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Justice for All: A Personal Credo

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Justice for All

Personal Credo

Social Justice

Myra Houser

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Social justice has several different meanings to many different people based on the injustices they have experienced in their lives. People obviously feel more strongly about the wrongdoings that they themselves have faced. These personal offenses typically play a major role in what justice means to them. I believe that social justice encompasses all of the oppression people face. It rights the wrongs and unfairnesses, as well as biases in society. My definition of social justice is the ongoing process of fighting the revolving door of injustice people face around the world. It is important for me to note that this fight is against oppression itself, not those condoning it. "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Ephesians 6:12). While this definition covers all wrongs in society it is still like a revolving door as I said before. Injustice is constantly coming and going. Right as we see a decrease in one area there will be a rise in another. This definition uses the participle -ing in the verb "fighting" to emphasize the process in which justice truly is. Justice is not something that we have accomplished nor is it something that we will accomplish in the future. As we right wrongs, more wrongs will always appear and reappear. We may make strides in certain areas such as homelessness, hunger, or healthcare, but we will never accomplish it entirely, nor will we accomplish all of the categories at once. We, as justice seekers or sociologists, have not even encountered all of the possible oppression faced in the world today. As we continue to learn about the world's growing population we continue to learn about the world's growing injustices.

This begs the question, is justice worth fighting for if we will never reach it worldwide? I believe that it is. I think that seeking what is right is a lifestyle in itself. It is the fight a person experiences between good and evil. Our lives will be defined and our legacy will be determined by the effort and passion we put into fighting for good and against evil.

Andrew Solomon, the author of "Far from the Tree", looks at social justice through the lens of a parent. He sees that everyone either is a parent or has a parent, making this a relevant lens to look through for a majority of society. His main objective is accepting differences. One of the most difficult relationships to accept contrast is between a parent and a child. When a child begins to discover his or her horizontal identity the lines begin to blur. There are many variables involved in accepting differences. Solomon says that "Difference unites us". He goes on to say that "While each of these experiences can isolate those who are affected, together they compose an aggregate of millions whose struggles connect them profoundly. The exceptional is ubiquitous; to be entirely typical is the rare and lonely state" (Solomon, 1-2). This description of unity in a diverse world allows us to see both the benefits and struggles of being different. He discusses the decision parents are faced with when it comes to deciding what to accept and what to attempt to change in their children. Solomon comes to the conclusion that there is a blurred line between acceptance and change for the better. He realizes that no parent wants their child to experience the isolation and difficulties that come with autism, but he also recognizes that autism in itself brings something beautiful to the world that would be sincerely missed without it. Solomon concludes his book by saying "sometimes, I had thought the heroic parents in this book were fools, enslaving themselves to a life's journey with their alien children, trying to breed identity out of misery. I was startled to learn that my research had built me a plank and that I was ready to join them on their ship" (Solomon, 702). In this, I believe that the author has learned

that what matters most is whether a person is able to construct meaning and value in their own life. While social justice that is moral or ideal might not be served we can make justice in our own lives by finding meaning and value in the hardships we do face.

I believe that my definition goes hand in hand with Solomon's definition. While my definition is a more general idea, the author covers specific areas of injustice. My definition includes righting wrongs, understanding that we will not be able to right all wrongs and working towards making some kind of progress towards justice in the midst of chaos. Solomon also gives us wiggle room to work with the issues we are faced in our own lives finding meaning and value. While Solomon's definition may be a bit more inclusive than mine when it comes to things that are "right", we are both generally working against injustice and pursuing societal progression and acceptance as a whole.

I believe that Kalanithi, author of "When Breath becomes Air", would define social justice as accepting suffering in the midst of fighting for your right to live a fulfilling life. It is not our job to sugar coat but instead, it is our job to be brutally honest, accept the facts, and move forward in a way that brings value and meaning to our lives. He is the type of person who might say that life is not about what happens to you but instead it is how you react to the things that happen to you. Kalanithi and his wife have a conversation about finding fulfillment in the life we are given no matter how short or how painful. She asks, "Will having a newborn distract from the time we have together?"(Paul Kalanithi, When Breath Becomes Air). "Don't you think saying goodbye to your child will make your death more painful?"(Paul Kalanithi, When Breath Becomes Air). Kalanithi responds by asking "Wouldn't it be great if it did?"(Paul Kalanithi, When Breath Becomes Air). He continues by explaining "Lucy and I both felt that life wasn't

about avoiding suffering” (Paul Kalanithi, *When Breath Becomes Air*) He recognizes that we will face suffering and the best way to receive justice, is to live your life to its fullest, accepting death but still maintaining the idea that there's more to life than simply living. To live is not simply to be alive but it is to experience life to its fullest, welcoming suffering and enduring pain all while creating a legacy so that the world will not be the same place it was before you got here once you are gone.

Kalanithi focuses on the injustices within illness, loss, and the medical realm. Kalanithi’s idea of social justice is more specific to personal grievances and illnesses while mine pertains to it on a larger scale. They are both working towards living fulfilling lives and doing our best with the circumstances we are given. My personal experience has been more focused on legal unfairness and crime. Our definitions reflect the things that mean the most to us due to the things we have experienced and in the way, we must individually accept and endure suffering. While my energy is focused on law and Kalanithi is focused on illness, we have one common enemy, injustice.

In Stevenson’s book “*Just Mercy*” he gives us a few comparisons. He says that “the opposite of poverty is not wealth, but justice”(Stevenson, *Just Mercy*). He also says that hopelessness is the opposite of justice. He believes that we will not change the world with ideas in our mind but with conviction in our hearts. He says that the character of the people is not determined by how we treat the wealthy and the innocent but it is in how we treat the poor and the condemned (Stevenson, *Just Mercy*). I believe that social justice to Stevenson means challenging the biases against the poor and condemned, especially those in the criminal justice system. He believes that “we all need justice, we all need mercy, and we all need some measure

of unmerited grace”(Stevenson, Just Mercy). He shows us what it means to sacrifice things that we have an abundance of for a community that lacks those very things. He sacrifices his time, energy, and even safety for those who were robbed of all of those things. He shows us that sometimes what is right can only be achieved through sacrifice. Unless people are willing to make sacrifices and give up what others are lacking in, we will not be able to achieve social justice in today's society.

Stevenson has seen things I have never seen, experienced prejudice in a way that I never have, and fought more passionately for integrity than I have ever had the opportunity to. I respect and cherish his definition of justice and cling to it as I long to seek integrity for the unheard in a similar yet different manner. I believe that we would agree on fighting against what is wrong rather than fighting against a person. He understands what it means to have truth on his side and how the truth doesn't always necessarily win. Truth in itself will not win unless there is someone fighting for it. There will always be someone fighting for what is wrong, and it is our job as justice seekers to fight against what is wrong and for what is right. This “wrong” is what I referred to in my definition of social justice as “evil”. If we can agree on what is good and what is evil we can choose which side we are fighting for without letting the bias of who is fighting for which side plays a role in our intentions and decision making. The issue is not that we don't know the difference between right and wrong, the issue is that we are fighting against people that are different from us out of fear. The criminal justice system becomes an issue when we lose sight of the law and grasp onto ideals that individuals hold and how we interpret those ideals based solely on the person holding them rather than the ideals themselves.

I spend a lot of time serving at the Clark County Humane Society. I adopt homeless dogs

temporarily, walk them, show them love, and sometimes give them treats. There are also cats but they are not allowed to leave the property so I sit with them, talk to them, and even sometimes sing to them. When I walk into the cages of abandoned dogs and cats I am reminded of how unfair the world is. We, just like these animals were brought into the world with no control over the circumstances that we were brought into. We are only able to do so much with the resources we are provided. These animals have done nothing but give love and affection, yet somehow they ended up abandoned and without families. They have so much love to give with no one to give it to. I believe that this happens to people. Many people with much to offer will be faced with prejudices and other horrible tragedies and this puts them in a position of hopelessness which, Stevenson would say contradicts justice. Justice is something one must seek, it is not something that one simply happens upon. A person without hope is a person who is not seeking. Occasionally, just like with Walter McMillan, the first step in getting justice is restoring one's hope. It is so easy to spend time with and show love to animals without homes. I would say it is a common occurrence for people to take in stray animals but how often are we willing to take in and provide housing and food for people without homes even if it is temporarily? I think if we spent half of the energy we do on taking care of animals, taking care of people, we would be able to make a huge impact on the hope of society. Hope can be difficult to restore but if even one person is willing to intentionally care for and give someone a fair chance, it is possible to restore hope. Once a person's hope is restored they can begin to seek the justice that they deserve.

For tiger serve day I picked up trash at the park by the highway. This unsanitary play area seems like a crime to the children that see this park as their safe place. This park might be a second home to kids in Arkadelphia yet random passers are littering with no second thought. It takes little to no effort to pick up after yourself. It takes less effort than it does for someone else

to come along and pick up after everybody else. Not only is the state of the community an injustice to the kids, but it is also an injustice to the people of the community as a whole. While many families are working jobs and taking care of kids, they do not have the time or the energy, nor is it their responsibility to clean up after others in order to live in a clean community. Litter is more than a sanitary issue, it is a pride issue. When a town is covered in litter people lose pride in their homes. When the spirit of the community suffers, there is often a domino effect that follows, affecting a large portion of the community in several areas of their lives. I believe that by cleaning up the trash around the park and seeing people pick up trash all around town, we were able to combat the negativity strewn about Arkadelphia in a way that brings honor and dignity to the community.

I also did some yard work this semester for a senior adult in town. It was interesting to listen to him talk and hear how things are playing out for him. He spoke to me about how he used to be a professor at Ouachita and is now retired and living in a small home. He is unable to lift things and do work around the house so he asked me to re-mulch all of his flower beds. It was a lot of work but it was worth it to help someone in need. I believe that this is a beautiful representation of what it means to sacrifice what you have in order to make up for what others lack, which is exactly what Stevenson spent his life doing. Stevenson had intelligence, and the adequate resources necessary to defend those who otherwise had no knowledge of how to defend themselves in court. I am young, I have my health and my strength. Because I have the physical capability to do labor and Mr. Garner did not, it was a great way to sacrifice my time and energy to benefit someone else.

As I have seen Solomon's definition of justice come to fruition in acceptance and love to

everyone, even the stray dogs and cats, as well as the elderly, and even the litterer, understand what is at the heart of justice itself. Love. Without love, it has little to no meaning or significance. When we are able to love the people we are serving we are able to find the purpose that each of us seeks as Kalanithi describes in “When Breath becomes Air”. Scripture says, “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not to love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:1-3). This verse gives a beautiful explanation of what it looks like to have justice without love. It is nothing but a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. Without love it is nothing. I believe that we all have some innate love within us for other humans. I do not believe that this love is hard to find. The love we all have within us is something that we must harness in order to live more meaningful lives and seek justice passionately.

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