Ok, now I can finally get down to some of my beliefs. And more importantly, why I believe them. Believing something without a good reason is no better than believing in nothing at all.

First off, we were created. By 'we' I mean all of humanity, this whole world, and everything on it. I don't know if it was by some old white guy with a beard, or a race of aliens, or some kind of concept beyond my understanding, but we were definitely brought about intentionally. Why do I believe that? Well, I could trot out the statistical reasons: the likelihood of things happening just so on Earth to give rise to life, and then to us. But the most important reason is personal. I find it comforting to believe in something greater than myself. Even if I don't know what that something is.

Next, and even more important, is that I believe all humans are equally worthy. Again, I need to be specific. By that, I mean that we *all* deserve the exact same degree of opportunity and support, regardless of where we were born, what we look like, who we love, what we believe, or any other consideration. Even what we've done falls in those categories! Convicted criminals deserve the same opportunities and support as everyone else!

(One might argue that a convicted criminal, once they've done their time and been released, might even value those opportunities and support more than someone who's never had their freedom taken away.)

Why do I believe that? Well I suppose it comes down to what I learned in history during grade school and middle school. Even though I was overseas, the school was filled with Americans, and taught in that style. As such I learned about Columbus, and Washington, and Lewis and Clark, and JFK, and MLKJr, and all the others. I was taught, wrongly, that America is the 'shining city on a hill'. That our country had achieved, through its dedication to equality, a perfection that no other nation had ever even approached!

It feels good, doesn't it? To be sure of yourself and your people? To know, beyond any doubt, that your people are the best, and all other peoples look up to you?

Pity it's all a lie. We may have been *more* egalitarian than other nations at the time, but we certainly didn't believe in equality. Not for women, and certainly not for black people. We tolerated slavery for nearly eighty years after founding America, and it still took a full-scale war to end it!

*again with the angry breathing*

I also believe that as a species, we're our own worst enemies. Why I believe that is entirely based on the evidence. Every step forward in human history has been faced with pushback. Galileo was tried and convicted for teaching his theories about the earth moving around the sun. Columbus' world-changing 'discovery' was exploited in the name of slavery and economic gain, by him and many, many others. The civil war ended slavery in America yes, but hatred and bigotry surged back into power almost immediately in the form of the KKK and other hate groups. Our election of a black man (which was a net good despite my many disagreements with his actions) was followed by our election of a clown!

And finally and most importantly, our global pursuit of improving our quality of life by digging up fossil fuels and burning them has dramatically improved the lives of many people... but is on track to end all life on our planet!

We're our own worst enemies politically speaking as well. When Marie Antoinette lost her head, and the French people basically told the whole world they were done with monarchies, they ended up putting an Emperor in charge instead. When the rest of the world got the message, and gave up power passed down by blood, they replaced it with power passed down through money. Which is inherited! By blood!

What else do I believe...

Murder is wrong. Killing is wrong. Ending anyone else's life for any reason, even self-defense, is wrong. Why do I believe that? I can't really explain this one. It's more of an extension of the 'all humans are equal' one.

"Aha!" Some of you might claim. "But what if you lived in Nazi Germany, and were hiding a family of Jews. What if one of your neighbors found out, and was going to turn them in, and the only way to stop them would be to kill? Would it still be wrong?"

Putting aside the fact that I would have left Nazi Germany the day it went Nazi, the answer is still yes. Killing is wrong no matter the reason. I might still do it (I've never been in such a terrible situation, so I can't know for sure), but it would be wrong regardless.

"What about abortion, then?" The chorus of Devil's Advocates might say. "Are you one of those nutjobs who thinks that a few cells growing inside some woman constitute a human being?"

Ah, now we're getting to the more real-world stuff. Yes, I believe that abortion is wrong. It's just one more kind of state-sanctioned murder, and we have plenty of those already. However right and wrong have never really overlapped with legal and illegal. Women are going to get abortions whether we say it's wrong or not. Whether it's illegal or not. Nothing we do is going to change that.

Therefore our best option is to make abortions less necessary. Comprehensive sex education. Free access to contraceptives. And an abortion system that we can make sure is safe. If we're going to kill one person, at least we can make it less likely that another person dies along with them.

In an ideal world like some of those I write up, such a system wouldn't be necessary. In fiction, I can hand-wave away all the social problems we have in the real world. Rape only happens if I'm trying to say something poignant about power dynamics or how a character handles trauma. Incest only happens among alien creatures that suffer no ill effects from it. That sort of thing. But in the real world, the best we can do is try and keep as many people alive as possible.

Wow, that got dark in a hurry, didn't it? Sorry about that.

I suppose my belief system can be summed up pretty simply. In just four words, actually. Don't be a jerk.

By that I mean it doesn't matter what someone else says or does. All that matters is what you do with your own life. If someone cuts me off in traffic, I can flip them the bird. I can ram them even. Or I can recognize that neither of those actions will help anyone, anywhere, and calm down instead. I can choose not to be a jerk.

Someone I know believes something that's wrong. We've spoken about it, and they're firmly entrenched in this wrong belief. They're more than willing to argue about it, even heatedly. Like my earlier entry about my debates with a co-worker, I fall back on not being a jerk. I'll debate with this person, civilly, and try to stay as even-tempered as possible. They could believe that cannibalism is good, or that the world is just some alien's hallucination, or that the earth is flat... it doesn't matter what they believe. All that matters is that I don't be a jerk about it.

Respect isn't about them. It's about you. You show respect because you have it for yourself. That's why ad hominem attacks (which are basically just name-calling and insulting) are signs of deep-seated insecurity and childishness. They come from people who are either too immature to have respect for themselves, or were never taught to (or possibly taught *not* to have respect for themselves). Oh, and lying falls in the category of being a jerk, in my opinion. Living an honest life is just about the least jerkish thing I can think of.

Anyway, that's about all my basic beliefs: we were all created (by what I don't know), we're all equal (and we really should live up to that ideal instead of just saying it), and we're our own worst enemies in just about every way. Bigotry, killing and lying are wrong. Not just on their own merits, but also because of what they say about us. That we don't respect ourselves, and therefore can't respect each other. That we're jerks.

Thankfully, we don't have to be. We can be better, or rather, train ourselves to be better. Changing yourself is never easy (I speak from experience), but it's possible. And in our world, increasingly necessary.