



You, yourself, as much as anybody in the entire universe, deserve your love and affection. —Siddhartha Gautama [Buddha]

GREAT TREASURY OF WESTERN THOUGHT

1.4 Self-Knowledge and Self-Love

43 What I really lack is to be clear in my mind what I am to do, not what I am to know, except in so far as a certain understanding must precede every action. The thing is to understand myself, to see what God really wishes me to do; the thing is to find a truth which is true for me, to find the idea for *which I* can live and die. What would be the use of discovering so-called objective truth, of working through all the systems of philosophy and of

being able, if required, to review them all and show up the inconsistencies within each system;—what good would it do me to be able to develop a theory of the state and combine all the details into a single whole, and so construct a world in which I did not live, but only held up to the view of others;—what good would it do me to be able to explain the meaning of Christianity if it had no deeper significance for me and for my life; —what good would it do me if truth stood before me, cold and naked, not caring whether I recognised her or not, and producing in me a shudder of fear rather than a trusting devotion? I certainly do not deny that I still recognise an imperative of understanding and that through it one can work upon men, but it must be taken up into my life, and that is what I now recognise as the most important thing. That is what my soul longs after, as the African desert thirsts for water.

Kierkegaard, *Journals* (Aug. 1, 1835)

- 44 When a man has gone astray to the point of perdition and is about to sink, his last speech, the sign is: ‘and yet something better in me is being lost’. It is like the bubbles rising to the surface from a drowning man; that is the sign—then he sinks. Just as self-isolation can be a man’s downfall, because he will not reveal what is hidden, in the same way to pronounce those words spells destruction. For that declaration expresses the fact that he has become so objective to himself that he can talk of his own destruction as of something settled, which can now be of psychological interest to a third person. The hope that there was something better in him, which should have been used in silence to work for his salvation, that hope is made public and used as an ingredient in the funeral oration he pronounces upon himself.

Kierkegaard, *Journals* (1846)

- 45 To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men—that is genius. Speak your latent conviction, and it shall be the universal sense; for the inmost in due time becomes the outmost, and our first thought is rendered back to us by the trumpets of the Last Judgment. Familiar as the voice of the mind is to each, the highest merit we ascribe to

Moses, Plato and Milton is that they set at naught books and traditions, and spoke not what men, but what *they* thought. A man should learn to detect and watch that gleam of light which flashes across his mind from within, more than the lustre of the firmament of bards and sages. Yet he dismisses without notice his thought, because it is his. In every work of genius we recognize our own rejected thoughts; they come back to us with a certain alienated majesty. Great works of art have no more affecting lesson for us than this. They teach us to abide by our spontaneous impression with good-humored inflexibility then most when the whole cry of voices is on the other side. Else tomorrow a stranger will say with masterly good sense precisely what we have thought and felt all the time, and we shall be forced to take with shame our own opinion from another.

Emerson, Self-Reliance

46 Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string.

Emerson, Self-Reliance

47 What I must do is all that concerns me, not what the people think. This rule, equally arduous in actual and in intellectual life, may serve for the whole distinction between greatness and meanness. It is the harder because you will always find those who think they know what is your duty better than you know it. It is easy in the world to live after the world's opinion; it is easy in solitude to live after our own; but the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude.

Emerson, Self-Reliance

48 The other terror that scares us from self-trust is our consistency; a reverence for our past act or word because the eyes of others have no other data for computing our orbit than our past acts, and we are loath to disappoint them.

But why should you keep your head over your shoulder? Why drag about this corpse of your memory, lest you contradict somewhat you have stated in this or that public place? Suppose you should contradict yourself; what then?

49 Among those points of self-education which take up the form of mental discipline, there is one of great importance, and, moreover, difficult to deal with, because it involves an internal conflict, and equally touches our vanity and our ease. It consists in the tendency to deceive ourselves regarding all we wish for, and the necessity of resistance to these desires. It is impossible for any one who has not been constrained, by the course of his occupation and thoughts, to a habit of continual self-correction to be aware of the amount of error in relation to judgment arising from this tendency. The force of the temptation which urges us to seek for such evidence and appearances as are in favour of our desires, and to disregard those which oppose them, is wonderfully great. In this respect we are all, more or less, active promoters of error. In place of practising wholesome self-abnegation, we ever make the wish the father to the thought: we receive as friendly that which agrees with, we resist with dislike that which opposes us; whereas the very reverse is required by every dictate of common sense.

Faraday, *Observations on Mental Education*

50 I would rather sit on a pumpkin and have it all to myself than be crowded on a velvet cushion. I would rather ride on earth in an ox cart, with a free circulation, than go to heaven in the fancy car of an excursion train and breathe a *malaria all the way*.

Thoreau, *Walden; Economy*

51 I never dreamed of any enormity greater than I have committed. I never knew, and never shall know, a worse man than myself.

Thoreau, *Walden; Economy*

52 I only know myself as a human entity; the scene, so to speak, of thoughts and affections; and am sensible of a certain doubleness by which I can stand as remote from myself as from another. However intense my experience, I am conscious of the presence and criticism of a part of me, which, as it were, is not a part of me, but spectator,

sharing no experience, but taking note of it, and that is no more I than it is you.

Thoreau, *Walden: Solitude*

53 I celebrate myself, and sing myself.

Whitman, *Song of Myself, I*

54 Do I contradict myself?

Very well then I contradict myself,
(I am large, I contain multitudes.)

Whitman, *Song of Myself, LI*

55 It is not by wearing down into uniformity all that is individual in themselves, but by cultivating it, and calling it forth, within the limits imposed by the rights and interests of others, that human beings become a noble and beautiful object of contemplation; and as the works partake the character of those who do them, by the same process human life also becomes rich, diversified, and animating, furnishing more abundant aliment to high thoughts and elevating feelings, and strengthening the tie which binds every individual to the race, by making the race infinitely better worth belonging to.

Mill, *On Liberty, III*

56 Because the tyranny of opinion is such as to make eccentricity a reproach, it is desirable, in order to break through that tyranny, that people should be eccentric. Eccentricity has always abounded when and where strength of character has abounded; and the amount of eccentricity in a society has generally been proportional to the amount of genius, mental vigour, and moral courage it contained. That so few now dare to be eccentric marks the chief danger of the time.

Mill, *On Liberty, III*

57 We are all of us born in moral stupidity, taking the world as an udder to feed our supreme selves: Dorothea had early begun to emerge from that stupidity, but yet it had been easier to her to imagine how she would devote herself to Mr. Casaubon, and become wise and strong in his strength and wisdom, than to conceive with that distinctness which is no longer reflection but feeling—an

idea wrought back to the directness of sense, like the solidity of objects—that he had an equivalent centre of self, whence the lights and shadows must always fall with a certain difference.

George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, II, 21

58 An eminent philosopher among my friends, who can dignify even your ugly furniture by lifting it into the serene light of science, has shown me this pregnant little fact. Your pier-glass or extensive surface of polished steel made to be rubbed by a housemaid, will be minutely and multitudinously scratched in all directions; but place now against it a lighted candle as a centre of illumination, and lo! the scratches will seem to arrange themselves in a fine series of concentric circles round that little sun. It is demonstrable that the scratches are going everywhere impartially, and it is only your candle which produces the flattering illusion of a concentric arrangement, its light falling with an exclusive optical selection. These things are a parable. The scratches are events, and the candle is the egoism of any person now absent.

George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, III, 27

59 She [Mary Garth] sat to-night revolving, as she was wont, the scenes of the day, her lips often curling with amusement at the oddities to which her fancy added fresh drollery: people were so ridiculous with their illusions, carrying their fool's caps unawares, thinking their own lies opaque while everybody else's were transparent, making themselves exceptions to everything, as if when all the world looked yellow under a lamp they alone were rosy.

George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, III, 33

60 Consciousness is a source of self-cognition quite apart from and independent of reason. Through his reason man observes himself, but only through consciousness does he know himself.

Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, II Epilogue, VIII

61 We are unknown, we knowers, ourselves to our-selves: this has its own good reason. We have never searched for

ourselves—how should it then come to pass, that we should ever *find* ourselves?

Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, Preface, I

- 62 The most spiritual human beings, as the *strongest*, find their happiness where others would find their destruction: in the labyrinth, in severity towards themselves and others, in attempting; their joy lies in self-constraint: with them asceticism becomes nature, need, instinct.

Nietzsche, *Antichrist*, LVII

- 63 I am often confronted by the necessity of standing by one of my empirical selves and relinquishing the rest. Not that I would not, if I could, be both handsome and fat and well dressed, and a great athlete, and make a million a year, be a wit, a *bon-vivant*, and a lady-killer, as well as a philosopher; a philanthropist, statesman, warrior, and African explorer, as well as a “tone-poet” and saint. But the thing is simply impossible. The millionaire’s work would run counter to the saint’s; the *bon-vivant* and the philanthropist would trip each other up; the philosopher and the lady-killer could not well keep house in the same tenement of clay. Such different characters may conceivably at the outset of life be alike *possible* to a man. But to make any one of them actual, the rest must more or less be suppressed. So the seeker of his truest, strongest, deepest self must review the list carefully, and pick out the one on which to stake his salvation. All other selves thereupon become unreal, but the fortunes of this self are real. Its failures are real failures, its triumphs real triumphs, carrying shame and gladness with them . . . Our thought, incessantly deciding, among many things of a kind, which ones for it shall be realities, here chooses one of many possible selves or characters, and forthwith reckons it no shame to fail in any of those not adopted expressly as its own.

William James, *Psychology*, X

- 64 The consciousness of Self involves a stream of thought, each part of which as “I” can 1) remember those which went before, and know the things they knew; and 2) emphasize and care paramountly for certain ones among them as “me,” and *appropriate to these* the rest. The nu-

cleus of the “*me*” is always the bodily existence felt to be present at the time. Whatever remembered-past-feelings *resemble* this present feeling are deemed to belong to the same *me* with it. Whatever other things are perceived to be *associated* with this feeling are deemed to form part of that *me*’s *experience*, and of them certain ones (which fluctuate more or less) are reckoned to be themselves constituents of the *me* in a larger sense,—such are the clothes, the material possessions, the friends, the honors and esteem which the person receives or may receive. This *me* is an empirical aggregate of things objectively known. The I which knows them cannot itself be an aggregate; neither for psychological purposes need it be considered to be an unchanging metaphysical entity like the Soul, or a principle like the pure Ego, viewed as “out of time.” It is a *Thought*, at each moment different from that of the last moment, but *appropriatwe* of the latter, together with all that the latter called its own. All the experiential facts find their place in this description, unencumbered with any hypothesis save that of the existence of passing thoughts or states of mind. The same brain may subserve many conscious selves, either alternate or coexisting; but by what modifications in its action, or whether ultracerebral conditions may intervene, are questions which cannot now be answered.

William James, *Psychology*, X

65 The blindness in human beings. . . is the blindness with which we all are afflicted in regard to the feelings of creatures and people different from ourselves.

We are practical beings, each of us with limited functions and duties to perform. Each is bound to feel intensely the importance of his own duties and the significance of the situations that call these forth. But this feeling is in each of us a vital secret, for sympathy with which we vainly look to others. The others are too much absorbed in their own vital secrets to take an interest in ours. Hence the stupidity and injustice of our opinions, so far as they deal with the significance of alien lives. Hence the falsity of our judgments, so far as they presume to decide in an absolute way on the value of other persons’ conditions or ideals.

William James, *On a Certain Blindness
in Human Beings*

66 A return from the over-estimation of the property of consciousness is the indispensable preliminary to any genuine insight into the course of psychic events . . . The unconscious must be accepted as the general basis of the psychic life. The unconscious is the larger circle which includes the smaller circle of the conscious; everything conscious has a preliminary unconscious stage, whereas the unconscious can stop at this stage, and yet claim to be considered a full psychic function. The unconscious is the true psychic reality; *in its inner nature it is just as much unknown to us as the reality of the external world, and it is just as imperfectly communicated to us by the data of consciousness as is the external world by the reports of our sense-organs.*

Freud, Interpretation of Dreams, VII, F

67 We must say that all the acts and manifestations which I notice in myself and do not know how to link up with the rest of my mental life must be judged as if they belonged to someone else and are to be explained by the mental life ascribed to that person. Further, experience shows that we understand very well how to interpret in others (i.e., how to fit into their mental context) those same acts which we refuse to acknowledge as mentally conditioned in ourselves. Some special hindrance evidently deflects our investigations from ourselves and interferes with our obtaining true knowledge of ourselves.

Freud, The Unconscious, I

68 Many good words get spoiled when the word self is prefixed to them: Words like pity, confidence, sacrifice, control, love. The reason is not far to seek. The word self infects them with a fixed introversion and isolation. It implies that the act of love or trust or control is turned back upon a self which already is in full existence and in whose behalf the act operates. Pity fulfils and creates a self when it is directed outward, opening the mind to new contacts and receptions. Pity for self withdraws the mind back into itself, rendering its subject unable to learn from the buffetings of fortune. Sacrifice may en-

large a self by bringing about surrender of acquired possessions to requirements of new growth. Self-sacrifice means a self-maiming which asks for compensatory pay in some later possession or indulgence. Confidence as an outgoing act is directness and courage in meeting the facts of life, trusting them to bring instruction and support to a developing self. Confidence which terminates in the self means a smug complacency that renders a person obtuse to instruction by events. Control means a command of resources that enlarges the self; self-control denotes a self which is contracting, concentrating itself upon its own achievements, hugging them tight, and thereby estopping the growth that comes when the self is generously released; a self-conscious moral athleticism that ends in a disproportionate enlargement of some organ.

Dewey, Human Nature and Conduct, II, 5

69 “Never shall a young man,
 Thrown into despair
 By those great honey-colored
 Ramparts at your ear,
 Love you for yourself alone
 And not your yellow hair.”

“But I can get a hair-dye
 And set such color there,
 Brown, or black, or carrot,
 That young men in despair
 May love me for myself alone
 And not my yellow hair.”

“I heard an old religious man
 But yesternight declare
 That he had found a text to prove
 That only God, my dear,
 Could love you for yourself alone
 And not your yellow hair.”

Yeats, For Anne Gregory

70 The philosophies of Descartes and Kant to the contrary, through the I *think* we reach our own self in the presence of others, and the others are just as real to us as our own

self. Thus, the man who becomes aware of himself through the *cogito* also perceives all others, and he perceives them as the condition of his own existence. He realizes that he can not be anything (in the sense that we say that someone is witty or nasty or jealous) unless others recognize it as such. In order to get any truth about myself, I must have contact with another person. The other is indispensable to my own existence, as well as to my knowledge about myself. This being so, in discovering my inner being I discover the other person at the same time, like a freedom placed in front of me which thinks and wills only for or against me. Hence, let us at once announce the discovery of a world which we shall call inter-subjectivity; this is the world in which man decides what he is and what others are.

Sartre, Existentialism

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BOOK REVIEWS

WONDERFUL

The Great Treasury is, without a doubt, the most useful and interesting book I have in my possession (it is my father's, but I "acquire" it from time to time). Brimming with insight into just about everything, this compendium is essential to any scholar or "back-yard philosopher" you know. It contains insight from almost every major philosopher, encapsulating many topics. It is also brilliantly indexed, and flipping to your topic of choice is simple and easy. I believe that it is an essential part of everyone's library, and if its presence is missing, then it should be bought.

—*Jacob Scott from Boston, MA, USA*

A World of Ideas

This is a wonderful book for anyone interested in ideas and prepared to distil the essence of what has been thought on major topics. There are thousands of entries. (The index alone is some 350 pages.) It's far more than a book of quotations although that too. Few books contain such extensive extracts running to several pages of normal print—the type face is fairly small (My eyesight is poor but I had no trouble.) The content has been brilliantly categorized by theme and what I found invaluable was to sweep through history and notice the changing views of philosophers, essayists, and major poets over time. (There are relatively few female writers) Virtually all the major western thinkers are featured. If you are in-

terested in finding out what major thinkers thought, this could be your starting point. It'll take you three months to read through if you tackle the whole thing at a go as I did. Excellent value for money.
—A. G. Clarke from South Africa

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