

**UNIT 1: A Life Worth Living**

**The Holy Bible: Standard King James Version**

Ecclesiastes

"All things are full of labour; man cannot utter it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing." (1:8)

- This is a frightening concept; that as humans we are striving for more than we are capable of achieving. Is the ultimate fulfillment we are searching for only theoretically not pragmatically possible? What more could the eyes want than to see? What more can the eyes do than see?

"The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of the fools is in the house of delight." (7:4)

- Although a rather disheartening idea, I agree that wisdom brings grief and as such those that are foolish enjoy delight. I have come to learn that life is paradoxical, that every action has an equal and opposite reaction. Technically, wisdom is good so it should be in the house of delight, and foolishness is the lesser of the two and thus should be in the house of mourning. But roses have thorns and children grow up. Wisdom puts you in the house of mourning because the kind of knowledge you attain and the wider you made your peripheral, the more of the good and the more of the bad you'll be able to see.

**Nicomachean Ethic (excerpts)**

Aristotle

**Book 1: The Goal of Life**

"But with regard to what happiness is they differ, and the many do not give the same account as the wise. For the former think it is some plain and obvious thing, like pleasure, wealth, or honour; they differ, however, from one another- and often even the same man identifies it with different things, with health when he is ill, with wealth when he is poor" (1.4; pg. 22)

- "The many" being the general public and the "wise" being the smaller more educated elite, Aristotle here is saying that happiness, although agreed by all as the *telos* of

human life, is represented in different ways for every individuals and sometimes even different for the same individual -contingent on circumstance. So is happiness contingent on what our circumstances are or how we react to our circumstances? Although a small distinction it makes a big difference. For instance, wealth is a necessary but insufficient factor to happiness, but could gratitude and appreciation for what one already has instead of what one lacks bring true fulfillment and happiness? But gratitude is self-sustainable, an ability to appreciate what you have no matter how much or little that is. So then is that a 'good' in itself or is it a factor of happiness?

"Life seems to be common even to plants, but we are seeking what is peculiar to man." (1.7; pg. 24)

- This brings up the importance of distinguishing living from just existing. The *telos* of human life must be a thing unique to humans because if it wasn't there would be no need for us to exist. Unlike other animals, we've been given the power of consciousness, so what do we do with it? Mathematically, the probability that you exist, factoring in everything that makes you uniquely you-- time and place you were born, country and parents you were born to, etc., is 1 in 400,000 trillion. In other words, your existence is almost technically non-existent, and thus all these unique factors must mean there is a unique purpose to each of us and humanity as a whole.

## Book 2: Moral Virtue

"Neither by nature, then, nor contrary to nature do the virtues arise in us; rather we are adapted by nature to receive them, and are made perfect by habit". (1, page 27)

- I agree that the ends we should strive for to live a just life are not directly related, in a good or bad way, but instead are a result of nature. In this context, I understood nature more as evolution and, as such, this quote to mean that virtuous traits are not an evolutionary trait but traits that we've been able to possess because we've evolved into conscious beings.

"That moral virtue is a mean, then, and in what sense it is so, and that it is a mean between two vices, the one involving excess, the other deficiency, and that it is such because its character is to aim at what is intermediate in passions and in actions." (9, page 33)

- This quote really put things into perspective to me -it put into words this understanding about life that I always had within me. I never saw myself or my world as black-or-white. I always thought good people do bad stuff and bad people do good stuff; you can eat a bag of chips and still be a generally healthy person. It's about the intermediate -not excess, not deficiency.

#### **Book 4: Examples of Moral Virtues**

“The magnificent man is like an artist; for he can see what is fitting and spend large sums tastefully. For, as we said at the beginning, a state of character is determined by its activities.” (2, page 36)

- I disagree that a magnificent man must spend large sums. Any person can be magnificent if they can see what is fitting and spend their sums tastefully; it doesn't have to be large but instead well spent for the resources they have. I think this is an important distinction because it would include a new group of people (the poor) into Aristotle's idea of a magnificent man. If magnificence is a characteristic and characteristics are made of virtues, why is a magnificent man only a wealthy man?

“The man who is angry at the right things and with the right people, and, further, as he ought, when he ought, and as long as he ought, is praised.” (5, page 39)

- This is a very odd concept when seen through a religious sense cause anger as a whole is condemned and, usually, a person is told to repress and ignore their anger. Although I do think dealing with your anger, instead of trying to bury it, who or what determines the right people, right time, right duration? If it's ambiguous or unique to everyone than how can you know if they are doing it right?

#### **Book 8: Friendship**

“For without friends no one would choose to live, though he had all other goods [...] for what is the use of such prosperity without the opportunity of beneficence, which is exercised chiefly and in the laudable form towards friends?” (1, page 41)

- Is it a sign or strength or weakness that, as humans, we are so dependent on each other? Shouldn't we be able to enjoy what we worked for regardless of our social status? If not, does it mean that true gratitude cannot be achieved if we don't have a good social standing? And is it true gratitude if its dependent on others.

#### **Book 10: Pleasure and Happiness**

“If reason is divine, then, in comparison with man, the life according to it is divine in comparison with human life. But we must not follow those who advise us, being men, to think of human things, and, being mortal, of mortal things, but must, so far as we can, make ourselves immortal, and strain every nerve to live in accordance with the best thing in us [...] this life therefore is also the happiest.” (7, page 46)

- This quote, I think, is the best one to summarize one of Aristotle's main teachings; which is to overcome our fear of death all we need to do is live a full life in which case we would have achieved the level of pleasure, happiness, and sense of peace we admire the gods for.

### Letter to Menoeceus

#### Epicurus

"Death, therefore, the most awful of evils, is nothing to us, seeing that, when we are, death is not come, and, when death is come, we are not" (Chapter 3, page 49)

- This is another concept I had an understanding for but didn't know how to articulate. It is a rather reassuring idea to anyone that does fear death to know that you and this entity cannot co-exist. What if the sun was scared of nighttime? We would explain to it that he would never have to deal with nighttime because his presence alone means it's not night.

"And even as men choose of food not merely and simply the larger portion, but the more pleasant, so the wise seek to enjoy the time which is most pleasant and not merely that which is longest." (Chapter 4, page 49)

- Enjoy life for the quality not quantity. All wise man would choose a short, good life over a long unfulfilled one, but a fool would just strive to make it to old age without considering if the quality of his day to day life is good.

"For man loses all semblance of mortality by living in the midst of immortal blessings." (Ch.11, Pg. 50)

- As humans, are we capable of living in the midst of immortal blessings? Or is our mortal life limited to blessings accordingly? The way I see it, humans striving to live in the midst of immortal blessings would be like the eyes not being satisfied with seeing, or the ears with hearing; because there are other sensations that could be enriching but not within the ability of the eyes or ears. But then again, if all senses worked together, each one would experience a greater pleasure, which is what Epicurus is trying to teach.

### The Principle Doctrines

#### Epicurus

"Unlimited time and limited time afford an equal amount of pleasure, if we measure the limits of the pleasure by reason." (19, pg. 52)

- This concept makes death insignificant. It is refreshing to hear (or read I guess) that there might not be a pleasure ceiling. This quote addresses my concerns about the last quote and explains that pleasure perused in accordance with reason is not limited by death, instead death is just the inevitable end of the road but has no effect on how and what you experience on the journey

“The same conviction which inspires confidence that nothing we have to fear is eternal or even of long duration, also enables us to see that in the limited evils of this life nothing enhances our security so much as friendship.” (28, pg. 52)

- Although I do agree that the impermanence of life should bring peace because it also means the impermanence of all negative virtues, don't we hear or dislike the “evils of this life” because even a day spent angry or sad is lowering the mean pleasure of our lives? But I guess Epicurus is saying that those are too small of pieces to affect the larger picture and as such we should react to them accordingly.

### The Vatican Sayings

#### Epicurus

“The wealth required by nature is limited and is easy to procure; but the wealth required by vain ideals extends to infinity.” (8, page 54)

- I completely agree and this quote made me think of Gandhi's quote that reads as follows. “The world has enough for everyone's need, but not enough for everyone's greed.”

“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.” (16, page 55)

- As we say today, the road to hell is paved by good intentions. Which is a very good point, because who would intentionally choose evil? We are all lured by what we think is good and it is after we chose it that we realize it was a deception.

“While we are on the road, we must try to make what is before us better than what is past; when we come to the road's end, we feel a smooth contentment” (48, page 57)

- This reminded me of Emily Dickinson's quote “Forever is composed of nows”. This quote brings peace because it breaks up this huge thing we call life into more digestible bits and pieces. We think planning and stressing for the future is a rational thing to do but it really isn't, because the future is not something bad or good that is waiting for us but instead an end result of every today we get to live.

“Nothing is enough to someone for whom what is enough is little” (68, page 58)

- The basic idea behind gratitude. I think if most people understood this and saw it in their lives they would start appreciate what they have. How could one be at peace and fulfilled if enough is too little for them.

### The Enchiridion (The Handbook)

#### Epictetus

“Don’t demand that things happen as you wish, but wish that they happen as they do happen, and you will go on well.” (8, page 61)

- My mom used to always say that life isn’t what happens to you but how you react to it and I think both these lessons are rooted in the same concept. That we are not defined by our circumstances but the virtues within is, that we are able to train and strengthen, to be content in good times and bad.

“When any person harms you, or speaks badly of you, remember that he acts or speaks from a supposition of its being his duty. Now, it is not possible that he should follow what appears right to you, but what appears so to himself. Therefore if he judges from a wrong appearance, he is the person hurt, since he too is the person deceived. [...] for you will say upon every occasion, “it seemed so to him.” (42, page 68)

- Respect a person that speaks ill of you for the basic ability to say what appears right to them. This is a unique but effective way to deal with people’s negative opinions so as to not be disturbed by them. Just say “it seemed so to him” and know that what is to him does not have to mean it is fact nor accurate.

### Discourses (excerpts)

#### Epictetus

“If you consider yourself as detached from other men, it is according to nature to live to old age, to be rich, to be healthy. If you consider yourself as a man a part of a certain whole, it is for the sake of that whole that you [...] in some cases, die prematurely.” (2.1, page 71)

- If all else fails, and you can’t console you fear of dead, then accept it as your civil duty as a global citizen. I think this is a very important concept, but very odd to see from Epictetus. During that time, we’re people very divided in terms of birthplace,

ethnicity, and even socio-economic status? How could we all be global citizens if we are not all equal?

“For if the good consists in the will, and the evil also in the will, see if what you say is not this: “What then, since that man has hurt himself by doing an unjust act to me, shall I not hurt myself by doing some unjust act to him?”

- I have always lived by this and have tried to explain this to my friends in an effort to persuade them to be the better person in a situation but, of course, I wasn't able to articulate it as simply and effectively as this. This reminds me of a Buddhist saying that reads “Holding on to anger is like grasping a hot coal with the intent of throwing it at someone else; you are the one who gets burned.”

### *The Emperor's Handbook*

#### Marcus Aurelius

“Alexander the Platonist cautioned me against saying or writing in a letter, either too often or without absolutely needing to, “I'm too busy,” as well as against using the demands of work as a constant excuse for ducking my social obligations and familial duties” (Book 1, page 21)

- Reading this forced a self-reflection because I do this too often and I thought of it as harmless but in this context I understand the negative effect it has on the big picture of my life. Is anybody really ever too busy as often as they claim to be? Because life is really about priorities and we have to shift and balance these priorities accordingly. My dad taught me that I will never have time to do everything I want but I will always have enough time to do what I've convinced myself I need to do, and this seems like a stoic idea echoed by Marcus Aurelius in this warning that being so busy with one aspect of your life while neglecting other is a greater disservice to your greater human experience than anything else.

“The truth is this: since death and life, glory and shame, pain and pleasure, wealth and poverty, all of these things happen to the good and the bad alike, without making the one worse or the other better, none of these things can be in itself either good or bad.” (Book 2, page 30)

- All these factors, Marcus Aurelius points out, are part of the human experience and no human is exempt from the pains of life because they are “good” nor undeserving of the pleasures of life because they are “bad”. This might be controversial in our times, but it ties back to Marcus's idea that humans are meant to work together no matter who they are or how they function individually; like the different parts of our bodies.

“We must get on with our lives, then, not only because we are closing in on death with each passing day, but because our mental capacities may desert us before death decides to take us.” (Book 3, page 33)

- I completely agree with this. Most people expect to have the ability to live a long, happy life but few understand that there are many factors that diminish that ability. The healthiest of us can reach 70 years old and develop Alzheimer's, some more fortunate might just lose physical mobility to old age while maintaining their mental capacity. And I would argue that losing one's mental capacity is a fate worse than death. Because it is easy to remember a person for who they were after they've died but it is exponentially harder to see someone become a ghost of themselves because their “mental capacities” have deserted them before their heart has stopped beating.

“Nothing produces greatness of mind like the habit of examining methodically and honestly everything we encounter in this life and of determining its place in the order of things” (Book 3, page 38)

- Whether good or bad, assess every situation or thought in the greater context of things and you will understand its individual meaning as well which will in turn give you a greater understanding of your own human experience. This is also echoed by the stoic belief that a person has a duty to self –where they have to do what is best for them, and a civil duty to their society and what is best for the whole. Thinking of everything honestly and methodically makes you a better person which makes you a better member in society.

“Never act without purpose and resolve, or without the means to finish the job.” (Book 4, page 2)

- The opposite of “it's the thought that counts”, Marcus Aurelius advises in this to say that our actions should define us and speak for our character and so we should act according to character instead of acting in a meaningless, hastily, incomplete manner. But is your effort any less valuable because it didn't carry you to an end or had no certain purpose? I guess Stoicism would say that if all else fails, the purpose of something could just be the sake of doing it, at which point you would have fulfilled the purpose and finished the job.

“This world is change; this life, opinion.” (Book 4, page 3)

- This is a comprehensive summarization of Marcus Aurelius's thought about life. He was previously explaining how the mind cannot be disturbed by anything outside of the mind because the disturbance doesn't come from what we interact with in our



lives but how we perceive what we have been dealt. And what we deal with constantly changes so if we form a good opinion in ourselves and of what life will deal us –good or bad, then we will have a good life.

“Whatever is beautiful owes its beauty to itself, and when it dies its beauty dies with it. Praise adds nothing to beauty –makes it neither better nor worse.” (Book 4, page 45)

- Goes back to the idea that the worst you can have is your life and the best you can have is your life and it is up to you to make sure the latter is experienced often and the previous experienced as little as possible. Marcus Aurelius is conveying the stoic belief that we are the only determinants of our happiness and satisfaction. The same way that a beautiful thing is made no better or worse because of praise or criticism, we shouldn't let our human experience be effected by what it is when we can control how we experience it to bring the greatest fulfillment.

“You must dislike yourself. Otherwise, you'd like your nature and the limits it imposes. At the same time, you'd recognize that enjoyment is meant to be found in work too”. (Book 5.1)

- Although this idea seems contradictory and as if it would make you less happy and fulfilled, disliking yourself for your bad habits and behaviors is the only way you can overcome and change them. I agree unproductive enjoyment has similar limitations as the enjoyment we get from eating or drinking in that no matter how good the food might be, if we are full we lose our ability to enjoy it. That's why Marcus Aurelius teaches the power of productive enjoyment, in enjoying our work and the things we have to do so that we are experiencing enjoyment all day.

“The mind alters and moved itself, molding the world in the shape of whatever judgements it pleases the mind to make.” (Book 5.59)

- It is very fascinating that Marcus Aurelius understood this about life and the human mind thousands of years before science did. This may seem like a purely theoretical philosophical idea but modern day cognitive science has proven that our memories are skewed by how we experienced something more than what we actually experienced and as such “we mold the world in the shape of whatever judgements [our mind] places.” How many more of these stoic ideas Aurelius presents will be backed by science in the future?

“Persuade me or prove to me that I am mistaken in thought or deed and I will gladly change – for it is the truth I seek, and the truth never harmed anyone. Harm comes from persisting in error and clinging to ignorance.” (Book 6.21)

- I completely agree with this. I believe we, as humans, could communicate so much more effectively if we talked to understand each other and reach for the common truth regardless of who has to be proven wrong in that circumstance; instead we usually argue to make our point and cling to ignorance before we admit we mistook or misunderstood something because we see the latter as defeat. Meanwhile the best thing you can do for yourself and the conversation is be open to constructive criticism to be better informed.

“Ask this of a thing: What is it in and of itself? What is its individual make-up its essence, form, and matter? Its purpose in the world? Its duration?” (Book 8.11)

- This is another quote that exemplifies the contradictory nature of life. Sometimes you have to see the bigger picture, need the context of a given thing to have gratitude. Other times you need to remove it of its context, eliminate all the other things that are better or worse and appreciate it for itself. Today might be cold compared to last month but it is what you are going to wish for in another month. Likewise, a girl might be prettier than one and uglier than the other but is nevertheless beautiful just in her individual make-up.

“Injustice results as often from not doing as from doing.” (Book 9.5)

- A very essential and often neglected aspect of morality. People today think inaction makes them neutral in a given situation but really it, by default, means they are making it easier for the aggressor by not helping the victim. How many global issues would we have developed solutions for if we adapted the idea that inaction is unjust? Global Warming, Immigration, ect.

### *Oration on the Dignity of Man*

Giovanni Pico della Mirandola

“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”. (Page 77, paragraph 4)

- This quote ties into two big ideas Mirandola conveys in *Oration*, (1) that man has the freedom to choose his own fate and (2) humans have the ability to make their existence rather divine or mediocre vegetative. This idea that, through philosophy and mindful inquiry, humans can reach a higher state of existence reminded me of Epicurus and his idea that “man loses all semblance of mortality by living in the midst of immortal blessings.”

“Let a certain saving ambition invade our souls so that, impatient of mediocrity, we pant after the highest of things and (since, if we will, we can) bend all our efforts to their attainment.”

(Page 78, paragraph 5)

- Throughout the passage, Mirandola argues that humans are unique and superior because God had given man what he granted no other creature in nature: free will. And so teaches that, if we set our minds to something we can achieve them, but I tend to disagree with “if we will, we can”. Hard work alone cannot get you great results. Even if you wholeheartedly follow your passion and focus your efforts, there are external factors like luck, opportunity, or luck in opportunity that can make or break your success.

### *The Ascent of Mont Ventoux*

Francesco Petrarch

“It will sound strange to you that hardly a single one of all my friends seemed to me suitable in every aspect, so rare a thing is absolute congeniality in every attitude and habit even among dear friends.” (Page 79, paragraph 2)

- I didn't find that strange at all. On the contrary, I think it is odder to see two people that are very similar in attitude and habit actually get along. This I believe is because, as humans, we tend to be more irritated by the shortcomings in the attitude and habits of others when they are a reflection of our own. For instance, if Petrarch and his companion are both hasty in action it might be dangerous when climbing the mountain, if they are both impatient or the complaining type it would make it less enjoyable. Friendship is not about finding your identical copy but the person whose piece of the puzzle fits best with yours.

“You must either ascend to the summit of the blessed life under the heavy burden of hard striving, ill deferred, or lie prostrate in your slothfulness in the valleys of your sins.” (Page 81, paragraph 1)

- In other words, you have to work hard towards a well-established goal, one that is worth your effort and then you must work tirelessly towards it. The key is to be neither too passive nor overly-aggressive in the pursuit of your passions. A reoccurring idea in *The Ascent of Mont Ventoux*, the main point is to balance the enjoyment you get from the journey with the enjoyment you get from the attaining the final goal.

*Tao Te Ching*

Lao-Tzu

“The more you use it, the more it produces; the more you talk of it, the less you understand.”  
(Coursepack pg.85, Mitchell #5)

- ‘It’ being the Tao, it is the journey of life that is not understood by standing in one stop and thinking of it but rather using it and moving down it. Life is not clear-cut and our attempts to categorize and label reality is not bringing us closer but is instead taking us further away from understanding it. Our reality has multiple dimensions and to try to flatten that out is not a good thing. Can a horrible life experience be a great life lesson? Can person with multiple bad traits be considered a good person? Yes and yes. In the first case to deny something horrible happened is stupid, to fail to see the lesson in it is a disservice to the person. In the latter, to deny a person’s bad traits is naïve, to judge their whole personality on just their shortcomings is unjust.

“When harmony no longer prevailed through the six kinships, filial sons found their manifestation; when the states and clans fell into disorder, loyal ministers appeared.” (Page 8, 18.2)

- In other words, even horrible things can breed good results, but why do humans always need tragedy or chaos to act on their morality? It is rather depressing that we are more morally inclined in the face of disorder than in the absence of it.

“He who stands on his tiptoes does not stand firm; he who stretched his legs does not walk easily. So, he who displays himself does not shine; he who asserts his own views is not distinguished.” (Page 11.24)

- A central theme of Taoism is the idea of following the Tao naturally and to never force or change anything you come across on the journey of life but instead appreciate it for its raw and natural beauty. A man might want to seem taller or see over something set higher but going on his tiptoes is a stretch of his natural limits and the tradeoff is that he is putting himself off-balance. Likewise, a man that displays himself or his abilities for the sole purpose of getting praise or wanting to shine will not truly achieve that (maybe he might get a superficial version of it) because the substantial aspects needed to earn that praise will not be there.

“He who knows other men is discerning; he who knows himself is intelligent. He who overcomes others is strong; he who overcomes himself is mighty.” (Page 15, 33.1)

- This is an example of the basic Taoist ideology that Taoism is best understood by simply accepting yourself. As humans we often find it difficult to understand ourselves for who we are and the image we want to portray as participants of a given culture and society but Taoism teaches that this problem is resolved easily by accepting who you are because the more you accept yourself the less you'll need others to accept you; which, ironically, builds your confidence which will lead to others to appreciate and accept you.

*The Way of Chuang Tzu*

Chang Tzu

“Prince Wan Hui said, “This is it! My cook has shown me how I ought to live my own life!”  
(Page 89)

- Prince Wan Hui says this after his cook has just described how he was able to effectively, painlessly, and efficiently cut up an ox while making as little mess, minimum wear to the knife and still finishing with good meat. This Prince Wan Hui applies to his life by citing the Tao and saying how living a life of little resistance to one's circumstances, following the rhythm of one's Tao, and using the resources you come across the Tao effectively and efficiently to make the most of your life and human experience. But how can a person be productive and constantly building a better life if all you have to do is go with the flow of the Tao?

“The wise man, then, when he must govern, knows how to do nothing [...] His movements will be invisible [...] Unconcerned, doing nothing, he will see all things grow ripe around him” (Page 92)

- A true leader is one whose followers feel like they have brought themselves to the place the leader has led them to. Similarly, the Tao is the natural progression of a person's life and with little resistance to the natural order of things a person can live a life of fulfillment. But, to my western and modern mind it is terrifying to think a leader that does nothing is what we should strive for.

“You cannot put a big load in a small bag, nor can you, with a short rope, draw water from a deep well. [...] Water is for fish and air is for men. Natures differ and needs with them.”  
(Page 95)

- Because Taoism doesn't clearly define itself or its aspects most people have a hard time understanding what it is, but as the above quote shows it is exactly what your life is to you. Everyone has a unique path, personality, and passion and so every life advice would be on a case-by-case basis. For the man with a small bag, you advise him to ration and appreciate his few for being more than nothing; the man with a short rope, you guide to a well he can reach. Taoism teaches that instead of molding yourself to fit

a certain believe or way of life, you should respect yourself enough to proudly love it for what it is. The Tao differs for everyone as everyone's needs are unique.

"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." (Page 96)

- This spoke to me personally because I am exactly like that, pressure drains me of my abilities. When I do something without a given objective I am very good at it. As soon as there's a pressure to perform a certain way, the nervousness makes me worse than I actually am. I have recognized my problem but I have yet to train my mind to perform the same way in the face of pressure as I do in the absence of it, especially in the heat of the moment.

## UNIT 2: Threats to Meaning

### *On the Sufferings of the World*

Arthur Schopenhauer

"The best consolation in misfortune or affliction of any kind will be the thought of other people who are in a still worse plight than yourself; and this is a form of consolation open to everyone. But what an awful fate this means for mankind as a whole!" (C.P, page 99)

- Until reading this I thought thinking that others have it worse of then me was a reasonable way to make myself grateful. How could I feel so sad when someone worse off then me is still able to be happy? How could I be upset about not getting a new pair of shoes when someone else is walking to school barefoot not upset? But Schopenhauer points out a dark basis for that thinking, some human must have it worse for me to feel good about what I have. It is rather disturbing to think that when we say that poverty and hunger are given positive functions, and shows thee dangers in thinking of the world in relative terms.

"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. Nevertheless, every man desires to reach old age". (C.P, page 100)

- As humans we are fouled by our sense of hope into thinking that even if life is occasionally bad day-to-day the whole span of it, if we live long enough, will make it worth it. But Schopenhauer claims otherwise and says longevity will not decrease suffering, instead it gives you the opportunity to see more clearly that "life is a disappointment, nay, a cheat". Although I want to remain optimistic, he does have a good point.

“It follows, therefore, that the happiness of any given life is to be measured, not by its joys and pleasures, but by the extent to which it has been free from suffering –from positive evil.” (C.P, page 101)

- Although, I disagree that “any given life” should be measured not by positive aspect but the lack of the negative ones, it is an interesting idea to entertain. I personally believe that life is measured by its joys and pleasures and it is up to us to make sure we live a kind of life that enables us to experience these positive emotions often enough. Because the way I see it there are negative aspects of life that bring suffering, positive aspects that bring joy and a middle where neither is present that brings a neutral peace because you are neither unhappy nor happy. However, I respect any person that can follow Schopenhauer’s thinking and be so satisfied with the neutral that they are just as happy.

*Confession (excerpt from chapter 3)*

Leo Tolstoy

“At first it seemed to me that these were aimless and irrelevant questions. I thought that it was all well known, and that if I should ever wish to deal with the solution, it would not cost me much effort.” (Paragraph 5, Page 109, CP)

- I guess this is what people that don’t appreciate or understand philosophy think. Tolstoy later explains how he let go of this idea and understood that “they are not childish and stupid [questions] but the most important and profound”. However, those that don’t grow out of it must carry this false sense of security justified by their own self-importance and inflated egos. Although I do not agree with the dark conclusion Tolstoy reaches, I do respect and appreciate his ability to address these philosophical questions instead of tossing the idea away as irrelevant.

“And I could not reply at all. The questions would not wait, they had to be answered at once, and if I did not answer them it was impossible to live. But there was no answer...” (Paragraph 7, Page 109, CP)

- I love how perfectly these sentences capture the contradiction and confusion that is life. These questions that become “a mortal internal disease” nag at us, and demand to be heard but cannot be resolved because they are not answers we find and finish but create and live by. I think pessimists have such a dark and cold view of life because they are looking for answers as profound and simple as the questions they are asking and I don’t think that’s how life works. What is the point of life? To live it the best you can and then reflect back after to answer with specific details. One of my favorite quotes reads “Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards.” In other words, you

might not see the point of life now but reflecting back when you're seventy years old you will find a moment, person, or action you can use as your answer.

*Myth of Sisyphus*

Albert Camus

"His scorn of the gods, his hatred of death, and his passion for life won him that unspeakable penalty in which the whole being is exerted towards accomplishing nothing." (Paragraph 1, Page 111, CP)

- Is he talking to philosophers as a whole here? Camus writes of Sisyphus, but he seems to be alluding to philosophers as a whole with this sentence. By rejecting religious teachings, fear of death and having a bright and relatively optimistic view of life, he could be saying a philosopher's "whole beings is exerted towards accomplishing nothing" because life is an existence of suffering.

"He too concludes that all is well. This universe henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night-filled mountain, in itself forms a world. The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy." (Paragraph 2, Page 112, CP)

- Although it is hard for me to accept that a life full of suffering could make a man happy, this explanation I can understand. It makes sense that his world is formed by the stone and the hopeless labor he completes day in and day out. Having nothing else to compare it to, he will adapt to his circumstance and conclude that this is his faith and that will make him come to terms with it and "conclude that all is well." But I disagree that "the struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart." Instead I believe the struggle will not fill his heart but shrink it. Once he has accepted that his life is nothing more than the act of rolling the stone to the summit his hear will shrink to adapt n a way that makes just rolling the stone enough to fill it.

*The Death of Ivan Ilych*

Leo Tolstoy



"[Ivan Ilych's death] aroused, as usual, in all who heard of it the complacent feeling that, "it is he who is dead and not I." [...] his so-called friends, could not help thinking also that they would now have to fulfill the very tiresome demands of propriety by attending the funeral service and paying visit of condolence to the widow." (Paragraph 5, page 114, CP)

- This speaks volumes to the selfish nature of humans. Although they "could not help" it, the thinking of even his friends is as if Ivan's death is getting in the way of their living. This comes from our denial as humans of our mortality, and when we don't understand what dying really means we can't offer our compassion. This made me realize that even I mourn not the person for dying but their loved ones pain in losing that person, and I don't know if that does the person that dies justice.

"Ivan Ilych's life had been most simple and most ordinary and therefore most terrible." (Paragraph 1, page 117, CP)

- Although he had a good job, a family and most other things that make up modern quintessential suburban life, it was the "most terrible" because it was so mundane. I agree with this prospect and am myself trying to avoid the terribly simple and ordinary 9-5 life.

"His chief interest came to be people's ailments and people's health. When sickness, deaths, or recoveries were mentioned in his presence, especially when the illness resembled his own, he listened with agitation which he tried to hide, asked questions, and applied what he heard to his own case" (Paragraph 4, Page 126, CP)

- This is an important contrast to the way his friends empathized with his death. His friends confronted his death by participating in ritual activities like going to the funeral and visiting his widow while they were more concerned with the implications his death would have on their lives through careers and other sorts of things. Meanwhile, Ivan confronted his own death, or the experience of dying by empathizing with people more, especially those in the same or similar circumstance as him. This shows one of humanity's greatest flaws, we only offer compassion for people in situations we are in or have been through. And our attitude towards death is no different, once we don't have the mutual experience of being alive we lose the ability to feel compassion for the person that died. But what is a person that no longer exists, by the vague understanding of death, feeling?

"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 – none of them except the first recollections of childhood. There, in childhood, there had been something really pleasant with which it would be possible to live if it could return. But the child

who had experienced that happiness existed no longer, it was like a reminiscence of somebody else.”

- I love this. It is a great way to show our inability to experience the present joys because they are overshadowed by our worry of the future. Ivan is looking back on moments that he now, in the grand scheme of life, deems “the best moments of his pleasant life” but is disappointed that he did not experience them with as much joy as that would infer. How unordinary we treat the most significant people and events in our lives! The only time we live in the present enough to fully experience the joy of it is when we were children. But as Tolstoy points out, we grow to lose that ability so much that we look back on the children we used to be as different people and experience those memories second-hand from the “somebody else” that once was us.

*What the Buddha Taught*

Walpola Rahula

CHAPTER I: The Buddhist Attitude of Mind

“He attributed all his realization, attainments and achievements to human endeavor and human intelligence. A man and only a man can become a Buddha. Every man has within himself the potentiality of becoming a Buddha, if he so wills it and endeavors.” (Page 1)

- This is the fundamental concept that distinguishes Buddhism as a way of life and not a religion. Further into the chapter Rahula explains “It does not matter what you call it. Buddhism remains what it is whatever label you may put on it. The label is immaterial.” (pg.5) Almost all other religions are based on the concept of us humans worshiping a higher being or beings, but Buddhism takes away that idea and gives man the responsibility of reaching it’s own potential. You don’t live by Buddhism to gain entry into Heaven or please ‘God’, but to be a better more at-peace version of yourself; and when you’ve become the best human you can be you will have all the tools to reach enlightenment. But is there a certain talent needed to become Buddha? Surely if it was just a matter of perseverance and commitment a lot more people would reach enlightenment.

“He saw Truth. If the medicine is good, the disease will be cured. It is not necessary to know who prepared it, or where it came from.” (Page 8)

- I love this quote. I think religious tensions in our world come from the grave misunderstanding of this concept --tolerance and respect for all religions, one which Buddhists embody. If you believe your god is the creator of all living things on this planet that surely includes those that practice other religions too, so how can you hate a person for believing in a different religion that you if everyone is created by your god?

Whether Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, etc. if that way of explaining spirituality works for her and another for you then so be it.

“Why, Malunkyaputta, have I not explained them? Because it is not useful, it is not fundamentally connected with the spiritual holy life.” (Page 14)

- This was the Buddha’s reply to being asked to answer about the finite nature of life, the existence of an afterlife, and the scope of the universe. He explains he has no answer and more importantly no obligation to answer because he never asked for followers and his followers never asked to be one. He is a teacher, and as such only relays the important information needed to reach Nirvana and he says those are not it. Which is rather ironic because most other religions have made the answers to those questions central ideas in their beliefs.

#### CHAPTER II: The Four Noble Truths: The First Noble Truth

“The First Noble Truth (*Dukkha-ariyasacca*) is generally translated by almost all scholars as 'The Noble Truth of Suffering', and it is interpreted to mean that life according to Buddhism is nothing but suffering and pain.” (Page 15)

- The chapter goes on to explain that The First Noble Truth is not as pessimistic as the translation makes it seem. Although *Dukkha* is best translated as suffering the idea of the first noble truth is rather realistic and hopeful. It is the belief that we must find peace and enlightenment not by avoiding suffering and pain but in spite of it, because life is full of it. Everyone will experience old age, illness, misfortune and dissatisfaction, but you can train your mind to be at peace in spite of these circumstances –except dissatisfaction which is later explained as a feeling your mind can actually eliminate by controlling your desires.

#### CHAPTER III: The Second Noble Truth

“It is this 'thirst', desire, greed, craving, manifesting itself in various ways, that gives rise to all forms of suffering and the continuity of beings. But it should not be taken as the first cause, for there is no first cause possible as, according to Buddhism, everything is relative and inter-dependent.” (Page 29)

- This reminds me of a modern day saying: change what you can control, Recognize and accept what you cannot change. According to Buddhism, life is full of pain and suffering, some of it comes from uncontrollable factors such as old age, illness, death, war, poverty; but there are sources to our suffering and pain we perpetuate through our own attitudes and perspectives and an important one of those is desire. Our desire, whether material or situational, for an alternative to our current circumstance is self-inflicted pain and suffering that rooted in our minds and by curbing our desires we can eliminate that pain and doing so will mean reaching the end of ‘continuity of being’, or reincarnation. But isn’t the process of enlightenment a desire in itself? The chapter later

explains it is not so because meditation and living by Buddhism isn't done through the desire for enlightenment. Instead it is an action or way of life that brings peace which leads to enlightenment but can't lead to that if we do it for that purpose –which is another example of the paradox that is life.

#### CHAPTER IV: The Third Noble Truth

“He who has realized the Truth, Nirvana, is the happiest being in the world. He is free from all 'complexes' and obsessions, the worries and troubles that torment others.” (Page 43)

- The Third Noble Truth is “that there is emancipation, liberation, freedom from suffering, from the continuity of dukkha” (pg. 35) by maintaining peace and positive energy in spite of the negative circumstance we are in. This is seen recognized as achieving Nirvana. The author also point out how the concept of nirvana is seen in other religions however only Buddhism sees it as a state that can be attained while alive and not just after death. Although it seems ideal to be able to free ourselves from all “the worried and troubles” that torment us, it is not like they are something we are purposely holding on too. Or maybe that’s the lesson of the Buddha? Even if you are not doing it purposefully, your mind is automatically perpetuating and holding on to worries and troubles and if you take control of your mind you can make it let go of them to reach Nirvana.

#### *Siddhartha*<sup>1</sup>

Hesse

“Siddhartha had started to nurse discontent in himself, he had started to feel that the love of his father and the love of his mother, and also the love of his friend, Govinda, would not bring him joy for ever and ever.” (Paragraph 4, Page 3)

- This passage shows the sad side-effect of growing up and losing naivety that had given Siddhartha, and really all children, the ability to experience joy and contentment from the simplest tasks. This is definitely necessary or else we would all be playing ball outside all day. It is also sad because we never know how big the vessel is, we just feel that it is not full, and that is a sad existence.

“I wish that they shall all stay with the teachings, that they shall reach their goal! It is not my place to judge another person’s life. Only for myself, for myself alone, I must decide, I must chose, I must refuse.” (Paragraph 4, Page 31)

- This quote captures the pure essence of Siddhartha’s search for enlightenment. As he later proves and explains, he does not care to lead nor is he asking for followers, instead

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<sup>1</sup> Used online copy: <http://philosophy.lander.edu/oriental/siddhartha.pdf>

he is looking for what works best for him. By understanding something doesn't work for him so he has a duty to himself to look for what does, he understands that what didn't work for him might work for others. This is a radical shift from the conventional belief "I'm right means you're wrong". Humanity would be so peaceful if everyone was able to think like Siddhartha.

"To tell you this and to thank you for being so beautiful. And if it doesn't displease you, Kamala, I would like to ask you to be my friend and teacher, for I know nothing yet of that art which you have mastered in the highest degree." (Paragraph 6, Page 49)

- My initial reaction to this was a smirk at the cleverness of the pick-up line. More seriously, it was interesting to me that he explicitly chose her as a teacher. Once Siddhartha stopped searching for teachers and instead pursued virtues, he gave himself the ability to learn without a teacher and pick who his teacher will be when he wanted one. But isn't his judgement superficial? Thinking that she must be a good lover because she is beautiful?

"Writing is good, thinking is better. Being smart is good, being patient is better." (Paragraph 7, Page 60)

- I completely agree with this quote. I want to make it into a poster to hang in my room. But also the fact that that Hesse had Siddhartha write something so deep and clever when Kamaswami was just testing if he could even write speaks to the characterization of Siddhartha and Kamaswami; for Kamaswami because his dismissiveness attitude for Siddhartha's deep understanding.

"He envied them for the one thing that was missing from him and that they had, the importance they were able to attach to their lives, the amount of passion in their joys and fears, the fearful but sweet happiness of being constantly in love. These people were all of the time in love with themselves, with women, with their children, with honours or money, with plans or hopes" (Paragraph 2, page 71)

- If only we were all in love and passionate about everything all the time. Although I can see why he would envy them, I find his life to be the one to be envied. These child-people live in a denial he has overcome through deep spiritual understanding, and one of the consequences of overcoming that means understanding that his life has no importance.