

## **Beasts in Eden excerpt**

### Wisdom

1

There can be no definitive law or guide that can help a Man decide what he should do with regard to ethics, as Aristotle noted. Therefore, Man will need to develop wisdom. Habit or custom are not enough when confronted with a conflict that divides a Man's soul, as do most moral dilemmas. Only the Man of wisdom will know what he should do and he will only become wise through intellectual and spiritual exercise.

2

There should be a few times in a Man's life when the beauty of the world forces him to his knees from a sheer sense of astonishment. In these moments of "divine" confrontation, a Man's spirit recognizes its own reflection and must pause awhile to reminisce.

3

The wise Man knows that he merely possesses a thing; he does not own it. Therefore, he has no need for spending much time or energy in either maintaining or sustaining it. After all, he has more significant matters to consider.

4

Wisdom will lead a Man to the correct path for him to travel, but only faith will keep him on it. Whether a Man succeeds on his quest is immaterial since it is the expedition itself that will lead to his evolution.

5

Wisely and slow does the wise Man proceed or he shall find himself in the sea with Icarus.

6

Man's private desire to kill — a rather common remnant from his ancient past — must be somehow weakened or sublimated. It lingers in a Man's personality, loitering in his subconscious mind — always at the ready to explode upon the scene whenever necessary. Yet, the wise Man will not repress such instincts. He will merely attempt to refine these energies into something more beautiful or sublime.

7

The wise Man has little to say to his contemporaries because they don't typically understand him when he speaks since rarely do they wish to discuss matters of any importance.

8

Old age never made a Man a whit more wise, but it does provide an opportunity for reflection and some insight which might lead him to wisdom regardless.

9

A wise Man needs to develop an inner strength, a place of great reserve and patience within his soul, wherein he can always find peace in a noisy world populated by neurotic Men who wander the city night in search of spectacle.

Assuming a Man has not been reduced to an animal state, there are essentially four different paths for him to travel in life, any one of which could easily diverge into another, and all, like a lazy river, wind through and around the various obstacles and hardships of his overall destiny. The first route is that of the pleasure-seeker who finds all sorts of distractions along his way. His path is strewn with a bouquet of sensuous delights that only fuel his desire for more. A Man gets lost oftentimes in the sheer abundance of these diversions, awash in the ecstasy of sensual experience and the spectacle of mere entertainment. Yet, he seems quite happy to tread along this trail. The second path is the way of the common Man. A Man on this trail is astute enough to imagine a larger sense of duty governing his life so he travels onward searching for these obligations, rarely at rest except to briefly contemplate his next conventional undertaking. The extraordinary path, the third of four, eventually forks into a puzzling network of highways and country roads that all seem to drop off at the horizon. Yet, this does not deter the Man who wanders out so far away from his companions. This Man, too, feels obliged to seek some higher purpose in life, but he has not the benefit of chart or star to guide him. His aim, as well, is loftier so the risk is greater too. Tradition and law help steady the common Man, but no such advantage directs someone through the labyrinth of the extraordinary. Such a Man is left largely on his own — to perish or to prosper in supplication to the fate that is his alone. The fourth and final way is that of wisdom which may ultimately lead a Man to some greater understanding, but nonetheless provides quite a deeply personal and passionate commitment to the simple task of walking and the practice of contemplation.

Wisdom has always meandered along the very precipice of extinction. If it weren't for the efforts of a few noble practitioners, Mankind might have banished human insight from the earth entirely. After all, if none will volunteer to be the standard bearer for Wisdom, then only knowledge and ignorance will survive and these will not sustain Mankind beyond a few malingering generations.

The wise Man knows the fool to be someone who has rendered himself so unconcerned with thought and reflection that he can only hear his own echo and see his own image. There is no point in arguing with such a Man or attempting to move the planets in order to alter his opinion about anything of importance. The fool chooses to live a life free from the frustration that occurs whenever a Man attempts to develop himself into something greater. He would rather spend his days lost in the stupor and comfort of his ignorance. If he does emerge from the dense mire of foolishness, it will be only as a result of his own decision to do so. Thus, the wise Man will make no effort to convince such a fool directly, yet he may still exert an influence by the example of a life spent in service and sacrifice to "divine" wisdom.

The difficulty with wisdom is that a Man must be well versed in a wide variety of perspectives and understandings in order to apply the correct judgment to the appropriate situation at any given time. The Buddhist, for example, is admirably able to persevere through the most extreme of circumstances by detaching himself from his own concerns. He is quite correct, after all, that desire has a strong tendency to lead a Man to suffering. So the Buddhist way will serve quite nicely under certain conditions. However, suffering itself can sometimes lead to a profound

epiphany which in the absence of suffering might never have arisen. The child must necessarily suffer frustration in learning to walk or to read or learn much of anything else. So a whole cluster of different views may be needed in determining what to do in any particular situation. The wise Man is he who knows when to apply what for whom.

14

The wise Man employs philosophical theory when appropriate to the circumstances. Stoicism, for example, should be utilized primarily by the terminally ill and during extended times of pain and suffering. Utilitarianism on the other hand is a view designed for crowds and those times in a Man's life when consequences will matter most to the dispensing of justice. The Kantian approach meanwhile might be best applied when a kind of ethical absolute is needed. In any event, any particular circumstance still requires someone to employ the theory wisely.

15

As the belief in religion — as opposed to its mere outward display — faded over time, Men began to seek justice on their own. If a Man perceives he has been wronged in some manner he will blame the government, or society, or his fellow Men and demand or exact retribution accordingly. Yet, this same Man imagines himself as exceedingly moral, his vengeance merely a consequence of what justice requires of him. The wise Man, on the other hand, wishes to inspire forgiveness and mercy when he has been wronged because these virtues embody the merits of true justice; these are the virtues — among others — which rouse humanity from the luxurious cradle of the inhumane.

16

Introspection, reflection, and study are meant to aid in leading a Man to a larger understanding of himself and his world. In this manner he will have a better comprehension of exactly *what* desires he must surrender to fate and *which* passions he should cultivate and pursue. Yet, these results will be slightly peculiar for each individual Man. The path to enlightenment, as they say, can be lined with thorns as well as roses and the bones of many high priests and kings lie littered beneath a field of weeds. Thus the need for the cultivation of wisdom — a kind of passion, too, brought about through introspection, reflection, and study.

17

The Man of wisdom and true genius is defined by the uniqueness of his perceptions rather than the singularity of his talents.

18

Wisdom, even of the most dour and unfortunate of life's features, reflects the highest form of humane activity, an intellectual pleasure that humbles the ego and cautions one to pause before leaping into battle or proclaiming some eternal truth. All of the other virtues derive in some sense from wisdom. Benevolence, for example, will not arise until someone can be inspired to fully understand and feel its significance. Courage, too, without wisdom, is merely the rash or instinctual deed of a fool. Intellect, if used unwisely is a dangerous tool for all sorts of rationalized immoralizing. So, virtue seems as a kind of wisdom, an understanding of what one should do in a particular situation from the imagined neutrality of the "bird's eye view." Yet, the "proper" or wise evaluation will be the one which best appreciates the circumstances involved and this is

generally accomplished through the moral imagination — imagining the world from the scrutiny of someone else's perspective.

19

While the wise Man contemplates what should be done in any particular situation, the rash Man arrives to enforce his own less considered view. The wise then must also learn to recognize when urgency is needed since not all circumstances allow the luxury of introspection.

20

The lovers of knowledge differ significantly from lovers of wisdom. Lovers of knowledge are engaged in the acts of acquisition, collection, and categorization of information in order to uncover truth. Lovers of wisdom, on the other hand, concern themselves with how this material might inform living the best life possible. It's a relatively easy task to stuff the head of any common fool with knowledge from a vast array of sources and, through practice, have him remember it all again. It is far more difficult indeed to teach him to reach a wise decision with such learning.