

## Collection of Quotes and Questions

### *Ecclesiastes*

1. “For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.” (Eccl., 1. 18)

Is ignorance bliss? Is it better to lead a happy life without much knowledge than a sorrowful life with much knowledge?

2. “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:  
A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted;  
A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up;  
A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;  
A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;  
A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away;  
A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;  
A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.” (Eccl., 3. 1-8)

Is there a higher power determining the destiny of all things? Do all things have a destiny?

3. “Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour.  
For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up.  
Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone?”  
(Eccl., 4. 9-11)

Do humans need each other to survive? Is happiness only real when shared?

### **Aristotle: *Nicomachean Ethics***

1. “Now each man judges well the things he knows, and of these he is a good judge. And so the man who has been educated in a subject is a good judge of that subject, and the man who has received an all-round education is a good judge in general.” (Aristotle, 1.3)

How can an individual be sure that they truly know anything about life? Should individuals be judging anything at all?

2. "Success or failure in life does not depend on these, but human life, as we said, needs these as mere additions, while virtuous activities or their opposites are what constitute happiness or the reverse." (Aristotle, 1.10)

Can a life lived without virtuous activity be a meaningful life? What if non-virtuous lives hold more meaning than virtuous lives, because they provide excellent examples?

3. "For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them, e.g. men become builders by building and lyreplayers by playing the lyre; so too we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts." (Aristotle, 2.1)

Are humans born with certain innate traits or affinities for certain characteristics?

### **Epicurus: *Letter to Menoeceus and Principal Doctrines***

1. "For the utterances of the multitude about the gods are not true preconceptions but false assumptions; hence it is that the greatest evils happen to the wicked and the greatest blessings happen to the good from the hand of the gods, seeing that they are always favorable to their own good qualities and take pleasure in people like to themselves, but reject as alien whatever is not of their kind." (Epicurus, *Letter*, page 1 paragraph 2)

What are the qualifications for being a "good" person or a "bad" person, and leading a "good" or "bad" life? Is it subjective?

2. "The just person enjoys the greatest peace of mind, while the unjust is full of the utmost disquietude." (Epicurus, *Principal Doctrines* 17)

Is a life pursuit of justice the path to a fulfilling life?

### **Epictetus: *The Enchiridion***

1. "With regard to whatever objects give you delight, are useful, or are deeply loved, remember to tell yourself of what general nature they are, beginning from the most insignificant things. If, for example, you are fond of a specific ceramic cup, remind yourself that it is only ceramic cups in general of which you are fond. Then, if it breaks, you will not be disturbed. If you kiss your child, or your wife, say that you only kiss

things which are human, and thus you will not be disturbed if either of them dies.”  
(Epictetus, 3)

Does happiness in life come from letting things go or from holding onto things – by things I do not mean objects, but more like memories and relationships. Is it wrong to reduce people to the same status of an object which you cannot take with you when you die?

2. “Don't demand that things happen as you wish, but wish that they happen as they do happen, and you will go on well.” (Epictetus, 8)

Do individuals have the power to create their own realities and construct for themselves the lives they desire?

3. “But, if you wish to have your desires undisappointed, this is in your own control. Exercise, therefore, what is in your control.” (Epictetus, 13)

Is it possible for individuals to control their own happiness? Even when it appears that certain individuals have control over their emotions, there are always underlying negations to this – “Unexpressed emotions will never die. They are buried alive and will come forth later in uglier ways.” –Freud

### **Marcus Aurelius: *The Emperor's Handbook***

1. “Look around you and see how everything is perpetually changing, and get used to the idea that nature loves nothing more than to change the things that are and to make more things like them come into being. In a way, everything is a seed of the thing that grows out of it. Don't be so naïve and narrow-minded as to assume that a seed is only something planted in the earth or in a womb.” (Aurelius, Book 4, 36 )

Is change the only constant in life?

2. "Your days are numbered. Use them to throw open the windows of your soul to the sun. If you do not, the sun will soon set, and you with it." (Aurelius, Book 2, 4)

What is the nature of the soul? What happens to the soul when individuals die?

3. “Calm down. Be simple. Has someone done something wrong? He has wronged himself. Has something happened to you? Fine. Every thread of your life was woven on the great loom of destiny from the beginning. The conclusion? Life is short. Save the moment by doing what is reasonable and right. Be serious, but not with fears and frets and frowns.” (Aurelius, Book 4, 26)

If everything that happens in life is an individual's destiny, then it is predetermined and no matter what they do, it is their destiny – do individuals have a true free will?

### **Giovanni Pico della Mirandola: *Oration on the Dignity of Man***

1. ““Know thyself," invites and exhorts us to the study of the whole nature of which the nature of man is the connecting link and the “mixed potion”; for he who knows himself knows all things in himself, as Zoroaster first and after him Plato, in the Alcibiades, wrote.” (Pico della Mirandola).

Is it possible to “know” yourself fully? Is anyone capable of truly knowing anyone else?

2. “We, therefore, imitating the life of the Cherubim here on earth, by refraining the impulses of our passions through moral science, by dissipating the darkness of reason by dialectic --- thus washing away, so to speak, the filth of ignorance and vice --- may likewise purify our souls, so that the passions may never run rampant, nor reason, lacking restraint, range beyond its natural limits.” (Pico della Mirandola)

Can a soul be purified, or altered in any way? Is a soul unique to one person?

3. “But what is the purpose of all this? That we may understand --- since we have been born into this condition of being what we choose to be --- that we ought to be sure above all else that it may never be said against us that, born to a high position, we failed to appreciate it..” (Pico della Mirandola)

What is the point in appreciating life? What comes of that? If an individual ought to constantly be thankful for the gift of life that was provided to them, is it really their life to do whatever they please with?

### **Lao Tzu: *Tao Te Ching***

1. “Darkness within darkness.  
The gateway to all understanding.” (Lao Tzu, 1)

Is there only one path to understanding – through the light of knowledge, or are there more important lessons to be learned through other paths such as darkness? Do all individuals begin in darkness?

2. “Being and non-being create each other  
Difficult and easy support each other.  
Long and short define each other.  
High and low depend on each other.

Before and after follow each other." (Lao Tzu, 2)

Does everything in life exist in perfect balance and have its rightful place in the order of things?

3. "Practice not doing,  
and everything will fall into place." (Lao Tzu, 3)

How can things fall into place, let alone fall into anything without action? How can "not doing" produce anything?

### **Chuang Tzu: *The Way of Chuang Tzu***

1. "There was a man who was so disturbed by the sight of his own shadow and so displeased with his own footsteps that he determined to get rid of both. The method he hit upon was to run away from them. So he got up and ran. But every time he put his foot down there was another step, while his shadow kept up with him without the slightest difficulty. He attributed his failure to the fact that he was not running fast enough. So he ran faster and faster, without stopping, until he finally dropped dead. He failed to realize that if he merely stepped into the shade, his shadow would vanish, and if he sat down and stayed still, there would be no more footsteps" (Chuang Tzu, *Flight from the shadow*, 155).

Why are individuals disturbed by their own shadows or displeased with their own footsteps? Why would individuals try to run away from themselves if they have the power to change what it is they dislike?

2. "The longer he lives, the more stupid he becomes, because his anxiety to avoid unavoidable death becomes more and more acute. What bitterness! He lives for what is always out of reach! His thirst for survival in the future makes him incapable of living in the present" (Chuang Tzu, *Perfect Joy*, 100).

Why are humans so afraid of something that is inevitable – to the point that it hinders the little time in life that they have?

3. "How should you treat a bird? As yourself or as a bird?" (Chuang Tzu, *Symphony for a sea bird*, 103)

Do humans, or animals, have a nature about them that requires them to be treated accordingly? Do they have a nature at all?

### **Anton Chekhov: *Ward 6***

1. "In his criticisms of people he laid on the colours thick, using only black and white, and no fine shades; mankind was divided for him into honest men and scoundrels: there was nothing in between" (Chekhov, II. Page 4).

How can individuals be categorized as honest or scoundrels, or even at all? What determines the honesty of an individual and who can truly know that other than the individual?

2. "People who have an official, professional relation to other men's sufferings -- for instance, judges, police officers, doctors -- in course of time, through habit, grow so callous that they cannot, even if they wish it, take any but a formal attitude to their clients; in this respect they are not different from the peasant who slaughters sheep and calves in the back-yard, and does not notice the blood" (Chekhov, III. Page 5).

Is it better to live a desensitized life or to fully empathize with other individuals?

3. "Life is a vexatious trap; when a thinking man reaches maturity and attains to full consciousness he cannot help feeling that he is in a trap from which there is no escape. Indeed, he is summoned without his choice by fortuitous circumstances from non-existence into life . . . what for? He tries to find out the meaning and object of his existence; he is told nothing, or he is told absurdities; he knocks and it is not opened to him; death comes to him -- also without his choice" (Chekhov, 17).

Do individuals have the ability to mold themselves into any kind of individual they wish or are there certain innate qualities – or natures to people that are held within their souls which they cannot alter?

### **Arthur Schopenhauer : *On the Suffering of the World***

1. "...happiness of a given life is to be measured, not by its joys and pleasures, but by the extent to which it has been free from suffering – from positive evil" (Schopenhauer, 8).

Are humans ever free from suffering, or is the human mind constantly in a state of discontent?

2. "And above and beyond all this, there is a separate and peculiar source of pleasure, and consequently of pain, which man has established for himself, also as the result of using his powers of reflection; and this occupies him out of all proportion to its value, nay, almost more than all his other interests put together – I mean ambition and the feeling of honor and shame; in plain words, what he thinks about the opinion other people have of him" (Schopenhauer, 9).

Do individuals define themselves based on the perceptions others have of them? Should individuals care what opinions others have of them?

### **Arthur Schopenhauer: *On the Vanity of Existence***

1. "Time is that in which all things pass away; it is merely the form under which the will to live – the thing-in-itself and therefore imperishable – has revealed to it that its efforts are in vain; it is that agent by which at every moment all things in our hands become as nothing, and lose any real value they possess" (Schopenhauer, 18).

If time did not exist, would individuals be as concerned with memory or the fear of loss as the world largely is today?

2. "The whole foundation on which our existence rests is the present – the ever-fleeting present. It lies, then, in the very nature of our existence to take the form of constant motion, and to offer no possibility of our ever attaining the rest for which we are always striving. We are like a man running downhill, who cannot keep on his legs unless he runs on, and will inevitably fall if he stops; or, again, like a pole balanced on the tip of one's finger; or like a planet, which would fall into its sun the moment it ceased to hurry forward on its way. Unrest is the mark of existence" (Schopenhauer, 19).

Is there no value in slowing down and letting life flow like the ease of a river? Why does Schopenhauer make life seem like it is a futile race to nothingness? Should individuals run crazy and try to do as much as possible, or try to slow down and enjoy moments?

### **Albert Camus: *The Myth of Sisyphus***

1. "His scorn of the gods, his hatred of death, and his passion for life won him that unspeakable penalty in which the whole being is exerted toward accomplishing nothing. This is the price that must be paid for the passions of this earth" (Camus, 53).

Is the existence of an individual futile? Do humans actually accomplish anything of value, or is life simply a continuous striving to end up getting nowhere?

2. "If this myth is tragic, that is because its hero is conscious. Where would his torture be, indeed, if at every step the hope of succeeding upheld him? The workman of today works every day in his life at the same tasks, and this fate is no less absurd. But it is tragic only at the rare moments when it becomes conscious.

Is it better to live an unconscious life in bliss due to ignorance, or does life hold more meaning when an individual lives it consciously? What are individuals supposed to do with their consciousness – what is the best way to utilize it?

### **Jean-Paul Sartre: *The Wall***

1. " I clung to nothing, in a way I was calm. But it was a horrible calm--because of my body; my body, I saw with its eyes, I heard with its ears, but it was no longer me; it sweated and trembled by itself and I didn't recognize it any more. I had to touch it and look at it to find out what was happening, as if it were the body of someone else. At times I could still feel it, I felt sinkings, and fallings, as when you're in a plane taking a nose dive, or I felt my heart beating. But that didn't reassure me. Everything that came from my body was all cockeyed" (Sartre).

What is the relationship between the human mind and the human body? How much do each of them have to do with the idea of an individual's self?

2. "...his life had no more value than mine; no life had value. They were going to slap a man up against a wall and shoot at him till he died, whether it was I or Gris or somebody else made no difference. I knew he was more useful than I to the cause of Spain but I thought to hell with Spain and anarchy; nothing was important. Yet I was there, I could save my skin and give up Gris and I refused to do it. I found that somehow comic; it was obstinacy. I thought, "I must be stubborn!" And a droll sort of gaiety spread over me" (Sarte).

Does confrontation with death cause everything in life to seem unimportant because life has no meaning, or does life seem to lack importance because of the fear that after death, one cannot experience life any longer? Is there any part of an individual that carries on after life, and if so, where does it exist and what is its function?

### **Tolstoy: *The Death of Ivan Ilych***

1. "His aim was to free himself more and more from those unpleasantness and to give them a semblance of harmlessness and propriety. He attained this by spending less and less time with his family, and when obliged to be at home he tried to safeguard his position by the presence of outsiders. The chief thing however was that he had his official duties. The whole interest of his life now centered in the official world and that interest absorbed him" (Tolstoy, 18).

How can individuals free themselves from suffering? Is it possible to completely eradicate suffering from life?

2. ""When I am not, what will there be? There will be nothing. Then where shall I be when I am no more? Can this be dying? No, I don't want to!" He jumped up and tried to light the candle, felt for it with trembling hands, dropped candle and candlestick on the floor, and fell back on his pillow.



“What’s the use? It makes no difference,” he said to himself, staring with wide-open eyes into the darkness. “Death. Yes, death” (Tolstoy, 34).

Why do humans panic about the inevitability of death? Why does calm follow the acceptance of death?

### ***Rahula: What the Buddha Taught***

1. “With reference to his own enlightenment the Buddha said: ‘The eye was born, knowledge was born, wisdom was born, science was born, light was born.’ It is always seeing through knowledge or wisdom, and not believing through faith” (Rahula, 9).

Is faith a creation of the fate of heart which cannot bear the idea of being responsible for their own actions, or who fear death?

2. “..it is just like a mountain river, flowing far and swift, taking everything along with it; there is no moment, no instant, no second when it stops flowing, but it goes on flowing and continuing. So Brahmana, is human life, like a mountain river. As the Buddha told Ratthapala: ‘The world is in continuous flux and is impermanent.’ ” (Rahula, 25-26).

If the world is like a flowing river that means it must have a starting point. Buddha says that the beginning of the stream of life is unthinkable. How does this idea get reconciled?