

BEST AND WISEST QUOTES FROM A BOOK THAT SHOULD BE THE ATHEIST'S BIBLE

Richard Robinson in this well written and once popular book is clear that secular values are needed and can be justified without God and indeed should be. He did not like the term humanist but did accept being labelled as a liberal. Robinson was a true atheist and nothing in his work can be said to have smuggled in Christian values. For example, he rejects love of neighbour in favour of making a choice not to make others more miserable than what they are or can be. So he is not about good directly. He cautions that good is always flawed and has the power to go wrong. He wants us to give ourselves the gift of living in reality not some illusion.

BEST QUOTES: Richard Robinson, An Atheist's Values, 1964.

QUOTE: "We might say that man needs slogans. This is a low and inaccurate way of putting it, but has its value. Slogans like 'liberty, equality, fraternity', or 'truth, beauty, goodness', can give life enormously greater interest and elevation. It is a question of choosing them rightly, and of deepening as much as possible our understanding of what they involve. An answer to the question What things are good? is, from this point of view, a choice of slogans for living, and an attempt to see far into the consequences of these slogans, their harm as well as their benefit."

COMMENT: No activist can be an activist without slogans. The current one, "Love is love" which is used to silence those who do not believe in same sex marriage. Love is love is not shouted by those who think that marriage should go and there should be civil partnerships, same sex and other sex. Love is love is accusing the objector of being a bigot and not seeing how obvious it is that love is love so marriage should be opened up to all. All love is not love when its an adult taking advantage of a child sex partner! Religion uses slogans as well in the form of doctrines. Slogans are necessary and desired but always have a bad side. They are about manipulating and silencing and bullying and lying. They are too simple. For example, what does liberty mean? Its not simple and translates into something very difficult to apply in real life.

People may not realise how little they believe in their own slogans. Using slogans can make you think something really is your opinion.

QUOTE: "We might say that man needs ideals ... the word 'ideal' suggests something never yet realized, whereas beauty and truth and other great goods are often realized around us. We need goods that are always realized in part and unrealized in part, goods that both confirm the worth of some things that have already happened and guide us for the future."

COMMENT: An ideal is just a slogan that does not look like a slogan. Ideals make you unsettled and feel inferior. They can be used to keep people down.

God is the perfect being - the being I should be if magic made it possible. So God is the ultimate ideal and puts me down. This is not my own business for I cannot put myself down without it impacting on the other people in my life. It is too easy to see myself as dirt and then starting seeing others the same way.

A boss who feels degraded will respond by bullying the employees to feel bigger and stronger and to forget his pain.

People can prefer x pain to y pain though the two are the same in horribleness. So you can respond to pain by hurting yourself or your relationship with others.

QUOTE: "Misery is an evil and happiness is a good. If anyone denies this, there is nothing to say to him. If he contemplates happy children without any satisfaction, if he calls to mind the vast array of miseries in the world such as wounded stags eaten alive by ants, oiled birds battered on the rocks, men and women with arthritis or insane depression, and feels no pity or disturbance, there is nothing to say to him. We choose to lessen misery and he does not. We choose to promote happiness and he does not."

COMMENT: Robinson says that those who think misery and happiness are too unclear need to do more observing and less thinking. He writes, "If I ask myself about anything considered good, Would you still call it good if you were convinced that the pursuit of it probably increased misery? I think I find myself determined to answer: 'No, I should call it bad.' This principle provides a negative test of goods. It does not determine that anything is good; but it determines that some things are not good, namely those whose pursuit probably increases misery. It is not a standard, by adopting which we can decide in every case whether a thing is good or bad or indifferent; but it is a criterion that applies to any choice or kind of choice, and either condemns the choice or does not condemn it."

It is good to know when you are being injured and so pain in that sense is good but when you know you are injured and

don't need it, it still hurts as much as ever. Christianity says that evil is not real in the way good is and is a parasite - it is good in the wrong place. Does that even matter or make any difference? If you think it is real then the thought that it is real is real so there is nothing further to discuss. It is evil and cold to even suggest there is. So evil as in evil thought is real.

Misery is not misery because it is totally bad. It hurts simply because it is using good to hurt you. There is something as cruel about the good of your pain detectors hurting you as there is in an infliction being totally evil so evil it cannot be called a good thing that is disordered. Good itself seems bad and looks bad. That is very disheartening. It is a threat to you ever trusting good or wanting it again. That is what immorality is trying to do - destroy what good can do for you.

Natural evil such as earthquakes does that too though it is just blind force.

Religion makes evil stronger. It says God loves you. But that love is only a further torment when you are depressed or suffering. If you see the evil as just what happens and has nothing to do with any being directly or indirectly you would not have that torment.

If depression and misery can only happen if there is good there that they attack or stop from growing then it is true there is something vague about misery and unhappiness. As we have seen misery uses good to hurt so observation does not prove that the person who is happy now is not part of something that is planning to use that happiness against her. Its the big picture that tells the truth not how things are now.

People want it to be easy to tell if somebody is miserable or unhappy for that makes morality more straightforward but they cannot get their wish. Many evil people will slip through the net because of the lack of clarity.

God is said to tolerate evil and its not his fault. If so that does not mean evil will be contained or controlled. So God may lovingly and justly send us terrible evils for he sees it saves us from worse. Maybe we will go to Hell to endure something akin to ten toothaches and ten depressions forever but that is saving us from ten and a half toothaches and ten and a half depressions.

Thus even the suggestion that there is a loving creator God breaks Robinson's rule, "If somebody cannot see misery as evil and intolerable then there is nothing to say to him." There is a problem with clarity but God makes it worse.

QUOTE REGARDING THE NEGATIVE TEST THAT YOU ONLY SEE IF SOMETHING IS GOOD BY TESTING TO SEE IF IT DOES TOO MUCH HARM IN THE LONG OR SHORT TERM: "The adoption of this principle is a supreme or ultimate choice, not in the strong sense that it entails every other choice, but in the weak sense that it tests all other choices and condemns some of them. It is also ultimate, in me, in the sense that I have no higher choice under which for me it falls, and I defend it only by referring to its consequences, not at all by referring to higher principles. Its consequences concern all that part of the misery of living things which can be caused or prevented by the action of man. This is not the whole of misery; but it is a great ocean of misery nevertheless."

COMMENT: He calls it the principle of counter-misery. He warns "Most of us cherish at least one good which we are strongly inclined to pursue no matter what the consequences in misery to the human race. With many people this reckless good is the reign of certain moral laws which they have adopted. (That is the spirit of 'let justice be done though the heavens fall'.) With me it is the spread of knowledge and truth."

The principle then is not very popular! He counsels that the best way to help it is to confront people for they do see it is right but need it brought to their attention.

Unlike Mill's Utilitarianism the doctrine that moral good is whatever promotes the best happiness of the greatest number, "This principle does not say, or entail, that happiness is any kind of a good at all. It only says that misery or unhappiness is a negative test of goods. Happiness is a good and misery is an evil; but this principle does not say so."

It makes the sole goal the reduction of misery not the increase of happiness. It is commonsense that it is better to save x from misery even if x will not be a very happy person.

Robinson asserts that, "I put forward this principle as a choice to be made; but Mill was not clear whether he was putting forward utilitarianism as a choice or as a fact, as a proposal or as a proposition". And Jesus Christ should read this bit, "To adopt the principle of counter-misery is not to love the human race. Most of us find it impossible to love the human race after we are forty; but we can still adopt this principle."

He then gives us a second principle, "No kind of act may be forbidden unless its discontinuance would lessen misery upon the whole."

Here is a prize line, "To be against pleasure is to be against life itself, because successful life is necessarily pleasant, as Aristotle nearly said (N.E. x. 4, §§ 10-11)."

And, "In saying that the best is the enemy of the good, we admit that the good is good. And that this principle claims. It does not say that anything that pleases anyone is a great good."

Robinson should have developed an argument for atheism from that. The principle does not command love but commands avoiding causing misery. If the principle is the only truly wise one then the God of love is out.

Faith in God is not God but if we can say that we have the right to refuse to say it is a great good then it is clear that God has not set things up in a way conducive for a relationship with him. No truly relationship God makes it too hard to find him.

The principle assumes that even if its not an exact match, hurting should be treated the same as immoral unless it really is the only way to do good. Attempts to argue that harming and immorality though connected does not make harming the same as immoral are just wrong. The motivation is just to avoid saying God is evil when there is so much harm in the world and talk of a purpose is not enough to get him off the hook. Why is it not enough? It denies that a purpose can make the harm good. The end result is not good but grey. Its a compromise that tries to include evil not avoid it.

The principle is not against a God who commands but against one that is about being loved. Obeying the command of x is not the same as obeying x. What is the difference? The personal touch is what makes the difference.

Prayer is evil for it is faith in action and involves trying to make yourself see that good x is really good and then trying to ask for it. You can use trial and error in finding the good but telling God what good is and to do it is too extreme and too forward.

QUOTE: "Life does not have to be itself good because it is a condition of there being any good. It is consistent to say that something is good and yet life is not a good. Life is very much more miserable than happy upon the whole, and therefore not a good but an evil. Life involves death, and death is felt to be a very great evil. Some life lives by killing, and all life dies. To give birth to a child is to prepare another death. Some feel that this cancels all the value of life and makes everything futile. A few feel that it makes life intolerable; these find themselves in the absurd position of seeking death because life is intolerable because it ends in death."

COMMENT: This an atheistic principle because life is just there and will lead to bad and to good. They are just like parasites that latch on to something that is not about good or bad. If God is about good or bad then God did not make life.

He decides, "Life is a great good in that it realizes many nameable and well known goods, such as beauty and truth, and also in that it realizes many nameless satisfactions and pleasures." So if atheism is true we have to make it part of life.

QUOTE: "The chief argument for the legitimacy of suicide is that life is a trap. We have not asked for it, and it can be terrible."

COMMENT: Its a chief argument or the right to choose. That is not the same as saying you are ever obligated to die by suicide. Life is made more special if you have the right to return it but keep it. You have the right to throw away your wedding ring but you keep it and that is much better. It is spontaneous uncompelled appreciation.

Atheism or at least holding that a God has no right to command you is the default view and position. Many agree and many disagree. But if it's a default then it follows that faith in God may ban suicide but cannot ban it legitimately. It is not true that atheists are enabling people to think of suicide - we are all doing it. The default even when rejected never loses its force. Its still the measuring standard.

QUOTE: "Beauty is a great good...There is a strong tradition against Beauty."

COMMENT: God is irrelevant for you cannot think of or see his beauty. He is a spirit - a being with no components so there can be no beauty there. Beauty is only in things.

He writes, "Let us avoid whatever may bring ridicule or suspicion on the love of Beauty."

QUOTE: "We make male homosexuality illegal and we fix no age of consent for males."

QUOTE: "Truth is inquiry at least as much as contemplation."

QUOTE: "There is no doubt that both the pursuit and the possession of Truth often do harm. The agitation against vivisection is an obvious reminder of the harm sometimes done by the pursuit. As to the harm done by the possession of it, the spectacle of the universe as it really is may perfectly well be terrible and depressing."

COMMENT: If so, then the pursuit of belief faith and false or half truth is worse. The suffering is wasted and the person is led astray and pursues more errors. Darwinism tells us we are about survival and we do need truth and reason to get the best

chance of that. Robinson writes, "The ideal of universal love also demands the pursuit of truth; for we want to love the world that is, not an illusion."

QUOTE: "People sometimes come to prefer the New Testament principle through taking unbelief as equivalent to doubt and judging it better to believe something than to doubt everything. In this state of mind it seems to them reasonable to say that it is impossible to doubt everything, and therefore it is reasonable to believe. But unbelief is not equivalent to doubt; it is equivalent to either doubt or disbelief, and he who disbelieves something believes something. I will develop this point, that he who disbelieves, something believes something. To assert any statement is necessarily to reject its contradictory, and to reject any statement is necessarily to assert its contradictory. This follows from the nature of contradiction and the fact that every statement has a contradictory. Every statement has a contradictory, because you can construct the contradictory of any statement by prefixing to it the words 'it is false that'. For example, the following are a pair of contradictories: 'there is a god' and 'it is false that there is a god'. (Langford in *Mind* for 1927 argued that singular propositions have no proper contradictories; but I will not go into this in an elementary lecture. Nelson discussed Langford's point in *Mind* for 1946.) No statement has more than one contradictory. Its contradictory can, indeed, be expressed in different ways; for example, we can say 'there is no god' instead of 'it is false that there is a god'. But these different ways are equivalent and come to the same thing. Every statement has one and only one contradictory. The definition of contradiction implied in this may be brought out as follows. The contradictory of any statement S is not-S. The contradictory of any statement not-S is S. Any two statements S and T are contradictories if and only if S is equivalent to not-T. Any two statements are contradictories if and only if the truth of either entails the falsity of the other and also the falsity of either entails the truth of the other. Hence all statements fall into pairs of which one is true and the other is false."

QUOTE: "A horrible example of acquiescing in inconsistency is provided by a certain common way of taking the doctrine that 'the exception proves the rule'. Many people take this to mean that, for example, you can prove that it is a rule that women are inferior to men by producing an exceptional woman who is not inferior. They imply that a universal generalization is proved to be true by the production of a case in which it is false! This is selfcontradictory and absurd. An exceptional woman who was superior to men would not prove a universal rule that all men are superior to all women. On the contrary, she would disprove it completely for all time. And as to a statement about averages, for example that the average man is superior to the average woman, it is neither proved nor disproved by any individual case of anything at all. What then is the value of this common doctrine that 'the exception proves the rule'? Is it just a piece of insanity? Yes, as commonly used today it is just a piece of insanity. But it has arisen out of a sane procedure in the lawcourts. Wherever men make and enforce rules of action, it is possible for them to allow some exceptions to their rules. If a governor is known to have said 'I make an exception in your favour', this is good evidence that the governor generally follows a certain rule, which he is breaking in this special case. The fact that the governor says he is making an exception shows that he has a rule. The exception proves that there is a rule. This is sane inference. But when it is transferred from the sphere of human rules of action to the sphere of laws of nature, insanity results. The phrase can also make sense if taken as a reference to the fact that apparent exceptions sometimes turn out on closer examination not to be exceptions at all, and thus strengthen our belief in the general statement. Thus punishing people for ignorance appears to be an exception to the rule that they should be punished only for their voluntary acts; but it may turn out that they are punished for ignorance only when that ignorance is due to a voluntary act of theirs."

COMMENT: A good refutation of a common vicious superstition. The exception only proves the rule is not allowed to be a rule in all cases. The exception proves the rule idea is used by Christians who say that the rule is dead men stay dead but Jesus alone rose and was the exception. The exception is not an exception but a case of, "The rule is right and so should not be broken but I will break it in this case." In Jesus case, the rule of nature is broken. And if all people should stay dead then it is immoral for Jesus to be raised.

QUOTE: "The argument from ignorance is often concealed in the form of a question. When a man has no argument whatever in favour of his thesis that pigs have wings, he can still impose it on many of the unwary by putting it in the form of a question: Who can say whether after all pigs may not have wings? The implication is that, in view of the general ignorance of man, you would be a rash fool to assert that pigs have no wings."

QUOTE: "The worst form of the argument from ignorance masquerading as a question is the 'how can' or 'how could' form."

COMMENT: Say that to the person who says God must have made the world or made us have a moral sense where we feel our conscience is commanding us with moral authority.

QUOTE: "The 'how can' form of argument is dishonest. By using this form the speaker conceals the fact that it is he who is making an assertion and thus incurring a responsibility. He insinuates falsely that the responsibility is all on you for not admitting the assertion. Instead of openly making his assertion and taking the responsibility for it, he insinuates that you ought to believe it unless you can answer some 'how' question.

COMMENT: So "How can the world exist without God?" is expecting you to show how it can be done. But it is not you

asking the question or making the assumption! Yet all assertions that there is a God have that question in the backdrop. God is not an assertion but a question and thus is fundamentally dishonest.

“Often the best way to meet one of these bogus questions is to reply: A question is not an argument, only statements can be arguments.”