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Therapy

by John Rockwell

"Hey, there's only so much garbage. If we let crazed-ass bums eat it all then you just know some of the smart bums are gonna starve to death. You want the next Einstein to die out on the streets just so another fruit loop can slobber around for a few more days?"

Dr. Vien didn't like what he was hearing but tried not to show it. Any sign of emotion might influence Leo's behavior and tilt his evaluation toward a false conclusion. That might be painful in this case, since the state could conclude to kill him. "In your eyes it was a question of economic necessity then. You murdered them because this country can't produce enough garbage to support both sane and insane vagrants."

"You got that right doc. We sure as hell don't make enough garbage for everyone. And we can't just lock the wackos up forever either. I don't know about you, but I got better things to do with my money."

'That's a new line of reasoning,' Vien thought, making a note of it. He

could have added that his office was a victim of economics too. Instead of giving him a real office the state had saved some money by putting his desk in a cell on an empty wing and calling it office. No one had given much thought to how it's dingy gray walls and barred windows might affect the prisoners he was supposed to treat. He guessed it probably wouldn't have mattered much to them even if they had thought of it. Most of the convicts here were going to be in prison for the rest of their lives anyway, and the ones who weren't were going to leave in the electric chair. "How could you be sure one of your victim's wasn't going to become the next Einstein?"

"You people said they wouldn't. You kicked them out of your hospitals with drool still running down their faces because you knew you couldn't cure them. They were hopeless."

'Victims all mentally ill', Vien scribbled on his pad. 'Two reasons to kill them - can't feed them and can't cure them.' He knew he'd have to refute both arguments if was going to cure Leo. There would probably be more added to the list before they were through too. "Okay, even if we can't feed everyone and couldn't cure those people in particular, did they deserve the death penalty for our own shortcomings?"

"Sure. Just because we can't make this world a paradise that doesn't give them the right to kill us. They were killing people every time they ate. Killing them back was the fair thing to do."

"What about the question of intent? Did they intentionally kill anyone?"

"Doesn't matter to the people who starved to death because of them, now does it? They were eating food other people needed and were going to keep right on doing it until I stopped them. Someone had to have the guts to do it."

"I see. Killing them was more than just the most economical thing to do, it was also an act of self-defense, so to speak. You killed them to protect the more deserving members of our society. Let's pursue that thought for a minute. What would happen if everyone believed the way you do?"

"I'll tell you one thing, we'd have a lot less people faking craziness just to get some welfare goodies, that's for damn sure. Getting killed would make a big impression on their lazy asses."

"Suppose people thought you were insane for thinking that?" Vien countered. "Would it give them the right to kill you?"

"Yup. They wouldn't though, would they. In your world people have got to be convinced I'm sane before they'll kill me, right?"

"True, the insane aren't held responsible for their actions. Only sane people can be given the death penalty for their crimes."

"Seems a little strange if you ask me. I kill wackos and you kill smart people, then I'm the one that gets put on trial." Leo suddenly turned serious. "What give you the right to kill anyone anyway?"

"The law."

"The law's just a bunch of words. People pull the switches. What's their excuse?"

"They know they're helping to dissuade others from committing murder."

"How does it dissuade those who've already done their killing?"

"It doesn't. It punishes them."

"Kind of a tough punishment, don't you think?"

"No worse than their crime."

"No better either, far as I can see. Why don't you just lock them up for the rest of their lives?"

"Sooner or later there wouldn't be enough money to support them."

"You might not have to support them forever. They might be rehabilitated someday."

"We both know that won't happen. They can't be rehabilitated. Our failures prove that."

Leo smiled. "So you can't feed them forever and you can't cure them. That just leaves killing them I guess. Seems like you and me are alot alike. We act and think the same - only our victims are different."

Vien didn't like the way this was going, not at all. A lunatic was

making him look like an idiot. "I suppose there are some surface similarities, yes. But who gets executed is more than a trivial question."

"The executioner's fear decides that. You've got plenty of food so you don't have to worry about starving to death, and I've got plenty of muscles so I don't have to worry about getting stomped to death. But you can be stomped and I can starve. Why don't we just agree it's a good idea to kill both kinds of killers."

"That's really not up to me to decide."

"Half of it is. You've got to decide if it's okay for them to kill me. Am I sane?"

Vien stood up and walked over to the window. The same dismal courtyard that had been there for the last three years was still there. "I think you're clever, not crazy."

"Then you don't think I believe everything I told you?"

"No. How could you? That would be insane. You can go now."

Leo sighed and slowly left the room. Two guards met him at the door and escorted him down the hall to another room where someone else was waiting to see him.

"Well, how'd it go?" the warden asked, motioning for him to sit down.

"Not good," Leo said, dropping into the chair. "The role-playing session was a bust. He still thinks he's a psychiatrist and that killing useless people is wrong. There's nothing else I can do."

"You're ready to sign the papers then?"

"Yeah. You can kill him tonight."