

Sticking to the Facts Would Be a Miracle

Written by Alex Baer
Friday, 27 June 2014 16:54

I've been wondering about People again, so that already means I'm in way over my head.

A number of areas keep getting jumbled all together for me, which puts me in pretty good stead with my fellow beings, I guess.

It's likely -- I hope -- that comments and posts on various website pages are not accurate reflections of the intelligence level of my countrymen and countrywomen and countrybeings, and all the counterpartbeings in cities.

There are always a number of uneasy, queasy word-wars in progress on any Comments page. Like opinions, as you've no doubt heard from colloquial references to bodily apertures and orifices, we all have at least *one*.

The subject matter runs the gamut, from those who believe *gamut* is the lowest note of the medieval scale, to those who think it is a reference to the entire modern scale of musical notes, and then even on to the nonmusical among us who believe a *gamut* is the full breadth of human emotional range -- and beyond, to the spooky outsiders and transcendentalists who see a *gamut* as the entire range of anything, of *everything*.

Sometimes, people get *gamut* confused with *gauntlet*, and insist on *running a gamut*, or *runnin g amok*, or even persist in thinking *The Gamut* was a Clint Eastwood movie. (You remember Clint -- acting icon turned prolific director turned nutbag Chair Whisperer.) And, very few people have ever successfully run a *mok*, so there is not much scientific literature around that might be considered helpful in running one, should any additional *moks*.

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be discovered.

Sometimes, once you get off the vehemently-espoused, hotly-contested Comments page for *Miscroscopic Musician Quarterly*, the conversation broadens back out immensely -- discussions that go beyond *gamut*, beyond the music of the Middle Ages, or Music of the Spheres, and the middle distances, and go on to snag all sorts of mindsets and mirth, from Middle Earth musings, to the special dietary needs of the middle-aged. And more.

Of course, you can't blame people for getting such things confused. What with Twitter and Trending and Texting and Tinder, and so forth, it's become a very busy place, this old world. Everything gets all balled up and bashed together and busy, morphing the discrete to the combined, so you end up with monstrosities like *Corned Beef Hashishtags*.

- (Attention, Colorado and Washington entrepreneurs: There will be a 20% fee for origination services, when you open up any such legal, licensed "sturdy-diner-food-for-twenty-something-techno-heads" emporiums and smoke shops. Use of the name *Corned Beef Hashishtags* will be for franchisees only; applications are right here, in the trunk of my 19-year-old car, just twenty bucks a piece...)

Nobody reads anymore, so there's no chance to see the word differences between a *moot* point and a *mute* one, so most people hear, and then pick from the air, the latter version -- and then defend it to the death, like *Latter Version Saints*, willing to die for a *mute* point.

As for reading, well -- if it's *rechargeable*, you might get some people interacting with it. If it doesn't use energy and has pages, actual *paper* pages, well, *good grief!*
What is this, the Middle Ages?! Do I have to run the gamut on this stuff all over again?!

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It's almost *beyond the pail*, comments like that. Makes you want to step right off this *mortal soil*
. Makes you want to go take
Olivia's Espresso

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* * * * *

Accidentally creative mishearings aside, there are plenty of people willing to prove their ignorance beyond any shadow of doubt, and combatively so, there on the Comments pages of the Interwebz.

The chief sport on these pages? One of them is arguing for the right -- usually deity-gifted -- to remain as willfully, stubbornly, intentionally ignorant as possible, and in the face of overwhelming contradictory evidence. For many, it appears to be a point of pride, clinging to stupidity, and long past any sane point of allegiance to mistaken, haphazard synapse connections in the brain.

These are probably the same people who call the same wrong number 2,649 times in a row, back to back, before finally giving up and concluding that The Twilight Zone is somehow in operation and has hijacked the number for Uncle Louie and Aunt Earlene. Or Ray's BBQ Chicken Hut. Or Big Bobby's House of Rolling Doughnuts, where [tag line time] *everyone is cordially invited to take a flyin' leap at the moooooon!*

Either that, or the eternal question: Is Sally Foster in -- *the one they went to junior high with, and am I that person?*

If you're wondering why it is you get fewer of those calls than you used to, it's because, through the profound advances in global telecommunications, all those calls are now routed directly here, to my home phone. I'm thinking of applying for a grant from the telecom trade group, for regular deliveries of over-the-counter headache remedies. If that works, I may ask them to step up to the plate and spring for some more recreational approaches to pain relief.

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Ignorance, dear friends, is oblivion's penalty and blessing, and I would urge you to have nothing to do with it. Ignorance used to be no excuse for some behaviors, and it still isn't, no more so than ignorance cuts you any breaks with the law.

- (Correction: *Never used to be*, that is. Since Rush, Fox, the Tea Party, the Republican party since 1960, and the celebration of Rampant Stupidity as the new Moral Certainty of the nation, Unfettered. Crowning Ignorance will now get you a prime table at the most elite, crowded nightclub of Public Opinion.)

The slippery slope of Ignorance is created, of course, when people let the little incongruities, major prevarications, and slips of logic slide past unchallenged, as if demonstrating the niceties of social grace, by not correcting anyone's errors, but by politely refocusing attention, by dabbing at the corner's of one's mouth or eyes with one's handkerchief, trying to overlook an accidentally-trumpeted fart at a podium, during a sedate and solemn eulogy.

As George Carlin so accurately observed, "When you're born you get a ticket to the freak show. When you're born in America, you get a front row seat." You know, I could get behind a politician like that, someone who would just let it rip, bring in some fresh air, and not much care how everyone had to scatter, terrified, whenever Truth landed suddenly, without prior planning or clearance from the proper authorities.

Instead, we have to be entertained in America as best we can by outright lies and balderdash, and by people who haven't a *prayer* of finding their way out of an elevator, not even with Sherpa guides, overhead announcements, arrows painted on the floor, tracer lights along the walls, and 16 pounds of spelunking gear.

Such wattage, in the single digits, understandably generates little illumination, and very dim light for anyone to see by -- and no, I haven't an idea of how many deities it would take to change all the *dim bulbs* in this world, nor any idea how long such a potential process would take, although this question may have triggered humanity's first real consideration of infinity.

It sure *feels* like infinity, whenever I come across, on the Comments page, my favorite scalp-bender -- which is to say my *least* favorite one, a type of comment that

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always sucks me in, like a leaf in a vast whirlpool.

- (That my *least* favorite scenario is also my *favorite* one is a contradictory conundrum and straightforward situation I can very easily accept as a human being: Rather than making sense, I will simply pursue my right to be as idiotic as I wish, as an illogical human being, and simply charge off this momentary conflict not to me, but to the vagaries of language.

See?

I have learned my lessons well, from right-wingers who will truck no personal responsibility in the rise of

falling

intellect... and in the fall of

rising

intellect.)

This whole science-religion and fact-fantasy scenario is an old one -- one I would have thought would have been resolved long ago, eons before the 'net was invented, back when chiseled stone tablets were used for long-term communication, when quick-dry mud and a trowel was the equivalent of an eraser.

But, no, people persist in getting religion and faith all tangled up with science and fact. It must be a genetic low spot in the DNA code somewhere, perhaps irrevocably entwined with our ability to be house-trained, or our mistaken, ongoing understanding that images of food viewed on a wall menu precisely indicate the actual food one will truly receive.

- This is the crazy-making situation, right here: People who discover a discussion about evolution on a page that houses an article about scientific discovery or speculation in some area. These same people then burst forth with opinions, mostly phrased this way: *Being a rational person, I consider my religious beliefs essential to any discussion of creation and that any reference to evolution must contain words that strongly note it's only a theory after all....*

There is no other way to flash-freeze in liquid nitrogen, and then par-boil my mind in hot lava, and in rapid, endlessly-repeated succession, than to roll out that gem. It's the thought-grenade I cannot ignore. I always jump on the damn thing, in hopes of protecting the innocent from the blast of *stupid* about to go off in all directions.

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Hell is not only other people, it is being a slow learner. I am not sure which Jean-Paul Sarte play offers *more* levels of Hell, but I'm willing to let him and Dante sort that one out on poker night, or with arm-wrestling and horse-shoes. Meanwhile, we can alternate singing *99 Bottles of Beer on the Wall* with *99 Levels of Hell on the Wallscreen*.

I try to not go for the shotgun blast to the gut, when on the Comments page, so I do not say things like *There is no way to be rational and religious at the same time*. In the end, I find myself repeating the same old plea, knowing that asking the religious to stick to the facts in a science discussion is expecting a real miracle:

- Faith is an expression of hopeful belief. Science is an attempt at refining observations and replicating results. Fantasy and Fact have no meaningful business in each other's conversations. There is no satisfactory answer in confusing the two, just as there is no satisfactory answer in trying to pass off rote instruction in mythologies as schooling in the sciences.

This doesn't seem like such a difficult concept to latch onto when it goes by. It's not like trying to hop a speeding freight train. It's more like asking people to board a stationary bus -- one of the *kneeling* buses meant to make access as easy as possible, by dropping down to meet the curb and help scoop you up.

But, these people never get on the Reality Bus -- they always make a big Religious Fuss. (My respects, and a hat tip, here to Frank Zappa and Ken Kesey as we walk through their living room.) It's apparently a lot more fun for religious folk to dodge the obvious and pursue their hallucinations -- not that I am calling religious people addicts, however much one might successfully make that particular case.

- Atheists are still the most hated and feared group in America today, it appears -- as much as rapists. This is how *scary and intolerable* it is when *everyone* doesn't think as the majority do, it seems. Good thing there's so much more freedom here than in Germany in, say, the 1930s.

No, as far as I'm concerned, people are free to believe whatever they most enjoy, or find

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comforting, or whatever. It's their right. Not only is it none of my business, I don't ever want it to *be*

my business. (I'd make a great benign dictator, maybe, but I don't want or need the burden of inventing things for people to believe in. That's for propaganda experts, political parties, marketing execs, talking hairdos on teevee, and Chair Whisperers.)

No, I simply would find it heartening if people would stop saying they are simultaneously religious *and* rational, when those two states have no common language. It's worse than oil and water, it's logic and emotions -- the two are not compatible, they are mutually exclusive, they are apples and ocelots.

* * * * *

I still don't understand why people aren't born as default agnostics. Agnosticism is just a Sunday-best way to say "Beats me," or "Heck if I know," or "No proof either way."

Clearly, I am expecting *way* too much again.

* * * * *

There used to be a program on teevee a long time ago, when I was a kid, called Meeting of Minds, hosted by Steve Allen. I didn't know Steve Allen, or the actors portraying the historical personalities, from Adam, or his housecat, but the show always held me spellbound. Interviews and round-table discussions of people from all throughout history -- imagine Leonardo da Vinci on a talk show. Astonishing stuff.

Try that sort of teevee programming today, and it would be about as popular as a series of parliamentary-style debates and *how-tos*. Both shows would be exceptionally educational and valuable, which is one reason neither would happen today. One other reason? Why, we'd come to expect an honest exchange of intelligent ideas between and among our leaders and politicians and ourselves.

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It's *way* more fun to sling mud and slingshot misinformation, and catapult nonsense and rubbish around, and then vote for candidates for public office on the basis of teevee ads and billboards, and from crapola bred from the bowels of the bottomless war-chests of billionaires, and set loose by the endorsements of multi-millionaire practitioners of what is euphemistically known today as radio and teevee *infotainers*.

Intelligent, creative programming would set a fearfully dangerous precedent in this country, and establish a deliriously high bar for those milling around the public food trough, biding their time until they have a decent shot at a juicy think-tank or lobbying-firm chair, or, better yet, a hot chance at some Koch or Walmart money.

* * * * *

- Maybe we could get this stone tablet replicated and placed in all public areas and in all public buildings of the nation: *Believe in religion and faith and G/god(s) as much as you wish, but please stop thinking it's scientific to do so. □ And quit trying to get everyone else to sign up for fairy tale hour. □ What are you -- the Amway and Tupperware salespeople of superstition? □ Do you really need a Big Brother to force you to do good?*

- And so on. There could be a whole series of them. *Collect all 79,000!*

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My sense of hope for humanity would be buoyed considerably if people would stop dragging their faith and religious observations into scientific discussions that are focused on facts. Story-time fancies and creation legends have no place in discussions of the observable, verifiable universe.

Gee, not to be an unreasonable stickler here, but the very *nature* of Science, and scientific inquiry, *restricts* the discussion to facts -- don't you get that, all you folks so anxious to convince us that your personal belief systems about the unseen and unprovable world are somehow equatable to scientific thought? I mean, believe what you want, but please stop thinking that dwelling in Faith is a

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scientific
housing project.

You know, even today, if you don't have a tie on, you still can't get into some restaurants. Like it or not, without any facts, you really can't contribute to any scientific discussion, training, schooling, or any other useful activity allied to science -- you simply can't get into the discussion. Bring up religion to fact-seekers, and you're simply not wanted there -- not because science is a snob, but because you have nothing, and nothing of value, to offer. *Wrong language, wrong audience.* □ *Try again.*

We're not being hoity-toity here, we're being true to the endeavor: the purpose of science is to discover and test *facts*, in an effort to learn more about our surroundings. It has nothing whatever to do with what your beliefs or faith. You simply cannot swim without becoming wet, and talking about science means you have to suit up and get wet. Standing on shore, clad in overalls and work boots, shouting about whether humans will ever learn to swim, or fly, or grow a third and workable eye, has very little to do with swimming.

Cooking is about *food preparation*, that's why it's called *cooking*. Odd enough, *cooking* has nothing to do with where you think the seasons or weather systems come from.... what you think happens after death, or what you believe would be a really cool way to say thank you to the universe for your life.

There are many entertaining discussions possible around the edges of science and religion, and comparison points, and philosophical possibilities, but, in the end, after the parlor tricks of snappy language fencing and amusingly thoughtful notions, religion has as much to offer science as steam has to offer stone. As much usefulness as bringing up elves in a discussion about astronomy. As different as chalk and cheese -- as cheese and Kepler 186f.

- Why it is people *insist* on trying to forge the vapors of their belief into the solid foundations of facts, and attempt to build on it? This is the thing that makes me want to pursue face-planting as a full-time activity.

Could be what happened to ostriches, back whenever -- they simply found others of their kind to be too humiliating and embarrassing, so they discovered the twin fascinations of underground breathing and making everyone else disappear with a plunge of the head.

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Of course, that's just my Looney Tunes upbringing speaking, that last part, about ostriches. Probably very little *to* that imagery. Before I pull a Delta Airlines, attributing giraffes to Ghana, I should use some *science* and check that out.

I really *should* do that, before I get as stumped as Miss Nevada, when asked the name of her state's capital in a radio interview, and could only respond with a series of seeming motorboat noises and verbal sputtering.

Somehow, I think I will now remember, and use, her awkward situation when encountering religious comments in science discussions: No matter how attractive any belief system, one shouldn't seek facts there. You see, beauty is in the eye of the beholder, it is a belief, subject to interpretations and preferences, and it can be many things -- whereas *facts is facts*, as the matter-of-fact argument goes.

I think I managed to dodge a self-inflicted bullet on that analogy, although just barely. Good thing. I'm already in over my head, and I don't need the help of shooting myself in the foot while I'm working my way toward shore.

Epilogue

America used to be on the cutting edge of all aspects of life, and was a willing teacher, and exporter, of all we discovered. Now, we could learn from others, but are too proud to do so, too unaware of other good ideas to entertain doing so.

Enter the UK: My kudos to the UK for banning the teaching of creationism in public schools. Imagine what would happen here, should anyone try such a sane, sober approach to educational life -- the fireworks would never stop, the Krakatoas never cease.

Strangely, it's only been the last couple of generations where there's been this mad push for forcing religion in all segments of secular life. In the past, most Americans were always content

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to teach religious topics within religious institutions, and allow secular institutions to teach about the rest of the world. No problem then, *big* problem now.

This is just another consequence of America's unending experimentation with extreme right-wing leanings. We've leaned so far right, and for so long, that everyone's holding on for dear life, as the angle gets sharper and sharper, and we all start falling toward the horizon line. So much for the level playing field.

Our grandparents and great-grandparents would be shocked at the insistence of teaching religion in public schools, would be scandalized at the free and easy bantering around of religious beliefs -- beliefs that were always fully and completely private, and no one's business but his or her own.

Then again, once upon a time, when people said *What a country!* they meant it in a very proud, admiring, complimentary way -- and not as a testament of regret, fading hope, borderline despair.

Pass the oxygen and nose plugs. And the swim fins. I plan on staying wet forever.

Eastwood: <http://www.cnn.com/2012/08/31/politics/eastwood-speech/>

Beyond the pail: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Pale

This mortal soil: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mortal_coil

Olivia's Espresso: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oblivion_Express

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Oblivion's penalty: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ignorantia_juris_non_excusat

Kepler 186f:

<http://www.nasa.gov/ames/kepler/nasas-kepler-discovers-first-earth-size-planet-in-the-habitable-zone-of-another-star#.U64BGq5jD3A>

Atheists: <http://mic.com/articles/53409/atheists-are-the-most-feared-group-in-america-but-why>

and: <http://atheism.about.com/od/atheistbigotryprejudice/a/AtheistsHated.htm>

Next stop -- Sartre: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/No_Exit

Hell's varieties: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inferno_\(Dante\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inferno_(Dante))

and: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/99_Levels_to_Hell

Meet and greet: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meeting_of_Minds

Giraffes to Ghana:

<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation-now/2014/06/17/delta-world-cup-tweet-fail-ghana/10656101/>

Stumped: <http://www.usmagazine.com/celebrity-news/news/miss-usa-nia-sanchez-doesnt-know-her-home-state-nevadas-capital-2014166>

Hooray for the UK: http://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2014/06/18/Teaching-creationism/

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[sm-as-scientifically-valid-now-banned-in-all-UK-public-schools/5631403128922/?spt=mps&v=3](http://www.sm-as-scientifically-valid-now-banned-in-all-UK-public-schools/5631403128922/?spt=mps&v=3)

Krakatoa: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1883_eruption_of_Krakatoa

Today's Bonus:

Meeting of Minds, clip #1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D-iDonhDO40>

Meeting of Minds, clip #2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XNqkzDHkATY>

Fun with Science: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zPqEEZa2Gis>

Science 101: <http://www.notjustatheory.com/>

Grateful for small victories: <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/friendlyatheist/2014/06/27/anti-vaxxer-and-flat-earth-fired-from-the-view/>

Bonus Bonus:

The joyous noise of Tuba Skinny in New Orleans:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NUwb-Cw_tT4

... and, from the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's studios:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ffXQ6qH3gwU>

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Many more of their vids to choose from on YouTube, with info here: <http://tubaskinny.blogspot.com/>