Could I be an MK-Ultra?

A novella.

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Why Speak When You Can Be Silent

Johnny Rogers was the kind of man that was highly economic in speech. One could've called him laconic, actually. Johnny was forty-eight going on fifty-six, divorced for about a decade, no kids thank heaven. The last thing he would've needed with his low type of income was paying child support.

Children are a blessing usually, and the Christian-minded Johnny acknowledged that fact, it's just that he did not dig child support that much.

The fact that Johnny Rogers was the quiet type also kept him away from intense socializing. He didn't dig large crowds and saw a social gathering as an essential opportunity for trouble. That was Johnny, he had his game all set-up, and he had his conceptions about life and the world well in place.

It would've been hard for a man his age to modify his world-view and as far as he could see there was no need for him to do that.

Yet he did have a good friend by the name of Peter Feszchek; he met Peter about fifteen years ago while enrolled in B.A. diploma in Psychology and Philosophy up the hill at Victoria University.

He could vouch that Peter was a good man, a stand-up type of person. So Peter eventually became Johnny's closest ally and a reliable confidant.

The two men were usually sharing a deep silence.

Johnny was a Bodhisattva, having taken the five precepts in a Jukai ceremony two years prior. Silent Shikantaza was the norm for Johnny and Peter was doing all he could to accommodate that type of idiosyncrasy.

The two men had an excellent relationship.

Johnny tried to convince Peter to take up Buddhism too, but he did not insist.

Johnny had other things on his mind. He was a failed engineering student, having dropped that degree and taken-up mathematics and computer science instead. Peter was obsessed with conspiracies and conspiracy theories. He was always up-to-date with the latest on that front.

“You know, mate, I cannot be a brain in a vat? Did you know that fact?” said Johnny once.

“How come?” inquired Peter.

“Well, I’m wondering if this is circular actually. But if I was truly a brain in a vat in a synthetic reality then the concepts ‘brain’ or ‘vat’ would be synthetic-dependent” said Johnny.

“Hah. I somehow don’t buy this argument, mate. There’s something fishy about it” said Peter.

“So you’re saying we could be brains in vats?”

“No, I’m not saying that, I’m just saying the argument is weak.”

“I was wondering if it was circular, but on second thoughts, I don’t think it is…”

“You should learn about being an MK-Ultra, mate” said Peter. “That is indeed weaker than being a brain in a vat, but the issue is somewhat similar…”

“MK-Ultra? Yes, I heard something about it. Refresh my memory please.”

“The Project MK-Ultra was a real, highly secretive and also illegal CIA human experimentation program” said Peter.

“The project ran from 1953 until 1973 with the primary goal of developing methods of mind control, interrogation techniques, and behavior

modification to be used against Soviet adversaries during the Cold War."

"MK-Ultra was a dark chapter of U.S. history involving documented government misconduct and human rights abuses."

"The program was approved by CIA Director Allen Dulles in 1953 and headed by a chemist named Sidney Gottlieb. The CIA believed that the Soviet Union, North Korea, and China had developed 'brainwashing' techniques, and they wanted to find a 'truth serum' or weaponized psychological tool to match them."

“The experiments were conducted across more than 80 institutions, including universities, hospitals, research foundations, and prisons. Some of the methods used on subjects were quite horrific” concluded Peter.

“And you could call such a subject, a person, an MK-Ultra?” inquired Johnny.

“I suppose so” answered Peter.

“Hence the thought experiment in question poses the question…”

“Whether I am an MK-Ultra or not, and how can I reasonably detect this fact” said Peter.

“So what does being an MK-Ultra entail actually?”

“Well, first and foremost, your past identity is erased from your mind and totally new memories are being implanted…”

“Right…”

“Then you get glimpses of events that happen in a certain way.”

“Right…”

“Like you get to places and you don’t remember how you got there. Or you may sustain certain

injuries and don't remember how you got them."

"Right. Sounds familiar… it's like a film I watched a very long time ago…"

"Eternal sunshine… Yes."

"Bingo, that's the one" said Johnny.

"Yes, but get along with this… it's very strange. Various subjects in the program found affinities with the familiar places and people from their past identity, even after that identity was erased. It's very strange."

"A-ha" said Johnny.

“In a way it does make sense, but it’s weird…”

“Yes, from a Psychology stand-point it does make very much sense” said Johnny.

“Right…”

“So what’s the answer to this puzzle then?” asked Johnny.

“Well, there is no answer. I don’t think anyone posed this question before.”

“But there must be an answer, right?”

“This thing should be very hard to detect, if one isn’t primarily relying on external sources, I would think…”

“Like third-party evidence and hearsay from other people?”

“Indeed” said Peter.

“Far out. I could in fact be an MK-Ultra. And you could be one, too” joked Johnny Rogers.

“This thing is highly unlikely, but yes, I do agree” said Peter Feszchek.

“And why is it so unlikely? Since it is undetectable, we may never find out…”

“You haven’t had any amnesia episodes, now have you? Or injuries that you’re not sure where they come from…”

“Indeed I haven’t” said Johnny.

“Well, neither have I and that’s a strong indication it is highly likely we’re not part of that program. Indeed there’s an epistemic requirement for verifiability and we kind of don’t have it, but evidence suggests we are not MK-Ultra.”

“But we can never be sure, that’s my point” joked Johnny again.

“Well, verifiability is inherently public, that’s the point of the private language argument of Wittgenstein.”

“Right…”

“Yet, you are able to examine yourself. Examine your experiences. If anything feels weird, that should ring a bell, right?”

“Right…”

“So once again… do you suffer from mild amnesia?”

“I suppose I don’t” said Johnny. “Though I do find bruises on myself from time to time without a good reasons for the bruises being there…”

“This evidence is not strong enough, mate…”

“Right…”

“Come, let’s go out for a walk, it’s a fine weather outdoors” said Peter.

“That’s fine with me” said Johnny. “Though you got my monkey mind restless on this anti-solipsistic type of stuff” said Johnny.

“Well, learn to switch-off Mister Buddhist” joked Peter Feszchek.

“Hah. I haven’t heard a joke from you in ages, mate” said Johnny.

The two men went out for a walk in the Wellington suburb of Newtown. Peter had to get a refill for his vaporizer from a petrol station near-by.

The evening sun was shining happily and its light was blinding to any observer that could’ve passed by the two men.

“I keep on telling you to quit smoking” said Johnny Rogers.

“I’m not smoking, I am vaping” said Peter.

“Same thing really” replied Johnny.

“You may have a point. I heard vaping juice does weird stuff to your brain… speaking about MK-Ultra…”

“Let us be silent now for a while… why speak when you can be silent?” said Johnny Rogers.

A Weird Holiday in Papeete

Johnny Rogers was in Papeete. And he couldn't quite remember how on earth he got there, though that particular question didn't quite bother him that much.

The fact that he couldn't quite understand how on earth he got to Papeete since, first of all he could not remember being able to afford such a trip, and second he could not remember

planning or actually making the trip was not his mental concern in any way, shape or form.

The weather was brilliant on the island. He was sitting on a white sand beach, enjoying the mild breeze and counting the water waves. That is all he was doing: counting waves.

Heather was with him, lying on the beach next to him. Their hands were slightly touching.

Last night they made love; just them, naked phantoms in the dark hotel bedroom. That would've been a night to remember. And Johnny Rogers could remember all details; he was indeed indulging in the details…

There he was on a white sandy beach, himself and the woman he loved. The woman of his dreams. His wildest dreams came true…

To a Buddhist like him, renunciation was a hard fact. A hard fact of life. Yet this experience was much more than his amateur zazen could handle.

Had he committed sexual misconduct? That question did cross his mind…

Well, the answer to that depended on the particular interpretation he personally chose to give to the third precept of Buddhism.

His own humble opinion was that this was not sexual misconduct, since the relations in question were performed by two consenting adults.

The breeze was just wonderful. The water had greenish blue reflections. They went swimming for a brief period of about twenty minutes. She rubbed against his body and felt his fiery loins with the palm of her hands.

Then they went out of the water and went to the hotel room, were they spent another night making love.

In the morning they had breakfast in bed. The hotel room service was exquisite. That was a five star service.

“Who are you, dear?” Johnny asked her.

“I am Heather” said the woman.

“Yes, but I can’t remember how we met.”

“I am Heather, your fiancée” repeated the woman.

“Well, if you say so, I believe you, dear. And maybe it is the case that I should believe you…”

“Don’t be silly, Johnny dear. We’ve been together for eight years now. And two years ago you proposed to me, in Wellington.”

“Yes, but there’s an amnesia in my head that I cannot explain, dear” said Johnny Rogers.

“Right…”

“My goodness. You know my friend Peter, right?”

“You mentioned him to me a few times, yes.”

“He was telling me about MK-Ultras.”

“What is an MK-Ultra, dear?” asked the woman.

“Too much to explain. Too many details…”

“Right…”

“In any case, it seems this amnesia is evidence I may be an MK-Ultra… I really can’t believe this stuff…”

“I’m sure you’re exaggerating, darling. Let’s get back to bed, shall we?”

Johnny wasn't in the mood for sex that evening. He kept tossing and turning in bed and rejecting all of Heather's innuendos.

"Heather, I can't seem to remember who you are and I can't even remember how I got to Papeete in the first place…"

"You don't like me, dear?" asked the woman.

"Yes, I like you very much, but that's beyond the point. I'm experiencing amnesia here. This is very serious stuff…"

"Relax, dear" said the woman…

Johnny Rogers was suddenly bothered by his state of amnesia.

“Heather, I think I may be in the MK-Ultra program…”

“What’s it like being in that program?”

“Being an MK-Ultra subject is always terrifying, disorienting, and deeply traumatizing. It feels like experiencing a severe, unexplained psychological breakdown because we don’t know we are being experimented on.

There’s a total reality distortion..

There’s a freak out, subjects would suddenly experience intense visual hallucinations, paranoia, and a complete loss of time and space. Because they don’t know they had been drugged, many believe they were suddenly going permanently insane.

Some people also suffer from psychological trauma, severe anxiety attacks, and flashbacks that may last for decades.”

“Right…”

“And most importantly there’s always amnesia, loss of previous identity, and experiences like this where you can’t actually remember how you got to do certain things…”

“Right. Well, I believe you should relax, dear” said the woman.

“You think so?”

“I’m one hundred per cent on this, dear…”

“And why’s that, dear?” asked Johnny.

“Because we are together now and we love each other very much, dear…”

“Yes, you have a point there, dear…”

Next day they went swimming again, and then they went swimming again during the night, skinny-dipping. They were kissing and making out right on the spot where the ocean kissed the shore, as a token of their immense love.

The day after, they started preparing for departure.

“When we get back to Wellington, I want you to take me out shopping, dear” said Heather.

Does my Butt Look Huge in This?

“Does my butt look huge in this dress, honey?” asked Heather.

“No it doesn’t” said Johnny Rogers. “Your butt looks just perfect, my darling…”

“Ah. Do you say that to all the ladies you take out shopping, Johnny?”

“I can’t recollect taking anyone out shopping for at least the last twenty years, my dear.”

“Right…”

After Heather bought that dress, they went out for a walk on Lambton Quay. It was sunny again and the light was incredibly bright. The sun rays kept following them, like a discrete insidious guest within their mild small talk.

“Have I told you about my friend Peter?”

“Yes, you’ve asked me before. I think I said you mentioned him to me a few times…”

“He’s into conspiracy theories and the sort” added Johnny.

“Right. Now I see where you get these amnesia ideations from” said Heather…

“Right. It isn’t quite like that, but yes…”

“We must move to England next year, after we get married, dear…” said Heather. The discussion got serious all of a sudden.

“England? Terrible weather, dear” said Johnny, seeming quite not too keen.

“You know I love my family, dear. I must be with them at any cost, dear…”

“What on earth am I going to do in England, dear?”

“You have a Psychology diploma, right? You may get a therapist job or something like that.”

“Alright, dear… let’s wait until next year and see what happens…”

“Great” said the woman.

“What a wonderful weather, dear, don’t you think?”

“Indeed” said the woman.

“What else could we do to end this wonderful day with a perfect evening, my darling?” inquired Johnny Rogers…

“Do you love me, Johnny?” asked Heather suddenly.

“More than anything in the world” said the man.

Let’s Sit on This for a While

“My friend, I think I could be an MK-Ultra” said Johnny to Peter when the two men met again.

“Well, do you know who I am?”

“Yes, you are my friend Peter.”

“Then you are not an MK-Ultra” concluded Peter.

“I am experiencing amnesia” said Johnny Rogers.

“Amnesia is a deeply disorienting, frightening, and exhausting state of existence that fundamentally breaks a person's relationship with time and identity” Peter told him.

“Depending on whether a person has retrograde amnesia, forgetting the past, or anterograde amnesia, the inability to form new memories, the daily lived experience varies, but both severely disrupt everyday life to the point where you lose your sense of who you are completely…”

“I seem to have lost some of my previous identity…”

“A person might feel as though they have just woken up from a deep, dreamless sleep every 30 seconds to a few minutes” said Peter.

“They look around, realize they don't know where they are or what they are doing, and just as they start to figure it out, the loop resets” concluded Peter.

“That’s kind of what’s happening to me, mate, but the temporal intervals are much larger.”

“So what happened actually?”

“About three months ago I wake up in Papeete without any reason for being there and no memory whatsoever of how I got there…”

“Right… tell me more.”

“I’m with this woman, Heather, and I have no idea who she is or where she came from.”

“Right.”

“We spend some good quality time together, don’t get me wrong, everything was marvellous. But the fact that I can’t remember the context and I can’t make anything of the context bothers me a lot…”

“I see. So how’s this Heather like?”

“Ah, she’s great mate. Any man’s dream…”

“Do you love her?”

“Yes, she asked me the same question, actually.”

“Well, you love her or not?”

“Yes, I do. I’m crazy about her…”

“Well, I’m saying… just enjoy the ride, mate, and take it easy…”

“Really?”

“Are you sure it isn’t Zen burn-out, mate?”

“No, Zen burn-out is just burn-out, not amnesia…”

“Well, introduce me to the lady in question next time she’s around…” concluded Peter.

“This is very interesting, let us sit on this for a while” concluded Johnny Rogers.

The End.