

Freshman Seminar: Meaning of Life  
Professor Cherkasova

**Collection of Quotes and Questions**

*Ecclesiastes*

1. *"There is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after." Ecclesiastes 1:11*

As humans, we are aware of our temporariness in this world, and we aim to be remembered after we die. We want to leave a legacy, create a lasting impression for the generations that come after us. What the author says in this quote is that the world will eventually forget about us. Life goes on without us. While I understand that our short time in the world is minuscule when looking at the big picture, I also disagree. What we do CAN make a difference for the future. We have so many examples of 'former things' that we still remember, that shifted the course of our existence. The earth does remember certain things we do. It is untrue that what we do makes no difference in the end.

2. *"For there is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever; seeing that which now is in the days to come shall all be forgotten. And how dies the wise man? as the fool." Ecclesiastes 2:17*

Is this fair? That ultimately, a 'wise man' and someone that works hard is no different than a 'fool'? Then what is the motivation to live a life pursuing wisdom? What is the point of trying to live a good life it will all be forgotten and we all end the same way?

3. *"All the labour of man is for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled." Ecclesiastes 6:7*

Why is it that we are never satisfied with what we already have? I don't think ambition is a bad thing, but why can't we ever be content? We will always want more and more, and we will always find something that we don't have, even though we have everything we need.

4. *"Rejoice, O young man, in your youth; and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth, and walk in the ways of your heart, and in the sight of your eyes: but know you, that for all these things God will bring you into judgement." Ecclesiastes 11:9*

Even though the author maintains throughout the book that joy and laughter are vain, he makes a point of enjoying them while we can, while our responsibilities are few and when we haven't experienced too much. He also says that while we explore our youth, we need to be careful. I feel like this this home with me as I go into a place in my life where I'm still young but I have the most freedom I have ever had. What I feel the author means is that we want to experiment and do whatever we want when we are young and seemingly carefree, but reminds us that nothing we do is free from consequences.

5. *"Vanity of vanities, says the preacher; all is vanity" Ecclesiastes 12:8*

This phrase is repeated throughout Ecclesiastes. It basically says that life is futile, pointless, meaningless. This depresses me a bit. Why then, do people do good things? Why do we carry out the life we do? It makes me question all that I hold important in life, since the author dismisses all of it as 'vain.'

6. *"For God shall bring every work into judgement, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil." Ecclesiastes 12:14*

Does this mean that this is our motivation? Our prize at the end for the good things we do is that God sees it and He will judge it? Will He reward us for it? If we live the 'foolish' life, are we ultimately punished for it in an afterlife? Are we punished for it during our lifetime?

#### *Nicomachean Ethics - Aristotle*

1. *"Shall we not, like archers who have a mark to aim at, be more likely to hit upon what is right? If so, we must try, in outline at least, to determine what it is, and of which of the sciences or capacities it is the object." Book I, Aristotle*

We need to have a plan. We must have some sort of direction as to where we are going, what we are aiming to achieve. This way, we have a better chance at achieving it than we would by just improvising. There is a quote that says "If you don't know where you are going, you might end up somewhere else" and this came to mind when I read this sentence.

2. *"It is the mark of an educated man to look for precision in each class of things just so far as the nature of the subject admits.." Book I, Aristotle*

I feel like we want to have everything in quantitative measures, or exact data of everything. We live in a society that tries to find an algorithm for everything, when there are some things that can't be measured like that. Some things are not exact and are not intended to be.

3. *"To entrust to chance what is greatest and most noble would be a very defective arrangement." Book I, Aristotle*

What is 'greatest and most noble'? What is so important we must take utmost care of it and not leave it to fate? Is it possible to escape fate?

4. *"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." Book I, Aristotle*

I think he is saying that if you do good and noble things, you should be happy forever, so if you are not happy, it must mean you are not noble and doing bad things. On one hand, I like the idea that he leaves happiness up to us. We decide, in a sense, if we want to be happy. We decide to make the best of what we are given, and everybody has that same chance. But on the other hand, we know this isn't entirely true. We can't ignore that some have less chances, or more obstacles to reach happiness.

5. *"It makes no small difference, then, whether we form habits of one kind or of another from our very youth; it makes a very great difference, or rather all the difference."* Book II, Aristotle

Aristotle reinforces the importance of a good upbringing, and I agree with him that the habits we create when we are young are hard to break as we grow. This is especially true when we consider what he says earlier, which is that our habits make our character. It's actually a little scary to think that the everyday choices I'm making now will define me as a person even later in life.

6. *"Again, we feel anger and fear without choice, but the virtues are modes of choice or involve choice."* Book II, Aristotle

Virtues, according to Aristotle, are things we choose to do. They are a conscious decision to do something. I like that he leaves the matter of excellence and happiness up to us, instead of leaving it up to chance. What I can also interpret from this sentence is that some circumstances in life we can't control and we shouldn't be judged for these. We shouldn't feel bad about being afraid or angry, but instead, make choices that allow us to overcome them.

7. *"For men are good in but one way, but bad in many."* Book II, Aristotle

There is only one way to be good? Is this what Aristotle means? Does this vary with different people, different telos, different meanings of good?

8. *"Evidently, then, we must cling to the middle state."* Book IV, Aristotle

I understand what Aristotle means by 'middle state.' However, I can't help but interpret his view on balance and sticking to the mean as being lukewarm, dull, and passionless. I agree that excess and defect is not good in a lot of things, but is this true for everything?

### *Epicurus*

1. *"...therefore a correct understanding that death is nothing to us makes the mortality of life enjoyable, not by adding to life a limitless time, but by taking away the yearning after immortality."* Letter to Menoecus, Epicurus

To Epicurus, we should look at death as something final and nothing happens after it, so it shouldn't scare us, thus making life more enjoyable. I agree with him in the fact that when we are so busy fearing death and what might happen to us when we die or as we die, we forget to live fully and take whole advantage of the short amount of time we have. Worrying about death won't stop it from eventually happening, so what is the point? I am, however, conflicted on whether death is truly final. I was raised to believe in an afterlife and such conviction is hard to shake off. I also think that if we live taking into account that afterlife, we can live a much more meaningful life.

2. *"6. In order to obtain protection from other men, any means for attaining this end is a natural good."*  
*The Principal Doctrines, Epicurus*

Does Epicurus mean that immorality or doing bad things is excused as long as we are defending ourselves from someone?

3. *"Poverty, if measured by the natural end, is great wealth; but wealth, if not limited, is great poverty."*  
*The Vatican Sayings, Epicurus*

I find this saying very interesting. It's hard to understand because it seems so contradicting, but the more I read it, the more it makes sense.

4. *"... in the study of philosophy delight coincides with knowledge; for pleasure does not follow learning; rather, learning and pleasure advance side by side."* *The Vatican Sayings, Epicurus*

Is this the opposite of what Ecclesiastes says, that in knowledge there is much sorrow? It's interesting how Epicurus relates knowledge with pleasure instead of sadness.

#### *Epictetus*

1. *"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."* *The Enchiridion, Epictetus*

I don't think Epictetus is right on this. Comparing your wife and child to ceramic cups? Really? I don't think ceramic cups compare to human value. It is extremely different appreciating a ceramic cup than loving your family. Clearly, when you lose a loved one, the feeling is not the same as when somebody close passes away. I don't believe that one is to be expected to show indifference towards losing your child or wife. After all, they are not the same as other humans, they hold a significantly deeper meaning to someone. It's also so much better to properly mourn somebody we loved, so I think pushing it aside or keeping it inside would only worsen a person's being.

2. *"For it is better to die with hunger, exempt from grief and fear, than to live in affluence with perturbation." The Enchiridion, Epictetus*

I like the notion that a guilty conscience is a heavier load than poverty. It also means that money does not equal happiness. Our society should learn that being rich isn't good if it's achieved through immoral means.

3. *"Don't allow your laughter be much, nor on many occasions, nor profuse." The Enchiridion, Epictetus*

Once again, I disagree with Epictetus' advice that we should suppress our emotions, especially those that are good for us to express. I understand having self control and not letting your emotions get the best of you, but laughter is something that we should be proud to express just because there are so many things that take laughter away. Laughter does so much good to oneself and to others around one, that we shouldn't hide it.

4. *"For, unless you perfectly understand the principle from which anyone acts, how should you know if he acts ill?" The Enchiridion, Epictetus*

Does Epictetus mean that we shouldn't judge based on acts but rather on intentions. I agree with his philosophy here because I also think that we don't know people's stories, their backgrounds, their struggles, so we can't judge what they do if we don't know what their motives are. This is how so many people are misunderstood because of how others perceived their actions. If we just took a small amount of time to consider others, we become more openminded and can learn new things.

5. *'It is circumstances that show what men are. Therefore when a difficulty falls upon you, remember that God, like a trainer of wrestlers, has matched you with a young young man. 'For what purpose?' you may say, Why, that you may become an Olympic conqueror; but it is not accomplished without sweat." Discourses, Epictetus*

This is my favorite quote so far. It illustrates how the bad things we go through shape us, make us stronger and more resilient. I also like how it is suggested that the adversities we have to endure are like a gift from God to make us better. It highlights the fact that we must work hard to get the things we wish for and that the journey to an accomplished life can be hard and with obstacles.

*The Emperor's Handbook - Marcus Aurelius*

1. *"A true Roman, my father didn't work about keeping up appearances. He felt no anxiety or stress." Book One, Marcus Aurelius*

Are these two things connected? Does the imposed necessity of putting on a mask and making other like us stress us out? If we were less worried about what others thought of us, would we find peace?

2. *"None of them can harm me, for none can force me to do wrong against my will." Book Two, Marcus Aurelius*

I find it interesting that Marcus Aurelius' definition of harm is going against one's principles, or harming one's soul. The first thing that comes to my mind, and I'm sure everyone else's when I think of 'harm' is physical harm. When taking this definition into account, another person is capable of harming you. But to Marcus Aurelius, you can only harm yourself by doing something wrong.

3. *"Go on abusing yourself, O my soul!" Book Two, Marcus Aurelius*

What does Marcus Aurelius mean by 'abusing'?

4. *"The truth is this: since death and life, glory and shame, pain and pleasure, wealth and poverty, all of these happen to the good and bad alike, without making the one worse or the other better, none of these things can be in itself either good or bad." Book Two, Marcus Aurelius*

What does Marcus Aurelius mean when he says 'make one worse'? Does he mean that the circumstances we face don't happen to us because we are good or bad, therefore they can't make us good or bad? Is he trying to say that death and life, wealth or poverty, can't affect us? I would think they do affect us, and they affect the bad and the good differently.

5. *"The end for all rational beings is to obey the reason and law of the one hallowed City and Republic." Book Two, Marcus Aurelius*

That is the one hallow City and Republic? Does Marcus Aurelius mean a high-power kingdom or does he mean the state, the country?

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

1. *"5. Show by a cheerful look that you don't need the help or comfort of others. Standing up – not propped up." Book Three, Marcus Aurelius*

Is Marcus Aurelius saying that it's wrong to ask for help, or to need help from others? On one hand, I do see his point; for me it's also important to be able to achieve certain things by my own merit. And I imagine it would be especially true if one inherits an empire. However, if one needs help, or even comfort, I think it is ok to seek others. We need other people sometimes.

2. *"3. Nowhere is there a more idyllic spot, a vacation home more private and peaceful, than in one's own mind, especially when it is furnished in such a way that the merest inward glance induces ease (and by ease I mean the effects of an orderly and well-appointed mind, neither lavish nor crude.) Book Four, Marcus Aurelius*

It's such a nice feeling to have peace of mind and a clean conscience. I think Marcus Aurelius is talking about this. He talks about our mind like a "vacation home", and this makes me think of taking a break from the outside world by just reflecting or meditating.

3. *"3. This world is change; this life, opinion" Book Four, Marcus Aurelius*

I really like this quote because emphasizes that life is what we make it out to be. By saying that life is "opinion," I think he is saying we see life as we want to see it. He also touches on the fact that the world is constantly changing and that emphasizes his philosophy of going with the flow and not trying to prevent change.

4. *"24. If you would be happy, limit your activities to a few." Book Four, Marcus Aurelius*

Many times we fill our schedules and glorify a busy lifestyle that just burns us out and doesn't let us enjoy life. By limiting our activities, not only are we going to do better at them since we would pay more attention to them, but we are also going to have time to just sit and enjoy life.

5. *"49. I hear you say, "How unlucky that this should happen to me!" Not at all! Say instead, "How lucky that I am not broken by what has happened and am not afraid of what is about to happen." Book Four, Marcus Aurelius*

I really like what he says here. It reminds me that I can't control the things that happen to me, but I can rise above them and be a stronger, better person because of it. It's rare that we think about hardships as "lucky" because we forget to look at the good that can come out of them.

6. *"22. You get what you deserve because you would rather become good tomorrow than do good today." Book Eight, Marcus Aurelius*

I find this to be so true. Everybody wants to do good and change the world for the better, but that can't be done by just wishing for it. We want the world to be a good place but we are not willing to actually get off our butts and do what's necessary for this to happen. We expect that our good thoughts will be enough to make the world better, but put off actually doing something that requires effort from our part. We complain about our messed up society but we simply encourage it with our inaction. If we keep thinking and living this way, nothing that we want to change will ever change.

7. *"58. He who fears death fears either the loss of sensation or some new sensation. But if he feels no sensation, how will he feel hurt? And if he experiences a new sensation, it will be as a new creature, yet still alive." Book Eight, Marcus Aurelius*

When I read this, I tried to understand why I'm so scared of the idea of death. Marcus Aurelius seems so at peace with idea of ceasing to exist. His argument is that we won't know when we are dead. It's really hard for me to understand this and I can't really explain why.

*Oration on the Dignity of Man - Giovanni Pico della Mirandola*

1. *"We have made you a creature neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal, in order that you may, as the free and proud shaper of your own being, fashion yourself in the form you may prefer."*

According to Pico della Mirandola, as humans, God granted us the freedom to shape our lives into whatever we desire. When comparing this point of view to the ones of other thinkers, such as Marcus Aurelius, they agree on the point that we define our world, but differ in the sense that Pico puts humans in the center, while Marcus Aurelius repeatedly states that we are insignificant when taking into consideration the immensity of the entire universe. I find this contradiction to be very interesting.

2. *"...if rational, he will reveal himself a heavenly being; if intellectual, he will be an angel and the son of God."*

The way I see this fragment is the change of perspective that was being born in the time of Pico della Mirandola. Before, men were discouraged, or in some extreme cases charged for heresy, if they used critical thinking and questioned the church's teachings. When Pico says that intellection actually brings one closer to God, he goes against that. What Pico means is that by exercising our intellectual thought, we are not rebelling against God, but quite the opposite.

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, (...) and finally that we may not, through abuse of the generosity of a most indulgent Father, pervert the free option which he has given us from a saving to a damning gift."*

This is Pico's meaning of life: to appreciate the world we have and use our free will to wisely shape our lives into what we want them to be. I think this is a nice idea. The way I see it, he is basically saying that we each have the right to do with our lives what we want to, as long as we are not hurting the world around us.

*The Ascent of Mont Ventoux - Francesco Petrarch*



1. *"The life we call blessed is located in a high peak. 'A narrow way,' they say, leads up to it. Many hilltops intervene, and we must proceed 'from virtue to virtue' with exalted steps."*

I like the comparison he makes to life being like a mountain. In the entire letter, it was interesting to see how his hiking trip was a whole metaphor for life. How, like he says, a harder way with many obstacles is the one that leads up to the high peak.

2. *"I love, but what I should love not to love, what I should wish to hate. Nevertheless I love t, but against my will, under compulsion and in sorrow and mourning"*

What could be the things that Petrarch doesn't want to love but loves? How can you want to hate something but not hate it?

*Tao Te Ching - Lao Tzu*

1. *"3. Practice not-doing, and everything will fall into place."*

What I think Lao Tzu says is that we just let things take their natural course, they will turn out fine. I can see how sometimes, interfering with things can create more chaos, and how things usually turn out fine if we let them be. But I can't understand how this can be put into practice, specially when we are taught that we will achieve our goals by *doing*, and by creating our own destiny. We are taught to relate "not-doing" with laziness, and that this practice will keep us from our goals.

2. *"8. When you are content to be simply yourself and don't compare or compete, everybody will respect you."*

I feel like this goes so against our Western way of thinking about competition and ambition. It is entirely the opposite. But it makes so much more sense.

3. *"19. Throw away holiness and wisdom, and people will be a hundred times happier. Throw away morality and justice, and people will do the right thing. Throw away industry and profit, and there won't be any thieves."*

I really enjoy the contrasting pairings that are used through the book. This one struck me because what we think leads to certain result often does the opposite. When we create expectations and make up standards for people, they will naturally fall short. Lao Tzu suggests taking these away and says that people will naturally get there.

4. *"23. If you open yourself to loss, you are at one with loss and you can accept it completely."*

I like this quote because it's the opposite of what previous philosophies teach, where we are supposed to contain and suppress grief. It has been shown that facing grief directly is the most effective way of coping, just like Lao Tzu says.

5. *"53. When rich speculators prosper while farmers lose their land; when government officials spend money on weapons instead of cures; when the upper class is extravagant and irresponsible while the poor have nowhere to turn – all this is robbery and chaos. It is not in keeping with the Tao."*

This is a clear reflection of what our modern day society looks like. It's crazy to think about how long ago this book was written yet how it still applies to today's world.

6. *"72. When they lose their sense of awe, people turn to religion. When they no longer trust themselves, they begin to depend on authority"*

What does losing our sense of awe mean? I understand that when we lose our sense of wonder, we begin to distrust ourselves, and turn to an outside source of authority to guide us. The whole point of Tao Te Ching, I feel, is going back to self-reliance and self-guidance. We turn spirituality into a organized religion but doing so, we go against its nature.

#### *The Way of Chuang Tzu - Chuang Tzu*

1. *"The true men of old were not afraid when they stood alone in their views. No great exploits. No plans. If they failed, no sorrow. No self-congratulation in success." Chuang Tzu, The True Man*

I think it is very important to know that it is ok to stand alone in our views, and that others' approval of our beliefs and opinions should not be what shapes them. Also, I really liked the idea that the 'true men' just lived, it didn't matter if they made a mistake or succeeded in something, they didn't let those circumstances affect them.

2. *"True men of old slept without dreams, woke without worries." Chuang Tzu, The True Man*

I found this part interesting and a little conflicting at the same time. When I think about it, my future dreams and ambitions are what cause me to worry sometimes. But, what would I live for if it weren't for the dreams I have. I find that the possibility of them coming true and knowing that I'm working towards them, although they worry me at times, are also what makes life interesting and worth living.

3. *"What do you think: is it better to give up one's life and leave a sacred shell as an object of cult in a cloud of incense three thousand years, or better to live as a plain turtle dragging its tail in the mud?" Chuang Tzu, The Turtle*

I really enjoyed this story. Sometimes we get caught up in what looks good, or the shallow aspects of life, when what is a lot better is just living out our nature and doing what makes us happy. It's for nothing to be admired and revered by others when we are not doing what makes us happy.

4. *"His skill has not changed. But the prize divides him. He cares. He thinks more of winning than of shooting – and the need to win drains him of power."* Chuang Tzu, *The Need to Win*

I find that sometimes the drive to win is what gives me power and makes me better. I understand that the skill is the same, but motivation is empowering and makes a big difference. Not caring can sometimes have the opposite effect of what Chuang Tzu is describing. Talent or skill doesn't work unless there is motivation behind it.

*On the Suffering of the World - Arthur Schopenhauer*

1. *"Could we foresee it, there are times when children might seem like innocent prisoners, condemned, not to death, but to life, and as yet all unconscious of what their sentence means."*

I find this so depressing. We see children as beings that have their whole lives ahead of them, so much to experience, so many dreams to realize, so much beauty to see, but Schopenhauer sees it in another way. For him, children are doomed to live a life full of misery that they won't be able to escape. He implies that death is preferable to life.

2. *"Life is a task to be done."*

Again, this is really depressing. I don't know what happened to Schopenhauer that made him think this way, but I like thinking that life is something to enjoy, not just something to get over with. If we look at life the way Schopenhauer does, how can we lead any sort of happy life? If we have this outlook on life, we won't ever be able to appreciate everything life has to offer. It's important to look beyond our sufferings to see that life can be beautiful.

3. *"Following upon this, there is one respect in which brutes show real wisdom when compared with us – I mean, their quiet, placid enjoyment of the present moment. The tranquility of mind which this seems to give them often puts us to shame for the many times we allow our thoughts and our cares to make us restless and discontented."*

I think this thought goes along with the belief that "ignorance is bliss." If one is not constantly thinking and worrying throughout the day, one can genuinely enjoy the present with peace. I agree with Schopenhauer on this one because he stresses how we let our worries get us worked up and anxious instead of enjoying the present moment without care. I know that I always find myself getting troubled or restless over trivial things and forget to enjoy life. I don't think putting our worries aside for a moment to enjoy what is really important means one is a brute, but it is something everybody should try to do.

4. *There are two things which make it impossible to believe that this world is the successful work of an all-wise, all-good, and, at the same time, all-powerful Being; firstly, the misery which abounds in it everywhere; and secondly, the obvious imperfection of its highest product, man, who is a burlesque of what he should be.*"

The part where Schopenhauer explains why God is either very cruel or does not exist really struck with me because it is definitely something that crosses my mind a lot. I think it is the complete opposite of what Pico della Mirandola suggested when he talked about man being the greatest creation, with infinite possibilities and the ability to transform himself into anything he desired. It is hard to think the way Pico does because we see every day that humans decide to do horrible things and fail terribly at being the "greatest creation". It's very difficult to imagine a good God letting all of the horrible things that happen in the world happen.

5. *"If you accustom yourself to this view of life you will regulate your expectations accordingly, and cease to look upon all its disagreeable incidents, great and small, its sufferings, its worries, its misery, as anything unusual or irregular; nay, you will find that everything is as it should be, in a world where each of us pays the penalty of existence in his own peculiar way."*

I think looking at life with very low expectations and overlooking the suffering and bad things going on around us can be good, but not all the time. While it's not productive to only focus on the misery of life, sometimes bad circumstances serve as a wake-up call and remind us that we have to fight for justice, or equality for example. It's not good to live in a bubble where everything is nice all the time and ignore problems. I think setting our expectations at a reasonable level is good because no one wants to be crushed when they find out life can be very hard and has a lot of suffering. What I didn't quite understand about this quote is the idea of "penalty of existence". Why are we paying for simply being born?

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

1. *"...for that which in the next moment exists no more, and vanishes utterly, like a dream, can never be worth a serious effort."*

I think things that are short-lived are usually the things that are worth the most effort. Sometimes, those are the most beautiful or precious things. If we think about it, everything in life has the possibility of being gone in the next second, but that doesn't mean that they are not worth any effort. To the contrary, there is beauty in their impermanence and they can bring a lot of joy.

2. *"Human life must be some kind of mistake."*

It's weird to think about life as a mistake. There are so many good things in life that we can't forget about, that make it all worth it. Humans, although they have the ability to be horrible and cruel, can also be extremely compassionate and loving in response to evil. It seems so difficult to

go about living without a purpose, as if we were put on earth by mistake. I find the misery of life a lot more bearable when I think that things have a deeper meaning to them and that we can do our part in making life easier and better.

*Confession - Leo Tolstoy*

1. *"I felt that what I had been standing on had collapsed and that I had nothing left under my feet. What I had lived on no longer existed, and there was nothing left..."*

I can relate to Tolstoy's feeling of having everything you ever thought was true or everything you relied on for meaning, fall to pieces. It can be so hard to deal with something like that, when the way you are living life suddenly makes no sense to you or you find that maybe it's not the correct way to live life. What is one supposed to do in a situation like that? It can be hard to explain to others what you are going through and even harder to just change the way you have been living your entire life.

*The Myth of Sisyphus - Albert Camus*

1. *"At each of those moments when he leaves the heights and gradually sinks toward the lairs of the gods, he is superior to his fate. He is stronger than his rock."*

I really like how Camus showed that Sisyphus was able to control his terrible fate and how he overcame his "rock." Even if he had no way out and he knew this, he was still able to make the best of his circumstances.

2. *"If the descent is thus sometimes performed in sorrow, it can also take place in joy. This word is not too much."*

This is so true. We must remember that even if we can't control what happens to us, we can control how to react and we always have the option of feeling happiness instead of sadness. When I first read this quote, I misread it and thought it said "This WORLD is not too much" and that is what caught my attention more. It reminded me of being overwhelmed and how I can control how I decide to cope with everything that is going on. I also like to look at the quote as saying that "joy" is not "too much" because sometimes it seems impossible to feel joy and it feels like too big of an effort but Camus reminds me that it is possible and not too hard to achieve.

3. *"There is no sun without shadow, and it is essential to know the night."*

I agree very strongly with Camus on this because I believe that in order to really appreciate the good things in life, we must have experienced some of the bad things. Sometimes, some suffering is helpful to keep things in perspective and really be happy when good things happen. Because of this, suffering can be useful and a good thing in the long run.

*The Death of Ivan Ilych - Leo Tolstoy*

1. *"Ivan Ilych's life had been most simple and most ordinary and therefore most terrible." Leo Tolstoy, Chapter II*

I found this quote troubling because it seems to me that most of us are living a simple, ordinary life like Ivan. So why is this type of life the most terrible? Sure, a more eventful and transcending life would be great, but there can be happiness found in the simple life as well.

2. *"Caius really was mortal and it was right for him to die; but for me, little Vanya, Ivan Ilych, with all my thoughts and emotions, it's altogether a different matter. It cannot be that I ought to die. That would be too terrible." Leo Tolstoy, Chapter VI*

Isn't it strange that when we think of somebody else dying, we recognize that everybody does and it is a normal thing of life, but when we think of ourselves dying, it seems impossible and unfair? I think Tolstoy really encapsulates this thought when he says that we think of others as simply being, while when we think of ourselves, we think of our experiences and emotions and perhaps don't think of others as people like us.

3. *"And the further he departed from childhood and the nearer he came to the present the more worthless and doubtful were the joys." Leo Tolstoy, Chapter IX*

Why is it that we think of our childhood as the happiest times and as we grow older, our memories get less happy? Is it the absence of worries and responsibilities? Is it the innocence that is so characteristic of children that made us happier than now? It's kind of sad to think that life gets worse as we grow older, because it's nice to look forward to better things, not worse.

4. *"It occurred to him that his scarcely perceptible attempts to struggle against what was considered good by the most highly placed people, those scarcely noticeable impulses which he had immediately suppressed, might have been the real thing, and all the rest false. And his professional duties and the whole arrangement of his life and of his family, and all his social and official interests, might all have been false." Leo Tolstoy, Chapter XI*

I found this very interesting because sometimes we get caught up in doing what is proper and good in other people's eyes and we restrain ourselves from doing what others think is wrong. We never really stop and think that maybe what others think is right is really not correct but is superficial and empty. Perhaps what is real and meaningful is what we don't allow ourselves to enjoy. It's sad that Ivan only realized this as he was dying, and wasn't able to live this way at all.

*What The Buddha Taught - Walpola Rahula*

1. "To force oneself to believe and to accept a thing without understanding is political. and not spiritual or intellectual." Chapter I

The passage where he talks about blind faith really hit home with me because I was brought up to believe in trusting God even when I didn't understand what anything meant. Buddha's teaching emphasizes that one must understand what they believe in in order to really believe and I think I agree with that because forcing yourself to believe in something you have doubts about is truly just trying to deceive yourself.

2. "So concord is good: Let all listen, and be willing to listen to the doctrines professed by others." Chapter I

I feel like this teaching of tolerance towards other religions is really lost in the world and it's very sad that some people choose to do acts of hate or terrorism towards others in the name of their religion. We can learn so much from other ways of thinking by simply listening peacefully.

3. "From this is evident that it is no question of pessimism or optimism, but that we must take account of the pleasures of life as well as of its pain and sorrows, and also of freedom from them, in order to understand life completely and objectively." Chapter II

I like this quote because it tells you that you can't look at life as if it were all good, and you also can't look at only the negative aspects of it. We must take all of the experiences life offers us into account to be able to understand and define it. Life wouldn't be complete without pain and suffering, but there is also beauty in life and a way to be free of suffering. I think that by truly understanding this, we can have peace of mind and live happily.

4. "A happy feeling, a happy condition in life, is not permanent, not everlasting. It changes sooner or later. When it changes, it produces pain, suffering, unhappiness." Chapter II

Why can't anything happy remain forever? Why does it have to end and change to suffering? Sometimes when I'm really happy and at a very good place in my life I get scared because I can only imagine that something will happen eventually that will end the happiness. And I don't like the idea of going through life questioning every happy feeling and wondering when or how it will end.

5. "...all economic, political and social problems are rooted in this selfish 'thirst'." Chapter III

I think this is extremely relevant today. Corruption, war, income inequality, among other issues, are all product of man's greed and the insatiable hunger for power. The only way to effectively combat the problems that we see around the world is to cut it at the roots and change the mentality of society.

6. "Now, what is Absolute Truth? According to Buddhism, the Absolute Truth is that there is nothing absolute in the world, that everything is relative, conditioned and impermanent..."  
Chapter III

Isn't this kind of contradictory? How can the absolute truth be that nothing is absolute?

Siddhartha - Hermann Hesse

1. "Wisdom cannot be imparted. Wisdom that a wise man attempts to impart always sounds like foolishness to someone else ... Knowledge can be communicated, but not wisdom. One can find it, live it, do wonders through it, but one cannot communicate and teach it."

I think this quote makes a lot of sense and it's very important to keep in mind. A lot of times we think learning is just getting knowledge from somebody else and while it's helpful, it's not everything and it's not complete without true wisdom, which can't be imparted. I think it's crucial to encourage real life experience and getting out of one's comfort zone to learn wisdom. We can't live through someone else's version of wisdom.

2. "I have always believed, and I still believe, that whatever good or bad fortune may come our way we can always give it meaning and transform it into something of value."

Again, this is so true and important to keep in mind always. It's one of the few things that most philosophers agree with: you can't control what circumstances occur to you, but you decide what to make of them. And it's a beautiful thing to think, because yes, horrible suffering does happen, but we can make the best of it and discover something great because of it; we can channel out misery through art or use our bad experiences to help others going through the same thing. We have the choice of feeling fortunate or otherwise.

3. "Your soul is the whole world."

I'm not sure why I like this saying that much, but I really do. It just makes me think of my soul as something that encompasses so much.

4. "It seems to me, Govinda, that love is the most important thing in the world."

I like that Siddhartha came to this realization because love is definitely so important and it's something that is so powerful. Love, in it's every form, can make such a big difference in our lives.