

Der Impfpass – A Kafkaian short story



Venetian doctor during the time of the plague by Jan van Grevenbroeck (1731-1807)

by [T. E. Creus](#) (January 2022)

Someone must have slandered Josef K., for one morning, without having done anything truly wrong, he was arrested. His landlady, Frau Grubach, had a cook who brought him breakfast each day around eight, but this time she didn't appear.

Instead, there were two gentlemen in dark grey clothes standing by the door.

"May we see your vaccine passport?" they asked.

Josef K., who was an unemployed bachelor and kept mostly at home, wasn't aware that he should have taken any kind of vaccine, much less carry a "vaccine passport" with him, a concept which he didn't really understand even though the two gentlemen explained it to him in utmost detail.

After denying having a vaccine passport, certificate, QR-code, or any proof of current and up-to-date vaccination, the two gentlemen declared his arrest.

"But why am I being arrested?" asked Josef K, timidly and politely, as he hated being rude even to strangers who woke him up early in the morning unannounced.

The two gentlemen proceeded to explain that there was a terrible contagious disease going around in the city, and since now vaccines against it were mandatory and he hadn't gotten one, nor had he the aforementioned vaccine certificate or passport, he was endangering public health and safety.

Josef K. replied that he didn't understand how he could possibly be endangering anyone, much less the whole of society, since he had never had such disease they were talking about, and thus could not have spread it. Moreover, he hardly got out from his house those days. But it was to no avail. The gentlemen were adamant that he was a criminal for not submitting to the still experimental medical procedure, which was, however, they assured him, "100% safe and effective."

“But why is this vaccine mandatory?” he asked. “Can’t it just be optional for those who want it?”

The reply was that only with a 100% fully vaccinated population, which by then meant two “jabs” plus another “booster” every six months, the city could reach “herd immunity”, and thus stop spread of the disease and end the pandemic.

“So the vaccine contains the spread of the disease?”, asked Josef.

Here, the two gentlemen had to make an embarrassed pause and admit that it didn’t really stop the spread, and that in fact there had been more cases since the vaccine was introduced than before it, but insisted that the unvaccinated were the problem, because by irresponsibly being unvaccinated they were giving a bad example to the rest of the population. Besides, the concept of “vaccine passports” could not fully work if people didn’t get their mandatory vaccines every six months.

“But if the vaccine does not contain the spread, then what is the point of the vaccine passports?” Josef asked.

Here, the two gentlemen had to make an embarrassed pause again, and inform him that the point of the vaccine passports was to force people to be vaccinated, so that they would be protected from contagion by the unvaccinated, even though they could still get it from the vaccinated, but at least it could provide useful tracking information to the authorities. Only with total vaccination it would be possible for society to “go back to normal.”

“But if we need a vaccine every six months, and a ‘vaccine passport’ to go anywhere, and still have to wear masks indoors, and suffer with lockdowns every winter, and not even get rid of the disease, then how is this in any way ‘back to normal?’” asked Josef again.

Here the gentlemen started to lose their patience. One of them made a threatening gesture and the other moved to block the door, in case Josef K. was just trying to distract them with complicated questions while planning an escape.

Josef K. still did not understand why they were trying to arrest him, nor why a “vaccine passport” could be needed by anyone, healthy or sick, but rules were rules. Besides, the two gentlemen informed him that he could avoid the fines and the long prison sentence if he would just follow them to the closest vaccination centre that same day.

So he did as ordered and took a double-vaccine, plus a couple of “boosters” at the same time, just in case.

The next morning he awoke from uneasy dreams and found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect. But that’s another story...

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