

GOD CAN QUOTE ME ON THAT

QUOTATIONS ON THE MEANING OF LIFE

INTRODUCED AND COMPILED
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acta
PUBLICATIONS

CONTENTS

God Can Quote Me on That	7
Meaning and the Examined Life	15
Character and Moral Courage	31
Ethics	45
Work	57
Business, Money, Ambition	73
Love and Relationships	87
Leadership	99
Grief and Death	113
Humor and Laughter	125
Miscellaneous Epiphanies	139
Index	151



GOD CAN QUOTE ME
ON THAT



I've been a student of philosophy for more years than I'm willing to admit in print. And I have taught Philosophy and Business Ethics at Loyola University Chicago for well over a quarter century.

I take great pride in the fact that I have diligently worked my way through some of the greatest philosophical texts ever written: Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*; Plato's *Republic*; Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*; Augustine's *City of God*; Erasmus' *The Praise of Folly*; Descartes' *Discourse on Method*; Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*; Spinoza's *Ethics*; Heidegger's *Being and Time*; Gilson's *The Unity of Philosophical Experience*; and, Chardin's *The Phenomenon of Man*. Believe me it wasn't easy. It was really hard work. Each page had to be read and, more often than not, reread again and again. I had to constantly refer to a dictionary to help decipher words and concepts I had never come across before. I took copious notes and made detailed outlines in hopes of better understanding the complicated logic of arguments I was trying to ingest.

Dutifully digging one's way through one ponderous philosophical tome after another is, of course, the classic way of seeking knowledge and, hopefully, achieving some measure of truth and wisdom. Because I'm a hyper-compulsive type-A personality, since graduate school I have, on average, read two books a week. That's about, give or take a few hundred, 4320 books¹. Do I remember every book that I've read? No! Was every book worth reading? No! Can I recall and recite large portions from my favorite books? Not really! So, what do I really have to show for all the years of burning the midnight oil and ruining my eyes?

¹ Do the math:

2 books a week x 4 weeks = 8 books per month

8 per month x 12 months a year = 96 books a year

96 books a year x 45 years = 4,320 books and counting!

Well, while I was doggedly taking notes as I was reading, I was also making lists. Over the years I have collected and compiled a long list of quirky quotes, profound proverbs, meaty maxims, pregnant phrases, arresting aphorisms, stunning slogans, witty wisecracks, and astute adages that cut through the clutter of technical jargon, professional pomposity, and arcane argumentation that can be found in too many philosophy books. Many, if not most, of these quotes revolve about the major question of both philosophy and religion: What is the meaning of life?

I have collected these quotes about meaning here and divided them into ten subsections of that overriding question. I believe they each deliver the essential message that the author was trying to get to, without all of the extra baggage. As far as I'm concerned these quotations are the best "bits" of the best "minds" and they afford a "bite size" view of a number of larger problems and issues of human life. I've even included a few that I'm pretty sure I came up with myself. Not all the quotes are profound. Some are profound in a funny way; some are serious. I do not agree with every single one of them, nor always with the person who said them, although I find them all insightful in one way or another.

Not all of the quotes in this book are "religious" in the traditional sense of being about religion or by people who made or make their living working for one religion or another, but I do believe God inspired most of them—and he can certainly quote me on that!

Of course, these quotes and nuggets and insights are not a sufficient substitute for real reading. But they can serve as miniature windows to wisdom or, at the very least, catalysts for debate, reflection, laughter, analysis, and further reading. For example, here are a dozen of my all-time-favorite quotes in this book:

Most mothers are instinctive philosophers.

HARRIET BEECHER STOWE

The study of philosophy
is not that we may know what [others] have thought,
but what the truth of things is.

THOMAS AQUINAS

Every time we liberate a woman, we liberate a man.

MARGARET MEAD

That which does not kill me, makes me stronger.

FREDERICK NIETZSCHE

Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement.

HELEN KELLER

Everything can be taken from a [person] but one thing:
the last of human freedoms –
to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances,
to choose one's own way.

VIKTOR E. FRANKL

[Humankind's] greatest gift,
also its greatest curse, is that we have free choice.
We can make our choices built from love or from fear.

ELISABETH KÜBLER-ROSS

You must be the change you wish to see in the world.

MOHANDAS GANDHI

I have long since come to believe
that people never mean half of what they say
and that it is best to disregard their talk
and judge only their actions.

DOROTHY DAY

If the only prayer you said in your whole life was thank you –
that would suffice.

CICERO

For lack of attention
a thousand forms of loveliness
elude us every day.

EVELYN UNDERHILL

Without laughter life would be too difficult to bear.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Even these few quotes, however, show one of the problems of writing and publishing this little book. In case you didn't notice, half the quotes above are by men and half by women. Would that this entire book were so! In addition, three of them (two of the men and one of the women) used male nouns or pronouns to indicate both genders. There are a couple of reasons for this...and one unsatisfactory solution that I have used herein.

First, many of the quotes are by men because in the 3000 or so years since philosophy began to be written down, it has been the purview of men for the most part (at least the work that got into print). There is not much I can do about that, except to say that I am an equal-opportunity quoter.

Second, the male nouns and pronouns were an accepted usage in English to indicate both genders until fairly recently. Even today we struggle with this issue to the point that the use of "inclusive language" is still a controversy inside the Catholic Church. The fact is that many of the quotes in this book are translated into English from another language that may not have this problem, but they have ended up with sexist references that may or may not have been the intention of the original authors. What is a poor quote compiler to do? Do I assume that all the people I quote would want their quotes to reflect our modern sensibilities and change them accordingly, or do I leave them as I found them?

The unsatisfactory solution that my publisher and I have come up with is to suggest in brackets [] what the person (or the translator) might have done about this today. In other words, if in my judgment the person being quoted intended to differentiate between the sexes, I left it alone. If I think he or she was talking

about both men and women, then I indicated by using brackets how that would read. If this bothers you, I apologize, but that is what we decided to do.

This little book represents the “best of the best” aphorisms, quotes, maxims, and proverbs on the meaning of life that I have been collecting all these years. They are concise, poignant, and arresting. Reflecting on them won’t necessarily make you a perfect human being, and they don’t answer every question you’ve ever had about the human condition, but there are worse places to start.

The various quotes in this text come from Christians of all denominations, like-minded believers, Christian sympathizers, and those of other faiths. You’ll also find quotes from a few pagans, apostates, atheists, and agnostics. But as Thomas Aquinas suggested, the study of philosophy is about the pursuit of truth, and truth is independent of the person who says it.

It is also important to remember that the word *catholic* means “universal” or “for everybody.” It implies “openness” and “not excluding” anyone or anything. That is why I call myself a “catholic” philosopher with a lowercase “c,” because I want to be open to understanding and appreciating all philosophies. For me, being a “catholic thinker” means being a thoughtful person in the world: a person who reflects on his or her rights and obligations in regard to others; a person who feels compelled and concerned about issues that transcend the simplistic equation of “me, myself, and I”; a person who tries to understand that, although all human beings are unique individuals, we are communal creatures in need of one another.

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