

FORWARD

My Credo: For what it is worth.

Be not afraid of life. Believe that life is worth living and your belief will help create the fact. William James

Faith may be defined briefly as an illogical belief in the occurrence of the improbable. H.L. Mencken

Our belief in any natural law cannot have a safer basis than our unsuccessful critical attempts to refute it. Karl Raimund Popper

Three passions, simple but overwhelmingly strong, have governed my life: the longing for love, the search for knowledge, and unbearable pity for the suffering of mankind. Bertrand Russell.

Of course I am not willing to die for my beliefs. They might be wrong. Bertrand Russell

Introduction:

I have just finished writing my sixty-fifth story. I hope that I will shortly celebrate my seventy-seventh birthday. I have become very aware of my mortality as many friends and old acquaintances disappear. In thinking about my life and thoughts I discovered that I really did not know who or what I am and what, if anything, I will leave once my existence terminates. I have reread many of my stories and have found that, while enjoying them and while they reflect many of my views, they do not really reveal, in any believable manner, what I think about existence, science, religion, life, society, justice, etc. I know that in attempting to describe all my feelings, I may be viewed as nothing more than a self-centered and self-serving hypocrite. These accusations are probably largely true. So be it! The elaboration of my credo is for my edification. That my ego and vanity will be well served by anything I say or write is axiomatic. However, even more so is, if anybody who reads my plethora of verbiage, expresses some appreciation of them. I am only sure that one person, besides myself, will very critically peruse this credo of mine and that is my loving wife Nikki whose views, especially about my writings, I cherish. She usually brings me down to earth.

Some final thoughts before I commence with my credo. I try to view everything through both the lens of uncertainty and the conviction that nothing is absolute. By the latter I feel that there are limitations and exceptions to any value I might espouse. Secondly, my credo will consist of a hierarchy of values, in no special order of importance, mostly positive, yet some negative. With justification, there is no doubt that my credo can be viewed by some as incoherent, chaotic and unorganized. After all it reflects me. I am incoherent, chaotic and unorganized as anyone who knows me and looks at my desk will readily attest.

My Credo:

Obviously the most important value laden item is "Life". Without it there is nothing else of consequence. Under its rubric are a host of other matters to consider. We will get to them shortly. First of all we should mention cases where "Life" appears to have some of its value diminished. There are instances when incurable debilitating and extremely painful maladies make a mockery of the term "quality of life". That phrase suggests that life always has a quality worth preserving, a belief that is questionable. There are other examples. A parent sacrificing their lives to save their offspring; soldiers capable of heroic deeds in the midst of battle forfeiting their lives to ensure victory; and psychological disorders brought on by and enhanced by shameful acts. There are other cases that should be condemned, such as behavior that harms or takes the lives of others as terrorist suicides or the Japanese Kamakazis of WW2. In summary; Life is worth saving and preserving when it offers many valid reasons for staying alive.

What are the values making life worthwhile? There are many. However, in my view, there are two overreaching and intangible ones. They are "Love" and "Freedom". I cannot define or even accurately describe each. Poets have been attempting to do so for many centuries. All I can do is fall back on the old bromide, "I cannot define pornography but I know it when I see it." Similarly I can recognize both love and freedom when I come across them. I attach very high value on both. They are not mutually exclusive as they frequently mirror each other. In my view most other worthwhile values derive from them.

Let us begin with "Love". Without 'love' there is no beauty and thus no contrast between it and ugliness. Without 'love' the world becomes a pallid grey and a fertile field for 'hatred', which in turn turns the grey to black with accompanying actions that are decidedly evil. In our world, hatred and love unfortunately seem to co-exist. However, much too frequently the former appears to have the upper hand despite all the moralistic preaching that organized religion intones. It fails especially when one religious sect denounces all the others and proclaims itself the only true voice of 'God'. The violence that often ensues is unforgivable. For me, the truly religious person and the truly rational one are both imbued with an overwhelming sense of humility before the mystery of existence. Religion has created an anthropologic 'God' with absolutely no basis for that approach whatsoever. Without belaboring it, I am reasonably sure that those responsible for religion initially tried to provide some sort of explanation for existence, how to deal with our mortality and also to present a civilized mode of behavior that would make it possible for people to co-exist in harmony. I maintain that it failed because it was based on fables, legends and myths that had no real evidence to support these beliefs. Using these tenets made it rather easy to justify denigrating those who did not share them. I am an agnostic. I base that on the fallibility of our knowledge. Quantum Mechanics and Relativity both teach us about probability and uncertainty.

As an aside, I would like to briefly amplify on my earlier assertion that, "Love gives rise to Beauty which in turn begets the 'Arts'. The power of various paintings, literature, poetry and especially music cannot be exaggerated. I am not as well versed, or as appreciative in the visual arts, literature and poetry as I should be. More is the pity. However, while I have no musical expertise I do have a deep and abiding love for music, especially of what is commonly thought of as the classical variety, although I am starting to more fully appreciate many other sorts. All the arts are a form of communication but nothing touches me more profoundly than music. The closest thing is poetry which can be considered another musical form. I cannot place anyone on a higher pedestal than the

three all time musical giants, Bach, Mozart and Beethoven. My favorite poet is Louis Aragon whose love poem to his wife, "Que fairais-je sans toi?" is the most beautiful expression of love by one human for another, I have ever come across. Enough!

One initiative that is often espoused is that of 'Charity'. At first glance it seems that charity is a very positive, noble and humane activity. Should we not provide succor to all in need, be it of food, clothing, shelter and medical attention? I am very much in favor of giving assistance directly to those requiring it. However, charity as a panacea for solving certain social problems is, at best, useless and at worst, downright insidious. George Sand had it right when she declared that, "Charity degrades those who receive it and hardens those who dispense it." Besides providing the latter with tax breaks, it also enhances their sense of superiority over the needy. Oscar Wilde also cynically observed that, "Charity creates a multitude of sins." It is akin to providing aspirin for a headache that is caused by a brain tumor. Instead of solving the problems associated with poverty, it masks them to ensure the maintenance of the status quo. Such behavior increases the frequency of their occurrence and ends up by making them more distressing. I firmly believe that every effort to eliminate poverty by instituting a fairer distribution of wealth should be undertaken. I recognize that this probably would be an impossible task since there would be much opposition and the power to do so is in the hands of the privileged whose interests are diametrically opposed to such a progressive idea.

I make a distinction between charity and kinship. The latter is a manifestation of our humane feelings for our fellow humans. This is probably motivated by the notion, that "There for the grace of God, go I." My interest in kinship is, no doubt, largely motivated by self interest. I have been one lucky individual. I live in one of the best countries in the world. I was born at a time that enabled me to avoid military duty, to acquire a fruitful education and subsequent economic security. I currently reside in a part of Canada that is blessed with a great climate and fabulously beautiful scenery.

Most of my life I have manifested this feeling of kinship by exhibiting anger at the vicious adversities that so many innocents have had to confront. The results are usually horrendous. These words do not do justice to the misery that they live and die under. Yet, there have been demonstrations of very humane policies that try to better the human condition. Examples are democracy, the law, justice, equality before the law, minimum earnings, universal health care, equity, progressive taxation, the acceptance of trade unions, attempts to abolish war by mediation between the nations in conflict, assistance to underdeveloped countries, the abolition of capital punishment, the acceptance of those whose life styles and cultures are radically different from ours, and finally equality. This last one is habitually misunderstood to mean that we are all born equal. This is patently not so. We are physically, mentally different, with differing abilities and talents. It should read that, "we should all be born with equal opportunities to fulfill our ambitions and talents."

It is apparent that I am a strong advocate of 'Love'. Do I hate? Of course I do. I am human with many, if not most, of human frailties. I am also imbued with other traits such as fear, envy, passion, greed, lust, sympathy, empathy, control, cognitive dissonance, honesty, integrity, curiosity, lying and pride. When one thinks of 'fear' one cannot help but remember Roosevelt's famous citation. "There is nothing to fear but fear itself." I only wish that was true. I try to minimize those qualities that are negative but I suspect I rarely succeed. I hardly ever come close to succeeding in accomplishing the positive ones. The trouble is that I, like most, never give these attributes much thought.

Returning to 'hate' I would like to suggest the following caveats. Hate is a normal human emotion. However, if hate is obsessive, in that it literally rules one's life, then one is in danger of becoming either totally neurotic or psychotic. Dealing with hate is relatively simple. Avoid the things you hate. Try to civilly oppose the ideas you hate. Either, steer clear of the people you hate or ignore them except when they pose a real threat to your well being. In that case, every effort to neutralize them should be attempted. If that fails then you either flee or confront them on your terms even if that means, 'fighting fire with fire'.

Finally an aspect of 'Love' that is closest to my heart. I am referring to the personal one. I am sure most of us have feelings of affection and a sense of caring for close friends, and most members of our families. I have always felt that since we choose our friends but not our family we should feel more strongly about the former. This certainly does not turn out to be the case. I guess that, more often than not, blood is thicker than water.

One person we do choose or we are chosen by, is our mate. My love for my wife Nikki knows no bounds. The previously mentioned Aragon poem whose title in English is, "What would I do without you?", " expresses my deep feelings for her. She is the only person I completely have faith in and with no qualms would trust her with my life. I cannot explain why I feel about her as I do or what attributes she has that endear her to me in the manner that she does. I am reminded of the person who spends a great deal of time analyzing a symphony while losing the sense of beauty, power and emotion the music conveys. Nikki is my symphony.

I could say a lot more about "Love" and its consequences. I think that it is time for me to expound on "Freedom", something that means many contrasting things for different nationalities and cultures. I need not elaborate on political freedom except to assert, as a French philosopher once did, "We get the governments we deserve." After all, we are free to vote, free to assemble, free to voice our views, and free to reject those in power in a constitutional manner. While all these have certain limitations, historically, we have never been freer from the yoke of rulers as we are now.

There are other sorts of freedom or lack thereof that are not usually thought of. For example, while a laborer labors, she or he cannot be said to be free. The activity and time involved with labor is prescribed. Even today, after much strife with trade unions, in the minds of many industrialists labor is still thought of as nothing more than a business tool whose cost needs to be minimized. Simply put, the human component is frequently overlooked.

Further the major if not the sole motivation for work is economic. Many, if not most workers are not free from 'freedom from want'. Providing for family needs, education for offspring, in some cases health requirements, mortgage payments, rent, etc. does not leave much for leisure activities or for savings for retirement. Simply put the rat race does not provide much freedom. The major virtue of being wealthy is not the purchasing power available but the freedom to do what you want whenever. Of course, there are those whose appetite for money enslaves them. I have never understood those affluent persons who chafe at being retired. Retirement allows one to follow ones unfulfilled dreams and to change one's lifestyle permitting one to look forward instead of living in the past.

As is easily imaginable, Freedom has a multitude of facets, far too many for me to deal with. In any case, I neither have the knowledge nor wisdom to adequately cover the topic. However, to illustrate, there is political freedom as already mentioned. There is social freedom that allows citizens to believe whatever as long as they do not impose or coerce others into the same belief or activity. For example, a woman has a right to choose an abortion if she so desires or persons of the same sex should have the freedom to cohabit legally without any constraints as a married couple, or we should all have the freedom that privacy provides. Another right that requires some consideration is the right to die with dignity. The right to an adequate education and appropriate health care are essential freedoms since without them we become captives of our ignorance and of our physical and mental ignominies. Then there is economic freedom. We have the freedom to spend our money as we wish and to invest or become an entrepreneur by going into business by ourselves or with others. The freedom to own things is vital. In other words private property within certain parameters is an essential part of our economy.

There are certain restrictions on some of our freedoms. No one has the right to cry fire in a crowded theatre. The freedom to swing one's fist is limited by the proximity of someone else's jaw. The wanton destruction of property or the taking of life should certainly not be allowed. In a free enterprise economy such as ours, control of the market or the government by an individual or a small group such as trusts should never be permissible and should be viewed as a major crime. It is a form of fascism.

There are two other points I wish to make. Firstly, we live in what political scientists call a 'liberal democracy' as opposed to a social democracy which appears to be prevalent in other parts of the world. The difference between the two, I think, is that the rights of the individual are paramount in the former and those of the collectivity in the latter. The truth is that we need a balancing act between the two. There are times when the former has to be given prime consideration and other times when the latter becomes more important especially when national security is involved. However, even if that situation arises the fundamental rights of the individual should never be sacrificed. On occasion, it appears that Solomon's wisdom is required.

Finally is the freedom that I value as much if not more than most of the others. It is the freedom to question nearly anything, to challenge long accepted ideas and to search for truth no matter where it might lead. We have many examples of those who were most daring. By the use of knowledge gleaned from sources often deemed unacceptable and by their imagination they put forth new daring concepts. Buddha, Moses, Jesus, Confucius, Archimedes, Pythagoras, Euclid, Socrates, Aristotle, Galileo, Copernicus, Spinoza, Newton, Maxwell, Adam Smith, Darwin, Marx, Plank, and Einstein are but a few. Our minds are the most valuable trait we possess. Not to fully utilize this facility is close to criminal. It is tragic to contemplate that so many of us waste this most precious gift.

The two activities that enhance our ability to question are science and technology. We do not pay enough attention to the former and approach the latter mostly from a utilitarian point of view. One of the criticisms of science has been that it has done next to nothing to resolve the world's problems. That is not its function. Its purpose is to provide us with a better understanding of existence be it that of life, our world and the universe. What we do with this knowledge very often becomes political. It is of interest to note that more than 80% of all scientists that ever lived are still alive. Very few are heeded.

The impact of technology in concert with science is absolutely astounding. A quick examination of how it has changed our lives over the last hundred years demonstrates that the technological changes during that period far surpass all the previous changes throughout human history. Modern technology is the scientist's major tool. Without it we might still be living in the 'Dark Ages' of the nineteenth century. Perhaps the most dramatic area where it has become paramount is in the practice of medicine. Energy production is another area where technology is critical. After all, without its abundant supply, we could not enjoy our luxuriant standard of living. Also we are all familiar with the rapid rise in our technical ability with respect to transportation and communication. It often seems that television, the telephone, the internet and digital photography, while very useful, also entrap many of us.

It has been stated by certain detractors of science that if ever we garner a complete understanding of existence, we would have no need for 'faith'. I am not convinced that we have such a need. I sense that anyone with such a requirement does not really know what they are having faith in. Faith usually embodies an ideal of what the world should be like as opposed to what it is. I cannot believe in something simply because I want that something to be true. Too many of us receive a distorted view of reality because we view it through the lens of a belief or ideology. Instead, we should let our beliefs or ideologies be shaped by reality as unpleasant as that might be.

I have one final assertion. Some may find it offensive. So be it!

First and foremost, and despite being a Canadian citizen, I am a Jew. It is true that I was lucky to have been born in Canada and provided with most of the means and freedom to achieve many of my personal goals. Canada is currently one of the best nations in the world. Yet Canada has a history of Anti-Semitism which, fortunately, has largely become illegal.

I consider myself a Diaspora Jew and I define that term as a Jew living in perpetual exile never feeling totally at home anywhere.

I am still a Jew. I am one not because I believe in the Jewish religion. I do not. I profess to be an agnostic equally opposed to all organized religions.

I am a Jew not because I have a particular affiliation for the state of Israel. I have always been anti-nationalist. However I do not want to see that nation obliterated since it probably would entail another holocaust. During our history, we Jews have had to survive many pogroms inflicted on us by many different ethnic groups. Israel is threatened because it is a small island haven for Jews, located in an ocean of hatred. Without exception, despite having diplomatic relations with two of its neighbors, every one of its neighboring nations would

like to see the Jewish state eradicated. I admit that my concern is for the Jewish citizens of Israel and not so much for its geography.

I am a Jew not because I am proud to be one because of all the accomplishments by Jews throughout history. Other nationalities have also made major contributions to humanity. In any case, one should only be proud of what one has personally accomplished. All other forms of pride are false.

Finally, I am a Jew because the world makes me one. To deny being a Jew is to give credence to the hate mongers, anti-Semites and to all other bigots with their vile ideas. That is something I absolutely refuse to do. The German Jews were more German than Jewish. We know about their fate. Simply put, I am a Jew because of all the Auschwitzs. With very few exceptions, notably Denmark and Bulgaria, the world was indifferent to the plight of the Jews. The recent actions by the General Assembly of the United Nations clearly indicates that nothing much has changed. According to the latest statistics, anti-Semitism is on the rise.

Addendum. The preceding is really a first version of my credo. It might be amended if I receive what I perceive to be valid criticisms and comments. It probably will be added to as I discover the need for more meat to my discourse. I suspect it will not be shortened. I am too vain for that.

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