

## Collection of Quotes and Questions

### *Ecclesiastes*

1. "Then I beheld all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun: because though a man labour to seek it out, yet he shall not find it; yea farther; though a wise man think to know it, yet shall he not be able to find it." (Eccl., 8:17)

Are there certain experiences we can never truly understand unless we experience them ourselves? I believe this passage answers the above question, because it describes that a wise man may think he knows what labor is, yet cannot truly understand if he only seeks out the answer. For the wise man to actually understand what labor is, he must experience labor himself. This is an example of an experience that we cannot just learn about to truly understand, we must live through it.

2. "One generation passes away, and another generation comes: but the earth abides for ever." (Eccl., 1:4)

Does our existence really matter in the grand scheme of life? "All is Vanity" seems to carry the notion that we are not the center of the world, and life will continue on without us if we were to disappear. This idea is humbling, as we often get caught up in our own lives and may not realize how small we are in the grand scheme of life. Does this make our existences worthless? Or is there liberty in the sense that you are not bound by importance to the world?

3. "If the iron be blunt, and he do not sharpen the edge, then must he put to more strength: but wisdom is profitable to direct." (Eccl., 10:10)

Strength or wisdom, which is a more powerful quality? "The Excellence of Wisdom" praises the pursuit of wisdom above all else. There are parts in our lives that effort alone cannot get us through. Certain tasks and accomplishments are easier or can only be done with proper wisdom. One may be able to slay an enemy with a blunt sword, but one who first sharpens the sword can do so much more efficiently. Can fools accomplish the same as those who are wise? Perhaps in some areas, but much more effort will be required of them.

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

1. "If activities are, as we said, what gives life its character, no happy man can become miserable; for he will never do the acts that are hateful and mean." (Aristotle 8)

Can a life of honor and virtue maintain happiness? I believe that this quote answers the above question by saying that no happy man can become miserable. If a man is happy, according to Aristotle, he has lived a life of success and virtue. If a man continues to live this life of success and virtue, he makes certain his happiness will not fade even if he is faced with hardships.

2. "But not every action nor every passion admits of a mean...in the case of actions adultery, theft, murder; for all of these and suchlike things imply by their names that they themselves bad, and not excesses or deficiencies of them." (Aristotle 16)

Do the ends always justify the means? No, there are certain actions that cannot be justified for the sake of virtues. While some actions can be forgiven if done for the sake of virtue, there are actions and passions that cannot be justified.

3. "For without friends no one would choose to live, though he had all other goods." (Aristotle 27)

Are worldly possessions more important than friendship? Without friendship, even the most successful and well off people would not want to continue living. Friendship is something that cannot be bought or claimed by success, yet is a universal need for man.

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

1. "It is pointless for a man to pray to the gods for that which he has the power to obtain by himself."

Are the gods responsible for all we have in life? While certain aspects of our lives are out of our control, several aspects are within our power to influence. There is no point in praying for that which we can achieve on our own.

2. "While therefore all pleasure because it is naturally akin to us is good, not all pleasure should be chosen, just as all pain is an evil and yet not all pain is to be shunned."

Are all pleasures inherently good and all pains definitely bad?

There are certain pleasures that should not be pursued due to the circumstances around them.

Perhaps in seeking out a pleasure, one indulges in something that is morally corrupt.

Alternatively, perhaps some pain is necessary to grow as a person. Pains such as this should not be completely rejected, to do so would stunt growth.

3. "Fate, which some introduce as sovereign over all things, he scorns, affirming rather that some things happen of necessity, others by chance, others through our own agency."

Are we in control of our Fate? There are parts of our lives that are destined to be, some parts of our Fate are not those we can fight. However, parts of our lives can be changed "through our own agency" and others by necessity or chance. Not everything is laid out on a set path to follow, our actions all have meanings in reaching our goals.

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

1. "You are unjust, then, and insatiable, if you are unwilling to pay the price for which these things are sold, and would have them for nothing." (Epictetus 25)

Is it wrong to envy the achievements of others? We often see that which others have and envy them. However, people often want what others have without having to take the same steps those individuals took to obtain them. One cannot expect instant gratification without having to bear any sacrifice.

2. "Consider first, man, what the matter is, and what your own nature is able to bear." (Epictetus 29)

Are we wrong to want that which we are not ready to accept? This passage reflects that we often wish for accomplishments to be given to us. For instance, one may wish to win the Olympics. That person must consider all the hard work and devotion it would take to actually accomplish that. If that person is not willing to give that hard work and devotion, then wanting an accomplishment that requires those sacrifices is foolish.

3. "For, unless you perfectly understand the principle from which anyone acts, how should you know if he acts ill?" (Epictetus 45)

Are we fit to judge the actions of others? We are very quick to judge others, but we cannot make judgments on others if we do not understand the reasoning of their actions.

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

1. "Because you have chosen not to respect yourself, you have made your happiness subject to the opinions others have of you." (Aurelius II.6)

Is our self-worth measured by the thoughts of others? We often look towards the opinions of others to affirm within ourselves our goodness based on their thoughts. By doing this, we subject our own peace of mind to their opinions. The opinions of others are out of our control, the regard for ourselves and our own happiness is not.

2. "Do not waste the rest of your life speculating about others in ways that are not to your mutual advantage." (Aurelius III.4)

Should the negative qualities in others influence our thoughts of them? Often it can be difficult to prevent oneself from thinking negative thoughts of someone who has wronged them. However, these thoughts are worthless and unnecessary. It is a waste of time that could be productive to speculate about those people. Keep your mind fixated on your own life, and your own path.

3. "Look then on how soon everything is forgotten, and gaze into the abyss of infinite time." (Aurelius IV.3)

Are the affairs of humanity the central focus of the universe? All of humanity is doomed to one day cease. Eventually all of our society will be nothing more than a glimpse back in history of the endless flow of time. To both those who have wronged you, and those who have praised you; how much value should you assign to their actions?

4. "To hope for the impossible is madness, and it is impossible for the wicked not to do wrong." (Aurelius V.17)

Could all of humanity abstain from sin? As a part of human nature, there will be those who commit wrongdoings. That is absolute, and beyond the control of any individual. One should not hope for this impossibility, but accept it.

5. "It is always within your power to prosper provided you are able to choose your own path wisely and can think and act in accordance with your choice." (Aurelius V.34)

Are the pursuits we choose in our power to reach? The path we choose in life is our own, and it is within our control to prosper in the goals we set for ourselves. With the determination to fight against what resists one in their pursuit of prosperity, they can reach their goals.

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

1. "I have placed you at the very center of the world, so that from that vantage point you may with greater ease glance round about you on all that the world contains." (pg. 2)

How important is humanity in the scheme of life? Humanity is at the very center of the world, all around us is there for our own benefit. We are extremely important in the grand scheme of life, and our existence is full of meaning and purpose.

2. "But upon man, at the moment of his creation, God bestowed seeds pregnant with all possibilities, the germs of every form of life." (pg. 2)

Are humanity's endeavors limited? Our destiny is not immutable, anything humanity dreams can also be the fate they will experience. Within all of us exists the possibility to experience nearly anything we would like. Mirandola even states that humanity could regress to being brutish, if they so desire. Or, they could ascend to that of a heavenly being. Everything is within our power and our reach.

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

1. "All such qualities, however difficult they are to bear, can be borne at home: loving friendship is able to endure everything; it refuses no burden."

Does true friendship have limitations? Petrarca states that true friendship is accepting of all qualities, yet he will not bring his friends with him on his journey because he cannot bear their qualities on such a trip. Are his friendships of a loving and true nature? If one were to create an intrinsic and genuine friendship, it could withstand all difficulties.

2. "But nature is not overcome by man's devices; a corporeal thing cannot reach the heights by descending."

Can nature be changed by the will of humanity? Humanity's schemes or will cannot change nature itself. Despite how crafty one may be, they cannot hope to ascend a mountain while descending. The protagonist scours a valley for a simple way up the mountain, yet either way he will still need to climb.

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

1. "Not-knowing is true knowledge./ Presuming to know is a disease./ First realize that you are sick:/ then you can move toward health." (pg. 71)

Is knowledge more important than open-mindedness? Those convinced they are correct are often very difficult to be persuaded otherwise. Presuming you have the correct idea is like a disease, it

prevents you from recognizing or considering any concepts beyond what you think you know. Having a closed mind condemns you to a life of ignorance.

2. "If you look to others for fulfillment,/ you will never truly be fulfilled./ If your happiness depends on money,/ you will never be happy with yourself." (pg. 44)

Where does happiness reside? Our fulfillment and happiness only resides within ourselves. It cannot be given to us by others, because then they would have the power to take it away. If we look within ourselves to find what we seek, then it cannot be taken from us by anyone else.

3. "Trying to control the future/ is like trying to take the master carpenter's place./ When you handle the master carpenter's tools,/ chances are that you'll cut your hand." (pg. 74)

Is it our power to shape the future? We can guide ourselves towards the path we choose, but ultimately are not in control of what the future holds. It is not our place to decide what the future will hold, and trying to take that place will only result in our own harm.

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

1. "Every man knows how useful It is to be useful./ No one seems to know/ How useful it is to be useless." (pg. 59)

Is having a use something that should be valued over all else? When something has a use, it is bound to be used up. A cinnamon tree is useful if it is edible, therefore it is cut down. We see having a use as the most important thing in life, but what if that use is not beneficial to us? If our use can destroy us, wouldn't it be much better to be useless? Without a specific use, one's possibilities are endless and vast.

2. "From emptiness comes the unconditioned./ From this, the conditioned, the individual things./ So from the sage's emptiness, stillness arises:/ From stillness, action. From action, attainment." (pg. 80)

What is the value of emptiness? From emptiness, comes opportunity. If there were no emptiness in the world, there would be no opportunity. We cannot take a step forward without empty space to walk upon. We cannot properly use a table unless there is empty space around it.

3. "When we look at things in the light of Tao,/ Nothing is best, nothing is worst./ Each thing, seen in its own light,/ Stands out in its own way." (pg. 87)

Can mankind place value on one object over another? We value gold over dirt, but each has their own unique place in nature. Mankind cannot truly make one more valuable than the other. They are both part of the same whole, and one cannot be "better" than the other.

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

1. "There seems to me no better explanation of our existence than that it is the result of some false step, some sin of which we are paying the penalty."  
(Schopenhauer 14)

What is the nature of our existence? We exist merely to pay the penalty of the sins of humanity. The general misfortune life gives us is because of that, and we cannot escape it. We will spend all of our lives suffering, and it is merely to pay the penalty of sin.

2. "I mean ambition and the feeling of honor and shame; in plain words, what he thinks about the opinion other people have of him. Taking a thousand forms, often very strange ones, this becomes the goal of almost all the efforts he makes that are not rooted in physical pleasure or pain."  
(Schopenhauer 9)

How much does man value the thoughts of others? We can become obsessed with how others perceive us. We can become obsessed with wanting to know, and we will often go to extremes to appease others. Stoicism also states the opinions of others are not in our control, so they should be of no concern. We can become so deeply rooted in how others feel about us, those opinions can overtake the root of our behavior.

3. "So, to gain anything we have longed for is only to discover how vain and empty it is; and even though we are always living in expectation of better things, at the same time we often repent and long to have the past back again." (Schopenhauer 20)

Can humanity achieve a sense of fulfillment? If we gain something we seek, no matter how grand, we are bound to find misery in it. Everything we long for is vain and empty, even if we do not realize it. Once we have what we long for, we look to the future expecting even better things. In other times, we look to the past and long for it. Mankind can never live in the present, only the future or the past.

4. "Human life must be some kind of mistake. The truth of this will be sufficiently obvious if we only remember that man is a compound of needs and necessities hard to satisfy; and that even when they are satisfied, all he obtains is a state of painlessness, where nothing remains to him but abandonment and boredom." (Schopenhauer 21)

Does human life have meaning? All of human life is some sort of mistake. Our existence in itself proves this. We have complex needs and we spend our lives trying to appease them, but even when we manage to do so we are only left with further boredom. When we experience boredom, we are reminded of the vain and worthless nature of our lives. We are either longing, or condemned to boredom.

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

1. "They had thought with some reason that there is no more dreadful punishment than futile and hopeless labor."

Is a meaningless destiny humanity's punishment? Sisyphus must roll a rock to the top of a mountain, only to have it fall back down again. He must continue this action as punishment from the Gods. If we feel our labor leads to some sort of accomplishment, we often can bear it. However, when it becomes apparent that our labor holds no purpose, we despair in it.

2. "It is during that return, that pause, that Sisyphus interests me. A face that toils so close to stones is already stone itself! I see that man going back down with a heavy yet measured step toward the torment of which he will never know the end."

Can we find comfort in rebelling against the inevitable? Sisyphus is condemned to always roll the rock up the mountain, but that does not break his spirit. He does not allow the punishment to break his spirit, and because of that becomes superior to his fate.

3. "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 futile labor only punishment for those who are conscious? If our lives truly have no meaning, why do only some despair? Only those who actually realize and accept this notion are affected by it. The everyday person may realize the same tasks are constantly before them, but does not understand the futile nature of those tasks.

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

1. "It is as if I had been going downhill while I imagined I was going up. And that is really what it was. I was going up in public opinion, but to the same extent life was ebbing away from me." (Tolstoy 56)

Can one live a "wrong" life? Ivan has everything going for him in his life. Ivan is a successful individual with several social connections and a well-paying job. Ivan lives a "wrong" life by not making any intrinsic relationships with anyone else, everybody he knows is just for some sort of social advantage. He even marries his own wife, Praskovya, just because it is beneficial and convenient. Ivan lives his life the wrong way and therefore is not prepared for death, he only realizes this fully when he is very near death.

2. "Ivan Ilych's life had been most simple and most ordinary and therefore most terrible." (Tolstoy 22)

What makes for an empty existence? A simple, ordinary, and successful life does not seem like it would be a terrible one. However, it is the ordinary and monotonous nature of our existence that makes it terrible. We are trapped in our lives and their meaningless existence. Ivan has a successful life, but his existence has little meaning.

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

1. "Repugnance (pratigha) is explained as "ill-will with regard to living beings, with regard to suffering and with regard to things pertaining to suffering. Its function is to produce a basis for unhappy states and bad conduct." Thus it is wrong to be impatient at suffering. Being impatient or angry at suffering does not remove it." (pg. 28)

How should mankind view suffering? Without the basis for bad states and bad conduct, how could there be positive variations of them? Suffering is constant in the universe, and we cannot escape or prevent that. Therefore, we should not be impatient or angry with the notion of suffering, it will not go away.

2. "If the medicine is good, the disease will be cured. It is not necessary to know who prepared it, or where it came from." (pg. 8)

Do we need to know the origin of Truth? We do not need to know the origin of the world's Truth, so long as it really is the truth. One does not question the medicine from a doctor, so long as that medicine works. So long as the Truth works, why would one need to know every detail? Details are unnecessary.

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

1. "Who can throw a stone at a man who favors his friends under circumstances when, sooner or later, it is a question of life or death? No man should judge unless he asks himself in absolute honesty whether in a similar situation he might not have done the same." (Frankl 48)

Are we fit to judge the actions of others? We are very quick to judge the actions of others without first considering what their circumstances are. We may hastily judge the behaviors of others, yet could easily behave the same way under the right circumstances.

2. "Then I grasped the meaning of the greatest secret that human poetry and human thought and belief have to impart: *The salvation of man is through love and in love.*" (Frankl 37)

How can humanity cope with suffering? Even under the hardest of times, we are able to persevere so long as the beacon of love exists in our lives. Even if humanity is doomed to suffer, the love which we have for one another can lessen the misery found in that suffering.

3. "I told my comrades (who lay motionless, although occasionally a sigh could be heard) that human life, under any circumstances, never ceases to have a meaning, and that this infinite meaning of life includes suffering and dying, privation, and death." (Frankl 83)

Can a human's life lose its meaning? While struggling through immense suffering, some individuals may feel a loss of meaning in their lives. This can severely escalate, to the point where an individual can feel completely void of purpose. Even during the worst times life has to offer, the life of an individual never loses its value or changes in its importance.

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

1. "Already he could no longer distinguish the many voices, could not distinguish the gay from the weeping, the childish from the virile; they all belonged together, the yearning laments and the wise man's laughter, the cry of anger and the moans of the dying; they were all one, all of them interlinked and interwoven, bound together in a thousand ways." (Hesse 113)

Does the concept of the self exist? Every face and voice are like droplets of water in a river, each are connected whether they exist near the start or the end. Everything merges together, and always is together.

2. "It is not fitting for me to pass judgment on another's life! Only for myself, for myself alone, must I judge, must I choose, must I reject." (Hesse 31)

Are we fit to judge the actions of others? We cannot judge the life of another, as we are not living their life. We cannot truly understand someone enough to judge them on their actions. The only people we can really judge are ourselves.