A Cento

compiled by

John L. Bell
I believe that through discipline, but not through discipline alone, we can achieve serenity, and a certain small but precious measure of freedom from the accidents of incarnation and chance, and that detachment which preserves the world which it recognizes. I believe that through discipline we learn to preserve what is essential to our happiness in more and more adverse circumstances,
and to abandon with simplicity what would else have seemed to us indispensable; that we come to see a little the world without the gross distorhion of personal desire, and in seeing it so, accept more easily our earthly privation and its earthly horror.

—J. R. Oppenheimer
The instinctive and progressive interest of every man in art will go on and on forever. New hopes, ever building new ones, ever opening new horizons, until the day will come when every man while digging his potatoes will breathe his own epics, his own symphonies (operas if he likes it), and as he gets off an evening in his backyard and shirt sleeves smoking his pipe and watching his children in
their fun of building
their theme's for their
donatas of their life
he will look up over
the mountair and see
his visions in their
reality, will hear the
transcendental theme's
of the day's symphony
resound in their
many choirs, and in
all their perfection
through the west wind
and the tree tops!

— Charles Ives.
Where leadership reigns, a scale of values becomes unnecessary.

- Albert Camus

In the game of world-building we lose a point whenever we have to ask for extraordinary material especially prepared for the end in view.

- A. S. Eddington
In Einstein's theory of relativity the observer is a man who sets out in quest of truth armed with a measuring-rod. In quantum theory he sets out armed with a sieve.

— A. S. Eddington

"Mathematizing" may well be a creative activity of man, like music, the products of which not only in form but also in substance are conditioned by the decisions of
history and therefore
deny complete objective
rationalization.

- Hermann Weyl

Art is the capacity
to put an idea in
the clearest, simplest,
most intelligible form.

- Webern

The most impressive
thing about man, perhaps,
the one thing that.
excuses him of all his idiocy and probably, is the fact that he has invented the concept of that which does not exist.

— Glenn Gould

Always dream and shoot higher than you know you can do. Don't bother just to be better than your contemporaries & predecessors. Try to be better than yourself.

— William Faulkner.
A psychotic is a guy who's just discovered what's going on.

—William Burroughs.

Only for the most select & most balanced minds does it seem possible to guard the perceived picture of external reality against the distortion to which it is otherwise subjected in its transit through the psychic individuality of the one perceiving it.

—Sigmund Freud.
The purpose of art is not the release of a momentary ejection of adrenaline but, rather, the gradual, lifelong construction of a state of wonder & serenity.

— Glenn Gould

As soon as nobody assents to it, a philosophy automatically becomes fantastic literature.

— Stanislaw Lem
Nothing is poorer than a truth expressed as it was thought.

— Walter Benjamin

"...music, that golden high-arched exit from this, "pit of pain and ignominy."

— John Updike

"[The original purpose of] music was [to act as] a means of shunning or exciting the senses, of spell-binding or spurring to action; it
served to put human beings into a different state, not to reflect the phenomena of the outside world.

- Ernst Fischer

The world is built in many ways: simple for the simple-hearted, deep for the profound.

- Erwin Chargaff.

If it is true that there is no greater sorrow than to remember a happy
time in a state of misery, it is just as
tree that calling up
a moment of anguish
in a tranquil mood,
seated quietly at one's
desk, is a source of
profound satisfaction.

—Primo Levi

You have to begin to lose
your memory, if only in
bits & pieces, to realize
that memory is what
makes our lives. Life
without memory is no
life at all.... Our
memory is our coherence.
our reason, our feeling, even our action. Without it, we are nothing. . . . . .
(I can only wait for the final amnesia, the one that can erase an entire life, as it did my mother’s. . . .)
Luis Buñuel

A reasoned life without a definite outlook is not a life, but a burden & a horror.

— Anton Chekhov.
No matter how simple a man may be, the simple cannot go on astonishing him for ever.

— Thomas Merton

To imitate others is necessary, to imitate oneself is pathetic.

— Picasso

Polyphony always contains the danger of cacophony.

— Yevgeny Zamyatin

The reason why our sentient, percipient l
thinking ego is met nowhere within our scientific world picture can easily be indicated in seven words: Because it is itself that world picture.

- E. Schrödinger.

Keep open the wild & irrational pathways through which the wildness & pangs of life can be glimpsed.

- William James.
Mediocrity knows nothing higher than itself, but talent instantly recognizes genius.

To the man who loves art for its own sake, it is frequently in its least important and lowest manifestations that the keenest pleasure is to be derived,

— Sherlock Holmes.

How simple is the prescription for a happy life: to do what we have to out of love for the thing.

— Karel Capek
"When the time is ripe for certain things, these things appear in different places in the manner of violets coming to light in early spring."

— Wolfgang Bohm (to his son Johann urging him to claim the incorrects of non-euclidean geometry without delay)

"What is so bad about the American Left is that it betrayed in order to save itself swimming pools."

— Orson Welles.
"When one undertakes to be absolutely honest, to hold nothing back, one doesn’t also undertake to be original."

- John Braine

"Moral motivations work... because we are capable of feeling guilty."

- Leszek Kolakowski

"Time is a continuum whence there is one escape only. By closing the eyes to it from time to time, it is possible to splinter it into those fragments with which alone we are familiar."

- Elias Canetti
"This book is written for
such as are in sympathy
with its spirit. This
spirit is different from the
one which informs the vast
stream of European and Amer-
ican civilization in which
all of us stand. That spirit
expresses itself in an onward
movement, in building ever
larger and more complicated
structures, the other in striving
after clarity and perspicuity in
no matter what structure. The
first tends to grasp the world by
way of its periphery — in its
variety; the second at its
centre — in its essence. And
so the first adds one constru
to another, moving on and up, as it were, from one stage to the next, while the other remains where it is. What it tries to grasp is always the same.

— Wittgenstein.

"It is a profoundly erroneous truism... that we should cultivate the habit of thinking of what we are doing. The precise opposite is the case. Civilization advances by extending the number of important operations which we
Can perform without thinking about them.

— Whitehead

"The truly classical is not foreign to anybody."

— Santayana

"Why else should we need music but for its ability to satisfy our longing for emotional experience, without our having to undergo the deep tumult at its root."

— Wolfgang Hildesheimer
“Marx is only anti-capitalist in so far as capitalism is out of date.”
—Albert Camus

"Like any art historian talk about the intoxication of creativity, while poor authors—important creators—pretend there's no such thing. There is such a thing, but what comes next is labour, anguish and futility."
—Alfred Döblin
"If the world were clear, art would not exist."

"The secondarily of the importance of a literary form are often measured by the 'trash' it contains."

— Camus

"We are attached to the possession of a thing because we think that if we can possess it, it will cease to exist."

— Simone Weil
"When we are disappointed by a pleasure which we have been expecting and which comes, the disappointment is because we were expecting the future. And as soon as it is there, it is the present. We want the future to be there without ceasing to be future. This is an absurdity of which eternity alone is the cure.

— Simone Weil"

"The great mistake of the Marxists and of all the whole of the 19th century was to think that by walking straight on one mounted upwards into heaven."

— Simone Weil
"Justice consists of establishing between analogous things connections identical with those between similar things, even when none of these has an object of attachment for us."

 Simone Veil

"The value of a philosopher's discourse is not diminished if it is delivered under a solitary plane tree in the noon of the decadas to hear."

Themistius (317–387)
"What is death? Either a transition or an end. I am not afraid of coming to an end, this being the same as never having begun, nor of transition, for I shall never be in confinement quite so cramped anywhere else as I am here."

— Seneca

"Men have learned to live with a black burden, a huge aching lump: the supposition that 'reality' may be only a 'dream'. How much more dreadful it would be if the very awareness of your being were of reality's dream."
like nature were also dream
a built-in hallucination.”

“Perhaps if the future existed, concretely and individually, as something that could be discerned by a better brain, the past would not be so seductive; its demands would be balanced by those of the future.”

— Vladimir Nabokov

I would rather meet a sheep than a lion in the open country; but behind bars, I would rather see a lion than a sheep. Not provide such fare.

— Tennessee Williams
"The state is that
in which which prevents
enmity other than such as
it committeth
— Ibn Khaldun

"As want is the constant
scourge of the people, so
ennui is that of the fashion-
able world. In middle-class
life ennui is represented
by the Sunday, and want
by the six week-days."
— de l'Isle-Adam

"As for living, our
servants shall do that
for us."
— de l'Isle-Adam
"There is no example of inevitability that can compare with the sight of a gifted young man narrowing down into an ordinary old man—not through personal misfortune, merely through the process of dehydration to which he was predestined."

— Robert Musil

"The very act of writing stops thought by making it dependent on words for its expression. We never think that what we think conceals us from what we are."

— Paul Valéry
"A single thought is that which it is from other thoughts, as a wave of the sea takes its form and shape from the waves which precede and follow it."

— S.T. Coleridge

"The break between the generations derives from the impossibility of transmitting experience of saving others from the mistakes we have already made. The real distance between two generations is created by the elements they have in common, that require
the cyclical repetition of the same experiences, as in the behavior of animal species, handed down through biological heredity. The element of real difference between us and them are, on the contrary, the result of the irreversible changes that every period evolves; these differences are the weight of the historical legacy that we have handed on to them, the true legacy for which we are responsible, even if unconsciously sometimes.
This is why we have nothing to teach: we can exert no influence on what most resembles our own experience; in what basis are our own imprint we are unable to recognize ourselves.

— Italo Calvino

“A man who has lost his anonymity has lost a precious & irreplaceable thing.” —

William James Sidis
"One of those clox English friendships that begin by excluding confidences from eliminate conversation altogether"

— Borges

"Nothing happens today man which he is not formed by nature to bear." (The Essence of Stoicism)

— Marcus Aurelius

One must work, if not from taste then at least from despair. For, to reduce everything to a single truth is less boring than pleasure.

— Baudelaire
"Conversation enriches the understanding, but solitude is the school of genius."

— Gibbon

"All men dream, but not equally. Those who dream by night in the dusty recesses of their minds, wake in the day to find that it was vanity; but the dreamers of the day are dangerous men, for they may act their dream with open eyes, to make it possible.

— T.E. Lawrence
"When you want to understand something, you stand in front of it all by yourself, without any help, all the past history of the world is no use to you. And then it disappears & wherever you thought understood disappears with you."

— T. S. Sartre

"The mind is like a richly woven tapestry in which the colors are distilled from the experiences of the senses & the designs drawn from the convolutions of the intellect."

— C. McCullers
"Perhaps peace between men is a sense of reconciled conflicts between equals."

— Lionel Trilling

"What we're doing in Vietnam is why the black man has to kill the yellow man so the white man
can keep the land he took from the red man"

— Dick Gregory

"The compilation of worst books is a laborious and impoverished exha-
vagance"

— Borges