



IN SEARCH  OF WISDOM

PERENNIAL MEDITATIONS

A Collection of Short Reflections

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DAY I

PERENNIAL MEDITATIONS



A Collection of Short Reflections

INTRODUCTION

How does one become wise? How do we live a good life? This free ebook attempts to provide an introduction to exploring these types of perennial questions.

We hope it serves as a basic introduction to timeless ideas and inspires you to continue your search for wisdom.

As the philosopher Seneca said, "No one ever became wise by chance."

The ancient lessons utilized in this ebook come from a wide range of philosophical and spiritual thinkers to introduce key ideas.

Thank you for reading; I hope you find something useful for daily life.

PART I

THE WISDOM OF NOT KNOWING



Nothing is so firmly believed as
that of which we least know.

MONTAIGNE

THE WISDOM OF NOT KNOWING

We turn to the philosopher Socrates for wisdom in this reflection. A curious paradox of wisdom is the need to let go of the traditional idea of knowing. Socrates now famously stated, "All that I know is that I know nothing."

Plato (student of Socrates) wrote,

We do not know — neither the sophists, nor the orators, nor the artists, nor I — what the True, the Good, and the Beautiful are. But there is this difference between us: although these people know nothing, they all believe they know something; whereas, I, if I know nothing, at least have no doubts about it. As a result, all this superiority in wisdom which the oracle has attributed to me reduces itself to the single point that I am strongly convinced that I am ignorant of what I do not know.

THE WISDOM OF NOT KNOWING

During an interview on In Search of Wisdom, Estelle Frankel (author of *[The Wisdom of Not Knowing](#)*) explained that being receptive to the unknown enables us to become open, curious, and expansive in our lives. When we fail to do so, it results in us going into sleep mode or autopilot. Although this autopilot is a helpful feature for developing healthy habits, it can also dull our perception and rob us of life's wonder.

Similarly, in the book *[The Socratic Method](#)*, author Ward Farnsworth explains:

The practitioner of the Socratic method thinks in questions, is at home with uncertainty, and knows how to value a search that doesn't end.

How can you start embracing uncertainty and work that has no end?

THE WISDOM OF NOT KNOWING

The wisdom of not knowing enables us to break our love of holding on to opinions. Farnsworth writes, it feels good to know what you think, and often when people turn to philosophy, they usually want more of that pleasure.

According to Socrates, our most urgent problem is we are certain when we shouldn't be and think we know what we do not. For this reason, the philosophy of Socrates is not a set of beliefs — it's an activity.

The Socratic method does not replace our opinions with better ones. It changes our relationship to our opinions. It replaces the love of holding them with the love of testing them.

To quote Socrates, "True wisdom comes to each of us when we realize how little we understand about life, ourselves, and the world around us."

PART II

THE WISDOM OF CONTEMPLATION



The ultimate meaning of life
is to make possible the happiness
of contemplation.

JOSEF PIEPER

THE WISDOM OF CONTEMPLATION

The philosopher Aristotle called "contemplation the highest form of activity and the most continuous" since we are more capable of contemplation than other practical activities. Similarly, the theologian Thomas Aquinas said it was necessary for the perfection of human society that there should be people who devote their lives to contemplation.

WHAT IS CONTEMPLATION?

There are many definitions and practices associated with contemplation. However, the most straightforward is — deep reflective thought. As mentioned, throughout history, philosophers and theologians have stressed the importance of the practice of contemplation.

For example, the theologian Meister Eckhart said, "What we plant in the soil of contemplation, we shall reap in the harvest of action."

THE WISDOM OF CONTEMPLATION

The writer and theologian Richard Rohr (founder of the [Center for Action and Contemplation](#)) suggests, The best definition for contemplation is as follows: "Contemplation is a long, loving look at what really is." Contemplation is finding a place where we can receive all of our experiences without repressing anything. It's where we can consider all that we have done –and not done–in our lives, a place that's bigger than Yes and No, a place bigger than the judgments we pass, writes Rohr.

THE PRACTICE OF CONTEMPLATION

Aristotle insisted we become better through the right action. Although towards the end of the [Nicomachean Ethics](#), he concluded the activity of wisdom is contemplation, so, therefore, "contemplation is the highest activity of human life."

But how does one practice contemplation?

THE WISDOM OF CONTEMPLATION

The Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius may provide the best example of contemplation in practice. His personal journal, known today as *Meditations*, has been called one of the greatest works of spiritual and ethical reflection ever written.

Take this passage for example,

Is change something to fear? But can anything happen without change? Is there anything that's nearer and dearer to universal nature? What about you personally? Can you take a warm bath unless the firewood undergoes a change? Can you be nourished unless your food undergoes a change? Can anything else worthwhile take place without change? So don't you see that the changes you experience are no different and are similarly necessary to universal nature? — *Meditations*, 7.18

Although contemplation is a solitary practice, it can help us to realize our connection with others.

THE WISDOM OF CONTEMPLATION

In a well-known passage, Marcus wrote, "At the start of each day tell yourself: I shall meet people who are abusive, ungrateful...."

The passage concludes like this,

Because we were born to work together, like feet or hands or eyelids, like the rows of upper and lower teeth. To work against each other is therefore unnatural — and anger and rejection count as ‘working against.’

Through his deep reflection on the challenges of dealing with difficult people, Marcus is able to find both compassion and clarity.

Although action and contemplation are intertwined. We must avoid the trap of viewing contemplation as a productivity hack. Contemplation is a lifelong endeavor with no goal to attain. The practice of contemplation, like virtue — is its own reward.

PART III

THE WISDOM OF EXPERIENCE



Day by day, what you do
is who you become.

HERACLITUS

THE WISDOM OF EXPERIENCE

How does wisdom differ from knowledge? Leonardo Da Vinci said, "Wisdom is the daughter of experience." The philosopher Lao Tzu suggested, "To attain knowledge, add things every day. To attain wisdom, remove things every day."

But, does wisdom only come by way of experience?

WHAT IS WISDOM?

According to Diogenes Laertius in *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, the Stoics defined wisdom this way:

The knowledge of things good and evil and of what is neither good nor evil...knowledge of what we ought to choose, what we ought to beware of, and what is indifferent.

Humans have an evolutionary need to be wise, writes Dilip Jeste, author of *Wiser* (previous podcast guest).

THE WISDOM OF EXPERIENCE

Although becoming wise is a process, Epicurus advised: "Let no one be slow to seek wisdom when they are young nor weary in search of it when they have grown old." The best time to embark on a path to becoming wiser is — the here and now.

WISDOM AND EXPERIENCE

To quote Immanuel Kant, "It is beyond a doubt that all our knowledge begins with experience." And we gain experience one day at a time. As Seneca advised, "obtain each day some aid against poverty, something against death, and likewise, against other calamities."

The philosopher Montaigne put it this way,

To compose our character is our duty, not to compose books..., but order and tranquility in our conduct. Our great and glorious masterpiece is to live appropriately.

THE WISDOM OF EXPERIENCE

WISDOM IN PRACTICE

The virtue of prudence is wisdom in practice. For wisdom to be truly useful, one must integrate it into daily life.

Take this anonymous quote, as an example,

Knowledge is knowing a tomato is a fruit, wisdom is knowing not to put it in a fruit salad.

Cicero defined prudence clearly, "Prudence is the knowledge of things to be sought, and those to be shunned." However, when knowledge is used toward unjust or evil ends, it becomes the vice of cunning.

The virtue of prudence and the common good are interconnected. The point of becoming wiser — is to put wisdom into practice for the common good.

ABOUT

PERENNIAL LEADER PROJECT



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wisdom for daily life.

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