

## Collection of Quotes and Questions

### *Ecclesiastes*

1. "He has made everything beautiful in his time: also he has set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God makes from the beginning to the end." (Eccl., 3:11)

If He has set the world in our heart, then does that mean that our world is just an illusion of the heart? It is true that no man can find out nor can understand completely the immensity of God's work; therefore it is possible that man is simply a watcher, aware of his mysterious limited existence.

2. A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one's birth." (Eccl., 7:1)

Is the day of our death better than the day of our birth because we leave a legacy behind? However even this idea is vain, because we pride ourselves in having something important enough to be a legacy. If there is no importance to you and your legacy, then why are you here? Why bother to exist, and think, and do?

3. "And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness in the flesh." (Eccl., 12:12)

Is incessant speech more valuable than a few well-chosen words? The less you have of something, the more valuable it becomes. "It is better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak and to remove all doubt."

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

1. "For just as for a flute-player, a sculptor, or an artist, and, in general, for all things that have a function or activity, the good and the 'well' is thought to reside in the function, so would it seem to be for man, if he has a function." (Aristotle 5)

Can man truly find his purpose? A flute-player has a clear purpose of playing the flute well, yet man does not have a clear purpose, other than doing what he is set out to do in a well, entirely good manner.

2. "For some identify happiness with virtue, some with practical wisdom, others with a kind of philosophic wisdom, others with these, or one of these, accompanied by pleasure or not without pleasure; while others include also external prosperity." (Aristotle 29)

Is happiness subjective? Can common ideals and objectives in life be only the creation of a group of individuals, where every individual has their own definition of happiness, and how to achieve it? How does this interfere with the organization of our society?

3. "Those who quickly show the marks of friendship to each other wish to be friends, but are not friends unless they both are lovable and know the fact; for a wish for friendship may arise quickly, but friendship does not." (Aristotle 29)

If two people know that they both want to be friends, and know each other better, (as with friends who eventually become a couple), does the knowledge of their similarities and the wish to become friends accelerate the process of acquiring friendship? This concept is seen in *The Little Prince* by Antoine Saint-Exupéry, when the Little Prince wishes to become friends with the fox, and the fox tells him that it takes time to become friends, and that every day they would become closer as friends, but not before this.

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

1. "Bodily Pleasure does not increase when the pain of want has been removed; after that it only admits of variation. The limit of mental pleasure, however, is reached when we reflect on these bodily pleasures and their related emotions, which used to cause the mind the greatest alarms."

Is bodily pleasure in reality as wrong as we are told? Or is it only considered as wrong because it is common to separate it from the mental and emotional aspects that form a part of it?

2. "No one chooses a thing seeing that it is evil; but being lured by it when it appears good in comparison to a greater evil, he is caught."

Are all things evil or good, or does it depend upon the light that is shone on it? Are ethics subjective? How can we know for sure that something is evil or good if we have had a limited set of experiences throughout only one life?

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

1. "But if you would both have these great things, along with power and riches, then you will not gain ever the latter, because you aim at the former too: but you will absolutely fail of the former, by which alone happiness and freedom are achieved." (Epictetus 1)

Cannot a person seek the great things, the great truths, as his ultimate goal, and at the same time enjoy power and riches? Can a person become something of an "entrepreneurial Buddhist" where he aims to live well, following good practices, and where he looks for power and riches for the pleasure of the challenge, but not for the results they bring?

2. "Does anyone bathe in a mighty little time? Don't say that he does it ill, but in a mighty little time. Does anyone drink a great quantity of wine? Don't say that he does ill, but that he drinks a great quantity. For unless you perfectly understand the principle from which anyone acts, how should you know if he acts ill? Thus you will not run the hazard of assenting to any appearances but such as you fully comprehend." (Epictetus: 45)

How can we judge what we see, as we are never truly able to understand the appearances? We never truly know the reasoning behind actions, and yet we are forced to judge our environment and others in order for us to take actions and decisions. Can these judgments ever be justified, ever be wise and correct? Is this part of our own limitations as human beings?

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

1. "Were you to live three thousand years, or even thirty thousand, remember that a man can lose only the life he is living, and he can live no other life than the one he loses. Whether he lives a long time or a short time amounts to the same thing, for the present moment is of equal duration for everyone, and that is all any man possesses. This is why the loss of life seems so momentary. A man cannot lose the past or the future – how can he be robbed of what is not his? Remember, then, these two truths: first, that everything from the beginning is just the same pattern repeating itself, and it makes no difference whether you watch this same show for a hundred years, or for two hundred, or for all eternity; and second, that the man who dies young loses not a jot more than the man who dies old. A man can only be deprived of the present moment, for this is all he has, and how can a man lose what he doesn't possess?" (Book 2, #14)

Is time subjective? Can every man be immortal in his own time seen that we all have only the present time while we are alive, and nothing more? Can we live forever in the continuity of right now, and after that, in the memory of other's thoughts? In *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury, towards the end one of his characters states that his grandfather is still alive, for he is inside his own memories and thoughts, and therefore he had not been forgotten. What, then, is to be alive?

2. "In the mind of a disciplined and pure man, you will find no sign of infection, no running sores, no wounds that haven't healed. It will not be this man's fate to quit life unfulfilled like the actor who fails to complete his lines and walks offstage before the play is ended. What is more, there is nothing obsequious or conceited about him; he neither depends on others nor is afraid to ask for help; he answers to no man for who he is and for what he does, yet he hides nothing." (Book 3, #8)

Is this the definition of a truly free mind, of a man who owes nothing to the world, and feels the same way? Is this a self-made man who knows the value of his own life, and his duty in fulfilling it with virtue? This appears to be the ultimate goal, for he is at peace with his role in life, and his right to exist there. As Max Erhmann's poem, *Desiderata*, states: "Beyond a wholesome discipline, be gentle with yourself. You are a child of the universe, no less than the trees and the stars; you have a right to be here. And whether or not it is clear to you, no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should."

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

1. "But upon man, at the moment of his creation, God bestowed seeds pregnant with all possibilities, the germs of every form of life. Whichever of these a man shall cultivate, the same will mature and bear fruit in him. If vegetative, he will become a plant; if sensual, he will become brutish; if rational, he will reveal himself a heavenly being; if intellectual, he will be an angel and the son of God." (pg. 2)

Has man all possible seeds within himself? Can every man truly conquer any aspect he chooses, whether it is to be vengeful or generous, crafty or incompetent, evil or good? Are we responsible for who we end up being in life, or do aspects such as family, culture, or status impact our capabilities to achieve great things?

2. "But what is the purpose of all of 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, but fell instead to the estate of brutes and uncomprehending beasts of burden..." (pg. 3)

Where does gratitude come into place upon accepting our fate? Is man supposed to, and able to give appreciation for his existence, however terrible and complex, however suffered and painful? Is gratitude a path towards greater understanding, towards illumination, forgiveness, and cleanliness of the spirit? Can we always be grateful towards the existence we are bound to experience?

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

1. "The time will perhaps come when I can review all this in the order in which it happened, using as a prologue that passage of your favorite Augustine: 'Let me remember my past mean acts and the carnal corruption of my soul, not that I love them, but that I may love Thee, my God.'" (pg. 3)

Just like Camus says, "We must know darkness so that we may know light." Must we always remember past wrong acts so that we learn from them, or must we leave them behind after some time so that they do not weight on us?

2. "This and like considerations toss in my breast again and again, dear father. I was glad of the progress I had made, but I wept over my imperfection and was grieved by the fickleness of all that men do. In this manner I seemed to have somehow forgotten the place I had come to and why, until I was warned to throw off such sorrows, for which another place would be more appropriate. I had better look around and see what I had intended to see in coming here." (pg. 4)

Isn't this a perfect comparison to be made about the world, by imagining that by here, they mean the world? By this change, one would leave those sorrows for another place that would be more appropriate. In this place we've all come to, we would focus only on the beauty of what is around us and not in the imperfection that grieves us.

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

1. "Fill your bowl to the brim and it will spill. Keep sharpening your knife and it will blunt. Chase after money and security and your heart will never unclench. Care about people's approval and you will be their prisoner. Do your work, then step back. The only path to serenity." (Chapter 9)

Is it not paradoxical that we are always looking for reassurance and guarantees in our lives, while the great masters tell us the road to happiness is carved from detachment, austerity, and understanding? If seeking for security and safety as a human species is part of our nature, (just like the wild animals in a forest will flee from danger), then can we ever gain complete and definite serenity?

2. "He who stands on tiptoes doesn't stand firm. He who rushes ahead doesn't go far. He who tries to shine dims his own light. He who defines himself can't know who he really is. He who

has power over others can't empower himself. He who clings to his work will create nothing that endures. If you want to accord with the Tao, just do your job, then let go." (Chapter 24)

How can we let go, when our time comes, if we are already less in contact with nature than what we used to be? The ego collides with this idea, as the ego is about our own self, our own importance. How can we eliminate, or shape the ego that we are part of? Is following the Tao a way to negate the self and deny our individuality?

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

1. "Yu replied: 'I understand: The music of earth sings through a thousand holes. The music of man is made on flutes and instruments. What makes the music of heaven?' Master Ki said: 'Something is blowing on a thousand different holes. Some power stands behind all this and makes the sounds die down. What is this power?'" (pg. 39)

What is the source that moves the rives, produces the wind, makes plants and trees grow, shakes the earth, moves the storms, and creates the waves in the ocean? Is this power the same as the one that moves man, beast, and the like? Are we one with our nature? If we are born from it, how come we are so detached from it these days, to the point of harming it? How can we know as a species the impact we have on our planet when everyone acts for only one person, but we are blinded to each other's actions?

2. "The tree on the mountain height is its own enemy. The grease that feeds the light devours itself. The cinnamon tree is edible: so it is cut down! The lacquer tree is profitable: they maim it. Every man knows how useful it is to be useful. No one seems to know How useful it is to be useless." (pg. 59)

Every person wants to know they are useful in their environment, however many forget that there is more to life than being useful. Man has the need to take advantage of whatever resources he sees in his way; for this reason he is always cutting down trees, shaping mountains, and harnessing the wind, etc. Can man find use in something that is useless? The loudest ones are the first to go, for the world knows of their existence. It is those who appear useless that are proved most necessary in the end.

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

1. "The brute is much more content with mere existence than man; the plant is wholly so; and man finds satisfaction in it just in proportion as he is dull and obtuse. Accordingly, the life of the brute carries less of sorrow with it, but also less of joy, when compared with the life of man; and while this may be traced, on the one side, to freedom from the torment of care and anxiety, it is also due to the fact that hope, in any real sense, is unknown to the brute." (On the Sufferings of the World, pg. 11)

Is the life of man much more valuable, then, than the life of the brute, or the life of an animal, for that matter? Is it better to live with all emotion than to refrain from some of it? Our misery is always present, just like our joy, because of the power of hope and apprehension. Man is always aware of he's situation in life, because he has the conscious reflection unique to himself.

“In a world where all is unstable, and nought can endure, but is swept onwards at once in the hurrying whirlpool of change; where a man, if he is to keep erect at all, must always be advancing and moving, like an acrobat on a rope – in such a world, happiness is inconceivable. How can it dwell where, as Plato says, continual Becoming and never Being is the sole form of existence?” (The Vanity of Existence, pg 19)

Then, following this train of thought, why should we live? Is our inability to ever achieve something eternal our curse? Man is always perplexed by the “injustice” of how little time he has left, and wonders at himself tirelessly about how he can leave a mark on the world. What if our purpose is not to leave a mark, but to take joy in what is actual and present? Is man’s ego his worse and only enemy? Is the ego the reason behind all of man’s problems, fears, and misery? Is ego responsible for greed, egoism, and fear? If we can never get rid of the ego, is this our personal curse, for it is to drive all of the misery in our lives? Why would we deserve a curse (or a sin, if seen from the Christian religion’s point of view)? Do we actually have one?

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

1. “What makes Sisyphus a hero is that he uses what freedom he has left to rebel against all restrictions on his freedom. If this myth is tragic, that is because its hero is conscious... The lucidity that was to constitute his torture at the same time crowns his victory. There is no fate that cannot be surmounted by scorn.” (Camus 53)

Does becoming conscious of oneself and one’s actions give us the power to control our own fate, our own outcome? Is this choice to rebel even within the smallest freedom truly a way to reclaim our victory? Can we always surmount our pain through our scorn? Is there a greater pain that cannot be rebelled against, for it is engrained so much within us that we cannot separate it from ourselves? There is a phrase carved into a concentration camp cell by a Jewish prisoner that reads, “If there is a God, he will have to beg my forgiveness.” This is an incredibly powerful statement, especially given the context where it is found, and it raises the question of whether everyone is capable of forgiving, of escaping their reality.

2. “One does not discover the absurd without tempted to write a manual of happiness.” (Camus 54)

Why is this? Is it because in realizing the absurd, one also realizes the beauty and the happiness? By defining the terrible and the fearful, the painful reality, do we create room for all other things to become wonderful, joyful things? It is in containing and in limiting the horrors that we set the boundaries and assign a greater space for beauty and joy.

3. “‘I conclude that all is well,’ says Œdipus, and that remark is sacred... It drives out of this world a god who had come into it with dissatisfaction and a preference for futile sufferings. It makes of fate a human matter, which must be settled among men... There is no sun without shadow, and it is essential to know the night.” (Camus 54)

Is this an absolute truth, or can one just as easily (and by other arguments, of course), determine that fate is not a human matter? Does one deem each perception as real by stating our belief in it? Does this follow the idea that whatever you think is real, is, in fact, real because you are saying so? Henry Ford said, “Whether you think you can, or you can’t, you’re right.” This may

be seen as a true statement; however, does it apply to anything else? For instance, "Whether you think heaven is real, or heaven isn't real, you're right." What happens if we are, in fact, able to shape our reality in the same way that we are able to shape our future plans, our ideas, and our actions? Is this even possible?

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

1. "He saw that no one felt for him, because no one even wished to grasp his position. Only Gerasim recognized it and pitied him. And so Ivan Ilych felt at ease only with him. He felt comforted when Gerasim supported his legs (sometimes all night long) and refused to go to bed, saying: 'Don't you worry, Ivan Ilych. I'll get sleep enough later on,' or when he suddenly became familiar and exclaimed: 'If you weren't sick it would be another matter, but as it is, why should I grudge a little trouble?' Gerasim alone did not lie; everything showed that he alone understood the facts of the case and did not consider it necessary to disguise them, but simply felt sorry for his emaciated and enfeebled master.'" (Tolstoy 42)

Are there two types of people in the world in the face of death? People like Gerasim, and people like Ivan Ilyich's family? Gerasim seems to look beyond the scenario he is in, understanding that all people go through a final deathly moment, a final outlook into life from the threshold of death. Ivan Ilyich's family, instead, is too worried about earthly possessions, social behavior, and vain wants.

2. "Having graduated from the School of Law and qualified for the tenth rank of the civil service, and having received money from his father for his equipment, Ivan Ilych ordered himself clothes at Scharmer's, the fashionable tailor, hung a medallion inscribed \*respice finem\* on his watch-chain, took leave of his professor and the prince who was patron of the school, had a farewell dinner with his comrades at Donon's first-class restaurant, and with his new and fashionable portmanteau, linen, clothes, shaving and other toilet appliances, and a travelling rug, all purchased at the best shops, he set off for one of the provinces where through his father's influence, he had been attached to the governor as an official for special service." (Tolstoy 13)

Do we, just like Ivan Ilyich, get ourselves carried away by the things we have in our lives? Is innovation, globalization and technology such a great advancement or is it desensitizing our satiation for need? In a world where every necessity is constantly met, are we losing empathy for others? This quote is also very ironic because Ivan Ilyich carries a medallion with the words "respice finem" in it, which means "consider the ending." Ivan Ilyich at this point in his life is very young, and has all the opportunities open to him. However the last thing that is in his mind is the end of his life, and because it seems so far away, he is blinded to his own fate.

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

1. "Under these circumstances, you foolish one, who refuses whom? Malunkyaputta, if anyone says, 'I will not lead the holy life under the Blessed One until he explains these questions,' he may die with these questions unanswered by the Tathagata." (Rahula 11)

Are these questions supposed to be universal and objective? Can we all answer these same questions if we look well into ourselves? Will any answer we give ourselves be insufficient, because we ourselves are insufficient in the knowledge of the creator, whoever or whatever it

may be? The Buddha clearly explains he is no deity, and that no further understanding is denied to man, but that instead man is the owner of his own nirvana and of his own peace. Can every man find his own peace?

2. "What is not necessary is anger or impatience, but the understanding of the question of suffering, how it comes about, and how to get rid of it, and then to work accordingly with patience, intelligence, determination, and energy." (Rahula, page 20)

It is said that you shouldn't fight fire with fire, as it only makes matters worse. If suffering is fire, are thus supposed to fight it not with anger or impatience, but with positive emotions such as determination and patience? Are we supposed to be "the bigger man" in our existential crisis, are we supposed to look into something bigger and greater than ourselves, and not dwell in fear or desperation? How can we be both the inquirer and the one to answer such questions at the same time? Can we at all? In the words of Epicurus, "Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is not omnipotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Then whence cometh evil? Is he neither able nor willing? Then why call him God?"