

Dying for More Life: Skinny-Dipping in the Fountain of Youth

Written by Alex Baer

Thursday, 27 February 2014 14:31 - Last Updated Thursday, 27 February 2014 20:26

Most of us get used to living in clusters of contradictions. Hypocrisy is part of the human condition, and irony is Nature's way of trying to lure us toward more introspection and humility. And, once those forces are in play, we gain perspective and are able to laugh at ourselves and the absurdities of life.

This is healthy and is supposed to work that way -- at least, once the laughing finally dies down a little. But, you know, difficult truths that fuel our recognition and laughter can sometimes linger and fester. I fell over another one of these today. I am still not certain how I feel about any of it. Still thinking on it.

The conflict and conundrum of the moment starts out being an easy one: All life is sacred. Then, gravity goes bonkers while we form the question: So, why are we such a death cult of a society? There are side branches to this stuff, and it runs off in all directions, once you get started on it.

For example, if life is so precious to us, as we espouse, why the endless fascination with murder and killing? Count the number of times in just one day in which death and dying keep us entertained: TeeVee shows, movies, books, news shows, and so on.

It's spooky how much we desire and seek out entertainment in Death's living room without wanting to participate in any actual, direct discussion about it. We go to great lengths to keep the reality of death at arm's length, at minimum, with a clear preference for it to stay a number of counties and parishes away from us, if you please. And, at the same time, we go a-courtin' for Death all day and all night when it comes to being kept company.

Like Woody Allen, we're not afraid to die -- we just don't want to be there when it happens. I suppose it's a fear we all have. Getting used to the idea of dying takes practice, probably, but it's the one subject most of us would rather not think about for more than a second or two.

Once again, I look to Albert Einstein to hold down the tall grass and help make us a path worth following. He did so when he said, "The fear of death is the most unjustified of all fears, for there's no risk of accident for someone who's dead."

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He's got a point: If you're dead, there's hardly much more that can go wrong. Yogi Berra bats clean-up here and knocks it out of the park with this one: "Always go to other people's funerals, otherwise they won't come to yours."

Laughter opens the mind and softens the heart. Laughter helps me see human beings in a much kinder light as opposed to, say, seeing human beings and the way *they* drive on the freeway and wherever.

Once I get to laughing about it, I begin to understand why it is we try to delay and deny the inevitable. It can get pretty twisty, though, trying to keep that warm, empathetic laughter going, however.

Take the 70-year-old billionaire fashion designer who's been scarfing up stem cell treatments for the last four years, and is convinced he's cranking back the aging clock. Good for him, I suppose -- but this jams new questions into my prefrontal cortex, like "Should youthfulness and extended life be available only for those who can afford it?" and "How in the the hell is it possible to be a billionaire *from being a fashion designer* while being dirt broke working as a nurse in a hospice, comforting the dying?"

Clearly, this is a world filled with contradictions on the order of cosmic pratfalls aplenty. Its next door neighbor for the former question, as you might expect, is a cousin to another uncomfortable query: Should medical care be available only for those who can afford it?

From there, it's a short leap to asking the same about food, water, clothing, shelter, heat, light, air...

Next stop is not Scroogeville, you're already there -- smack dab in the middle of Pottersville, USA, amped up by some sort of GOP-fever-dream skirmish in the Twilight Zone.

And, if you really want to ask some tough questions, what does it say about us -- humans,

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celebrities, Americans, whatever -- when sheep placenta facials and vampire facelifts are the next stop, right after liposuction and lip injections?

Vampire facelifts is the term being trotted out to help explain the phenomenon of removing a patient's blood, infusing it with platelets, and then injecting it back into the same patient's face.

At this point, a test: Are you more concerned that this procedure is not approved by the USFDA or that its cost is enough to run a school hot lunch program for a significant period of time? Or that it's not offered in your area? Or that you're wondering if you can skip a dozen car payments or so in order to get spring for a plane ticket somewhere and get this done right now?

The 2:51 video blurb at the BBC link below preheats this whole line of thought by providers, comparing the week before the Oscars with the week of the Superbowl. Good luck figuring out which of those contests is more superficial, narcissistic, money-driven, and more power-hungry.

Other boxes of questions start clattering out of that same closet: How did we get this way? Why do we base most of our impression about people on appearance, with almost no attention paid to what is said chipping into that pot, and with actual actions chiming in least of all?

Before long, if you're not careful, you're into questions like "Why won't Bieber, Lohan, Spelling, and Timberlake simply shut up, go away, and give us a little peace?"

OK, well, maybe not. Depends.

At any rate, we're still left with the bare-bones question: Why bother with sheep placenta and vampire facelifts when there's no body of evidence to suggest there's any benefit? *I dunno* -- why do normally sane people inject Botox into their faces? Why does the fashion industry, and its attendant handmaiden magazines, insist on keeping women in a perpetual state of beauty envy and self-disgust? Why do eating disorders exist, get triggered, become worse, when intertwined with all the rest?

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Once again, I dunno. It may not be *how low can you go* -- the new question may be *how can you say no?*

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Gear change: When there were fewer people and more resources, we used to make everyday things out of real, actual wood: furniture, flooring, cupboards and shelves...

Then, as populations grew, competition grew for resources that were not growing at the same rate. Eventually, particle board was the only viable option, unless you were a billionaire and could afford real wood.

Have we grown our populations beyond our ability to amicably compete with one another in various arenas? We can measure the 3 or even 4 unemployed people for every job opening with some effort. How do you measure, quantify, and understand the degree to which the country is nuts about staying alive -- and youthful-appearing -- at any conceivable cost? How about beyond any conceivable cost?

How long before none of us can afford life? Or medical care? Shelter? Before we can no longer afford food, just as we can no longer afford wood?

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I suppose it's human vanity that makes us strive to rewind the calendar and grasp at any possible reverse-birthday straws. And that it's human arrogance that makes us believe we can slip Time into a leash and make it do parlor tricks. And that it's our own ignorance and fear that drives us to slide the deadbolt into place when the Grim Reaper comes a-knockin'.

Jane Austen said a person could be proud without being vain, as pride related more to what one thought of oneself, while vanity related more to what others thought of us. Elle Macpherson

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summed up both views by saying it's not vanity to believe you have a right to be beautiful, but added her aim is to cherish herself as she is.

There's looking your best, and there's living well and long -- and then, there's just plain out-to-lunch, running in flopping swim fins, desperate to scuba dive in Crazyland Lake.

* * * * *

Carl Sandburg comes up to bat with the bases loaded and 2 outs, in the bottom of the ninth:

Time is the coin of your life. It is the only coin you have, and only you can determine how it will be spent. Be careful lest you let other people spend it for you.

Maybe the only way to be convinced to abandon paddling around in the Fountain of Youth is to have someone who loves you wave at you, and wait on you, holding a fresh towel, urging you out, smiling, letting you know everything will be OK.

Last laughs about death: <http://www.funeralhelper.org/funeral-quotes/humorous-death-quotes.html>

Try this one on Google: *humorous quotes about death*

and: http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/topics/topic_death.html

Billionaire and the stem cells: <http://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-news-from-elsewhere-2636675>
[1](#)

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The unchanging Pottersville, GOP style:

http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/topics/topic_death.html

Vampire facelifts: <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-26344744>

Jobs: <http://rt.com/usa/us-economy-unemployment-obama-jobs-306/>

Vanity: <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/keywords/vanity.html>

Time: http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/topics/topic_time.html

Today's Bonus:

Hans Zimmer's "Time," from the film, "Inception" -- live: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WQvM4EM0IO8>

... and, from the soundtrack: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z0kGAz6HYM8>

Hans Zimmer's and Lisa Gerrard's "Now We Are Free," from the film, "Gladiator," set to starfields: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HwmT_Sskaek

Plus: An entertaining look at Time itself: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yqzgYRBslw>

... and a visit with Einstein's thoughts:

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<http://www.alberteinsteinsteinsite.com/quotes/einsteinquotes.html>

Plus: A time-romp at Sesame Street:

Martians meets a clock: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dhKhGyUnc2E>

... and Elmo's lullabye from Bocelli: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5BDVvB7Xx1w>