

## Sources that Shape our Identity

*The Examined, Reflective, Purposeful Life is Well Worth Living*

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- my culture, country and family of origin, the history of my people, my mother tongue and color—where I was born, my early years.
- my personal passion, or more deeply, my sense of calling—what I want to contribute, my life trajectory.
- my educational and job experience/training—my leadership skill set.
- my personal mentors, coaches, partners and life journey guides.
- my sexual orientation, the biology of my body, my gender socialization and choices about self-expression, my management of sexual desires.
- my religion, philosophy of life, worldview or ideological orientation, my ideals, standards and principles (internal drivers).
- my interpretation of self and my self-articulation to the outside world, to society: through performative enactments, symbols of art and verbal expression. These are *metabiological* meanings which define the shape of significance for me; they make tacit intuitions more explicit, entailing something I can learn from.
- my experience of trauma, tragedy and suffering, failures, handicaps and how I cope with hard circumstances or personal loss.
- the friends I hang out with—my social life and romantic life.
- my creative engagement with people who differ from me, either in background or convictions, my listening skills and ability to learn from others that I may disagree with, or who make me feel uncomfortable with my current assumptions.
- the community or charity projects where I volunteer and attempt to make a better, more equal playing field.
- the larger story or narrative that makes sense of my life. This clarifies what really matters, what constitutes being human, what gives solidity and substance to my biography, my personal story.
- my children, their lives, their needs and aspirations—the creative sacrifices that go into giving them life, nurture, guidance and purpose.
- my social capital: commitments to the poor, the homeless, helping the marginalized—community service, social compassion, positive social change, taking responsibility for the other.
- my political affiliations, causes, debates and engagements—my sense of justice, concern for human rights, peace-making, freedom of speech and religion, my commitment to resist oppression and violence within my circle of influence.
- my moral commitments to certain virtues and values (*strong evaluations*)—the good and the common good, human ideals, the admirable and noble—leading to my growth in character and

civility, my relationship to my highest good that empowers my moral agency. This is how I “become better through seeing better”.

- my self-concept as a global citizen, commitment to the wellbeing of other people groups and nations—my international self.
- my commitment to a larger cause: cure cancer, address climate change, improve education for the poor, fight racism, build communality (benevolence).
- my relationship to creation/natural environment: the land, air, and oceans, to the wellbeing of the planet and its people for the long term.
- my critical and circumspect relationship to science and technology, one of the suburbs in the bigger city of human language and meaning, one sphere of human culture.
- my local social roots and commitments—my deeper experience of neighbourhood.
- my economic, career track potential and capacity—traction in applying my knowledge, being innovative, taking leadership, shaping culture, leaving a positive legacy.
- my prayer, worship and spiritual life practices, exposure to mystery, relationship with divine goodness and grace: experience of the transcendent, my quest for wisdom towards the Good Life/life worth living.
- my music interests, loves, participation: seeking the good of my mental and emotional health, my creative artistic expression, the nurture and development of my aesthetic self.
- my personal addictions and obsessions—darker motives and habits—my chaos, my deceptiveness, dishonesty with self and others, my refusal to take responsibility, to admit where I have been wrong, to admit where I am not speaking the truth in love (integrity).
- my means of recreation, relaxation, travel, refreshment, creative outlets, entertainment, fun and adventure.
- my self-articulation on social media, video, audio or print media, public speaking, book and article writing and publication.
- my engagements with *agape* love, which helps heuristically to shape and interpret both my stance towards myself and my stance towards the larger world.

## Implications

1. The virtues are a powerful place to start the discussion of identity.
2. There is a much broader basis for dialogue about identity than we might have otherwise thought. The sense of crisis of identity is often because an individual is too narrow in self-perception, or too narrowly focused.
3. A healthy, whole person should not put all their identity eggs in one basket—fragility.
4. One needs to build connections between various facets of life to be a whole, integrated person.
5. This offers a good range of places for beginning a discussion with a friend about meaning, purpose, calling, about God/spirituality, life, overall health and wellbeing.
6. There is room to grow a meaningful, reflective life in order to head off an identity crisis. There is room to grow my story with all sorts of rich experiments in becoming more human.
7. We can access the right mentorship in the areas that we find ourselves currently weak or vulnerable.

## Wisdom on Diversity & Dialogue: Towards a Mature Identity

### Skills to Cultivate

- Seek out good interlocutors with sound thinking and convictions.
- Ability to pursue ideas, amidst diversity, and think for yourself.
- Champion a continual search for the truth, and disagreement with lies and deception, propaganda, poor scholarship, spin.
- Beware: too much choice can be harmful to one's psychological and sociological wellbeing.
- Don't buy into relativism or subjectivism (unfortunately, too many Canadians do). It cannot be lived well—this stance is definitely not good for human flourishing.
- Remember that your personal opinion might be poorly examined and ill-informed, weak empirically, bigoted or seriously biased.
- Celebrate high values/virtues/ideals: honesty, trustworthiness, compassion, decency, respect for life, good environmental stewardship, taking responsibility for your behaviour and for others (inclusive humanism).
- Shun dishonesty, cheating, abuse, theft, fraud, plagiarism, exploitation and oppression, things causing emotional pain and suffering to others, the *not-so-good* or dark side of human character.
- Ask yourself what leads to a truly good life?
- Learn to distinguish between good, better, best decisions. Not all theories or worldviews are of equal value. There is a hierarchy among the moral goods.
- Think about the consequences of your actions and decisions, including the unintended ones.

