

A Cento

compiled by

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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 renounces. 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 distortion 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, ever
 fulfilling hopes, ever
 building new ones, ever
 opening new horizons,
 until the day will
 come when every man
 while digging his pot-
 aposes will breathe
 his own epics, his
 own symphonies (or
 if he likes it); and
 as he sits of an even-
 ing in his backyard
 and shirt-sleeved smok-
 ing his pipe and watch-
 ing his children in

their fun of building
their themes for their
sonatas of their life,
he will look up over
the mountains and see
his visions in their
reality, will hear the
transcendental strains
of the day's symphony
resounding in their
many choirs, and in
all their perfection,
through the west wind
and the tree tops!

- Charles Ives.

Where lucidity 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 specially
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 got only in form but also in substance are conditioned by the decisions of

history and therefore
defy 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 pro-
tality, 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 is, rather, the gradual, life-long 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 stunning 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 true 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 anesthesia, the one
 that can erase an
 entire life, as it did
 my mother's. . . .)

Luis Buñuel

A reasoned life with-
 out 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
admirating 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
sentiment, percipient &

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 wild-
ness & pang of life can
be glimpsed.

- William James.

Mediocrity knows
nothing higher than itself,
but talent instantly recog-
nizes genius.

To the man who loves
art for its own sake, it
is frequently in the least
important & lowliest man-
ifestations that the keen-
est 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 Bolyai
(to his son Johann urging him to claim the invention of noneuclidean geometry without delay)

"What is so bad about the American Left is that it betrayed in order to save its 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 & more complicated
 structures, the other in striving
 after clarity & perspicuity in
 no matter what structure. The
 first tries 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 construction

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 imperfect 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, with-
out our having to undergo the
deep tumult at its root."

— Wolfgang Hildesheimer

"Marx is only anti —
capitalist. Insofar as
capitalism is out of
date."

— Albert Camus

"Literati and art historians
talk about the inextricabilities
of creativity, while poor
authors — impotent creators —
pretend there's no such thing.
There is such a thing, but
what comes next is Labour,
anguish and tedium"

— Alfred Döblin

"If the world were dead,
art would not exist"

"The fecundity & 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 cease to 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 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 some of those things concern us personally & are an object of attachment for us."

— Simone Weil

"The value of a philosopher's discourse is not diminished if it is delivered under a solitary plane tree with none but cicadas 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 aware of reality's dream"

like nature were also a dream,
a built-in hallucination."

"Perhaps if the phone existed,
concretely and individually, as
something that could be discovered
by a better brain, the post
would not be so reductive:
its demands would be balanced
by those of the phone."

— 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. Art provides
such fare

— Taine

"The state is that institution which prevents injustice other than such as it commits itself -

- Ibn Khaldun

"As want is the constant scourge of the people, so envy is that of the fashionable world. In middle-class life envy 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 & shape from the waves which precede & 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 elements of real
 difference between
 them are, on the contrary,
 the result of the irre-
 versible changes that
 every period evokes; these
 differences are the result
 of the historical legacy
 that we have handed on
 to them, the true legacy
 for which we are re-
 sponsible, even if un-
 consciously sometimes.

This is why we have
nothing to teach: we can
exert no influence on
what most resembles our
own experience; in
what bears 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 close English friendships that begin by excluding confidences & soon eliminate conversation altogether.

— Borges

"Nothing happens to any man which he is not forced 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: work 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 dusky recesses of their minds, waken 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 & what you have understood disappears with you."

- T.-P. Sartre -

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

- C. McCullers

"Perhaps peace
between men is
a series of recan-
cled conflicts
between equals."

—Lionel Trilling

"What we're doing
in Vietnam is using
the black man to
kill the yellow man
so the white man

can keep the land
he took from the
Red man "

- Dick Greary

"The compilation
of vast books is
a laborious and
improvidently exha-
vance "

- Bayle