

Illustrative Quotes

Collected by Jeff Huggins March, 2009

The following dozen or so pages contain quotes, lyrics, and related expressions that have to do with the relationship between morality and sustainability, with morality itself, and with some of the considerations related to a full understanding of morality, including the bridging of empirical understanding and exploration with reasoning—i.e., of “scientific” findings with “philosophical” reasoning.

These are not all of the quotes on these matters, of course: There are tens of thousands, and perhaps millions. Nor are these all that well-organized. But, they are helpful and illustrative, I believe.

Because I’ve pulled these from earlier materials focused on specific themes, the focus of the quotes shifts from the first half of the list to different portions of the second half. And, there is a slight, or perhaps modest, degree of overlap between the various parts of the list. I apologize in advance for redundancies.

Be Well.

Look and listen for the welfare of the whole people and have always in view not only the present but also the coming generations, even those whose faces are yet beneath the surface of the ground – the unborn of the future Nation.

The Constitution of the Iroquois Nations

A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.

Aldo Leopold

Some people would rather die than think; and many do.

Bertrand Russell

To make the world work for 100% of humanity in the shortest possible time through spontaneous cooperation without ecological offense or the disadvantage of anyone.

R. Buckminster Fuller

We are firmly convinced, and we act on that conviction, that with nations, as with individuals, our interests soundly calculated will ever be found inseparable from our moral duties.

Thomas Jefferson

You cannot be considered an ethical company if you do not follow sustainability principles. Nor can you apply sustainability concepts if you do not have a strong foundation of ethical principles. The two are intrinsically intertwined ...

Perry Minnis, Global Director, Ethics & Compliance, Alcoa

Let us look at the world not as something we have inherited from our parents, but as something we have borrowed from our children.

Kenyan saying, also similar to a Kashmiri proverb

The most important human endeavor is the striving for morality in our actions. Our inner balance and even our very existence depend on it. Only morality in our actions can give beauty and dignity to life.

Albert Einstein

A pine cut down, a dead pine, is no more a pine than a dead human carcass is a man. Can he who has discovered only some of the values of whalebone and whale oil be said to have discovered the true use of the whale? Can he who slays the elephant for his ivory be said to have "seen the elephant"? These are petty and accidental uses; just as if a stronger race were to kill us in order to make buttons and flageolets of our bones; for everything may serve a lower as well as a higher use. Every creature is better alive than dead, men and moose and pine trees, and he who understands it aright will rather preserve its life than destroy it.

Henry David Thoreau, *Chesuncook*

Today we begin in earnest the work of making sure that the world we leave our children is just a little bit better than the one we inhabit today.

Barack Obama; the headline quote on the website change.gov on November 30 last year

When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe.

John Muir

In keeping with our commitment to environmental justice and education, we invite all our guests to reflect on their need to reverence and preserve the earth and their responsibility to work toward a just and sustainable future for all creation. Let ours be a time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace, and the joyful celebration of life.

Presentation Center, Los Gatos, California

K'ung fu-zi (Confucius), from the *Analects*:

Confucius fished with a pole, and did not use a net; when he hunted, he did not shoot roosting birds. (7:26/27)

Confucius said, "The virtue of balanced normalcy is consummate, it seems, but it has been scarce among the people for a long time." (6:29)

Confucius said, "Ideal people are universal and not clannish. Small-minded people are clannish and not universal." (2:14)

Confucius said, "Exemplary people understand matters of justice; small people understand matters of profit." (1:16)

Confucius said, "People who do not think far enough ahead inevitably have worries near at hand." (15:12)

Confucius said, "Not to mend one's ways when one has erred is to err indeed." (15:30)

We have chosen them [these initiatives] both because we think solving them will make a better, fairer, safer world for our children and grandchildren — and the children and grandchildren of people all over the world — but also because we feel that these core initiatives fit well with Google's core strengths . . .

Google's Dr. Larry Brilliant

For Enel, Corporate Social Responsibility is synonymous with sustainability and the ability to maintain its three variables in balance: economic responsibility, environmental responsibility and social responsibility.

The website of Enel SpA, a major European utility and proponent of renewable energy

Necessity is the mother and teacher of Nature. Necessity is Nature's theme and its inventor, and it is the eternal restraint and rule.

Leonardo da Vinci

Nature, to be commanded, must be obeyed.

Francis Bacon

Look deep into nature, and then you will understand everything better.

Albert Einstein

Socrates, from *The Republic* (Plato):

Socrates: For though the society we have described seems to me to be the true one, like a man in health, there's nothing to prevent us, if you wish, studying one in a fever. Such a society will not be satisfied with the standard of living we have described. It will want couches and tables and other furniture, and a variety of delicacies, scents, perfumes, call-girls and confectionary. And we must no longer confine ourselves to the bare necessities of our earlier description, houses, clothing, and shoes, but must add the fine arts of painting and embroidery, and introduce materials like gold and ivory. ...

Socrates: We shall have to enlarge our state again. Our healthy state is no longer big enough; its size must be enlarged to make room for a multitude of occupations none of which is concerned with necessities. ...

Socrates: And the territory which was formerly enough to support us will now be too small.

Socrates: If we are to have enough for pasture and plough, we shall have to cut a slice off our neighbours' territory. And if they too are no longer confining themselves to necessities and have embarked on the pursuit of unlimited material possessions, they will want a slice of ours too. ... And that will lead to war, Glaucon, will it not?

Glaucon: It will.

... and it has to be concluded that the greatest source of harm to man is man.

Cicero, *On Duties II*

... for it is of the nature of desire not to be satisfied, and most men live only for the gratification of it.

Aristotle, *Politics*

It's not the current data that are so critical. It is basically the failure to address the future.

Alan Greenspan

We enjoy the comfort of opinion without the discomfort of thought.

John F. Kennedy

... but all the relevant facts were outside the range of their vision. They were like the ant, which can see small objects but not large ones.

George Orwell, *1984*

And because, as we have seen, our interests are inextricably linked, we are compelled to accept ethics as the indispensable interface between my desire to be happy and yours.

The Dalai Lama, *Ethics for the New Millennium*

In the wilds we comprehend that in the big picture and over the long run security does not come from controlling and exploiting nature. The fundamental revelation of this first century of ecological science is that human well-being is inextricably linked to the health, diversity, and normal functioning of the global ecosystem.

Roderick Frazier Nash, *Why Wilderness?*, from the "Plateau Journal"

One touch of nature makes the whole world kin.

William Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*

The means by which we live have outdistanced the ends for which we live. Our scientific power has outrun our spiritual power. We have guided missiles and misguided men.

Martin Luther King Jr.

If a nation expects to be ignorant and free, in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be.

Thomas Jefferson

The significant problems we have cannot be solved at the same level of thinking with which we created them.

Albert Einstein

It is obvious that the real wealth of life aboard our planet is a forwardly-operative, metabolic, and intellectual regenerating system. Quite clearly we have vast amounts of income wealth as Sun radiation and Moon gravity to implement our forward success. Wherefore living only on our energy savings by burning up the fossil fuels which took billions of years to impound from the Sun or living on our capital by burning up our Earth's atoms is lethally ignorant and also utterly irresponsible to our coming generations and their forward days. Our children and their children and our future days. If we do not comprehend and realize our potential ability to support all life forever we are cosmicly bankrupt.

R. Buckminster Fuller, *Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth* (1969)

In the present circumstances, no one can afford to assume that someone else will solve their problems. Every individual has a responsibility to help guide our global family in the right direction. Good wishes are not sufficient; we must become actively engaged.

The Dalai Lama

So let us not talk falsely now, the hour is getting late.

Bob Dylan, *All Along The Watchtower*

Where will people go
After the garden is gone?
What will people know
After the garden?

Neil Young, *After The Garden Is Gone*

A little bird did sing
Man loses all
When he wants everything

Scarlet Tide, sung by Joan Baez (by Elvis Costello/Joseph Henry Burnett)

What good am I if I know and don't do,
If I see and don't say, if I look right through you,
If I turn a deaf ear to the thunderin' sky,
What good am I?

Bob Dylan, *What Good Am I?*

Character is destiny.

Heraclitus

There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy. All the rest—whether or not the world has three dimensions, whether the mind has nine or twelve categories—comes afterwards. These are games; one must first answer. And if it is true, as Nietzsche claims, that a philosopher, to deserve our respect, must preach by example, you can appreciate the importance of that reply, for it will precede the definitive act. These are facts the heart can feel; yet they call for careful study before they become clear to the intellect.

Albert Camus, in the opening paragraph of the first essay in his book, *The Myth of Sisyphus and other essays*

Men at some time are masters of their fates.
The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,
But in ourselves, that we are underlings.

Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar* (Cassius speaking to Brutus). This general idea is often paraphrased as “It is not in the stars to hold our destiny, but in ourselves”.

Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie,
Which we ascribe to heaven: the fated sky
Gives us free scope; only, doth backward pull
Our slow designs, when we ourselves are dull.

Shakespeare, *All's Well that Ends Well*

Man can will nothing unless he has first understood that he must count on no one but himself; that he is alone, abandoned on earth in the midst of his infinite responsibilities, without help, with no other aim than the one he sets himself, with no other destiny than the one he forges for himself on this earth.

Jean-Paul Sartre

Some circumstantial evidence is very strong, as when you find a trout in the milk.

Henry David Thoreau

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Look deep into nature, and then you will understand everything better.

Albert Einstein

By means of beauty all beautiful things become beautiful.

Socrates (as quoted by Plato)

Necessity is the mother and teacher of Nature. Necessity is Nature's theme and its inventor, and it is the eternal restraint and rule.

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Francis Bacon

Impersonal, blind to the future, it [natural selection] has no goals, only results. Its sole standards of valuation are survival and reproductive success. From scattershot variations, culled and accreted, it produces pragmatic forms of order. . . . its products and byproducts are adaptation, complexity, and diversity.

David Quammen, *The Reluctant Mr. Darwin: An Intimate Portrait of Charles Darwin and the Making of His Theory of Evolution*

Mutation is utterly random, but selection is extremely choosey!

American biologist Ursula Goodenough, as quoted in the Dalai Lama's book, *The Universe in a Single Atom: The Convergence of Science and Spirituality*

Current mechanisms of mind are the end products of a selective process, a sieve through which features passed because they contributed, either directly or indirectly, to reproductive success. All living humans are evolutionary success stories. They each have inherited the mechanisms of mind and body that led to their ancestors' achievements in producing descendants. If any one of their ancestors had failed along the way to survive, mate, reproduce, and solve a host of tributary adaptive problems, they would not have become ancestors. As their descendants, people hold in their possession magical keys—the adaptive mechanisms that led to their ancestors' success.

David M. Buss, *The Evolution of Happiness* (*American Psychologist*, January 2000)

A social instinct is implanted in all men by nature . . .

Aristotle, *Politics*

The social brain's wiring connects us all at our common human core.

Daniel Goleman, *Social Intelligence* (the final sentence in the main text)

The following proposition seems to me in a high degree probable — namely, that any animal whatever, endowed with well-marked social instincts, would inevitably acquire a moral sense or conscience, as soon as its intellectual powers had become as well developed, or nearly as well developed, as in man.

Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man*

Man ‘possesses’ many things which he has never acquired but has inherited from his ancestors. He is not born as a tabula rasa, he is merely born unconscious. But he brings with him systems that are organized and ready to function in a specifically human way, and these he owes to millions of years of human development. Just as the migratory and nest-building instincts of birds were never learnt or acquired individually, man brings with him at birth the ground-plan of his nature, and not only of his individual nature but of his collective nature. These inherited systems correspond to the human situations that have existed since primeval times: youth and old age, birth and death, sons and daughters, fathers and mothers, mating, and so on. Only the individual consciousness experiences these things for the first time, but not the bodily system and the unconscious. For them they are only the habitual functioning of instincts that were preformed long ago. ‘You were in bygone times my wife or sister,’ says Goethe, clothing in words the dim feelings of many.

Carl Jung

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Albert Camus; the first paragraph of the first essay in his book *The Myth of Sisyphus and other essays*

To be, or not to be . . .

William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

For everything begins with consciousness and nothing is worth anything except through it. There is nothing original about these remarks. But they are obvious; that is enough for a while, during a sketchy reconnaissance in the origins of the absurd.

Albert Camus

A pine cut down, a dead pine, is no more a pine than a dead human carcass is a man. Can he who has discovered only some of the values of whalebone and whale oil be said to have discovered the true use of the whale? Can he who slays the elephant for his ivory be said to have “seen the elephant”? These are petty and accidental uses; just as if a stronger race were to kill us in order to make buttons and flageolets of our bones; for everything may serve a lower as well as a higher use. Every creature is better alive than dead, men and moose and pine trees, and he who understands it aright will rather preserve its life than destroy it.

Henry David Thoreau, *Chesuncook*

I want to live
I want to give
I've been a miner for a heart of gold

Neil Young, *Heart Of Gold*

Some people would rather die than think; and many do.

Bertrand Russell

All is finally settled, & I have sealed away about half a chance of life. If one lived merely to see how long one could spin out life, I should repent my choice. As it is I do not.

Charles Darwin in a letter to friend Charles Whitley, before embarking on the Beagle voyage

We have lost the joy of the household and the solace of our old age.

Charles Darwin, regarding the death of his daughter Annie at age 10

Although “The Myth of Sisyphus” poses mortal problems, it sums itself up for me as a lucid invitation to live and to create, in the very midst of the desert.

Albert Camus

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Albert Einstein

When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe.

John Muir

In ethics as in optics, we need stereoscopy to see the world in all its dimensions.

Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Experiments in Ethics*

The reciprocal relationship of epistemology and science is of noteworthy kind. They are dependent upon each other. Epistemology without contact with science becomes an empty scheme. Science without epistemology is – insofar as it is thinkable at all – primitive and muddled.

Albert Einstein

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Socrates (as quoted by Plato)

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[E]thical philosophers intuit the deontological canons of morality by consulting the emotive centers of their own hypothalamic-limbic systems.

Edward O. Wilson

[T]he 'is'/'ought' gap, and the naturalistic fallacy are perhaps better seen as warnings than as outright barriers, reminding us of ways in which the project can fail, and indeed often has failed. But they should not warn us off the project altogether, since the need to ask how morality fits with our best empirical understanding of ourselves and our place in nature and history arises from within normative moral thought itself.

Peter Railton

But he had never really found that self, because he had tried to catch it with the net of thought. Even if the body was certainly not the self, and the play of the senses was not it, nevertheless, thought was not the self, either, nor was the intellect, nor acquired wisdom, nor the acquired art of drawing conclusions and spinning new thoughts out of preexisting ones. No, this world of thought was also terrestrial, and you arrived at no goal when you killed the accidental "I" of the senses but instead fattened the accidental "I" of thinking and scholarship. Thoughts and senses were both fine things behind which ultimate meaning lay concealed; both should be listened to, both should be played with, neither of them should be condemned or overrated, by means of both you should try to hear the secret voices of the innermost essence. He decided to strive solely for what the voice commanded him to strive for; to linger over nothing unless the voice advised him to.

Hermann Hesse, *Siddhartha*

I went down where the vultures feed
I would've gone deeper, but there wasn't any need
Heard the tongues of angels and the tongues of men
Wasn't any difference to me

Soul of a nation is under the knife
Death is standin' in the doorway of life
In the next room, a man, fightin' with his wife
Over dignity

Bob Dylan, *Dignity* (the version on his album *Tell Tale Signs*)

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Siddhartha: "I can think. I can wait. I can fast."

Kamala: "Nothing else?"

Siddhartha: "Nothing. Oh, yes, I can also compose poetry. Will you give me a kiss for a poem?"

Hermann Hesse, *Siddhartha*