

Opposites, Fence-Sitting, and Trekking

Written by Alex Baer
Monday, 28 April 2014 21:22

Opposites attract, it is said. These days, I suspect opposites attract all right, and bunched up around their opposite poles, are two groups: the totally apathetic and the absolutely certain.

The majority of us are less extreme, lumped in the middle somewhere, fence-sitters, undecided, waiting for more information to drift in and for the clouds of our doubt to clear -- waiting for something like clarity and confidence to bloom somewhere close to our decision-making abilities, our opinions, our beliefs.

Ignorance and apathy make mischievous, self-chasing twins that raise only dust clouds and smokescreens, when they can be persuaded to move at all. Their opposite forces, ego and conviction, sweat buckets to ensure knowledge and action both corner the market and are locked all the way down.

Me, I usually buzz and flit around the whole length and area of those poles of attraction with an armload of bald facts and bare opinions. Sometimes, I sport splashy, energetic layer cakes of logic, interest, fascination. Other times, frankly, I'd be hard pressed to come up with an eighteenth of a half-baked hoot about anything. Sometimes, bereft of answers and beaten down, I refuse to play at all, completely rejecting the *Catch-22*, *damned if you do, damned if you don't*,
own
concept of play -- my
Kobayashi Maru

Fence-sitting puts an uncomfortable crimp and crease in one's pants and fence-sitting apparatus, but it keeps the mind from being unduly, and prematurely, folded, bent, spindled, and mutilated -- a definite upside for those suffering from bouts of indecision.

However, I've been noticing that the effects of other people's activities are starting to crimp and crease my mind regardless, even if I'm motionless and straddling fences of my own making. But, as an American, I claim my birthright -- to shamle over to, and then carefully mount, the Sacred Fence of Shilly-Shallying and hedge as many bets as I like, over there, on the Hedge of Hesitation, on the Ledge of Potential Jumpers.

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(It gets really busy at this waffling, midway locus and nexus some days, especially around election time, when the Candidate Blitz-and-Lurch is just about through the roof. Please be sure to have -- *and make* -- all your fence-sitting reservations in advance, if at all possible, during the busy season.)

Meanwhile, the fallout from opposites trying to attract is just plain brutal these days. We get ripped and rent from one side of life and decision-making to the other, many times on issues that should be non-issues by now, one would think, out of utter boredom from endless repetition or from attempts to rise above them via evolution, experience, and a desire to move-the-heck-on.

Take the swells and falls around racism, for example. We've had a few thousand years to get used to the fact that some members of the human family come in a wide assortment of hues, pallors, tones, shades, and tints. Instead of seeing skin tones as an interesting palette range that helps keeps things lively, attractive, and never boring within our extended families, many of us choose suspicion and dislike based on coloration.

A great many of us have bounded off the fence on this issue a long time ago, and simple don't understand what all the fuss is about. From those of us who don't share the distaste about skin tone that some do, I can only offer one thought from us who *don't* to those who *do*: *Stop it. This makes no sense. □ You're really making our minds hurt. □ And our hearts. □ Please quit it.* And so on.

Here, again, I find myself referencing *Star Trek*, this time an episode of the original series in which two individuals -- both colored half white and half black -- are locked in a life-or-death struggle. We find the reason for this nonstop struggle for racial superiority? One person is *black* on the right side, while one is *white* on the right side. Both are peeved, insulted, and stunned, that this *very* clear fact had to be pointed out to observers.

This reminds me a great deal of Kurt Vonnegut's quote regarding the preposterous nature of any reviewer expressing rage over a novel: *He or she is like a person who has put on full armor and attacked a hot fudge sundae.* Maybe these

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people also hate those who are a different body size, or who find different jokes funny, or those who like their coffee other than the *normal* way...

One supposes this is the unthinking, reptilian part of the brain at work here, the suspicious *Like Us / Not Like Us* reflex common enough in our cave-dwelling days, when fire was still high-tech and not to be trusted. You think we would have left a great deal of things in that cave when we moved on. We did not. We packed them all along, just in case. Damn shame.

- I should probably toss out some statistics, and some humor relief, in through here somewhere, as I have not yet done so, and you may need a break about now. Here we go: Not leaving outmoded, ugly, smelly, useless stuff behind in the cave when we moved on, via evolution, now accounts for 88% of all headache remedy sales and 73% of all alcoholic beverage sales. (The remaining 26% and 39%, respectively, are due to male pattern baldness; and to not asking your doctor if *all* the drugs you see advertised on TeeVee are right for you; and from a continually poor worldwide showing by American students in calculator operation and long-hand mathematics.)

So much for humor relief. In real life, as you already know, there is very little humor relief, there are precious few letdowns of tensions, and almost no amelioration of humorless forces. However, from time to time, there are unexpected bright spots. Minneapolis has allowed a little light to leak in, changing Columbus Day to Indigenous People's Day. I'd say *good job*, but that took *only* a hundred and twenty-odd some years to wangle. Still, *we'll take it!*

- One NPR story web commenter helped jog loose an ancient memory-myth of a Chippewa named Lucky Eagle -- Adam Nordwall, 44, of San Francisco -- who flew to Italy and claimed that country in a gesture of reverse Columbanism, saying, "If Christopher Columbus could claim he had discovered America even though Indians had been living there for thousands of years, I cannot see why I cannot do the same for Italy."

- Another commenter recited a fine meme-card that has been going around for a while now: *Let's celebrate Columbus Day / by walking into someone's house / and telling them we live there now.*

Great points. Maybe we're learning, albeit slowly. You know, maybe we're starting to make a

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little progress... No, wait, hang on -- never mind. The Klan's at it again.

A group of KKK yahoos in Pennsylvania have been volunteering for what they call crime-watch patrols. There's a slew of other KKK madness elsewhere -- throw a dart at a map, pick an antisocial trait. The Clippers are in the news, too, rather the club's owner, and his racist comments. And, guess what? The GOP is still going steady with racist pinheads from All Over This Great Land -- no word yet if the engagement will hold or if the marriage will endure after the extended pre-marital honeymoon, there in the steamy back seat of America's drive-in horror show.

None of this is news, not really. Mankind is usually gullet-deep in opposites. Racism's the tip of the iceberg. Speaking of which: There's no such thing as man-made climate change -- global warming, if you will -- and yet, another gargantuan iceberg has cleaved away from Antarctica. This one's six times larger than Manhattan -- 21 miles by 12 miles. That's bigger than the island of Guam. That's some Big Ice. Happens all the time these days.

Off the coast of Newfoundland, in the meantime, oil rigs are playing dodge-ball with icebergs. In California, we skid to the opposite end of things, where the entire state is in drought -- for the first time in 15 years. That will play hell with food prices. Apple has chimed in and said climate change is real and that humanity should consider a solutions-reboot; Homeland Security, meanwhile, has Microsoft firmly booting itself in its own software, telling users to abandon Internet Explorer because of security flaws.

Security? What security? We can holler, ring, buzz, and call for security all we like -- both the computer and non-computer kind. We're not likely to get much security these days, not on any front. We'll not get even an overweight mall cop on foot with the pedestrian ability to call somebody else, somewhere or other, for real, *actual* help.

It's not news -- more like a kaleidoscope that shifts and changes even as it stays the same. There are a lot of stories that keep happening, over and over again. The locations change, the amounts of pain differ, the size of the scares vary here and there... Radioactivity, for example. North Dakota's fighting radioactive oil waste. Again. Across the Pacific, in Fukushima, they're s
till
having major problems with radioactive water -- some eight months
after
Japan's prime minister gave the world a reassuring thumbs-up and all's-clear. It's not.

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Closer to home. the NRA had a Youth Day bash, offering kids free membership, and a chance to win a high-powered rifle or shotgun. A company, however, is trying to market a so-called smart gun that hopes to deliver more gun safety. The NRA, of course, is so exercised by this issue it is soiling itself three times every eleven seconds and has called for a Depends mobilization and airlift.

On the other hand, outcrazy-ing Texas, which is very tough to do, Georgia's Governor has signed the so-called "Guns Everywhere" bill that lets people tote firearms in bars, churches, government buildings -- you name it. The NRA is now giving the historic legislation a crisp salute, and is busy humming a happy little fundraising, lobbying, and legislation-pushing tune.

A song keeps echoing in my head: *Nobody's right if everybody's wrong...*

Firesign Theatre says everything I know is wrong. As a mere human being, I admit this is more than possible. However, everything I know that's of any consequence, I suspect, I really learned from *Star Trek*. And from the thoughtful distance that my meditative fence-sitting provides, and from considering a range of many opposites, and the area in between. I have been taught much.

I could really use more time to try to figure these things out. But, then, I suppose *everybody* wants more time, whether they're figuring anything out, or trying to, or not.

AFTERWORD

There are small lights in the darkness, flickering night lights of hope, relief, distraction. These small blurbs and buoys are miniature beacons, like lighthouses trying to keep us from dashing ourselves on the despairing rocks. Headway is welcome, especially in storms.

Scientific headway: Gravitational lensing, for example -- a supernova mystery is explained. Or, the serendipity of the Mars rover, Curiosity, accidentally spotting asteroids from the surface of Mars. Back on Earth, our gaze is shifted again, looking back in time, inside ancient ice, looking for climate clues, maybe going back one and a half million years. Peering into the

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future, we find a Chinese company which can now create ten full-size houses a day -- using a 3D printer. We even have time to smile at the birth of a zonkey. Or a dobra, as you like.

Still, it's difficult to shake the awareness that asteroids strike the Earth a lot more than we think. There's a lot of very big rocks swirling around us in space. And then, in Earth orbit, jazzing along at a jagged 17,500 miles an hour, we have half a million pieces of man-made space litter swirling around us, too. Right now, we're pretty much sitting ducks, fingers crossed, playing the odds, chanting around camp fires, hoping for clean misses when the big rocks come by, and pointing at some fiery streaks when one gets close and paints scorch marks on the sky.

Yeah, this sounds about right, for humans. And, you know: The splinters and bent nails on the fence are getting harder for my backside to ignore. If only to stop the pain and stem the bleeding, looks like I'll have to get off my duff, hop down from the fence, and take a stand.

Somewhere, somehow. ☐ And soon.

Kobayashi Maru: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kobayashi_Maru

Do not fold, bend, spindle, or mutilate: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Punched_card

Last Battlefield: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Let_That_Be_Your_Last_Battlefield

Goodbye, Columbus: <http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2014/04/27/307445328/minneapolis-renames-columbus-day-as-indigenous-peoples-day>

Lucky Eagle:

<http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1144&dat=19730925&id=k6kbAAAIBAJ&sjid=hVQEAAAIBAJ&pg=7224,4334413>

Klan crime-watch: <http://www.examiner.com/article/kkk-neighborhood-watch-kkk-wizards-vow-impartiality-during-pa-crime-watch>

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Klan brand-watch:

<http://www.npr.org/blogs/theprotojournalist/2014/04/27/307426730/keeping-an-eye-on-the-kkk>

GOP racists: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/apr/25/cliven-bundy-saga-republicans-far-right-rand-paul>

Sterling rep:

<http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2014/04/28/307675955/what-can-the-nba-do-with-donald-sterling>

Big 'berg - story & short vid:

http://www.upi.com/Science_News/2014/04/24/Humongous-iceberg-slowly-drifts-away-from-Antarctica/7581398350152/?spt=mps_v=4

Apple on climate change:

<http://cironline.org/reports/apple-climate-change-real-and-its-real-problem-6289>

Dodge the icebergs:

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/newfoundland-labrador/oil-rigs-moved-due-to-iceberg-threat-1.2623535>

Drought: http://www.upi.com/Science_News/2014/04/25/Entire-state-of-California-in-drought-first-time-in-15-years/8451398442804/?spt=hts_v=4

Radioactive plant water:

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/04/17/japan-fukushima-water-idUSL2N0N606720140417>

Radioactive oil waste: <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2014/4/25/radioactive-wastedakota>

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Bye-bye, IE: <http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2014/04/28/307763583/u-s-tells-users-to-stop-using-internet-explorer-for-now>

NRA Youth Day:

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/apr/27/nra-children-membership-youth-day-guns>

Guns -- *smart* and otherwise:

http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/28/us/politics/smart-firearm-draws-wrath-of-the-gun-lobby.html?_r=2

Georgia gunning:

<http://politics.blog.ajc.com/2014/04/23/nathan-deal-stresses-positive-changes-in-gun-bill-hell-sighn-today/>

Gravitational lensing: <http://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-27118405>

Curiosity:

http://www.upi.com/Science_News/2014/04/25/Asteroid-images-captured-from-surface-of-Mars-Curiosity-Rover-first/2501398448394/?spt=mps_v=5

3D printer: <http://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-news-from-elsewhere-27156775>

Space junk:

http://www.nasa.gov/mission_pages/station/news/orbital_debris.html#.U19Ff65jD3A

Asteroid strikes:

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<http://www.nbcnews.com/science/space/big-bangs-asteroids-strike-earth-more-often-we-think-n86281>

Ancient ice: <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2014/4/21/antarctic-ice-dating.html>

Zonkey:

http://www.upi.com/Science_News/2014/04/25/Zonkey-rare-zebra-donkey-hybrid-born-in-Mexican-zoo/5701398451243/?spt=mps_v=3

Today's Bonuses:

For What It's Worth: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f5M_Ttstbgs

Planet-views from the Space Station: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6X5DqKdi8A4>

Restoring awe -- The Sun: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wisdfag6WIQ>

Here Comes the Sun, Beatles style: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_p-fANMqo0s

Here Comes the Sun, Madrid flash mob style: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fHK2lxS5lvw>