

Personal Philosophy of Life

=== SAMPLE ===

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***"The starry heavens above
and the moral law within"***

Immanuel Kant
Critique of Practical Reason

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About this Book

For years, I searched for a publication similar to this one, with this kind of content. I wanted to see firsthand how someone else creates a system of values based on their experiences. And I wanted to create some points of reference for myself, by comparing them with someone who had, at some point, asked themselves similar questions.

To learn what I need in order to become a moral and responsible person. To not feel ashamed when I look in the mirror, and to know that, whatever happens, I have lived—and continue to live—a decent life, grounded in a solid philosophical foundation.

Unfortunately, I never found such a book. Most of them are either highly complex and taken to extremes, or too simplistic and childish. So my hope is that I can now offer such a publication myself, one that may help others.

The book is a collection of anecdotes and other personal experiences that I have had from childhood through my current years of old age.

My only great regret is that I did not figure out many things much, much earlier, during my youth. I would have avoided many mistakes. But perhaps my life experience can now help others.

I will not lecture you here. But I will focus on norms, values, and principles that you yourselves could use in life to develop your own system of values. I will present brief but essential introductions to philosophies of life, basic political and religious concepts, and other tools that may even prove decisive in helping you shape yourselves as people.

I will be extremely honest and authentic in everything I say. However, I will not spare your own sensibilities either. This is not a book in which I will be delicate or politically correct. I will state bluntly, and even without diplomacy, how I see things.

You have every right not to agree with me. You may even be very upset by what I am going to say, and I fully respect that right.

Do not simply copy my political opinions—or my opinions on any other matters—word for word. Form your own convictions, and use mine only as a point of reference.

Part I: Fundamental Principles of Life

A first part in which I present my most important ideas about life. Far from encouraging you to adopt exactly the same values, I nevertheless suggest that you use them for comparison and as a point of reference for yourselves.

I think it is a good idea to find a simple motto of your own as the foundation of your personal creed in life. Something to guide you in almost everything you do. For me, as you will see, it was a quote from Kant about knowledge and morality.

I adopted positive thinking NATIVELY, by accident, only in recent years. If you can adopt it yourselves, that would be wonderful.

I have also only recently become aware of the relative weight of alternatives. It is very important for you, too, to learn to appreciate the good you receive from others several times more than the bad. Simply because anyone can easily do harm. Whereas people who consistently bring good into your life are extremely rare.

I also recommend my principles of ethics. When I decided that I wanted to live as a moral person, without nevertheless going overboard with generosity toward others, I formulated these principles accordingly.

Your Life Creed

If you were to define your life creed in a single sentence or phrase, what would it be?

For me, ever since my teenage years, it has been ***The starry sky above me and the moral law within me***. Ever since I struggled to understand Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason*.

I devoured books on philosophy and psychology from around the age of 16–17. Back when nothing like this was taught in schools at all—perhaps we were simply too immature...

Immanuel Kant opened the door for me to an idealistic ethical universe that does not exist at all in reality and perhaps never will. It was about knowledge and morality. And I embraced both completely for the rest of my life, much as a believer embraces the teachings of Jesus...

Interestingly, the Bible and the teachings of Jesus in the New Testament were, and remain, pillars of my morality. Kant places greater emphasis on ethics. And it is interesting again that, even though the philosopher did not necessarily embrace religion, you can draw inspiration from entirely different sources for your own personal life creed.

They are not even contradictory. And you do not have to fully adopt either one person's philosophy or another person's religion. You choose what you believe is good for your soul—the parts that resonate with you.

Positive Thinking

I have not found an existing philosophical equivalent for this major change that occurred at a certain point in my life: **I suddenly started thinking naturally and predominantly positively!** Without making any effort, I developed a natural tendency to focus more, in any situation, on what is positive around me.

As an example, let's say you are having disagreements in your relationship. No big deal—I instinctively focus on how we can resolve them constructively. Without immediately breaking up, as we used to do in the past. Around me, I look for a more

relaxed atmosphere, without the arguments of not so long ago. I appreciate nature and situations that bring me serenity more. I avoid stress, arguments, and negative thinking.

It is not "positivism," because that is a completely different philosophical movement. Nor is it "positive psychology," because that branch of psychology comes with other additions that I do not necessarily subscribe to. It is simply an inner impulse, natural and unpremeditated, to perceive the positive in almost everything around me. Even in situations that are obviously loaded with a large dose of negativity.

It is like looking at mud, but this time seeing the reflection of the stars rather than the filth. You naturally appreciate two or three times more the streets you walk along, the apartment buildings in the neighborhoods, the cliffs along the shores of lakes. And you increasingly seek out more and more experiences of this kind—clearly positive ones.

I was also talking with my wife about how much I had changed, clearly. I know what actually triggered this change. It was a very unpleasant event a few years ago, when I came within a hair's breadth of death.

When I woke up on New Year's Day and found myself still alive, I told myself: that's it, the One Above does not want to take me yet. And I started cleaning up my life and my thinking. I gradually lifted my mental state and started thinking differently.

But this constant positive thinking did not come to me overnight. It was only several years later that I looked back in amazement at how differently I thought today compared with how I had thought yesterday.

And my wife was the first to realize it too. Because she more or less remained stuck in that "old" way of perceiving the negative first. And of eventually allowing herself to be overwhelmed by it.

So I recommend that everyone make a serious effort in this area as well. Even if at first it may involve some degree of self-suggestion, persevere and, as much as possible,

develop a similar inclination to see the positive in things first. Regardless of their actual nature.

I said that I naturally changed my way of thinking very significantly following a traumatic event a few years ago. I used to be like most people, in the sense that if I saw something was no longer working, I would leave quickly and turn my back on it. Or I would argue about anything...

Since then, however, I have developed a tendency to focus immediately more on the positive. And I even initially approach difficult situations with the people around me along the lines of: *"Okay, we may not be able to reconcile at all here, but let's still see what was good between us."*

The problem is that the overwhelming majority of people continue to focus on the negative. And whatever you do, you see them not only sabotaging everything good you are trying to do. They also sabotage themselves, because in the end, rejection affects them negatively too.

Other people's negativity eventually ends up affecting you badly as well. No matter how hard you try to find something constructive. For example, having constant arguments every few days because someone else is insecure, has their own delusions, and constantly invents problems for you that do not even exist can negatively affect your own mental state as well.

The Weight of Alternatives

I once lived completely alone in Bucharest (Romania). And I also became seriously ill. In a few months, my wife was supposed to come from Vancouver (Canada), only so that we could get divorced.

Nevertheless, I sent my wife a message. By that point, I was blocked online by almost everyone else in Bucharest (former friends, my mother, my sister, relatives), and none of them was keeping in touch with me.

My wife wanted to get on a plane immediately. She was even about to buy an expensive ticket on the spot (and I know she would have done it), to reach me within 24 hours, no matter where I was. And that was when I realized the following logic—pay attention...

Clearly, there are people in your life who do both harm and good to you. **Do not judge the good and the bad in exactly the same way.** Give the good a much greater value when a single person is there for you when you are truly in trouble (as in this case).

It matters little how many disagreements I had with my wife if she was nevertheless the only person in the world ready to immediately get on a plane. Even from the other side of the world, at her own expense. While other insensitive people around you would have simply left you to die!

There are many other situations in life where you can make decisions by comparing the good and the bad of the alternatives. Or the good and the bad that come from a particular person. And the tendency is to naturally give equal weight—say, a single point—to every observation on our list.

Wrong! **Always try to assign many more points to the good!** Because there are plenty of people who can do us harm. Even unintentionally, often simply out of selfishness. But people who would actually save your life, if necessary, are extremely rare.

By comparison, for me, the intentional good my wife did in the situation above was worth ten times more than any other harm she might have done to me at the same time.

Or, to take another concrete example, let's say I blamed her for arguments, possessiveness, and putting her brother first. If you put everything on a simple and superficial scale, it would be 3–1 in favor of the bad things in this situation.

But the fact that she was and remains roughly the only person in the world who would still get on a plane for me today if necessary should assign at least 10 points to the good. So a much fairer ratio would be 3–10 in favor of the good.

Try to judge things the same way in more impersonal situations as well. For example, when you are about to leave a job. Do not rush immediately into a 3–1 calculation in favor of leaving the job if, on the list of positives, you find freedom from stress, rediscovering the joy of life, and inner peace.

If that 1 on the other side is the fact that the money brought in by that job is absolutely crucial to you, and that without the job you could even end up on the street, increase the weight of that 1 on the right to 10 or more!

Other similar comparisons might arise when you are about to abandon a friend or acquaintance, distance yourself from a relative, or make decisions about other situations in which you have a list of pros and cons.

Do not settle for superficially assigning a weight of 1 to every item on the two lists. Because some items are frequently worth much more than others!

The Ethics of Life

For many years, I have stated my own principles of ethics (concerning good and evil, for oneself and for others) as follows:

1) Seek to do what is good for you and is also good for others.

This would be the ideal, if you were looking to do something good either for yourself or for others. Because the good would implicitly flow in both directions. Something good done for you would implicitly make others happy as well. Or something good done for others would implicitly make you happy too.

2) Seek to do what is good for you and is not bad for others.

This applies when you are seeking something good for yourself. If it does not conflict with others, it is okay. Notice the difference from individualism and selfishness. The conflict arises when what is good for you can be done at the expense of others. For example, you do not cheat on your spouse, as long as they are not doing it either and would suffer if they knew you were doing it.

3) Seek to do what is not bad for you and is good for others.

This applies when you are seeking to do something good for others. If it does not conflict with you, it is okay. Notice the difference from altruism and sacrifice. The conflict arises when what is good for others can be done at your expense. For example, you do not defend someone at work if, by doing so, you know that you will also be fired.

4) Seek to do what is not bad for you and is not bad for others either.

This would be the ordinary everyday case, involving actions that are neutral both for you and for others. It is nevertheless important that harm is avoided on both sides. For example, you do not start throwing money out the window when that would be good for neither you nor the person next to you.

Even though they may seem obvious, these simple rules eliminate situations in which there is harm on both sides. Or harm to at least one side, whether yourself or others. They eliminate the possibilities of both highly individualistic selfishness (which hurts others) and recklessly altruistic sacrifice (which hurts you).

Minimalism

I became a minimalist in life almost without realizing it. A few years ago, I watched a documentary about two young people and found it merely interesting. But today my entire life fits into just two suitcases. And I cannot say that I regret it.

Minimalism does not mean being poor. You can still own various things, have money in the bank, or possess all sorts of digital assets. But you no longer have to carry crates of books with you every time you move when you can read many more on a Kindle.

You no longer fill your closet with clothes and shoes when you can periodically buy only what you need. You no longer surround yourself with heavy and expensive furniture when you can live with lightweight and practical things.

When you surround yourself with too many things, they implicitly make you unhappier as well. You have to find a place for them, dust them periodically, carry them with you every time you move, look after them when you leave home...

Nowadays, you also have many other options for avoiding ownership of so many unnecessary things. Vacation homes come equipped with kitchen utensils, toiletries, and bed linens.

And you can easily get by with a laptop, an iPad, and an iPhone. Goodbye to heavy printers and bulky monitors. You have Wi-Fi everywhere.

My wife is the exact opposite of me today. More than 90% of everything we currently have around the house consists of things that belong to her. An abundance of clothes and shoes, three large shelves full of medications, many of them expired.

Other large shelves filled with toiletries and detergents. Printed books and plenty of stationery. Pots and pans in abundance. Heavy, massive furniture that would make moving to another place very difficult...

She frequently asks me to help her get rid of some of these things, but I don't. Simply because she would immediately buy other new things to fill the space she had freed up. Unless she too naturally adopts this minimalist mindset, all the effort would unfortunately just be an additional expense.

Mindfulness

The fundamental concept behind what we call “mindfulness” is to live only in the present moment, eliminating the “noise.” And there are two dimensions to this reality: ***in time*** (“now”) and ***in space*** (“here”).

The human mind “*always runs wild*”, wandering into the past and the future. Or toward too many things around us that distract us from the present moment.

1) Eliminate unresolved problems from the past, as well as the worries you constantly create for yourself about the future, by living only in the present moment.

This is the temporal dimension (the idea of “now”). For example, you have gone on vacation and are worried that someone might break into your house while you are away. Just as your neighbors’ house was broken into not long ago. Try to eliminate both the image of the past and the worry about the future, and simply enjoy your vacation.

2) Eliminate the many things happening simultaneously around you and focus only on what is most important in the present moment.

This would be the spatial dimension (the idea of “here”). For example, you are on the same vacation, you have managed to forget about the break-ins, but you still cannot simply enjoy the view of the sea and nothing else. Because you are bothered by the children screaming, the vendors around you, your neighbors’ radio... From the present moment, try to eliminate these various sources of noise as well.

A typical mindfulness exercise consists of becoming aware of simple gestures and absolutely trivial objects around you. For example, genuinely focus on a blade of grass and nothing else. On the way the wind moves it and on the inner peace brought by that gentle swaying...

Epicureanism

Ten to fifteen years ago, I often suffered from bronchitis because of smoking. I was unhappy with my professional life, and I would sometimes argue with my wife or my

daughters. I had been diagnosed with hypothyroidism and was on the verge of diabetes. I tested my blood sugar several times a day, and it was high.

But at some point I suddenly quit smoking. And I physically exhausted myself, hiking through the mountains with my wife. Then I gave up sugar and changed my diet. But I did not give up worldly pleasures—in fact, quite the opposite. When we came back from the mountains, we would make our way through the good restaurants in the area, one after another...

In that context, I did not discover ***Epicureanism***; rather, it found me. In the sense that I had already deliberately and consciously adopted a way of life in which I could enjoy as much as possible of everything that life had to offer. The mountains, relationships with the people around me, good food, and a good wine... To stop worrying so much about my job, money, or health...

Only later did I discover that my lifestyle was called "*Epicureanism*." And I have calmed down somewhat in the meantime. I have matured and incorporated other elements into this way of life as well. But I can say that Epicureanism should be a component incorporated into anyone's life.

Not necessarily as a complete lifestyle, because it can also be rather irresponsible. Eating whatever you like and drinking whatever you like will certainly lead to health problems as well. And it is simply impossible to continuously enjoy absolutely everything.

Be careful again about today's confusion regarding Epicureanism. It is often presented as a carefree and nonchalant lifestyle, favoring expensive and extravagant foods. Whereas *Epicurus* ("the founder" of this way of thinking) actually promoted minimalism, simplicity rather than excess, prudence, and moderation.

Epicurus also believed that, if we make the attainment of happiness the goal of life, the most important obstacle standing in the way of that goal is the fear of death. But if death brings us neither physical nor emotional pain, our fear of it during life may prove to be unfounded.

Stoicism and Taoism

Both philosophies discuss somewhat different ways in which you can adapt to negative external factors. But both are important, because you can use them separately and complementarily in your own personal development.

Stoicism (a philosophy originating in ancient Greece) suggests first distinguishing between the things we can and cannot control. You can control only your own thoughts, actions, and reactions. You cannot control other people's opinions, natural or political events, the past, or the future.

As for the latter, since you cannot do anything to change them anyway, you have to become "stoic" (in the now-established sense of the term). In other words, you must endure and accept things as they are. It is worth noting, however, the idea of inner struggle and awareness of one's internal control when doing this. It points toward a form of momentary self-suggestion.

If someone criticizes you unfairly, you are in control only of how you respond to them. Not of the other person's opinion. This philosophy therefore teaches you how to remain calm in moments of adversity and stress.

Taoism (originating in ancient China) advocates, rather, harmonious merging with nature. The concept of water is particularly interesting here: it flows smoothly around both sides, finding other ways forward when it encounters rocks as obstacles. We therefore have the idea of effortless action. Or allowing things to flow naturally and without confrontation.

Self-suggestion is also present here, but in a very different way. It is used to create a mindset focused on harmony, rather than confrontation or discrepancies.

For me, it is a philosophy with a somewhat more positive outlook, which I appreciate more. Provided, of course, that you can gradually adapt yourself to seeing things this way. Otherwise, naturally, apply Stoicism to immediate situations, when you are not mentally prepared enough to deal with them in this manner.

Both philosophies call for moderation, giving up excessive desires, and accepting present reality. But Stoicism is based on logic, active control of the mind, and social duty, whereas Taoism is based on intuition, relinquishing rigid control, and a passive merging with nature.

Part II: Principles from Professional Life

I have worked in *software engineering* all my life. At some point, I took note of several *clean code* principles that help you develop more reliable programs. Then Agile came along, which is still applied today to many other processes within companies.

Surprisingly, many of these principles can also be successfully adapted and adopted in real life. They can help with the way you think and solve your personal problems. They help you become more efficient and more focused on the pragmatic side of things.

Take the time to go through all of them, because I present them very briefly here. With concrete examples of how you can use them in your own everyday life as well, regardless of what profession you have.

If you work in other fields, professions, or trades, think about whether you can adapt some of the rules you have learned there—from codes of ethics or even stricter regulations—into principles that can also help you in life.

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