, but an war on poverty.

We can point the accusing finger at anything we want, but at the end of the day, our lot in life is determined, in large part, by our actions. You can choose to play the role of the victim, or you can get up, dust yourself off and try again. I entered prison with a background in e-Commerce, and while in prison, I taught myself how to design and maintain databases. I also taught myself the law, got the basics of electronics under my belt, and a number of other things besides. I did so because I know it's not going to be easy when I get out of here, but the more I have to fall back on when I get out, the better my chances for success, as opposed to laying on my butt and trying to collect welfare, all while making excuses for why I can't work.

As far as Steven Hawking is concerned, it's not that he intimidates me, it's just that he's one of the brightest minds in the world, and here I am, an inmate with little formal education, so who am I to point out, if not an error in his reasoning, at least an alternate way of looking at the problem.

With that said, something tells me that Mr. Hawking would probably listen quite respectfully to anyone pointing out a flaw or alternate theory, provided, of course, that the person approached it with respect and reason, which is what you were pointing out. Who knows, maybe one day I'll have a way of making contact with him and I can present my alternate theory. After all, stranger things have happened.

Since you said you'd love to hear what I had to say about one of his theories...

In the PBS special I spoke of, Mr. Hawking was attempting to demonstrate why he'd reached his conclusion that time travel was physically impossible. After putting his students through a number of tests designed to provide them with a chance to reach this conclusion on their own, and the reasoning behind it, the answer became clear: time travel was an impossibility because what we already know about science has already proven that matter can't be created out of thin air, by which I mean that you can convert matter from one form to another, i.e., mixing flour, water and yeast together to make bread, but you couldn't simply create matter out of nothing. In this case, he meant that the matter making up your physical body couldn't disappear from this day and time and magically reappear in an earlier date and time. To do this, he argued, would be to create something out of nothing, literally, not to convert matter from one form to another.

On the surface, his argument makes sense. After all, as he correctly pointed out, you can't **create** matter, any matter, no matter how small, all you can do is **convert** matter. In fact, if you're familiar with the Harry Potter series, his teachers made this same argument when explaining why a magic wand was able to magically put dinner on the table. It wasn't, as students thought, creating matter out of nothing, it was converting matter from one form to another, even if it was just the oxygen molecules in the environment. However, Mr. Hawking's perspective was that of a time traveler popping in and out of time, from one location, or date, to another, which, admittedly, is the traditional train of thought concerning time travel. However, just because this is the traditional train of thought doesn't mean it's the only, or even right, train of thought, and it wouldn't be the first time we got it wrong. After all, didn't we used to believe that the world was flat? That the universe revolved around us? Or that building a building high enough would allow us to touch the face of God? Science, and centuries of trial and error, have dispelled all of these notions, so perhaps it might be wise to think about time travel from a different perspective, but before I do that, I should explain another theory he had.

As with his earlier theory, he didn't just explain his thoughts and why he'd reached the conclusions he did. Instead, he provided them with the implements, some which were already set up for them, to use to reach their own conclusions. In this instance, he was trying to get them to reach their own conclusions on how fast time moves in comparison to the distance from the black hole, or to put it another, and more accurate way, how much of an effect gravity had on how fast time passes.

One of the tests he devised was giving them some atomic clocks, perfectly in synch with each other, with each team going their separate ways. One team went down, while the other team went up, moving farther and farther away from sea level, and therefore, the gravitational, effect of the Earth, even if not noticeable by the human body. A day later, they met up to compare the differences, if any, between these atomic clocks. Amazingly enough, they discovered that, the less the effect of gravity, the faster time moved.

This second theory, of how fast, or slow, time moved in comparison to the strength of gravity, gave me an idea. Mr. Hawking was looking at traveling throughout time as the traveler's matter winking out of existence in one frame of time, and popping into existence in another frame of time, or destroying matter in one frame and creating it in another, which, as mentioned earlier, we already know is a physical impossibility. What if, instead of popping in and out of existence, you merely traveled, quite literally, forward or backwards through time?

To better explain what I mean, think, for a moment, of how your CD Player works when you want to go from track #10 to track #1, or any other track, for that matter. All you've got to do is push the appropriate button the appropriate number of times, and you literally pop in from one track to the next, kind of like the time traveler popping in and out of existence from one time to another. Compare this to how a tape player works (if you're a younger reader, go ask mom and dad, they'll explain). With a tape player, if you want to skip ahead to the next song, or go back to the previous song, you push the appropriate button (fast forward or rewind), and the tape itself literally moves faster one way or the other, depending upon which button you pushed. What if time travel, assuming it's possible, operated the same way? What if, instead of the traveler literally popping in and out of existence, traveling through time "merely" resulted in time itself moving forwards or backwards? If time travel worked in this manner, then you could, theoretically, travel forwards and backwards through time without the need to create, or even destroy, matter.

I'm not saying that time travel's possible, or even ethical (although I'm sure we all have things we'd love to go back and change, if we had the ability to do so). I'm just saying that Mr. Hawking's reasoning for discounting time travel, that you can't create matter, in this case, your physical body, out of nothing, fails to take into account alternate methods of traveling through time, and if time speeds up or slows down, depending on the force of gravity, then wouldn't it stand to reason that there's another way of looking at time travel? That it's not the traveler who travels through time, but that it's time itself that moves? And why not? Doesn't time itself already move forward, and at different speeds? So why would it be inconceivable for time to also move backwards?

Hopefully, I didn't lose you, or anyone else, for that matter, but it's been known to happen before. I sometimes have a tendency to overexplain the obvious, while, at the same time, failing to explain the not-so obvious.

In regards to law enforcement, if you ask me, there are two major problems. The first, to use a popular saying, involves "too many chiefs and not enough Indians." To make matters even worse, you've got all of these agencies getting territorial over the information they've managed to acquire. While I understand their concern, which is usually that dissemination of the information would expose their source(s), this doesn't make it any easier to deal with a loss caused because someone failed to share potentially life saving information. I see the second problem as involving too many analysts analyzing too much data. To put it simply, there's no way on Earth that any one person could take in, let alone remember, every single bit of information that could conceivably pose a threat to America, or any country, for that matter, which means that you have to continuously bring in more and more people to analyze the ever increasing amount of data that comes in. The more people you have working on things, the bigger your chances of missing something.

For instance, John, Debbie, Susan and Mike all work for different agencies, and all in different parts of the country, and each has a critical piece of information that, innocent on its own, take on a whole new meaning when viewed in context with everything else. For instance, John knows that Dum Dum traveled to America and obtained citizenship after his parents were accidentally killed by an American unmanned drone. Susan knows that Dum Dum just returned from a country known that Muslims not only travel to for legitimate religious purposes, but which terrorists also travel to in order to learn and perfect their craft. Debbie knows that Dum Dum's been purchasing an increasing amount of ammunition, while at the same time, increasing the number of guns he has, none of which happen to be illegal for him to own. Finally, Mike knows that Dum Dum's wife was just killed by a drunk driver who got off on a technicality, the failure of law enforcement to advise him of his rights. Individually, nothing here is sufficient to raise any major red flags, not should they. After all, we live in a country where we're supposed to be innocent until proven guilty, but taken collectively, you realize that Dum Dum could indeed be headed down a very deadly path, especially when Tim reports that Dum Dum just purchased a bunch of fertilizer, along with a farm.

There are plenty of ways to combat these problems, none of which involve stripping people of, or violating our rights. Sharing information legally obtained is a good start, as is building and maintaining centralized databases capable of being accessed by all of the necessary agencies. However, the most critical component involves adequate programming, with the ability to refine the program(s) on the fly. As someone who's designed my own databases, I can tell you from firsthand experience that it's possible to design your program to automatically raise an alert when certain criteria is met, so why are we not doing this? Why is it that things are always so clear in hindsight when they should have been just as obvious beforehand?

I really did enjoy reading the questions and comments you left for me, and I look forward to hearing anything else you might want to share. As always, you can leave a response for me here, which will be printed up at their convenience and sent to me via snail mail, or you can write to me direct, at the address listed below, an offer which I extend to any who review my blogs.

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