

## Collection of Quotes and Questions

### *Ecclesiastes*

1. "Sorrow is better than laughter."

Is it really? Is sadness *really* better than happiness? Does the heart actually improve when you're sad?

2. "I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favor to men of skill; but time and chance happens to them all."

Does skill, wisdom, knowledge, or anything about us really matter in how our lives play out, or are we slaves to chance?

3. "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man."

Nope. The whole duty of man is *not* to fear God and keep his commandments. So what *is* the duty of man?

### *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics*

1. "Good has rightly been declared to be that at which all things aim." (pg. 1)

What do people strive for?

2. "His study will be vain and unprofitable, because the end aimed at is not knowledge but action." (pg. 2)

Should we learn things for the sake of learning them, or to achieve some means?

3. "For men are good in but one way, but bad in many." (pg. 15)

Is there only one way to be "good"? What does it mean to be "good"? Is good defined by the masses, or by each person separately for themselves? And if it's on an individual basis, why have laws and punishments?

4. "He must be unable to make his life revolve around another, unless it be a friend; for this is slavish" (pg. 24)

What about friendship makes it *not* slavish? I assume what he means by this quote is that you shouldn't base your life and actions around someone who isn't a friend, because they are unworthy of that attention. Again, why is it fine if it's a friend? Or is it only fine when you offer, not when they ask? Would a true friend ask, or even *want*, you to focus your entire life on them?

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

1. "Much worse is he who says that it were good not to be born, but when once one is born to pass quickly through the gates of Hades. For if he truly believes this, why does he not depart from life?" (pg. 2)

Why do some people kill themselves and others don't, if they both think life is suffering? Why do people who have no intention of killing themselves say that life isn't worth living? I can't tell you how many times I've heard someone say something like "kill me now". But if I held a gun to their head, nine times out of ten they'd start begging for their life. So many of us fear death, yet we trivialize it. We give it less importance than it deserves until it happens.

2. "The natural wealth is limited and easily obtained; but riches of idle fancies go on forever." (pg. 5)

What about fantasy and imagination makes it worth more than money? I could be starving, but if you offered me food in exchange for my imagination, I'd flat out refuse. Imagination is everything. Money would not exist if someone didn't imagine it. We wouldn't be anything more than animals without our creativity and imagination.

3. "Of all the things that wisdom acquires to ensure happiness throughout the whole of life, by far the most important is friendship." (pg. 6)

Yes. Yes, yes, yes. A thousand times yes. All the physical comforts in the world mean absolutely nothing without friendship. Family means nothing without friendship. *Life* means nothing without friendship. I spent three years with no friends, and it was absolutely horrible. I never, ever want to experience that kind of loneliness again.

4. "If sight, association, and intercourse are removed, the passion of love is ended." (pg. 7)

Well, it depends on how long those are removed, and why. Long distance relationships do work, after all, and those have no "intercourse", very little sight, and a lot less association. Obviously if you cut all ties with someone, your love will fade, but presumably you *want* it to fade, hence why you completely cut them out of your life. If love is true, you will find some

way to keep it going. The “passion” or infatuation may have ended, but that just lets you settle into the content kind of love that needs no reaffirmation. Passion is about declarations of love and grand romantic gestures; love is about the little things and compromises.

5. “He is of very small account for whom there are many good reasons for ending his life.” (pg. 8)

I'm not sure what he means by “is of very small account”. I think he's either referring to business or reasons for doing something. The former seems...harsh. “Don't do business with someone who has good reasons to kill himself” sounds too cutthroat to be Epicurus, not to mention overly focused on material with the whole business thing. And the latter, “He has no reason for killing himself, but he has many good ones” also doesn't really fit. I mean, I guess if it was like “He *thinks* he has good reasons for killing himself, but he has none” then that would make more sense as well as fit in with the whole “don't seek death but don't fear it” thing.

### **Epicetetus: *The Enchiridion***

1. “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.” (pg. 2)

Um, harsh much? I mean really, I understand not wanting to break down and cease functioning in your grief, but to completely disregard the death of your wife or child? Recognizing that they will die is one thing, having no sadness over it is another.

2. “Lameness is a hindrance to the leg, but not your ability to choose.” (pg. 3)

Choose what? There are limitations to what I can do based on my body. I could never be a basketball player, for instance, since I'm only average height. I can, however, not care about my inability to play basketball.

3. “Don't allow your laughter be much, nor on many occasions, nor profuse.” (pg. 8)

No. I refuse. All the stuff about self-restraint when it comes to grief and sadness, I can understand. But why restrain yourself from joy? I have spent too fucking long in a joyless void of emotion, and I refuse to go back to that by choice. I will laugh, I will love, and I will live. If that means suffering through sadness, well, I've done it once. I can do it again. And *nothing* is worth more than my laughter.

4. “These reasoning's are unconnected: 'I am richer than you, therefore I am better'; 'I am more eloquent than you, therefore I am better.'” (pg. 11)

If it were possible to be better than someone, instead of just being different from them, what would it take to achieve that? How could you measure two people based on every single facet of their life and personality?

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

1. "You don't have time to reread your diaries, or the lives of the ancient Greeks and Romans." (pg. 39)

While I agree with his statement in reference to him and the fact that he has an army to lead, I disagree with it in just about every other case. There is always time to look back on the person you were, to reflect. Looking back reminds you of how far you've come, and how much further you must go. Likewise, what other people have said or done can also help you.

2. "Stop all this theorizing about what a good man should be. Be it!" (pg. 118)

How can I be it if I don't know what it means? I can do what feels right to me, but if I never think about what I'm doing and if it's good or not, how can I be sure that I am?

3. "Just as circus games and other popular entertainments offer the same tedious scenes over and over, so it is with life-an appalling sameness, a tiresome round of cause and effect. When will it ever end?"

Maybe it's tedious and circular to you, Marcus, but that just might be because you let other people force you into becoming something you never wanted to be. I, for one, disagree. Life *can* be full of the same, but that's only if you let it. You can choose to do something new and different with your life, or heck, just look at the world through fresh eyes. You can find wonder and excitement in almost anything.

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

1. "The highest spiritual beings were, from the very moment of creation, or soon thereafter, fixed in the mode of being which would be theirs through measureless eternities." (pg. 2)

So do Satan and the other fallen angels not count? Where *do* they fit on the Great Chain of Being? Well Wikipedia says they fall just below angels, but that still doesn't make sense. If they are (or were) angels, how can they have their own category? I mean, the Great Chain of Being operates under the belief that God put everything in a specific place, right? So if the demons have a place, doesn't that mean God made the angels so that they would be demons? So if God created them to be demons, why are they seen as fallen or rebellious angels?

2. "A pure contemplator, unmindful of the body, wholly withdrawn into the inner chambers of the mind, here indeed is neither a creature of the earth nor a heavenly creature, but some higher divinity, clothed in human flesh." (pg. 3)

So... The Buddha. He basically just described Buddha. It's always interesting to see schools of thought that were developed so far apart yet have many similarities.

### **Francesco Petrarch: *The Ascent of Mont Ventoux***

1. "Such qualities, however difficult they are to bear, can be borne at home: loving friendship is able to endure everything; it refuses no burden. But on a journey they become intolerable." (pg. 1)

How? How does a journey differ from the home when it comes to friendships? If a loving friendship is able to endure everything, it should be able to endure a few days trip. What is it about the trip in particular? Because he doesn't talk about the journey being too long, so it can't be spending too much time with someone. And then he goes with his brother? What kind of relationship do they have? Because I know I'd much rather spend a few days traveling with friends than my brother.

2. "I wondered through valleys, looking for the longer and easier path and stumbling only into longer difficulties. Thus I indeed put off the disagreeable strain of climbing. But nature is not overcome by man's devices." (pg. 2)

We always look for shortcuts when we try to do something. Looking for them, though, usually doesn't work, and wastes a lot of time. Instead of trying to breeze through life, we need to suck it up and slog through.

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

1. "When you are content to be simply yourself and don't compare or compete, everybody will respect you." (pg. 8)

This is...basically what I've been trying to do this year, for myself. I don't care about other people respecting me for it, though. I just want to get out from under people's expectations. It's like Stoicism, where you don't care about what others think of you. It's a lot more difficult than it sounds, though.

2. "When you realize where you come from, you naturally become tolerant, disinterested, amused, kind-hearted as a grandmother, dignified as a king." (pg. 16)

I like almost all of that. I just don't like the disinterested part. It's very difficult for me to get behind apathy or disinterest in a philosophy. I can imagine the type of person the poem is describing, and I wouldn't mind being that, but I don't want to seek it.

3. "When man interferes with Tao, the sky becomes filthy, the earth becomes depleted, the equilibrium crumbles, creatures become extinct." (pg. 39)

This sounds a lot like what's going on in the world right now. The Tao is about not doing, and maybe the reason we're wrecking the earth is because we're doing too much, too fast. We spend our days rushing around yet accomplishing nothing of value. We ruin our bodies to live our lives. Lack of sleep, lack of exercise, lack of nutrition, all because we value "productivity" too much. If you're not doing something, you need to. We're trying to outwit nature, outwit Tao, and it's backfiring.

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

1. "Though she might have all she desired/Set before her./She would rather run/And seek her own little living/Uncaged." (pg. 49)

A life where everything is handed to you on a silver platter isn't a life worth living. You need to work for things before you can truly appreciate having them.

2. "No one seems to know/How useful it is to be useless." (pg. 59)

When people think you're useless, they won't trouble you. They won't harm you. If you have use, people will take advantage and use you and use you until you're all used up, and then they'll cast you aside. You'll be worse off than if you were useless to begin with.

3. "A poor man must swing/For stealing a belt buckle/But if a rich man steals a whole state/He is acclaimed/As statesman of the year." (pg. 68)

Not to mention how the poor are seen as needy for having food stamps and welfare to survive, yet the rich men fire half their employees just to give themselves a raise for it.

### **Arthur Schopenhauer: *On the Suffering of the World & On the Vanity of Existence***

1. "So it is that in our good days we are all unconscious of the evil Fate may have presently in store for us—sickness, poverty, mutilation, loss of sight or reason." (pg. 5)

Wow. That's pretty depressing. Like, actually, that sounds like the kind of thing a depressed person thinks of life: it's only pain, pain, and more pain, with maybe a little pleasure. Maybe.

2. “[I]n any case, even though things have gone with you tolerably well, the longer you live the more clearly you will feel that, on the whole, life is a disappointment, nay, a cheat.” (pg. 7)

Okay, seriously, do you have depression? Because I've never heard this kind of stuff coming from someone who wasn't depressed. That kind of thought is what leads people to suicide.

3. “I shall be told, I suppose, that my philosophy is comfortless – because I speak the truth; and people prefer to be assured that everything the Lord has made is good.” (pg. 7)

You'll be told that because it's true. Seriously. And no, that's not the truth. Obviously not everything God (supposedly) made is good, but that doesn't mean life equals suffering.

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

1. “When the images of earth cling too tightly to memory, when the call of happiness becomes too insistent, it happens that melancholy rises in man's heart.” (pg. 53)

So basically, when people focus too much on the physical and material, it's bad? Or, I suppose, yearning for something you can never have, in this case a meaningful life, makes you sad. Just accept the absurdity of your life, because wishing for another life only hurts you.

2. “Likewise, the absurd man, when he contemplates his torment, silences all the idols.” (pg. 54)

You are the only one who can make meaning in your life. No one can define your life for you. People can try, but the second you decide what your life is worth, other people have no power.

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

1. “So they lived, and all went well, without change, and life flowed pleasantly.” (pg. 25)

And yet, that pleasant life leaves nothing but regrets for Ivan Ilych. I suppose the lack of change is what makes his life so unsatisfying. At least, that's what Tolstoy thinks. Personally, I think an average life of pleasantness would be nice to have.

2. “Ivan Ilych was left alone with the consciousness that his life was poisoned and was poisoning the lives of others, and that this poison did not weaken but penetrated more and more deeply into his whole being.” (pg. 31)

Ah yes, the classic depressed guilt about living. I mean really, if *his* life is poisoning other people, then other people are poisoning themselves. After all, the only reason he's hurting others is

because he formed bonds with them. He hurts others, others hurt him, but he also helps others, and others help him. He needs to get over himself and realize that he is not the center of everyone's universe.

3. "And in imagination he began to recall the best moments of his pleasant life. But strange to say none of those best moments of his pleasant life now seemed at all what they had then seemed." (pg. 50)

Okay, what is it with these guys and writing depression as philosophy, because the inability to see the good and happy parts of your life is part of depression. You don't remember being truly happy, so you figure you'll never be happy. But really, your perception of your memories is just being skewed, and if you get into a less depressive state of mind, you remember that yes, you were happy, and you can be happy again.

4. "From that moment the screaming began that continued for three days, and was so terrible that one could not hear it through two closed doors without horror." (pg. 56)

So much for dying with dignity! It's interesting that he sees death as terrible, and struggles against it for so long.

5. "There was no fear because there was no death. In place of death there was light." (pg. 58)

This is quite an uplifting quote. I'm conflicted though, about replacing death with light. Because there is death, no matter what form it takes. Death may very well be light, but it's still death. Ilych should've accepted death as it is, instead of redefining it to comfort himself.

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

1. "And there are ways of resolving that doubt. Just to say 'I believe', or 'I do not doubt' will certainly not solve the problem." (pg. 3)

Interesting. So how would I resolve the doubt? I mean, how do I believe without it being blind faith? There's no way for me to be sure of anything, truly and utterly sure, so there will always be doubt unless I give myself fully to faith.

2. "Mere suffering exists, but no sufferer is found. The deeds are, but no doer is found." (pg. 26)

Everything that is, is, without someone making it so. There can be no sufferer, no doer, no thinker, since that would require something to be separate from the suffering, the deed, or the thought. We are all the same, we are all connected like the parts of the body, and thus aren't separate.



3. "The term 'justice' is ambiguous and dangerous, and in its name more harm than good is done to humanity." (pg. 32)

It's really difficult to pass judgment on someone for things that they've done. The world isn't black and white, and 'justice' is likewise murky. If I kill a serial killer, am I wrong? What if I didn't know that person was a serial killer? What if I did know? Or what if I killed someone who was widely known as a horrible person? They committed no crime, but did horrible things and treated people horribly. Is killing them right? Is letting them live wrong?

4. "Will, volition, desire, thirst to exist, to continue, to become more and more, is a tremendous force that moves whole lives, whole existences, that even moves the whole world. This is the greatest force, the greatest energy in the world." (pg. 33)

What about suicidal people? Do they have the same force inside them? If it's the greatest energy in the world, the thirst to exist, why do some people not want to exist? Or is that their way of wanting to become more? I, and many of my peers, have at one point wanted to 'stop existing'. But, I suppose, what we are really wanting is freedom from our lives and responsibilities. We want to sleep, but with sleep comes waking, and facing the stress in our lives. Ceasing to exist means permanent freedom from the stress, but any way we can achieve that is welcome. So the greatest force is really the greatest.

5. "Because Nirvāna is thus expressed in negative terms, there are many who have got a wrong notion that it is negative, and expresses self-annihilation. Nirvāna is definitely no annihilation of self, because there is no self to annihilate. If at all, it is the annihilation of the illusion, of the false idea of self." (pg. 37)

What I wouldn't give to go back to Siddhartha's time and learn from the Buddha in person. Or at least remember if, in a past life, I learned from him. So anyways, there is no self. When I achieve Nirvāna (because it will happen, in this life or another), I will be free from the false notion of self and rejoin the rest of existence. But when that point is reached, what happens to me, to the illusion of self that I currently have? When I break free from the cycle of death, life, and rebirth, what happens?

### **Viktor E. Frankl: *Man's Search for Meaning***

1. "The prisoner of Auschwitz, in the first phase of shock, did not fear death. Even the gas chambers lost their horrors for him after the first few days - after all, they spared him the act of committing suicide." (pg. 18)

Somehow I don't think this is what Epicurus had in mind when he said not to fear death. It's like some grotesque hybrid of pessimism, Stoicism, and Epicurean philosophy. It is hard to grasp kind of Hell that someone would have to go through to reach that point. I can just imagine the listless, apathetic, glassy-eyed look they must have had.

2. "Suffering is not always a pathological phenomenon; rather than being a symptom of neurosis, suffering may well be a human achievement, especially if the suffering grows out of existential frustration." (pg. 102)

Existential suffering may well be a human achievement, but suffering in general is not. Physical suffering in animals is present too. Mental and emotional suffering is found in animals too. If you've ever left a pet to go on vacation, you know how animals can suffer emotionally.

### **Hermann Hesse: *Siddhartha***

1. "Whenever Kamaswami felt unwell, whenever he was peevish, whenever he felt insulted, whenever he was plagued by his business worries, Siddhartha had always looked on mockingly." (pg. 41)

Wow, Hesse, way to make Siddhartha look like a jerk. And here I thought that Siddhartha, from the beginning, had compassion for everyone and everything around him, regardless of their level of enlightenment. Nope, clearly Siddhartha was smugly superior and concerned with being better than the people around him. Look, Hesse, just because you're an existentialist (and an elitist) doesn't mean you should drag Buddhism into it too. Stick to writing about schoolboys in Germany.

2. "It is good to make your way downward, to move lower, to seek the depths." (pg. 57)

Simplicity is key, I suppose. That is what you're talking about, right Hesse? That complex ideas and complicated thinking is all well and good, but it's also good to slow down and relax, or meditate. That is what you're going for, right? Not 'the intelligent should lower themselves to the level of the common masses'? Right?

3. "He possessed the awareness, the conscious idea, of the oneness of all life. And at many times Siddhartha even doubted whether that knowledge, that idea, should be so highly valued, whether it, too, might not perhaps be a childish quality of thinking people, of the thinkers among the child-people." (pg. 70)

Well, if you keep separating people into 'thinkers' and 'child-people', maybe you're not really aware of the oneness of all life. Buddha isn't some higher person, he's not better than anyone else. Well, technically he is, but in a very minor way. Everyone and anyone can reach enlightenment.