



Reverence for Life: The Words of Albert Schweitzer

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ALBERT SCHWEITZER (1875-1965) was an Alsatian theologian, musician, and medical missionary. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1952.

"I cannot but have Reverence for all that is called life. I cannot avoid compassion for everything that is called life. That is the beginning and foundation of morality. " Albert Schweitzer spanning many decades and a host of topics, this rich collection of the words of Albert Schweitzer offers a glimpse into the life and thought of an eminent humanitarian.

"Reverence for Life" was Schweitzer's unifying term for a concept of ethics. He believed that such an ethic would reconcile the drives of altruism and egoism by requiring a respect for the lives of all other beings and by demanding the highest development of an individual's resources. The thread of this inspirational belief appears throughout his deeply insightful writings. Excerpts from previously(continued from front flap)unpublished letters to John F. Kennedy, Norman Cousins, Bertrand Russell, and others show how truly committed Schweitzer was to creating a global consciousness and cultivating a dignity toward all people. A foreword by Schweitzer's daughter, Rhena Schweitzer Miller, an introduction by the editor, and a brief biographical sketch of Schweitzer's life round out this stunning collection of quotations.

Reverence for Life: The Words of Albert Schweitzer Details

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Fredrick Danysh says

Albert Schweitzer practiced medicine in Africa most of his life. This is his biography.

Kenghis Khan says

While trained in philosophy and theology, Schweitzer had better things to do. Yet as a man of action, Schweitzer also understood that all action must be based upon ethical and intellectual commitments. There are other works in which he expounds upon the details. It is in this work that one can survey the broad strokes of what Schweitzer is trying to accomplish. For those of us without the time or the interest to invest in his later "Philosophy of Civilization," the "Reverence for Life" is a very inspiring compilation. Indeed, it is simply unfair to read Schweitzer and expect a great classic of ethical thought. Schweitzer's primary preoccupation in this work seems to be to communicate to others simple insights that motivated his daily activities, and he does that with ample effectiveness.

Joshua says

The book contains many letters and excerpts of letters from Schweitzer to various persons. Some are personal friends varying from heads of state to leading scientists such as A. Einstein. The underlying message is that if we all adapt an understanding and Reverence for Life we can improve the condition of the world.

Nance says

Maybe he grapples with questions that everyone would want answered but this book gives no answers. Doesn't mean he wasn't a smart man but you'd have to look elsewhere to see it.

Rosa Ramôa says

"Dar o exemplo não é a melhor maneira de influenciar os outros - é a única".

Manzoid says

To Schweitzer, primitive people care only for their blood relations. More spiritually evolved people feel responsible for all human beings. He offers examples (Jesus, Paul, Lao-tzu, Isaiah, etc).

He compares various faiths under the lens of humanitarianism, dividing religions into those which negate the world and those which affirm the world, examining the implications of each approach on the degree of worldly activity it entails. This may sound abstract -- to clarify, I'll mention one example: from this vantage, he rejects the great Indian traditions (Brahmanism, Jainism, Buddhism) as a basis for ethical action. This is by definition -- they cannot serve as a basis for ethical action, since they culminate in inaction.

In a very brief outline of the development of ethics, he sweeps through the Greco-Romans, Hebrews, early Christians, Erasmus, Bentham, Hume, Kant.

He concludes that ethics cannot be rigorously supported by a philosophical framework. Any attempt to justify altruism is logically flawed. It is entirely subjective. Science leads us to understand more of the physical universe, but in such a way as to strip its human meaning. Ethics is irreconcilable with observations of a predatory phenomenal world. [Note: Schweitzer's invocation of survival of the fittest here does not gibe with Darwin's original concept, and our modern understanding, of the workings of ecosystems, predicated on survival of the fittest *within a fitting ecological niche*. That is, there is great inter-individual competition but ultimately an elegant inter-species cooperation, the spirit of which might be close to what Schweitzer is attempting to articulate.]

Schweitzer claims that the culmination of the search for a rigorous underpinning to ethics results in the realization that all creatures are common in their will to live, so "Goodness is: preserve life, promote life, help life achieve its highest destiny. The essence of Evil is: Destroy life, harm life, hamper the development of life." Hence, the title of the book. The point seems to be that, in his opinion, soul-searching for the core of altruism will lead one to revere life for its own sake, including non-human life. This reverence should permeate all our actions.

From what I could tell, this is essentially no more than his passionate opinion. I found the arguments to be loose and unconvincing, simply a discursive description of the author's compassionate frame of mind. Still, it is impressive to hear a profoundly good person describe the nature of his compassion. Reading beyond the somewhat rambling message, beyond to the man himself, I found myself musing on recent small compromises and personal pettiness, by contrast with Schweitzer's will and heart.

Anyone inclined toward the environmental and animal welfare movements will find a champion in Schweitzer, who stressed the interdependence and unity of all life. However, his autobiography, "Out of My Life and Thought", would probably be a better introduction to him and his philosophy

David says

Well-chosen excerpts from Schweitzer's "Philosophy of Civilization" and autobiography. Complementary essays by Schweitzer scholars are thorough if often academically dry: they cast needed light on his Jain influence and offer some valid points of criticism.

JP Morgan says

This book was given to me by my mentor in-service of my rediscovery of NOW and my cultivation of a reverence for all. The excerpts of Schweitzer's writings and speeches give a clear window into this man.

He speaks from and to spirit. Inspired! Only reason it's not 5 stars is because it felt jumpy and broken. There could have been more of a story or narrative presented through his words.

Martica J says

I found this book absolutely amazing. I was able to understand what it means to be Christian without all the hype and evangelical rhetoric. Even after all these years Albert Schweitzer can still make the message powerful and hit close to home.

Arian says

i thought this book was really intricate and i the way i read this book i made it feel like a musical instrument i did like the book because it was telling the truth about people and our world it wasn't holding back anything.

Timothy Rg says

Schweitzer is remembered first as a humanitarian and a doctor. People may not know that he held a position preaching in the Alsace-Lorraine territory to which Schweitzer his given an eternal legacy.

In the course of the book, you may experience some lulls with the preacher cantering to the philosophical side of faith. The final chapter waters down the "attitude of gratitude" preached still today.

Nevertheless, you will find Schweitzer's a brilliant mind on the subjects of overcoming death and acknowledging false motives--a mind on par with C.S. Lewis, A.W. Tozer and today's evangelists

Johnny says

The Teaching of Reverence for Life is a slim volume, penned late in life by Albert Schweitzer, the theologian who "changed careers" at age 30 to endure seven years of medical school and follow a call into medical missionary work. Schweitzer parlayed his unsuccessful (but monumental *Quest for the Historical Jesus*) into a quest for humanitarian mission work that put him afoul of both the German forces in World War I and the colonizing forces in Africa when he denounced colonialism as de facto racism. The essence of his philosophy can be found in this volume on page 23: "We must in our time make it our special task to struggle against the antihuman traditions and inhuman emotions that are still too much in our midst." But Schweitzer was more than a *humanitarian*. He goes on to say: "In the main, reverence for life dictates the same sort of behavior as the ethical principle of love. But reverence for life contains within itself the rationale of the commandment to love, and it calls for compassion for all creature life." (p. 26) That's a bit broader. On the very next page of the English translation, he states, "By ethical conduct toward all creatures, we enter into a spiritual relationship with the universe." Here, he has captured the insights of the Genesis 2 account of creation where nature is presented to humankind as a responsibility to be savored, not a mere

resource to be exploited.

Schweitzer was skeptical of relativism, summarizing his ethics into a division of good (“the preserving and benefiting of life”) and evil (“injury to, and destruction of, life) (p. 31). Instead of the amorphous relativity that he saw as an excuse for not maturing as humankind, he defined the development of humanity as moving from a foundation of knowledge and technology into a beneficent socialization of humankind such that civilization could make progress in spirituality (p. 33). This schema was not atypical to the continental theologians of his era who sought a theology from below, humankind evolving toward godliness. Yet, it does not take seriously that phenomena within humanity that Reformation theologians called “depravity” and more modern scientists call “entropy.” It doesn’t seem like he takes seriously the self-destructive entropy of humankind who, by our complacency and self-centeredness, not only fail to mature in our thinking, understanding, and actions, but actually lose ground by insufficiently valuing the insights and sacrifices of those who have gone before us.

I was particularly taken by a metaphor he used in his chapter on human interaction, though. “Just as white light consists of colored rays, so reverence for life contains all the components of ethics: love, kindness, sympathy, empathy, peacefulness, power to forgive.” (p. 41) Again, “Where there is energy, it will have effects. No ray of sunlight is lost; but the green growth that sunlight awakens needs time to sprout, and the sower is not always destined to witness the harvest. All worthwhile accomplishment is acting on faith.” (p. 42)

The final portion of the book contains a chapter on human interaction with animals that one would expect to resonate firmly with People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. Schweitzer does not go quite that far, but he forces one to think and re-evaluate one’s attitude toward experimentation with animals at the very least. The final chapter on the abolition of atomic weapons is a marvelous ideal, but the window for the course of action he advocated has long since closed. Of course, having grown up in the Cold War, I know that it was never really open.

The Teaching of Reverence for Life is a stimulating book. For me, it is difficult to sift through the idealism to that which is pragmatic, but it makes me glad that someone existed and lived his life toward such an ideal. And without some people shooting at the target, the rest of us would (as I noted earlier) have a tendency to become complacent and devolve rather than evolve.

Andrew says

an important book

Philah says

mu

Jodi Tooke says

Intellectual discussion of what we all believe in our hearts--we must respect all life. Also, as the most advanced and capable creature on Earth, we humans are responsible for the good stewardship of all living things. The author provides compelling argument and relevant insight into the human condition and reverence for life.

