

Dangerous Advices

Ziade Hailu, July 2013

Take any advice with a grain of salt especially if they are dangerous. Mine is not an exception. Two things motivated me to write this piece. One, there is a sort of cold war going on in our household concerning our real ages. Before my baptismal papers were discovered by sniffing wife the other day, my real age was a state secret while hers is still a closely guarded mystery, perhaps requiring carbon dating. With no choice left I decided to come clean: My name is Ziade and I am 40 years old today. (July 5, 2013). Two, some young students wrote to me an email requesting if I could give them some advice. I am not making up the latter case. To prove these young souls wrong that I can't give instructions even at 40 years, I came up with the following advices, fully aware of the risks involved in the trade of advice dispensing for a novice essayist. I have no intention of converting, moralizing or even imparting new knowledge, unless you are conspiring with me.

Advice #1: **Meaning of life.**

I will be solving perennial philosophical problem that had engaged philosophers for millennia in one sentence. It is a pity that the Swedish are so mean to philosophy to consider for a Nobel prize. Finally today you will hear from Plato (did I say Plato? Hell no, from me) what the meaning of life is: there is no meaning in life except the one you construct for yourself. Has some one already said that? Originality is always a problem. Never mind. Why waste your precious time in searching for it. Any one who tried to provide the meaning of life with a sentence that begins "the meaning of life is....." has always faltered. One discovers a better life explanation emerging the next minute. So, don't try to discover the meaning of life from others, including mine. Find it in yourself. What others will give you is their own version of 'meaning of life' that may not work in your understanding. But why would you want to know the meaning of life while you are too busy being useful to yourself and others. Perhaps you have already discovered the minute you decided to become a contributing member of the society.

Advice #2: Money:

I can't tell you how to be rich for I don't know the secret. As they say, if I knew I would have been already rich. Despite considerable investment in materials that promised me an instant formula to make me rich, the journey towards wealth, I discovered, is a work in progress. However, I know few things you might as well know about money. If you don't have money you are (almost) finished. Let's get this straight. The luxury capitalism offers is for those who have money. I want you to distrust people who tell you money is not important. Money may not be everything but money is what makes the 'world go round'. The proven way of getting money is to solve other people's problem. That is how the *real* rich got rich. So think of an area that you can make people's life a lot easier and comfortable and money will come.

Advice #3: Sex and relationships:

I appreciate your openness in confiding in me something I already knew, that at that age of yours you feel like sleeping with the next beautiful girl that you happen to meet. Ah, that might be good for Mother Nature but I am sure it is not good for you. Now, you have heard probably from religiously inclined people that those feelings are evil and if you act upon them eternal damnation waits for you. The fear of eternal fire is not preventing people from sleeping with each other. A 'Devil' explanation to your sexual pressures has brought tension and misery. Instead I offer you a simple, unloaded, '*biology*' explanation in that your genes are wired for reproductive success. So in a way 'nature is tricking' you to make babies. Through the magic of science we are able to avoid the 'babies' component from the deal but the attraction part will always be there and that is beautiful feeling to own. The moment you explained the origin of your feelings the big burden is taken off your shoulders. It is your choice to sleep with the next man you meet on the road and make as many babies as you wish or refuse to lead your life based on genetic programming.

Sooner or later I expect, I am not the only one, sex to be delinked from moral and cultural constraints and be played as any other 'recreational game' between two consenting adults. Writings are on the wall for any one bothering to see in that some members of western society are giving their backs to serial monogamy, fed up by the conflict such relationships bring about. I detest referring theories in my popular write-ups but I can't resist mentioning the power of sexual conflict theory in explaining and predicting how conflicts arise in human mating market. Unless 'sexual cooperation' can fairly be predicted equally by both parties, conflicts are inevitable. But for now, considering the way the society is organized (law, resources) you are better off limiting

your sexual adventures on practical grounds and instead invest on love and deep relationships that might offer you meaning and deep satisfaction.

Advice #4: Religion:

Debates about God are certainly older than you, and most probably will survive you. God question was, still is in some part of the world, literally the matter of life and death. People were slaughtered, villages vandalized, women abused based on alternative views people hold about God. I would think, complete ‘certainty’ that comes from both camps (believers and unbelievers) should be suspected based on evolutionary nature of human knowledge. In fact, if a community is confronted by two people, one equipped with suicide belt and another with utter conviction, a bomb man will make a better friend. There would be some chances of convincing the bomb man, unless he is wearing both ‘utter conviction and a bomb’ at the same time.

Taking strong arguments from both sides and building life based on ‘provisional truths’ might provide you, I like to believe, a respected position with some room for improvement and learning. At any rate, while having reasonable faith is beneficial to human health, I believe you are too smart to be convinced that human understanding about himself and environment is complete. But I warn you to resist a temptation to join militant groups on both sides that work relentlessly to improve membership size, with no apparent objectives of making life on earth more interesting or less painful.

If you still insist, conversion of the souls is a worthy pursuit, (though I suspect your moral superiority) then go ahead but I suggest that you build a “room of your own” as some feminists would advise their followers. That is to say, if you are to do religion, make sure you can put food on the table first.

Advice #7: Revolutionary spirit, literature, and love of life

You indicated to me in your correspondences that you have lost faith in politics and your initial revolutionary fire is dying out. I must express my disappointment with you. If you lost faith in politics then that is even better reason to be a revolutionary. ‘Run for office and get elected’, that is, if you can. Revolutionary spirit is not tied to politics alone and if your (liberal) education is not inspiring you to be a troublemaker, then you are not getting valuable education. A revolutionary

sprit is not fearful of attempting new ways of looking at things. If the Polish man, Copernicus, did not mistrust the model that places the earth at the center of the universe, we would have been stuck in that view for ever until another revolutionary comes on scene.

The ruling class, be it in culture, politics, religion etc... shall offer you every trick in exchange for your brains. The whole propaganda industry is to do with the 'battle to your mind'. I urge you to think for yourselves. Take your own position on important issues no matter unpopular your views might seem. Get good education, accumulate information, but most of all learn the methods. At the end, I promise you that you will never run out of issues that need revolutionary revision. And if you are only interested private existence in relation to public life, then live a life you designed for yourself in revolutionary spirit and refuse to be counted as another sheep.

Don't allow people to resize you, remodel you to their ethnic ambitions, geographical boundaries, and religious believes. Thoughtful contrarians will tell you not to allow anyone to use the 'we' without your consent. I believe, more or less, people everywhere are the same.

And finally, dear conspirator, while I don't know what comprises happiness, but if you are fallen in love with knowledge via books and other literature you will not be unhappy. The masters tell us that at higher level reading a book is the most complex job. And if you are lucky enough to drive joy out of reading essays, poems, novels, and other specialized books you should consider yourself a 'chosen' one. In the long term we all are going to die, but before we become food for termites, it is wise to attempt to live a good life, worthy of the gift of life we are blessed with. 'Not many are so lucky to see the light.'