One Life to Live: Reflections

We are ourselves given the power of moral independence.
– Marcus Aurelius

1
A good education in childhood is the key to success in life, for a good education builds a strong foundation. If you want to build a twenty-story high-rise, you must have the right foundation for it. You can't build it on the weak foundation of a two-story building. Similarly, you can't get very far in life on the weak foundation of a poor education in childhood.

2
The aim of education is not to indoctrinate young people to slavishly serve a particular system or ideology but to make them independent thinkers who can shape their lives and their society the way they see fit as adults. That is social advancement.

3
Teachers who make students think are educating them; those who make them memorize are indoctrinating them.

4
When children are taught to adjust to all kinds of environment, they are prepared for the "survival of the fittest."

5
Put a pen in the hand of a child and he won't need a gun.

6
Professor: A literary work gives you a new perspective on life.
Student: Apart from our belief?
Professor: It helps you grow.

7
If you do the best at every step, you don't have to worry about the rest.

8
We will be better off if instead of competing with others we challenge ourselves to see how far our brains can take us.

9
Dean: What's the motto of a successful teacher?
Professor: I want to produce students who will say, "I will do the work you can't," not "I will do the work you won't."

10
Child: Dad, how do I excel? I mean, how do I become better than others?
Dad: You study, sweetheart, when others goof off.

Child: Is that as simple as that?
Dad: It worked for me.

11
Professor: How did you do on the test?
Student: I did *good.*
Professor: Is that what your high school English teacher taught you?
Student: Who remembers a *teacher*?
Professor: Those who do *well* on the test.

12
It is better to be last among bright minds than first among fools.

13
Parents who indoctrinate their children with one kind of knowledge – whether religious, political, or philosophical – do a very bad job of parenting. By not letting their children know "the best which has been thought and said in the world," in Matthew Arnold's words, they stunt the intellectual growth of their children, which will ultimately hinder their progress in life, possibly rendering them incapable of living in a modern world.

14
Professor: Democracy stops at the college gate even in a democratic society.
Student: Why?
Professor: Higher education is about meritocracy.

15
The free spirits who strive to seek the truth on their own are the only hope for the world, not the throngs chasing after dogmas for, as Montaigne says so correctly, he who follows another finds nothing.

16
Student: It's so difficult, sir.
Professor: That's what education is all about: mastering the difficult things.

17
True acquisition of knowledge takes place when the drive comes from within, not without.

18
Discontent debilitates the fool but drives the wise.

19
A whole person education – building character along with acquiring skills – should be the aim of school education because good citizens are more desirable than skilled labor for a society's well-being.

20

Plato, as well as Socrates, said that the aim of rhetoric was to deceive people. Be careful of following the classical Greek ideas without critical analysis. Otherwise, you may very well get the Trojan horse.

21

For lack of original ideas traditionalists hang on to the past without realizing that their tradition was also an innovation once, for today's innovation will be tomorrow's tradition.

22

Misguided governments produce misguided citizens.

23

The greatness of a nation is evidenced not in the way it handles its fortunes, but in the way it handles its misfortunes.

24

My deeds have moral value when they benefit not only me but also my fellow humans. If they benefit only me but not society at large, they are just egotistical actions.

25

It is "The Unknown Citizen[s]" without notable accomplishments who are most proud of their national accomplishments.

26

For the world to be a better place individuals have to be better, which can only be achieved through self-education, not schools or institutions.

27

As long as controlling the narrative is more important than seeking the truth, peace will elude us.

28

It is easy to kill in the name of race, religion, nation, or caste because one sheds all sense of personal responsibility for a group, responsibility that arises from one's own conscience.

29

Study books for skills, life for wisdom.

30

Politics and conscience do not walk hand in hand.

31

Preemptive strikes against others exhibit more fear than courage.

32

The plot that you hatch today to undo others may very well undo you in the end.

33
While you are busy burning down others' homes to fashion them as you will, termites are creeping into yours.

34
One of the best lessons history teaches us is that trying to become supreme leaders individuals and nations end up becoming supreme culprits.

35
When the storied carpet of imperialism finally folds, as it must, the guilt-ridden descendants will tear down their ancestors' monuments.

36
As perception and truth are different, it is hard for politicians to be truthful.

37
Professor: Please remember to turn in your paper on time.
Student: Will you pay us for that?
Professor: No. It's your responsibility as a student to submit your paper on time. Otherwise, according to the syllabus, you lose five points for each day your paper is late, unless you have a valid excuse.
Student: Our high school English teacher gave us five dollars for turning in the paper to inspire us.
Professor: That's not how you inspire students to do their job. That's how you inspire greed in them, and irresponsibility. Remember, the primary aim of education is self-improvement. And nobody pays you to improve yourself. You do so for your own good. That should motivate you to study. The world doesn't owe you, or me, anything. We have to earn our laurels. So dedicate yourself to education and write your paper for . . .
Student: For . . .
Professor: Education requires dedication.

38
True religion is about principles for the proper conduct of life; organized religion is about power over people.

39
Those who have God within don't have to look for Him without.

40
Love conquers all but hate conquers the hater.

41
None can save those from falling for whom ignorance is a badge of pride.

42
Humans can fly to the outer space to conquer the moon but they can't journey within themselves to conquer the hate.

43
Prufrock: Is this all life has to offer, Eliot?
Eliot: If you had lived it right, Prufrock, you'd be content with less.

44
There is no end to wealth but there is an end to poverty.

45
If a disreputable man (or woman) without scruples becomes the leader of a nation, however rich or powerful it may be, that nation, like its leader, commands no respect.

46
Pat Mora writes in her poem "Legal Alien":

> *Bi-lingual, Bi-cultural,*
> *able to slip from "How's life?"*
> *to* "Me'stan volviendo loca,"
> *able to sit in a paneled office*
> *drafting memos in smooth English,*
> *able to order in fluent Spanish*
> *at a Mexican restaurant . . .*
> *an American to Mexicans*
> *a Mexican to Americans*
> *a handy token*
> *sliding back and forth*
> *between the fringes of both worlds . . .*

Pat, in time, the fringes will journey to the center.

47
Civilization would have progressed further if humans had conquered their hate instead of the moon.

48
Your accomplices in misdeeds today may string you up for those crimes tomorrow.

49
Those who depend on the validation of others have lost themselves.

50
Professor Nietzsche, you wanted Europe to learn to write well so that they could "*prepare the way* for that still distant state of things in which the good Europeans will come into possession of their great task: the direction and supervision of the total culture of the earth." What would you say if you were alive today? The "good Europeans," who were at each other's throats, engaged in

mutual destruction in two Great Wars, are now busy combating the pidginization of German and McDonaldization of France instead of supervising the total culture of the earth.

51
Evidence of all cycles petering out sooner or later:
Alfred Lord Tennyson: "Better fifty years of Europe than a cycle of Cathay." (1842)
Report: China is buying European bonds to help the Union solve its debt crisis. (2011)

52
When we pay too much attention to others' faults neglecting our own, we perish faster than they.

53
Blinded by Icarus complex, the powerful spurn wisdom only to seek it after going over the cliff.

54
If a leader is a "dealer in hope," as Napoleon Bonaparte claimed, the French Emperor certainly was no leader with his endless wars for death and destruction do not instill hope in people but despair.

55
A true leader doesn't have a gun in his hand but compassion in his heart.

56
Flattery boosts the fools' ego but makes the wise cautious.

57
Though flatterers and critics often have hidden motives, the wise are more cautious of their flatterers than of their critics.

58
The four-posters of opulent palaces you had fashioned at the cost of the famished populace gave comfort to invaders when the indigents' knees buckled.

59
People disparage others because they have nothing good to say about themselves.

60
Don't be fooled by the adulation of those who celebrate you with pomp and pageantry. Alexander and Caesar had that, too. Now they are "morally indistinguishable," in V.S. Pritchett's words, "from gang leaders, sharpers, murderers, and pickpockets." So, take a good look at what you're leaving behind for posterity is a better judge of us all.

61
If you use your eyes to see, mind to think, and hands to work, you will not need another man's charity.

62
If people listened to wisdom as much as they admire it, they could do better than seeking confrontation for fleeting hegemony, making the world a vale of tears and suffering, for according to the much-acclaimed philosopher-king Marcus Aurelius: “we have come into the world to work together, like feet, like hands, like eyelids, like the rows of upper and lower teeth. To work against one another therefore is to oppose Nature; and to be vexed with another or to turn away from him is to tend to antagonism.”

63
Confrontation never solves a contentious issue to the satisfaction of both parties for the victor imposes a treaty on the victim on his own terms, which may very well contain the seed of a future conflict.

64
Confrontation-seekers can never be honest or truthful for their *modus operandi* is always arrant propaganda.

65
Wise people prefer cooperation with others for mutual development to confrontation for mutual destruction.

66
One’s rule is another’s misrule, the former designed by those seeking control under the pretext of a rule-based world making others carry the millstone of the latter, resulting in rebellion or even revolution.

67
Preaching condescendingly at the United Nations about helping others, those yearning for freedom, with your meagre handouts to solve the dreadful effects of climate change that your fossil fuels have caused will not win you friends.

68
From afar famous personalities flashed in newspapers and on TV screens appear larger than life like mythical figures that diminish in stature and estimation when seen in the flesh, some even so dishonest and disagreeable in nature and demeanor that an honorable person will not touch them with a ten-foot pole.

69
Past colonialism involved economic exploitation of an occupied territory while neocolonialism entails economic stranglehold through sanctions imposed on nations that will not toe the line.

70
Only Lilliputians with vested interests see the world as “us” versus “them” while to the superior souls the world has always been “all of us.”

71
Royals and dictators dancing with swords or hanging them from their waists remind the world the source of their anachronistic position and power.

72
Cooperation is not in the interest of the merchants of death, who can line their pockets only through confrontation, which they promote, unleashing the Dionysian forces of death and destruction, through their client politicians in the government.

73
The more the human misery, the richer, and happier, are the merchants of death.

74
If you do not care for history, history will not care for you.

75
Like a family or a nation, the world cannot be in peace if the promoters of confrontation lead it.

76
Professor: Summarize briefly what we've learned this semester in Victorian and Modern poetry.
Student: "Better fifty years of Europe than a cycle of Cathay" seemed like a "moon-blanched land" of dreams that turned into a "darkling plain," finally resulting in the wasteland of Prufrock, Mr. Stetson, and Madame Sosostris.
Professor: Good job.

77
Guns can kill people, not their ideas. So however injurious an idea may be, it can't be defeated by bullets but through proper education.

78
The wise know how to say *mea culpa* because they are intelligent enough to recognize their errors; only fools can't utter it because they are too stupid to recognize their mistakes.

79
Trying to gain knowledge only for utilitarian reasons without any love for it is like having intercourse with a person we do not care about. It satisfies the body but not the heart. And where the heart is not involved, there is no true attainment of either knowledge or satisfaction.

80
If you want to preach peace, you should have pity in your heart, not a gun in your hand.

81
Easy success makes a wise man cautious, a fool reckless.

82
Professor (reciting Ovid's poem):

> ". . . We see
> The eras change, nations grow strong, or weaken,

Like Troy, magnificent in men and riches,
For ten years lavish with her blood, and now
Displaying only ruin and for wealth
The old ancestral tombs. Sparta, Mycenae,
Athens, and Thebes, all flourished once, and now
What are they more than names?"

Student: Will that happen to us, too?
Professor: No exceptions. It's just a matter of time.
Student: So how should we live?
Professor: If you remember that a virtuous person's worth is not determined by nationality or citizenship, you'll be fine.
Student: No worries, then?
Professor: None whatsoever.
Student: Got it.

83
Rituals of organized religions do not make us religious unless we do good deeds.

84
As faith is *a priori* and philosophy is *a posteriori*, the former is found by believing and the latter by seeking. Hence, most people do not understand philosophy.

85
A wise man will look within himself first for the source of his suffering while a fool will point fingers at others.

86
One does not need an iota of intelligence to praise but a good deal of it to criticize justly. Hence, we should heed the honest critics more than the foolish admirers.

87
If you seek privacy, lock up your innermost thoughts in the Bastille of your heart unless you want them to show up in print.

88
It is better to have one conscientious enemy than a hundred friends without conscience.

89
Self-righteousness is our greatest enemy because it stunts our growth.

90
"Obstinacy comes from limited intelligence," says La Rochefoucauld. Hence, a wise man watches out for what lurks ahead and veers off well in advance instead of staying the course to avoid a disaster.

91
Lies make cowards of otherwise wise men.

92
Although we hear the word *perfect* all too often, it is not a universal concept. It is a relative term because what is perfect to one may be imperfect to another. But that does not mean we should not strive to be prefect, at least in our own eyes.

93
If you depend on others for happiness, you're destined to be unhappy sooner or later, because nobody can forever live up to others' expectations.

94
Selma: So you called it quits at the bank?
Sofia: That's right. The day I cheated a poor old woman out of $50.00 for the sake of my job, I cried at night. The next morning, you know . . .
Selma: Wow! Why did you cry?
Sofia: I remembered my late mother's words on her deathbed: "Honey, do not be the cause of others' pain for your gain."
Selma: Wise woman, wasn't she?
Sofia: We called her "the firefly."

95
A friend is not a yes-man who dances to my tunes but one who shows me the right way when I take a wrong turn.

96
Violence is a primitive instinct in humans, which education refines and wisdom restrains.

97
Those who do not learn from the past have no future.

98
If you rely on the commendations of those who benefit from your power, you may very well be deceived, for fame, as Euripides rightly says, "has exalted many lives of worthless men."

99
An upright person who has made *vitam impendere vero* his motto serves no master other than his own conscience.

100
Professor Nietzsche, when you claim that Christianity is based upon a "pathological excess of feeling, upon the profound corruption of head and heart that was required for it, that all the psychological sensations of Christianity operate: it desires to destroy, shatter, stupefy, intoxicate, the one thing it does not desire is *measure*: and that is why it is in the profoundest sense barbaric, Asiatic, ignoble, un-Hellenic," you seem to go overboard with your enthusiasm for the Greeks. You are like a rabid fan who only sees the virtues of Homer, Socrates, and Plato, but forgets to

look at the flipside with gods that fornicated and intrigued, education – especially rhetoric – that taught deception, women that were commodities, and a culture that you yourself admit was not only "shallow and superficial" but also admired people like Odysseus for lying, cunning, and horrible retribution. You could draw a fair conclusion about the Hellenic world – which invented the Trojan horse – if you were led more by your head than your heart. Then you would understand why the Christian God – the "Oriental in heaven," in your words – had triumphed over the Hellenic Olympians. And you wouldn't contradict yourself either conveying what many consider your greatest philosophy through an Asian, claiming admiringly, "Zarathustra is more truthful than any other thinker. His teaching, and his alone, upholds truthfulness as the supreme virtue – that is to say, the opposite of the *cowardice* of the 'idealist', who takes flight in face of reality; Zarathustra has more courage in him than all other thinkers put together. To tell the truth and *to shoot well with arrows*: that is Persian virtue." That does not sound barbaric at all, but better than Hellenic. I am sure you – a *sui generis* mind, a philosopher *par excellence* – would agree if you want your philosophy to be embraced by any right-thinking person.

101
After the Roman Emperor Constantine I borrowed Christianity – a religion based on God as a moral principle coming from the Vedas of India, monotheism coming from Zarathustra of Persia, and the myth of the Garden of Eden coming from the Hebrews – to Europe from the East in the 4th century CE and was later imposed on Europeans by the kings through violence – e.g., the Frankish King Charles, ironically called Charlemagne, who founded the Holy Roman Empire doing the unholiest of acts – Europe became multicultural. That knowledge helps us understand that the United States has been a multicultural society since the days of the English pilgrims.

102
Son: What is truth?
Father: Truth is that you've living. Truth is the smile on your face now. Truth was the tears on your cheeks yesterday. You smile because you're happy. You cried because you were in pain. Heaven is a metaphor for that smile. Hell is a metaphor for that pain. So, if you make someone smile, you help to create a little heaven for him. And if you make someone cry, you help to create a little hell for her.
Son: Then there isn't any heaven or hell after death?
*Fathe*r: If you can help to create a little heaven while you're alive, you won't have to worry about what happens after death.

103
When your soldiers' hearts aren't set on the mission, you're just wasting their lives.

104
Big mouths are always an indication of small minds.

105
If mind rules life, life loses its charm.

106
A hard life is more rewarding than an easy one for those who are perspicacious.

107
When our mind is not in tune with our nature, we are thrown into a whirlwind of anguish. And peace cannot return until we bring our intellectual faculties into harmony with our natural inclinations.

108
It is morally a crime to bring a life to this world that one cannot care for.

109
As every step in life since our birth is a step toward death, it should not be wasted in vice.

110
Professor: Those who want to rule over you, what will they do first except using violence?
Student: Deprive me of knowledge.
Professor: How?
Student: By taking away my books.
Professor: Well said.

111
A person who is averse to knowledge is averse to the possibilities in life.

112
To be truly good we should mold our nature to conform to the laws of Nature instead of looking for role models in human beings for good and bad are just our perceptions, which may very well lead us astray.

113
The only nobility worth aspiring to is the nobility of character achieved through virtue rather than the nobility of rank acquired with physical prowess and popular consent.

114
The unethical nature of a person does him more harm than his worst enemy because it always leads him astray.

115
If you have caused human suffering, whatever may be your pretext – national, religious, racial, political, or personal – you have offended against heaven. And when "you have offended against Heaven," as Confucius says so correctly, "there is nowhere you can turn to in your prayers."

116
Mired in blind faith, those who do not seek knowledge, knowledge will not find them.

117
Those who hate others suffer more than the ones hated.

118
You can be wise and benevolent, learned and cultivated, but if you are not trustworthy, you have lost credibility with your fellow humans because, after all, you are only as true as your word.

119
It is far better to live in peace with others, feeling secure, than to try to rule the world, attracting foes and living in constant fear.

120
As likes and dislikes hinge on what a person can relate to, it is better to be disliked by an evil person – one who acts contrary to natural law – than to be liked by him.

121
Student: You know I pray regularly.
Professor: Yes.
Student: And I give to charity generously.
Professor: Yes.
Student: And I volunteer at the hospital.
Professor: Yes.
Student: So I'm serving God.
Professor: Not if you hurt anyone.

122
Student: I'm sorry I was absent last time because I joined the demonstration to end government corruption.
Teacher: But how can public demonstrations end government corruption when it is a personal matter?
Student: How do you mean?
Teacher: If we individually do not choose to be corrupt, the government won't be so.
Student: You mean if we individually remove the corruption within, there won't be any corruption without?
Teacher: It's your life which you can control, not those of others.
Student: So instead of joining the demonstration, I should have come to class to learn.
Teacher: That would have been the wiser choice.

123
If you always resort to violence to promote your values, you must have very little faith in them. You are afraid they might crumble at the slightest challenge. If you trusted them, you would not be afraid of competing values. You would rather set examples for others. And they would follow your lead.

124
When making money becomes the sole aim in life, human nature begins to degrade.

125

While we fanned ourselves in the oppressive heat of South Texas, the commencement speaker grabbed the microphone to recount his rags-to-riches story in the land of opportunity. Then the naval commander, his ribbons and medals blazing in the slanting rays of the May afternoon, threw in our face that he had sailed far and wide like Sinbad and found no nation as great and no military as powerful as ours, reminding me of the memorable words of Ralph Waldo Emerson, the New England sage: "Great men, great nations, have not been boasters and buffoons, but perceivers of the terror of life, and have manned themselves to face it." How? Not with ribbons and medals, but with profound wisdom and understanding.

126

Foreigner: You are very proud of your Cromwell, Clive, and corporate culture, aren't you?
Englishman: We adore them.
Foreigner: Have you asked their victims for their estimation of your objects of adoration?
Englishman: They are beyond our shores, irrelevant.
Foreigner: Then you really don't know who or what you adore.

127

A wise man would promise the least and deliver the most. Politicians, however, promise the most and deliver the least. Hence, they fall from grace.

128

Most people support a political leader because, like the Pied Piper of Hamelin, he sings a tune to their liking, not because he is wise, erudite, or even honest. If they follow him to the end of the road, like those children in the above-mentioned Grimms' tale, they have only themselves to blame.

129

Though Rome conquered Greece with its might, Greek philosophers still rule the world while Rome's might bit the dust centuries ago.

130

Teacher: On my way to class today, I saw a bumper sticker on a truck proclaiming "Pride in Power."
Student: Doesn't the Bible say pride goes before the fall?
Teacher: That's right. "Pride goeth before destruction."

131

Colonialism is the control of an area or people by a power for exploiting and extending its way of life. If that control is political, it is political colonialism; if that is economic, it is economic colonialism; and if that it is religious, it is spiritual colonialism.

132

Virtuous people, secure in their goodness, do not fear God for He resides in them.

133

Democracy and philosophy do not go hand in hand. Democracy is about the approval of the multitude. Philosophy, on the other hand, is about the seeking of wisdom, which, as Plato observed aptly, is beyond the grasp of the multitude.

134

Hoisting mediocrity on the staff of "the most powerful man on earth" is a dangerous proposition for both the man and the world, because the mediocre mind develops a toxic hubris to bite off more than he can chew.

135

You can con people into voting for you in an election, but you cannot con your ability to do a successful job in office.

136

A truly independent mind can be achieved only through a proper education. But as political as well as religious leaders are afraid of a properly educated citizenry to whom they can't feed whatever they wish, there are very few truly independent people even in a democracy.

137

An economic system based on consumer spending fuels greed in its people. So the government should not blame them when they prop up the system living beyond their means and wrecking the system.

138

When a small population, being valiant and invincible, conquers a larger one, it is ultimately absorbed into the latter. Thus, the conqueror is conquered.

139

The strong self-love of imperialists comes from the fact that nobody else loves them.

140

The greatest human frailty is the lust for earthly glory.

141

Those who choose to shut their eyes to the world beating their own drums will ultimately find themselves behind the times because the world will pass them by.

142

The psychological effects of colonialism on the colonized people are far worse than the political domination and economic exploitation, because the psychological effects are so ingrained in their minds that they linger like a chronic ulcer long after political domination and economic exploitation are thrown overboard.

143

The first step to curing social ills is for a society to be honest with itself.

144
The best subject for a political leader is history, history from the perspective of the victors as well as that of the victims, because if he does not know all facets of the past, there is nothing to guide him for the proper course of action in the future.

145
Teacher: A man who doesn't read, a man who doesn't learn, a man who doesn't think, nothing can be expected of him.
Student: What about a woman?
Teacher: There's no difference between a man and a woman in this respect.
*Studen*t: What about a society?
Teacher: Who forms a society?
Student: Men and women.
Teacher: Then draw your own conclusion.
Student: A society that doesn't read, a society that doesn't learn, a society that doesn't think, nothing can be expected of it.

146
A government composed of corrupt people can never succeed, for to govern is to correct, as demonstrated by the Chinese word *cheng*. So a government that is not correct itself cannot hope to correct its citizens to lead them in the right direction.

147
Just as a teacher is more successful when his students understand rather than follow what he explains in class, a government is also more successful when the citizens understand rather than obey all the decrees and declarations.

148
It is in the best interest of a government that it should give its people a good education so they can become responsible and productive citizens of society. Then the task of governing becomes easy. Otherwise, an irresponsible and unproductive population will only cause chaos and hardship, making it difficult for any government to govern effectively.

149
As every law enacted by a government, democratic or autocratic, is an encroachment on the freedom of the individual, a good government would rather educate its citizens in the proper conduct than pass laws to regulate their behavior.

150
Student: The economy is in shambles. People are losing their homes, selling their valuables . . .
Teacher: And living in their cars. I know. In most cases, however, they have brought the misery upon themselves living beyond their means.
Student: When will things turn around?
Teacher: When people turn around.
Student: How do you mean?
*Teache*r: When people learn to feed their spirit more than their bodies, they will see an end to their misery.

151
Just as a writing teacher must be able to write herself to be successful with her students, a government that wants to educate its citizens in the proper conduct must also behave properly to be effective in its endeavor.

152
Artificially created physical boundaries of any kind – national, racial, religious, caste – by vested interests invariably create psychological boundaries that lead to group identity causing conflicts and preventing social cohesion.

153
Religion and politics are antithetical. Religion is about the proper conduct of life while politics, as the Germans say, is a dirty business (*Politik ist ein schmutziges Geschäft*). So when religion is used for political power, it is also sullied.

154
The aim of a good government is the welfare of a society, but those who exploit organized religion for political power can only do so by stoking religious intolerance against other persuasions, which causes social discord and degradation and ultimately social disintegration through violence and bloodshed.

155
Majority and minority are usually bureaucratic constructs that will evidently find the minority scapegoated for the ills of a society, generating resentment against each other and ripping the social fabric.

156
A society that does not think *as* a society cannot remain a society for long.

157
A true patriot will foster accord between people – or groups of people – in a country rather than foment discord between them for that may lead to hostility and violence, which can destabilize a society.

158
The true strength of a society lies not in the number of its people but in their competence.

159
As a self-righteous individual who is not introspective is brought down by his own mistakes, so a self-righteous society that does not mend its ways is ravaged by the plague of its wrongdoing.

160
Only empty vessels without any personal accomplishments to speak of pump themselves up with national, religious, or racial pride.

161

Enslaved minds cannot produce great societies because minds must be free to think in order to advance society to be great.

162

Even pain, when turned into art, becomes a celebration of life.

163

Those who impose peace at gunpoint can't have peace themselves because they may very well be staring into the barrels of their adversaries' guns someday. That fear drives them to accumulate more guns under whose weight their knees finally buckle.

164

In a consumer-driven culture, where possessions are more important than people, the individual loses significance as an individual, which ultimately leads to his suffering.

165

As some cultures are predominantly spiritual and others commercial, all cultures can't be judged by the same principles because one can't serve God and Mammon simultaneously.

166

Is it any wonder that the President struts? He knows that appearing presidential is more important than being presidential.

167

Daughter: Why is there so much nonsense in the media, especially on talk radio?
Mother: According to the sagacious Emerson, Americans rely on the power of the dollar. So if people can make millions spewing nonsense, why will they ever talk sense?

168

Reverse discrimination wouldn't have happened if those in power yesterday had not discriminated against those in power today.

169

La Rochefoucauld's view that "The man who thinks he can find enough in himself to be able to dispense with everybody else makes a great mistake, but the man who thinks he is indispensable to others makes an even greater" is *a fortiori* true for nations as well.

170

As a man who believes in the goodness of his deeds does not have to worry about his reputation, so a nation that trusts in the rightness of its actions does not have to worry about its image.

171

If howling and shouting could make people patriotic, dogs would be the greatest patriots because they shout the loudest.

172

Hackneyed and hollow lip service is given to ordinary soldiers only to exploit generally less gifted individuals to fatten the Roscoe Kurtzes.

173

Fallen soldiers are draped in a nation's flag in honor of their service but the nation is not going to be responsible for their misdeeds.

174

If people learned to respect their fellow humans more than their own glory, they could make this world a better place with increased cooperation.

175

It is important for a society to have people of multiple faiths for it not only makes them tolerant but also tests their beliefs leading to the enrichment of the self as well as the community.

176

This is how Kandy was colonized by the British in the 19th century. They were invited by the chiefs of this Sri Lankan kingdom in 1815 to successfully overthrow their tyrannical king. Three years later the same chiefs were put down with an iron fist when they tried to rebel against British domination.

177

A society where profits are preferable to virtues, soldiers are more desirable than philosophers, and education is nothing more than indoctrination, that society is on a downward slope.

178

The more materialistic a society becomes, the more superficial it grows because of the emphasis on material possessions that can be advertised and sold openly, unlike goodness that resides within and can neither be advertised nor traded.

179

As most criminals are the product of social policies, a society should focus on reducing the number of criminals through education instead of increasing the number of police, for the fewer criminals there are, the healthier a society will be.

180

Anyone who causes human misery is not worthy of being called a human.

181

Mediocrity triumphs in a democracy because that is what the majority of the electorate can relate to, turning democracy into mediocracy.

182

Citizen: I thought you were an honest man, mayor, when I voted for you.
Mayor: Would you have voted for me, sir, if I had told you the truth? 1

183

Professor: Confucius claimed that the gentleman understands what is moral and the small man understands what is profitable.
Student: That's why Socrates asked the Athenians to cater to virtue.
Professor: And our virtue will remain with us forever, as Voltaire says so correctly, while our riches may dwindle sooner or later.
Student: So, it is better to be good than to be rich.
Professor: If you realize that, you'll be in peace.
Student: If we all realize that?
Professor: Society will be in peace.

184

If we do not wish to be untrustworthy to others, we should refrain from making promises for we are not in control of our future circumstances that alone can decide whether promises will be kept.

185

For the same uncertainty of future circumstances, those who rely on others' promises more often than not end up disappointed leading to animosity between best friends, even death.

186

Human salvation lies in good deeds, not ancient dogmas rendered obsolete by the advancement of knowledge.

187

Plato claims that philosophy, which wants convictions on the basis of reason, is not for everybody. So, religions based on revelation become the metaphysics of the masses. They are "the only means of introducing some notion of high significance of life into the uncultivated heads," says Schopenhauer. But as long as they shift the responsibility for their actions on someone else through prayers and confessions, they will not become cultivated. Until philosophy makes inroads into the world of the masses, they will not learn to be responsible for their actions and the misery of the human race will not only continue but may even lead to the self-destruction of the species.

188

Why would generals and admirals like to see a cessation of wars and conflicts, their *raison d'être?* Nobody would ask for their opinions then. They would be as irrelevant and useless as the junked jalopies on a dump.

189

The hellfire that you unleash on others will burn you sooner or later.

190

A child is born neither a sinner nor a saint because he has not yet had the chance to prove himself. His life is like a clean slate. What he writes on it with his deeds will determine whether he turns out to be a sinner or a saint.

191

Beware of those who claim to have a divine duty to do this or that. Zillions of leaders, both political and religious, used that excuse throughout history to commit crimes without consequences.

192

U.S. reporter: The contemporary Nobel Laureates – Derek Walcott, Seamus Heaney, Czeslaw Milosz – are all foreign-born. Why can't America produce such good poets?
Poet: That says something about our society: Life is comfortable here.

193

As kids imitate adults, confrontation-loving adults that shun cooperation, regularly resorting to bullets to solve international issues, should not blame angsty kids for being trigger-happy, who blow up their peers to deal with their problems.

194

The noblest duty of every citizen is to contribute positively to the betterment of a society. But those who produce five babies when they can barely afford one or two are contributing negatively to society by creating a burden on the taxpayers, who will eventually have to pay more taxes for social services, public education, and government hospitals, besides suffering from overcrowding, social nuisance, and even criminality. Giving preference to their lower instinct than the upper, these people become the true enemies of society.

195

Even the blackest crimes can be whitewashed by the perpetrators with fitting rhetoric, the way the Nazis inscribed over the gates of their concentration camps: "*Arbeit macht frei*."

196

Those who are blinded by power shamelessly justify the most unjust of their actions only to put their descendants to shame. That is why Germans had to apologize to the Jews for the Nazi concentration camps and gas chambers during the second Great War. The U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright recognized the mistake the Eisenhower administration had made by toppling the democratically elected Iranian government of Mosaddeq in 1953. And the French President Sarkozy admitted that French colonialism in Algeria for over a hundred years, when over a third of the population of the country had been exterminated, was unjust. All seen clearly in hindsight, after the fact, after the damage had been done. The mirage of power is certainly misleading.

197

"The most powerful Commander-in-Chief on earth" with his finger at the switch of an intercontinental ballistic missile is as afraid of flying shoes as any Tom, Dick, and Harry.

198

As one does not understand the worth of the money one has not earned, so one cannot fathom the significance of an idea one has not conceived.

199

Felix: Ralph Waldo Emerson, the sage of New England, calls you "the man of truth." So tell me, truthful man, what rewards do I get for doing what is good if there's no heaven in the Great Beyond?
Saadi: I don't know anything about the Great Beyond. But by doing what is good, you get to live in a better world, enjoying the smiles on happy faces. Isn't that all heaven is about, a metaphor for happy life?
Felix: You mean I get to live in a heaven on earth.
Saadi: That's your reward.

200

History is the best teacher of a thinker, not prophets, professors, and pundits.

201

There are no holy wars for there is nothing holy about letting loose hell on earth through hatred, murder, and bloodshed, which a war unleashes turning humans into beasts.

202

Good people are friends of God, unafraid of Him, for He shows up in their deeds.

203

The difference between ordinary thieves and conquerors or colonizers is that the former hide their stolen treasures out of shame and fear while the latter flaunt them shamelessly without fear on crowns and in museums.

204

As history is replete with inferior minds that by virtue of their birth or popular consent have done incalculable damage to vastly superior minds, Nero claiming the foremost but by no means the only example, nobility of birth or public adulation is not a measure of either goodness or greatness.

205

Love ennobles a woman in the eyes of her lover who subjects her to the most "ridiculous posture" to possess her in a "humiliating anti-climax."

206

Insufferable pain from the loss of one true love is far better than middling happiness from ten significant others.

207

We are never in love with the real person but an image of the loved one that our affection creates.

208

When a relationship goes sour, the disappointed partners allege that it would not have happened had they found the right person, without realizing that they had failed the test to make it work, wherein lay the challenge and the excitement of the relationship as well as their merit as human beings.

209
Knowing full well that our first love may not be our last – and in most cases it isn't – we nonetheless plunge into it with all our passion which, once the affair ceases, leaves some of us emotionally crippled for the rest of our lives because we are unable to evoke the same intensity of feeling for another. Thus begins a lifetime of suffering for what seemed to be an excursion through Eden.

210
Who says that virtue can't beget vice? Look at love engendering jealousy.

211
When the temple of love rules over the temple of bricks, there will be no more "you" or "me," or "he" or "she," but all of "us" and "we."

212
Cavalcades of people demonstrated yesterday in the streets of various capitals against higher food prices, blaming those countries that produce biofuels. What they do not realize is that they can't control others' behavior by parading their irresponsibility. They need to control their own behavior, reining in their desire for babies that they can't feed. If they take responsibility for their actions within the four walls of their homes, they won't have to flock to the street.

213
The heart is superior to the mind because love is preferable to ideas. The love that flows from the heart can never injure anyone, but the ideas that flow from the mind can.

214
As wisdom is perennial and empires periodic, for wisdom never fades while empires come and go, philosophers are the ultimate winners and empire builders abject losers.

215
As actions are easier than thinking, we find more empire builders in the world than philosophers.

216
The authentic self is known only to the person himself. To everybody else he is a creation of their fancy, influenced by their idiosyncrasies.

217
The worst part of a war is not the number of people losing their lives, because they are gone forever, but the hatred that is fueled against each other as a result, which lingers long after the war is over for the living to suffer.

218
When news outlets become propaganda outlets, even their truths are suspicious.

219

For those who can realize it, misfortunes from time to time are blessings in disguise because they remind us of our vulnerability as humans and prevent us from developing a sense of invincibility, the nemesis that can lure us to bite more than we can chew and choke on our own impudence.

220

A great deal of misery on this earth can be eliminated simply by being dutiful.

221

No scholarly interpretation of a creative work of great literary merit is complete, not just because the scholar's schema is different from that of the creator's but also because the depth of thinking of the scholar doesn't reach that of the writer. Most of all, however, it is because the scholar cannot resort to the flights of imagination like that of the creative artist.

222

The quality of life does not lie in material well-being but in responsible living.

223

Plato: I hear that you're retiring next year.
Professor: Yup. Sailing into the sunset. No more grading of papers.
Plato: Just boating and fishing, hunh?
Professor: And traveling. What about you? When are you calling it quits?
Plato: When I can stop thinking.
Professor: Then I guess it's never.
Plato: As long as there's a whiff of breath.

224

For the conscious individual like a thinker, the physical migration is not as important as the spiritual migration, because he is solitary even in his ancestral home.

225

A life that corrupts one's soul for the comfort of the body is a demoralized life.

226

Nothing good can come from those who shun knowledge.

227

Making people knowledgeable is making them virtuous.

228

As the ideal condition of goodness and intellect are rare in a person, goodness without intellect is preferable to intellect without goodness for one need not fear harm from the former as one does from the latter.

229

We should not entirely turn a deaf ear to our enemies because they can often evaluate us better than our friends.

230
Our friends can sometimes be more dangerous than our enemies for while we are always sure of the motives of the latter we are never sure of the motives of the former.

231
As it is easier to display the possessions rather than the essence of people, the future generations in a world increasingly dominated by the visual media are in danger of craving fortune more than virtue, enriching the peddlers at the cost of their own moral nature.

232
We should exercise the utmost caution at the moment of the greatest triumph because it is precisely at that moment we are most vulnerable to rash decisions that can spell calamity.

233
Self-righteousness often turns intelligent people into fools blinding them to their faults and thus hastening them to their self-destruction.

234
Enslaved minds can't produce great nations because they can't think without borders.

235
A smiling face's "hi" is no guarantee of a greeting for at times it is as long as the dagger pointed at the back.

236
Love's advantage over lust is that unlike the latter it can kill two birds with one stone for love always leads to lust while lust seldom leads to love.

237
Unfaithful lovers always claim "there is no perfect love" to defend their waywardness like those scholars who say they "don't care for Nietzsche's or Schopenhauer's views" to defend their ignorance.

238
We all wish we had not met certain people in life but, thanks to them, our perspectives have broadened.

239
We are never too busy to love if we are truly in love.

240
Some men have none of the virtues required to be a hero for which they resort to shoddy schemes to make a name by bringing down noble worthies but, more often than not, end up proving the old adage: *Zeroes don't become heroes*.

241

Virtues bind a man to goodness as securely as the roots tie an oak to the ground, firm enough to weather the whipping storms of evil, shaken and swayed but never uprooted.

242

Interviewer: Does the quarterly you've recently launched, *The Polymath*, have a focus?
Editor: It's dedicated to the ideas of the 17th -century philosopher Gottfried Leibniz.
Interviewer: How would you describe him – a conservative or a progressive?
Editor: Progressive for his time.
Interviewer: And yourself?
Editor: I am a conservative.

243

A monster can lurk inside a master, too. Confucius, one of the greatest philosophers of all time, known popularly as "the teacher of teachers," the father of the principle of reciprocity, while visiting Ch'i as the acting Chief Minister of Lu, was displeased with the actors and dwarfs who were playing music. "Common people," he told the Master of Ceremonies, "who try to corrupt the rules should be killed." Accordingly, the MC had the musicians executed, separating their limbs from their bodies.

244

Bad experiences with our near and dear ones hurt us more than those with strangers and enemies, and the closer the relationship the greater the pain, which is best expressed by the Japanese poet Issa:

in this world
we walk on the roof of hell
gazing at flowers

245

A man in love has to the make the most painful decision when he realizes he can't live with or without her.

246

The true nature of a person is revealed when he (or she) is cast off by a lover.

247

No experience is negative for the wise because every experience contains a lesson.

248

Universal peace begins with the individual. Every step an individual takes toward self-improvement helps the world make a stride toward peace.

249

The local hero often turns out to be a global villain and the global hero a local villain because the former champions a community's preconceived notions while the latter challenges them for humanity's sake.

250
If you become a laughingstock to great men, you certainly aren't great.

251
Just like a meandering river cannot follow a straight course, a man down a tortuous road cannot find a straight path.

252
The wise always navigate a calamity – be it personal, social, or economic – better than the wealthy.

253
Those who can detect the good in others can discover the ill in themselves.

254
Whatever happens to a good man happens for his own good.

255
The dominant organized religions of today are a legacy of conquests, the conquerors imposing their morals and manners on the subdued people, not because they were good or right but to prevent the subjects from thinking on their own for fear of the rulers losing their authority; following them without critical analysis is to continue that legacy of autocracy, not democracy.

256
The stream the conquerors crossed muddying their marauding feet washes the wounds of their victims.

257
Honorable people make their descendants proud of their ancestors' noble deeds, but those self-proclaimed patriots whose misdeeds are enshrined in crime museums abroad only make their descendants ashamed of their progenitors.

258
Senator: Which side are you on, Socrates?
Socrates: I don't serve any vested interest, sir.
Senator: Please answer the question.
Socrates: I'm on the side of my conscience.

259
Know thyself, says the wise Socrates. And to know oneself one must be completely free of all authorities – spiritual as well as political, because, as Krishnamurti says, authority prevents us from understanding ourselves. So we must educate ourselves without the interference of parents or schools.

260
The lust for earthly glory is the fountain of misery.

261
Those who build palaces for comfort may very well end up making their beds in spider holes.

262
One must have a taste for beauty to appreciate beauty just as one must have merit to appreciate merit.

263
Good guys don't train others to kill for, as the universally beloved Pablo Neruda says, there are no good murderers.

264
It is better to feel safe in a hut than unsafe in a palace.

265
Adversity tests our integrity; prosperity tests our humanity.

266
Shiv: I understand how you feel.
Robi: No, you don't.
Shiv: I was there, in your shoes. I went through the same experience.
Robi: You couldn't have been in my shoes, for no two people perceive an identical experience the same way.
Shiv: And why not?
Robi: Because of different dispositions.

267
Fools don't realize the strength of a virtuous character because they don't have it in them.

268
Knowing full well all empires fizzle out in the end, as history shows us, some still find it difficult to resist the lure of fleeting glory for eternal damnation.

269
You have built palaces for comfort by starving the people who at least die among mourning relatives while you end up dangling from a hangman's noose, none to shed a tear for you.

270
A mythology belongs to a people but a philosophy belongs to all.

271
Artists and critics are like spouses who do not see eye to eye but one can't live without the other either. The critics need the artists for their livelihood and the artists need the critics for their longevity.

272

Knowing what the reporter is saying about us is misleading, we tend to believe what he is saying about others.

273

Those who deprive others of their rights may very well lose their own in the end.

274

History repeats itself for those who, knowingly or unknowingly, try to defy it.

275

The devil may come calling in the dead of night but a good man is never roused from sleep.

276

An artist survives through the love of his audience, not awards.

277

Principles bring us misery, some say, for they prevent us from compromising; but those with principles are still better than those without, for the unprincipled can commit crimes at will without qualms.

278

Worshippers of the heart win over those of the muscle for the heart beats strong even when the muscle degenerates.

279

Those who conquer themselves do not have to conquer others.

280

Mythology enslaves the mind while philosophy liberates it.

281

A heart that beats is a heart that loves.

282

The charm of love lies in the continual discovery of the hidden mystery about lovers; once that discovery ceases love loses its charm; all that remains is a humdrum habit or good-bye kiss.

283

Love, unlike power, knows no bounds.

284

Power engenders fear in the powerful while love engenders courage in the lover.

285

Vociferous lies may drown the truth but can’t usurp its place.

286
Lies have their time and place but truths are everlasting.

287
“It’s time to sow, sweetheart,” urges the girl who eloped with the boy that worries about the harvest.

288
Heart tempered by mind can help us choose better partners.

289
The trees in the oppressive heat are eternally grateful to the whiff.

290
Like a bride murmuring love, water dances over the dry riverbed to give it life.

291
Though days are of the same length, we want a good day to linger to savor every minute and can’t wait to see the back of a bad one for a sigh of relief.

292
The dog gets tired of barking at the moon that never tires of its glow.

293
The palm stands erect in the storm that shatters the cathedral.

294
The hibiscus in all its varicolored glory blessing my yard is a poor man’s Champs-Élysées, say some, not knowing I am all the more richer for it.

295
The murmur of bygone love is a brook winding through autumn leaves.

296
Weeds are sprouting from the cracks of the faded walls of the late debonair actor’s desolate mansion from whose balcony he waved at jubilant devotees outside his gate.

297
The night lends its darkness to the moon’s brilliance to which Basho gives thanks.

298
You wonder why you are in debt lighting the pyre with your riches.

299
The autumn leaf kisses the ground with a sigh, like an old lover’s tender breath at night.

300
The horse raises dust in its haste while the elephant calmly walks by.

301
The green leaf fluttering on the tree laughs at the yellow mate drifting to the ground, before a blast whips it down.

302
Seldom-traveled alleys leaving traces are better than oft-traveled highways that make no marks.

303
The adolescent's muscle mocks the wisdom of the old that rests easy for having caused no pain.

304
Son: What's your New Year's resolution, Father?
*Fathe*r: I must be the cause of others' smiles, not their tears.

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