

Rejuvenation

by Rob Rose, Sunday, November 13, 2016

Like everyone my age, crystallized intelligence props me up as my liquid intelligence begins to diminish. I'm posting this first blog in the spirit of embracing this phenomenon while simultaneously exercising my liquid intelligence to hold onto it. This post draws from a couple of my past efforts: 1) the website, "Unbelievable Status", at this same domain which I had let go for several years, and 2) a post about gratitude that I made on another site a few years ago that seems appropriate now.

If any readers happen to be looking here for a new one-liner to shout at an anti-Trump rally, or something to shout back at them, they will be disappointed. There are no angry tweets here because that seems to be part of a larger problem regardless of what "side" you're on. And by the way, I've certainly used Twitter in the past so I claim no moral high ground, but when discourse is reduced to brief slogans that must stand out on their own to even be read, the medium itself becomes a driver away from rational, careful, and respectful discourse. It becomes "twitting" (not tweeting). Let's define that:

Main Entry: **twit**

Function: transitive verb

Inflected Form: **twitted ; twitted ; twitting ; twits**

1 : to subject to ridicule or reproach : TAUNT <nearly every day finds him ... *twitting* reporters on their personal and professional weaknesses— New Republic>

<some seamen were *twitting* him about dressing so formally— Joseph Whitehill>

2 : to impute or make game of as a fault <*twitted* his laziness>

synonyms see RIDICULE

~Merriam-Webster's Unabridged Dictionary

I had used the old "Unbelievable Status" site for a few months as a forum for satirical articles about poor decision making processes á la "The Onion". I let the domain for the URL expire, but a couple weeks ago, while watching the presidential contest, there was a special something in the air that made me want to revive the site. I repurchased the domain without knowing exactly how I would use it. We seem to have reached a point where humor no longer suffices either for edification or relief. I suppose it never did.

My original post that I draw from here was on President's Day in 2010 but in these days after a new president-elect and honoring our veterans, it still seems appropriate. Of course President's Day was originally all about our *first* president, and deservedly so. George Washington stands out as one of the people who could have easily made bad decisions with devastating consequences to both the people of the former British colonies and to humanity, but instead he made the right decisions. If he had been a lesser man, the negative impact would have harmed many generations to follow. I feel that I personally owe him a debt, but only when stopping to consider it. Many generals have seized control from a repressive regime and then become dictators themselves. Washington was clearly very different.

Like a lot of people my age, both my grandfathers served in wars. My maternal grandfather, Truman Bruch, grew up in Pennsylvania. He and his seven brothers and two sisters were farmhands. Their parents, who had emigrated from Germany, died while most of the children were still very young. The older children raised the younger ones while barely earning enough to live. Truman was curious about how things worked. He became the one they would turn to with a difficult problem or if machines needed to be fixed. Later, he became a pilot. When he returned home from military service, he got a job as a civilian flight instructor working for the military in Oak Ridge. No one would tell him anything about the mission that the pilots were being trained for, although at one point he figured it out. They were the men that would drop the atomic bombs on Japan, ending the war, but also doing something too horrible to ever be fully imagined. One of my cousins, a Navy officer of the same generation, spent the last years of his life having chronic nightmares about Japanese planes deliberately crashing into his ship. I have the same feeling of owing a personal debt for what my relatives defended.

Coincidentally, my other grandfather, Col. Frank Rose was stationed at Oak Ridge around the same time as Truman although the two men never met until years later in Virginia. Frank's work was completely classified until about 15 years ago. He worked for a "special weapons" force whose job entailed monitoring nuclear weapons after production – making sure they were accounted for, kept in safe conditions, and periodically examined for any abnormalities. Essentially, a whole team and system existed in the military for making sure nuclear weapons didn't get lost or accidentally go off. Frank's work involved memorizing and verbally communicating information that was considered too sensitive to even write down. This should also be added to my debt.

Can such a debt be measured? I submit that we should all embrace that simple conservative

principle of earning our wages – that market principle of honest exchange that is revered above all else by so many. It's the simple, yet elegant, idea of paying in return for things received. If we truly embrace this conservative principle, this Republican ideal, then we have a moral obligation to at least try to measure our own debt. *And then pay it back.*

I know that my own debt can't be entirely identified here. It includes parents who worked hard. My mother was only able to pass things on to me because her mother had worked hard for her, paying for her to go to college, among other things. Before that, my mother's grandmother had no money but raised two girls by herself in a major economic depression after her husband died. My debt goes back centuries.

I know that my debt is illusive – like the mysterious man who gave a bag of seeds to Edmund McIlhenny when his life seemed to be in financial ruin. I know that my debt is not limited by location. It's everywhere in the country and beyond – it can be traced back to John Nevill who came to the United States from England. Two ships traveled together, funded by someone named Caesilius Calvert and more significantly, this ancestor of my maternal grandmother arrived safely under the command of their captains. Nevill was probably on the "Ark" commanded by Richard Lowe, but it's possible he was on the other ship, the "Dove" commanded by someone named Winter. My debt includes the construction of Kilravock castle in Scotland and the Roses who lived there, protected from bandits. My debt is to the Roses that immigrated here hundreds of years later through Avery Island.

I know that the debt is as real as any bank loan. There can be no denying that the conditions that allowed for a life here in the United States came to be owned by us from those that came before us. I know that my debt is not limited to family. Millions of men besides my grandfathers fought in World War II. I have no direct relationship to most of them but nevertheless owe them a debt. The debt includes all those that fought for the United States in the American Revolutionary War, as well as George Washington.

I know that my debt is not limited to material possessions. Those that defended our country in wars were of course not only defending its borders, but also the ideals that had been allowed to flourish here. My debt is to all those who were unwilling to accept the status quo of their time when basic human rights were less effectively protected than they are for me. My debt is to those who

orchestrated The Boston Tea Party (the original, not the remix.) That was a protest *not* of taxation but of *taxation without representation*. I owe a debt to all those who were considered liberal extremists because they rejected economic arguments for continuing to allow slavery. The triumph of their values over the status quo was an achievement given to all of us. I owe a debt to the liberal extremists who fought and continue to fight to improve conditions and regulation of food production and sale because the food I eat has labels telling me what's in it and is produced in places that are independently inspected. I owe a debt for language. No one living today can claim the origination or purchase of the English language or of the languages of math, science, and philosophy.

Since Republicans will soon control 2 branches of government and hopefully also the new president, we should all try to find common ground in our embrace of that market principle of honest exchange for all we've received. You may have already decided that I'm discussing a debt that simply can't be repaid. But there's more: Most of what was given wasn't just for us -- it was also intended for future generations. So we actually have 2 moral imperatives under the same market principle:

1) Pay for what we received.

2) Don't take what wasn't intended for us.

Although we cannot repay our debt we can still respect it, respond to it, and preserve the gifts for future generations. While I do not want to come across as unduly pushing my opinions on others, I believe in some very specific ideas that require participation from all of us if we are going to properly respect, respond to, and preserve what has been given.

We must believe that education is important and that entails improving our understanding by listening to and trying to understand others. We need to challenge ourselves to become sophisticated enough to listen without "picking sides". We need to listen to police officers whose daily personal risk deserves our gratitude, attention, and help. We need to listen to law-abiding citizens who say they feel generally threatened by police based on things they have seen and heard from those in their community. Looking at the issue of policing and race in a one-sided way is blind and unproductive. We need to listen and try to understand.

If we're doing well financially, then we are the ones who need to improve our understanding of the circumstances for those around us who are unemployed or whose wages barely cover expenses.

We need to listen especially carefully to illegal immigrants whose second-class status stifles their voices. To improve our understanding, we must improve transparency in both the public and corporate sectors. The idea of a "private" sector has no place in this interdependent country and world. The way that our limited resources are used and the way people are treated is everyone's business.

Most importantly we need to become more comfortable with uncertainty, and willing to identify to ourselves those things that we're uncertain about. It is human nature to form strong opinions about things we don't fully understand. It's also human nature to form the most extreme (and un-nuanced) viewpoints on subjects we understand the least. We need to accept that every human brain is flawed, and developing a level of comfort with uncertainty is the first step in overcoming the brain's greatest flaws.

We need to constantly moderate our own thinking, weeding out every unkindness from our thoughts by properly identifying causes and constructive alternatives. The rest follows naturally from right understanding and thinking.

We need to define our own speech. If a statement was already broadcasted to millions of viewers on Fox News, CNN, or MSNBC, it probably doesn't need to be repeated. Alternatively, here's a quote that has been repeated many times and *is still* worth repeating again:

"In the United States, the majority takes upon itself the task of supplying to the individual a mass of ready-made opinions, thus relieving him of the necessity to take the proper responsibility of arriving at his own. Thus, he accepts without scrutiny a great number of philosophic, moral, or political theories on the word of the general masses."

~Alexis de Tocqueville, "Democracy in America", p. 501

To choose the right speech is to lend our own voices to the task of improving the understanding of others.

We need to choose actions that are not only consistent with our values, but also gauged appropriately with our understanding. Before marching with a poster about increasing border security, one might first question how well border security is currently working. (Real influx data shows it's actually already working.)

We need to be conscientious about the logical consequences of our actions for ourselves and others, whether we're going into Walmart to make a trade deal with China or deciding how to spend an evening.

We need to constantly realign our daily work with our values as we improve our understanding and thinking. We should let no wage derail who we want to be.

We need to remind ourselves that hard work makes us better humans.

"Whatsoever your hand is able to do, do it with your might; for there is no work nor device nor knowledge nor wisdom in oblivion where you are going."

~Ecclesiastes 9:10

We need to recognize that the only difference between knowing something can be better and making it better is effort.

We need to realize that our own happiness is inevitably tied to those around us throughout our country and throughout the world. We must look beyond our immediate families and communities and realize the need for stable environments for all children and why this is ultimately important for the health of humanity.

And finally, we need to practice concentration and critical thinking so we learn to identify and actively remove distractions from our ability to improve our understanding. Our country and our world are now more connected than ever before and most of what's transmitted is noise.

Perhaps these eight ideas are already familiar to you (The Eightfold Path). We must all try to do all eight every day. Anything less would be ungrateful.

