

David Harris – Entry into the Rotary Four-Way Test Essay Contest

### **How the Personas That We Create Online are not Consonant with the Rotary 4-Way Test**

Of the things we think, say, or do, our social media presence is perhaps one of the most powerful. As a youth, I was raised constantly surrounded by the bombastic world of social media. A world that is expansive yet limiting; generous, but cruel. Inexplicably, our online persona becomes an extension of ourselves; derived from our membership in communities online. However, droves of pressure from the constant maintenance of this online persona can distort our perceptions and create a false narrative. It is in the constant stream of images of others skinnier than I, happier than I, and more successful than I, that causes me to doubt myself. Everyone seems to be simply *better* than me, and I feel like a fraud. So, to feel like I fit in, I inflate my online persona. I share and send only the most pristine images that glamorize my life to impress those who view my account. The boring and the unpleasant are obscured to make way for workout selfies and my favourite photos encapsulating a night out with friends. I post partial truths so that my life looks better on the internet than it does in actuality. In this way, to idealize oneself online is to conceal the difficult times by solely posting that “perfect” golden-hour selfie with a painted smile and makeup.

Nevertheless, this truth we create is nothing more than a façade. Our romanticized online persona simply is not true as a partial truth is inherently not true in its entirety. It is not true that I am always smiling, nor that I go to the gym at 6 am every day, as my followers believe. Truth is modelled by our perspectives and experiences; by omitting so many crucial aspects of ourselves, we so too lose the truth. What I post inherently is not aimed at representing reality, but at

aggrandizing, emboldening, and redefining it. We must acknowledge that despite our intentions or necessity, posting glamorizing images inherently negates the adherence to reality in favour of a fastidious portrayal. This is not the truth. By flaunting our glamorized profile online, I am failing to open my vision to the perspectives of others. I do not realize that I am confining them to the same wind tunnel that I myself am struggling in. So, in this way, it is not fair to all those concerned: to my followers, to the online community, and to the real people behind the screens. By being untruthful, we are part of the unattainable standard of perfection that drives so many to question their self-worth which should be inalienable from social media. Simply put, our online personas do not do unto others as we would like them to show toward ourselves, and that is not fair to all concerned.

We must realize that the likes of our posts are built on the insecurities of others. We must realize that our relationships with others, virtual or otherwise, are not a win-lose situation. Indeed, when carrying such a frame of mind, finding a situation that is mutually beneficial to all is nearly impossible. We must realize that to preserve our relationships, we must spread the benefits of the social media landscape equally; to allow myself to stop jousting for attention and rather act in the interest of another. To use the system to post hedonistic photos to garner likes and validation is to ask yourself “will it be beneficial to me”, when we need to be asking “will it be beneficial to all”, if we wanted to ensure that we are acting in a fashion beneficial to all concerned. In one of the greatest ironies of life, we are tearing down our most genuine friendships, putting ourselves above the calls of others to chase their hollow admiration in the glow of a screen. Goodwill is more than giving a like, or a comment, but instead the genuine

kindly feeling of approval or support. It is born out of the combination of integrity and reputation – sadly the two most cherished aspects that are edited away by the glamorized photos we post.

However, I refuse to be confined by the past; we can still choose to address the need to build a mutually beneficial and sustainable online community. So let us choose fellowship, empathy, and accountability in every decision we make and every picture we post. The four-way test critically is not a tool to judge others, but a tool for self-improvement. So, I now realize to build truth online, I must build a tolerance to acknowledge that it is okay not to be okay. To speak the truth is to speak the entire truth, difficult or otherwise. There is a time for smiling photos on a beach, but just the time there must be a time for the less glamorous. That is how truth is built. Let us consider others; realizing that what I post can carry an immense weight to someone else. I can ensure that it is beneficial to all by setting a healthier precedent for image, mental health, and self-respect. Let us make a new standard online; one where you do not have to “fit in” because of someone else’s perspective. I can set an equal stage for all, simply by not comparing my image to another, or asking them to do the same. This is how I can be fair to all involved. Finally, I focus back on goodwill, building our reputation integrity. We can demonstrate our morals by adhering to my previous sentiments. Someone who is trusted and reliable to not aggrandize myself at the expense of others. Someone who chooses to step out of the wind tunnel, not out of the judgement of others, but for the betterment of oneself. It is there, outside of the noise, that we will build our most genuine friendships. So let us extend the four-part ethical guidelines of the four-way test to our actions online, and let us acknowledge, that any change begins with “I”.