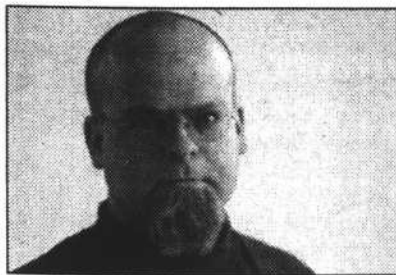


Cheating death

Achieving immortality is as easy as disproving Newton's second law



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Want to live forever? It's easy; I've been doing it for years: just keep on breathing in and out, in and out — you can't miss.

Actually, it's a little more complicated than that as the universe continues its slow burn, degrading softly off into the sort of cosmic "white noise" that some physicists tell us is the eventual destiny of every mother-loving thing.

That's entropy for you and it's a bitch.

Based on a pre-Einsteinian view of Newton's Second Law of Thermodynamics the idea is this: Everything runs down; everything — but everything — dies.

So no matter how long you live, eventually the heat death of the universe catches up with you and you vanish in meaningless static, along with the entire Star Wars dodecadology and every word ever written by Hugh Nibley.

The universe is only good for another 10^{31} years on the outside and that sets an absolute limit to the number of candles you might legitimately stick in the pasty icing of your penultimate birthday cake.

So much for eternity? Not on your life.

Self-organizing systems seem to operate in a counter-entropic or "extropal" manner, moving from states of lesser towards those of greater complexity.

What is a self-organizing system? Why, you are, for one.

The development of the human fetus in the womb is an illustration of the process, evolving as it does from a simple, single-celled organism into a ball of wailing gristle in just nine short months.

But that same individual will age, deteriorate, eat Twinkies and die within a century of its first confused glimpses of this world unless ...

Well, unless nothing. That's the received wisdom, and you don't get any points for bucking the clichés.

What goes on under Newton's disapproving gaze, however, is Life — that is Life itself as opposed to any individual organism. Life, the triumph of self-organization over formal decay, extropy over entropy by a knockout.

So one way you might extend your days beyond number is to turn yourself into Life. That is, drop your identity, your personality, your body with its twinges, its aches and pains, and put on the Technicolor dream coat of evolution.

You don't have to give up the mind because Life includes the human mind and you can have all of human interaction in which to think your complicated thoughts.

And talk about sex! All kinds of sex.

From the rutting of mountain goats in the spring to the kinky 24-hour orgies of horny bacteria, you get more sex than you can even imagine right now with your limited cranial capacity.

Problem with becoming Life, however, is it's a solution more in line with the powers of a deity than some 21-year-old undergraduate music major with maxed-out credit cards and a runaway case of toenail fungus.

Sure it works for Shiva, but what about Joe Cannibal here?

On the other hand, if you want to live forever, why are you complaining? No one said it would be a cake walk.

On yet another hand (and Shiva, mercifully, has any number of "other hands"), your idea of eternal life may entail going on as something recognizably yourself — though why you would want to keep your nose or even your P.O. box forever is a mystery to me.

In that case, consult your physician immediately; it may already be too late!

People (and army ants) die because they are programmed to die. Or, failing that, because errors creep into cellular reproduction (cancer) and after a while systems dependent on those cells collapse.

As we have hinted in passing,

Life doesn't care too much about individuals — and once sexual reproduction came on line way back in that primordial sea or whatever — death became an absolute necessity: Eat, Copulate and Die became Nature's prime directive.

Otherwise the pool gets a little crowded.

But we're not talking about everyone else here, we're talking about YOU, unique and irreplaceable YOU. For YOU death is unthinkable, a terrible, terrible waste.

So you might start taking antioxidants.

Antioxidants are chemicals that

shield the cells of your body from free radicals, those pesky rogue molecules responsible for the development of neuro-degenerative disorders such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's, as well as auto-immune disease, cancer, coronary disease, arteriosclerosis, diabetes and more.

One of the best antioxidants, and one of the key elements in your cells' program of DNA replication (and error correction), is something called NADH.

Although NADH was discovered in 1934, technological breakthroughs have only recently allowed for the

manufacturing of a stabilized, tablet form of this crucial co-enzyme (nicotinamide adenine dinucleotide — the "H" stands for "hydrogen").

Unfortunately, the only information available on the benefits of NADH seems to come from the manufacturers holding the patent on its production processes.

But if even half of what they say is true, a daily dose of NADH and you're well on your way to immortality.

Also you will need plenty of rest, lots of fresh vegetables and to avoid like the plague all falling anvils. (Avoiding the plague is also a good idea.)

As for that "heat death" thing, well, remember we said it was pre-Einsteinian, which means it doesn't take into account all kinds of quantum facts of life such as the little-known truth that there's no such thing as simultaneity — that is, no two events can be said categorically to occur at the same time.

This is complicated and has to do with the speed of light and other niceties of Relativity, but let's just say that when the universe ends, you arrange to be out of town and leave it at that.



DEB LEE/DN

Pollution of the press

The media cannot be objective, no matter how hard they try



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Objective news reporting is a sham. Sham, sham, sham.

There're no two ways about it — members of the media, like the rest of us, are simply incapable of leaving their opinions at home.

This is not to say reporters and editors alike, do not make a valiant effort to report "the facts." The problem is, the facts reported are the facts as they see them, and their perception is undoubtedly tainted by their subjective life experiences — not to mention a host of other factors.

You see, you are a product of your environment and the choices you've made. No, no, I don't intend to engage in the Nature vs. Nurture discussion —

but you have to admit, your surroundings and your choices have shaped who you are.

As humans, our collective experiences develop our perception of reality: our lens through which we view the world, if you will. The point is, we're all subject to bias. And the differences in our experiences are likely the determining factors for the differences of our opinions. So opinion is likely a reflection of experience and predictably, opinion is present in perception.

Simply, nobody can be truly objective.

Come on, do you really think Dan Rather and Connie Chung are going to have the same take on sexual harassment? No, how could they? And I'm certain both would acknowledge and address their preconceived notions before they attempted to report on a situation involving sexual harassment. But chances are, their coverage of the issue would differ. Now, back to how individual bias translates into our little realities. In case you missed it, the news flash here was that members of the media are subject to bias and opinion, even in reporting. "NO!" you say, aghast at the very idea.

Well, I'm here to tell you it's true; there is no such thing as objectivity in the news — or anywhere else for that

matter.

"What does that mean for me?" you wonder, as the foundation of reality as you know it begins to erode away.

Well, settle down — it just means you can't believe everything you read, that's all.

When reading (or watching) the news, you must keep in mind the biases of the source. Even in a respectable profession such as journalism, individuals are subject to racial, religious, social, political, educational, economic and whatever else you can think of bias.

Because of this, we, as consumers, need to consider these biases and question the presentation of facts.

Oh yes. Question, question, question.

Question not only the presentation of facts, but the absence of alternative perspective. Question the amount of attention devoted to a specific issue and why the issue warrants that much attention. Question why a story was front page. Question why a story was buried somewhere in the middle. Question the headlines, the pictures, and even the cartoons, if you're so inclined.

Rock the boat, baby.

I must warn you though, questioning a news source about objectivity in reporting or newsworthiness may not

be looked upon favorably. In fact, you may be designated a "rabble-rouser" or some equally dreadful classification. And if you are in the ideological minority, you will almost certainly be chastised.

Should you choose to question the unquestionable, you will undoubtedly be accused of being opinionated. Boo ... If you disagree with someone you may be accused of trying to force your opinions on others. Heaven forbid you'd be accused of being partisan. Hiss ...

Just remember, questioning the news through your own subjective lens is not only your right, but it can be an important tool for the general public to hold the industry accountable.

Abraham Lincoln once said, "In this age, in this country, public sentiment is everything. With it, nothing can fail; against it, nothing can succeed. Whoever molds public sentiment goes deeper than he who enacts statutes, or pronounces judicial decisions."

And he was right.

Any ideological movement that seeks to end injustice, or prompt any significant change, must first sway public opinion. To do this, there must be a shift in how it (the idea, group of people, or the movement) is portrayed in the media.

Thus, the media must be courted.

In my meager political experience, I have witnessed firsthand the power of the press. Candidates and activist groups buddy up to reporters, cater to their every need, all in the hopes that a pleasant experience will translate to a favorable story.

Underestimating the power of the press has been the downfall of many a formidable candidate.

Earned media is invaluable to political organizations and campaigns because the news is widely perceived as being objective and factual. Because if something or someone is cast in a positive light in the news, and the news is objective, that something or someone must then, be positive. Right?

Well, no. Whatever light it's cast in is invariably a manifestation of the lens through which the reporter sees the world. This is not to say reporters purposely insert their opinion in an attempt to skew the facts. In fact, I would think most of them give objectivity their best shot.

So, while the news industry strives to be objective, and endeavors to give a fair and accurate account of history in the making, our news, and thus our public sentiment, is merely a reflection of our own prejudices.