

Like many things in life, creativity is neither good nor bad. It depends what we do with it.

In his article, "TED talks are lying to you," Thomas Frank points out that the Nazis were very creative, and they were also murderous and diabolical.

What Adolf Hitler and his minions demonstrated is that brilliance and creativity without a sense of morals can be incredibly destructive.

In my Social Justice 12 course, we examine the concept of genocide because in essence, each violation of human rights is a step toward genocide. The Holocaust did not begin with gas chambers, it began with words.

When studying Elie Wiesel's classic *NIGHT* one can see how the brilliance and creativity of the Nazis as they manipulated our natural human tendency to trust and to hope for the best, despite the circumstances. The loss of freedom and the path to the chimneys of Auschwitz was gradual, like the proverbial frog placed in cold water and then boiled to death.

Is there then a way to make sure that creativity leads to a moral outcome? Yes. Creativity needs to be run through a moral filter, so to speak.

As part of my effort to integrate Indigenous ways of knowing into my teaching, I began studying the 7 Grandfather Teachings with my students. Not only have they become central to my teaching, they have become central to my life. Being brought up Catholic, ethics were important to me, but I found that the essence of their message became distorted by doctrines which are, for lack of a better word, silly. The 7 Grandfather Teachings provide me with a framework that is profound, yet simple to apply.

Now when I look at options in facing a challenge I ask the following questions:

1. Am I practicing HUMILITY? The concept of humility has been distorted by Western society. It does not mean putting ourselves down in any way. It means recognizing that I am a gifted person, and so is my neighbour. I need to listen and to also share my ideas. I also need to recognize that every other human being in this world is a gift, regardless of arbitrary distinctions we make between people. Imagine if the Nazis had the humility to ask, "Are we REALLY the master race?"
2. Am I being HONEST? First and foremost, I need to be honest with myself. As these principles build upon one another, I need to apply honesty to my humility as well.
3. Am I being RESPECTFUL? Answering this question would stop any violation of human rights in its tracks. We need to treat our neighbours, our environment and ourselves with the utmost of respect.
4. Am I practicing COURAGE? Courage is an interesting principle because it should not be practiced in isolation. If I see something that violates the other principles, however, I need to have the courage to do something or to say something to make things right, even if it is unpopular or dangerous.
5. Am I practicing WISDOM? The Nazis had a lot of knowledge, but they did not have the wisdom to realize that what they were doing would not only lead to destruction, it would eventually to their own demise. With creativity we can say, "Yes, I can do that." This needs to be followed by, "But is it wise to do so?"

6. What is the TRUTH? Truth is an incredibly powerful force. Regardless of our efforts to hide it, it always comes to the surface eventually. It is important to embrace this fact in all we do.
7. What does LOVE call me to? Love, in essence, is the embodiment of all the other principles. It cannot exist without respect, humility, honesty or truth. It allows us to see wisdom and it moves us to show courage.

When creativity is thus filtered through a clear understanding of ethics, it can be used to expand our humanity, not to destroy it.