



Study Guide and Discussion Questions

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1. The Human Condition

1. After sharing stories of Harold, Alice, and Harry, Wine concludes that “We can all testify to unwelcome and undeserved surprises, not only in the lives of friends and neighbors, but in our own lives as well” (page 6, Kindle Locations 197-198). Do these stories, and this conclusion, resonate with you? Can you relate any similar stories from your own life, or of people you know? Why do you think “bad things happen to good people?”

2. In the section entitled “Cruelty,” Wine writes, “Contrary to the clichés, death does not become easier and less frightening with age. It is often more painful because we are filled with regret for all that we failed to do and for all that we failed to see” (pages 8-9, Kindle Locations 234-235). If you are of a certain age, does this match your experience? If you are younger, what things do you want to make sure you accomplish before you die? What regrets do you have, whatever your age, and do you regret more the things you did or the things you failed to do?

3. Wine writes, “Mathematics, physics and astronomy have made the movements of the sun, moon and stars a dance of unerring scientific prophecy. But on the small, earthly, human scale of daily living, existence is far more uncertain” (pages 11-12, Kindle Locations 271-272). Is this true, in your opinion? Why should our daily existence be more uncertain, do you suppose, with all our scientific and technological progress?

2. The Comforts of Tradition

1. In the third paragraph of this chapter, Wine writes: “For liberal believers and for non-believers religion is a human creation. It is a human response to a crazy world. It is a human attempt to deal with the hopelessness and helplessness that so many people experience in their daily lives. It is a human denial of what makes life meaningless and intolerable” (page 16, Kindle Locations 307-309). Do you agree with Wine’s assessment? Can life have meaning without religion?

2. A bit later in this chapter, Wine argues, “There is no fundamental reason why religion and morality have to be united” (page 19, Kindle Locations 352-353). What is your take on this claim? Why do you think so many people think religion is necessary for morality?

3. In the section entitled “Decline of Religion,” Wine credits science and capitalism with bringing about a shift in the culture away from traditional religion. Science, he says, offered “a new method for the discovery of truth” and granted to human beings “the power that formerly belonged only to the gods”; capitalism, he argues, “radically transformed human relations and human expectations” and promised “that progress and salvation were possible here on earth.” Do you agree with this analysis? Does this represent “progress” in your view or just “change”? What of non-capitalist societies, such as Russia and China, which have also broken away from their traditional religious heritages?

3. The Secular Alternative

1. In this chapter, Wine addresses what he calls “the central question” of the book: “Does life have any meaning? And, if it does, where does it come from?” (page 29, Kindle Locations 485-486). When and how have you found meaning your life? Or do you think there is no “meaning” to life?

2. In the next paragraph, Wine writes that, after the decline of religion, “[n]egative secularists simply ceased to be religious, but never bothered to articulate an alternative philosophy of life for themselves,” whereas “[p]ositive secularists lost their old faith but were eager for a new one....” (page 29, Kindle Locations 487-489). Would you call yourself one of these “positive secularists”? What do you think this “new faith” might look like? Could it ever hope to replace the old one? Could it be better in some ways?

3. A bit later in this chapter Wine discusses the evolution of liberal religion. Among other things, he describes how, in this belief system, the God of the Bible was replaced by one of three conceptions of God. These include: “the deistic God who invented the world and then allowed it to run all by itself”; “the pantheistic God who was one and the same with nature”; and “the ‘symbolic’ God, a hodge-podge of forces and powers in the world that supported human welfare” (page 36, Kindle Locations 572-573). Do you suppose most adherents of liberal religious denominations would accept this characterization? Are any of these conceptions of God acceptable to you? Why or why not?

4. In addition to liberal religious alternatives, Wine writes in this chapter about the rise of “religious psychology” and “thisworldliness.” The former is centered on “religious experiences” and corresponds to a form of “secular psychotherapy” for the practitioner; the latter, on “social action” and “the salvation of the human race here on earth.” Do any of these themes resonate with you? Have you ever had what you would describe as a “religious experience?” Do you believe in or practice “social action”?

5. In the section entitled, “The Crisis of Secularism,” Wine writes that “despite the tremendous advances in material welfare for so many millions, pessimism and disappointment are everywhere” (page 39, Kindle Locations 614-615). Why do you suppose this is the case? What do you think is the remedy?

4. New Search for Meaning

1. Near the beginning of this chapter, Wine writes, “Traditional religion emphasized faith. Secular Utopians put their trust in reason. New Age thinkers are comfortable with intuition” (page 46, Kindle Locations 698-699). What are your feelings about *intuition* as a means of seeking truth? Can it produce results that are better, or as good as, faith and reason? Do you consider yourself an “intuitive” person, whatever that may mean to you?
2. Citing the importance of intuition to modern existentialist thinkers, Wine writes, “The universe of Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus may be morally absurd and without meaning. But the human spirit is divine in its freedom” (page 48, Kindle Locations 729-735). What are your reactions to this? What is meant by “the human spirit”? Are we truly “the authors of meaning through the choices we make”? What of people who make bad choices or those who are severely limited by external circumstances?
3. Citing the beliefs of Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and Hindu mystics, Wine writes of a “deep awareness that all things in the universe are parts of a greater whole, which is infused with beauty and harmony” (page 49, Kindle Locations 741-742). Do you accept such a view of the world? If not, why not?
4. Later in this chapter Wine discusses the articulate and charismatic thinker Joseph Campbell, who maintained that each of us has two ways of understanding the world: the first “narrowly rational and analytic”; the second, “spiritual and synthetic” (page 53, Kindle Locations 797-798). Is it possible we do in fact have more than one way of knowing? Could it be possible for a person to toggle back and forth, depending on the setting?

5. Realism

1. At the beginning of this chapter, Wine relates a personal anecdote from childhood in which a teacher consoled him after his favorite new pen was broken by a careless and thoughtless classmate. This teacher, who possessed a certain “rough strength and consistency of purpose” in Wine’s recollection, consoled him by saying: “Sherwin, the world is unfair. Being mad at it and crying won’t change it. Your pen is broken and you didn’t deserve to have it broken. So dry your tears and be strong. If you do, you will find that you are stronger than you think” (page 62, Kindle Locations 908-909). What do you make of this advice? Would you call this “tough love”? Is it the appropriate thing to say to a grieving child, in your opinion?

2. In the section entitled “Basic Truths,” Wine articulates a cornerstone of his philosophy of life. He writes: “The world is not a figment of my imagination, a projection of my desire, a personal preserve where my emotions can invent a place they need to live in. It is something external to me, out there, objective, independent of whether I want it or do not want it, like it or do not like it” (page 63, Kindle Locations 921-924). Do you agree with Wine’s claim? How can we ever truly know what lies beyond the realm of our own senses? How do we know what is “real”?

3. A bit later in this section, Wine observes: “Many people ask ‘What is the purpose of life?’ or ‘What is the purpose of the universe?’” also observing that “A meaningless world is a distinct possibility” (pages 65 and 69, Kindle Locations 953-955, 993). Is there a “purpose” to life, in your opinion? If not, why continue on?

4. Towards the end of this chapter, Wine affirms, “Painful truth is better in the end than painless fantasy” (page 70, Kindle Locations 1007-1008). Do you agree, and is this true in all cases? What do we mean by “better”? Is it never true that “ignorance is bliss”?

6. Dismissing Illusions

1. In this chapter, Wine identifies two causes of “illusions.” The first is ignorance; the second, “the refusal to accept what is emotionally unacceptable,” which he also associates with “privileged premises” (page 77, Kindle Locations 1069-1070). What “premises” have you held on to in your own life, and what did it feel like to abandon or reject them? Can you understand why many people are reluctant to do this? Can these premises be benign, or are they necessarily harmful if not supported by factual evidence?

2. Of those who would question the firmly-held beliefs of others, Wine writes, “Many challengers take their pity to heart and come to feel sorry for themselves. ‘I wish I had his faith,’ ‘I wish I could believe the way she does.’ ‘I wish I had my own eternal truth.’ ‘I really admire people with that kind of conviction.’” (page 81, Kindle Locations 1125-1127). Have you ever envied another person’s convictions? If so, would you trade places with them if you could?

3. In the next section of this chapter, Wine writes of what he calls “the grand illusion,” or “the belief that we live in a meaningful world, that the universe enforces the moral agenda of human beings, that the fates conspire to reward the good and punish the wicked, that the behavior of men and women ought to reflect the behavior of destiny” (page 83, Kindle Locations 1147-1150). Have you ever believed in such a concept? If so, what changed your view? Is it harmless to believe in fictions such as this, or can it be dangerous?

4. In the last section of this chapter (“The Alternative”), Wine articulates four essential pieces of his positive life philosophy. These include: “There is no universal justice” (page 85, Kindle Location 1170); “There is no just and loving providence” (page 86, Kindle Locations 1192-1193); “Life and people are not at the center of the universe” (page 88, Kindle Location 1215); and “Only the human agenda is a moral agenda” (page 89, Kindle Location 1230). What are your reflections on this? Is there any room for secular humanists to equivocate on any of these points, or are they all necessary for the foundation for a secular humanist life stance? Are any of these statements wholly or partly compatible with other non-secular worldviews?

7. Rejecting Despair

1. In perhaps one of the most powerful moments in the book, Wine retells the story of a chance encounter with a Vietnamese-American man in an airport who had lost everything, slowly rebuilt a life for himself in a new country, and lost everything again due a tragic accident. Yet the man did not despair. He instead affirmed, “I still want to live. I still want to have a family. I still want to be happy. No matter what has happened to me, I still want to go on” (page 93, Kindle Locations 1274-1275). Can you relate to this man’s tragic story in any way? Can you draw inspiration from it? What is it inside us that makes us continue on, despite sometimes unspeakable hardships?

2. In the section of this chapter entitled “Basic Truths,” Wine writes: “Second choices are not as good as first choices. But they are not all bad. Turning life into either success or disaster eliminates all the wonderful in-between options that make life quite tolerable” (page 102, Kindle Locations 1391-1393). Have you ever been compelled to accept a “second choice”? Did you find that things turned out all right in end? Why do you think so many people seem so quick to reduce life to “either success or disaster”?

3. In the final section of this chapter, Wine writes: “Ethical rules do not fall from heaven....They arise in the give and take of small communities struggling for survival” (pages 105-106, Kindle Locations 1439-1440). Do you agree? Do you think different communities will tend to evolve different ethical systems based on different local conditions? Are there any ethical rules that are universal?

4. In the next paragraph of this section, Wine writes: “Loyalty, love and sharing are the stuff of survival. In time, almost everywhere in the world, the conscience of loyalty and duty emerged, each culture adapting it to its physical context and social needs, but sharing with other cultures a core of commitments” (page 106, Kindle Locations 1440-1442). Is this your understanding of how these emotions developed? Are love, loyalty, and sharing universal human emotions and behaviors? Are they uniquely human?

8. Pursuit of Happiness

1. In response to the question, “What is happiness?” Wine argues that perhaps the best way to approach the question is “to identify its ‘symptoms.’” Wine identifies these as: “pleasure”; “being in control of your life”; and “having few regrets” (pages 113-114, Kindle Locations 1523-1530). What is your definition of happiness, and how is it similar or different from Wine’s? Or do you think that happiness is “simply indefinable,” in the words of Wine’s colleague who is quoted in the chapter?

2. In the section entitled, “Pleasure,” Wine argues that “[t]here are three kinds of pleasure: sensual, emotional and intellectual. Most gratifying experiences,” he goes on to say, “combine all three.” (page 117, Kindle Location 1564). Can you think of any activities or experiences from your own life that combine more than one of these kinds of “pleasure”? Do you find that the most meaningful activities in your life in fact involve a combination of sensual, emotional, and intellectual pleasures?

3. In the section entitled, “Sense of Control,” Wine writes, “The search for ‘my assignment’ is a futile one” (page 124, Kindle Location 1665). Instead, he argues that becoming an adult involves making choices, and that “no choice is ever completely right” (page 124, Kindle Location 1658). When have you been compelled to make an important choice in your life? Did it significantly change the course of events in your life following, and was it impossible to ever “un-make” that choice?

4. In the section entitled, “Few Regrets,” Wine writes, “We all make mistakes, some trivial, some serious. We all have regrets....But some people who make mistakes are happy. And some...are desperately unhappy.” (page 130, Kindle Locations 1738-1739). Wine further offers that “[r]esignation,” described as “a special form of apathy,” is the key to living a life of meaning, even one with regrets. It involves “[a]ccepting the immutability of the past,” “the recognition that nothing we do or say will make one change in what has already happened,” “the good humor to admit that regret is a waste of time,” and that “[o]nly the future can be affected by our anxiety and work” (page 130, Kindle Locations 1742-1744). Can you relate to this in any way? Have you tried resignation within your own personal experience, and has it helped?

9. Appropriate Expectations

1. In the opening section of this chapter, Wine writes that “much unhappiness comes from experiencing positive things, but never being able to see them as positive because we expected them to be so much more” (page 134, Kindle Locations 1767-1769). What “expectations” did you bring to life when you were younger, and did you find these were met by the events of your life? Is it better to have expectations that are too high or too low, in your opinion?

2. In the section entitled, “Hope,” Wine writes: “Optimists are not necessarily people who have led easy lives. Nor are pessimists people who have experienced many adversities. On the contrary, some of the most coddled men and women I know are pessimists.” (page 135, Kindle Locations 1776-1781). What do you make of this? Do you consider yourself more of an optimist or a pessimist? Do you feel your own expectations for the world are in line with your experience, and have you always felt this way?

3. In the section entitled, “Resistance to Purity,” Wine writes: “Moral purists have a hard time staying sane, happy or hopeful. They are perpetually frustrated. No matter what decision they make, it always has some bad consequence or other” (page 137, Kindle Locations 1803-1804). Do you consider yourself a “moral purist”? Can you appreciate why even the best decisions can sometimes have adverse consequences for some involved parties?

4. In the section entitled, “No Guarantees,” Wine writes: “there are no guarantees. No matter how strong your faith, how intense your intuition, there is no way of knowing for sure that something will happen. The human condition is uncertainty” (page 141, Kindle Locations 1856-1858). Is this a difficult fact to accept? Is this one of the challenges of secular humanism as a life stance? Could it also be considered a strength?

10. Taming Fear

1. At the opening of this chapter, Wine writes: “In a crazy world there is a crazy side to human nature. This crazy side is what we call our emotions” (page 148, Kindle Locations 1959-1960). Are our emotions truly “crazy”? Can we ever hope to completely control them? Have you ever been surprised by something you said or did, fueled by an emotional reaction? Does it happen to you often or relatively rarely?

2. A bit later in this chapter, Wine writes: “Fear is useful. But it can also be harmful. If we see danger where there is no real danger, if we exaggerate the danger and make it more dangerous than it really is, if we come to believe that we are powerless to handle any danger that intrudes on our life, then fear takes over our life and paralyzes us. (pages 151-152, Kindle Locations 1992-1994). Have you ever felt “paralyzed by fear”? Have you ever felt fear to be useful, either in a dangerous situation or afterward? What is the right balance, do you think, between courage and fear?

3. Wine writes, “We do not need to get rid of fear. We need to acknowledge it and use it. When it points to real danger, we need to pay attention to it. When it points to illusory danger, we need to understand it. When it exaggerates, we need to tame it. When it interferes with long-run goals, we need to resist it. But we never hide from it. It is much too exhausting to do that. It only makes us look silly and pretentious” (page 159, Kindle Locations 2090-2093). What is your response to this? Have you ever tried to get rid of your fear, and were you successful at doing so? Have you ever tried to hide your fear to avoid looking silly? Did it only end up backfiring and making you look even sillier?

11. Useful Anger

1. In the first section of this chapter, Wine writes: “Anger is very human. Without it we would never defend our own personal space. We would allow other people to step all over us. We would have no dignity” (page 168, Kindle Locations 2193-2195). How much importance do you place on anger? Do you ever get angry? How do you typically express your anger?

2. A bit later in this section, Wine writes: “Some people find a virtue in martyrdom. They regard anger as the enemy, the root of all evil. Self-sacrifice is the noble way to live. Dying for others, giving up your wealth to others, paying no attention to your happiness and survival are the signs of saints. Many religions cultivate this lifestyle. Suffering is more virtuous than defiance. Passivity is a sign of childlike faith, which God admires” (page 169, Kindle Locations 2210-2213). What do you think about this? Have you ever felt yourself a “martyr” for some cause or other? Did it end up making you feel good or bad?

3. “Ventilating feelings, letting ‘everything out’ that bothers you has now become a legitimate pastime among many contemporary psychotherapists....The alternative approach challenges this assumption. It recognizes that expressing anger drains our energies. Getting angry and acting on it is exhausting....It is frustrating” (pages 175-176, Kindle Locations 2291-2297). Do you ever feel the need to “ventilate” your anger? Does it make invigorate you or deplete you? Or are you someone who “bottles up” your anger, and does this strike you as better or worse?

4. In another key passage of this text, Wine writes about laughter and its therapeutic qualities: “Life has an absurdity to it....We can resign ourselves piously to the situation and pray, knowing that in some mysterious way getting stuck in a stairwell is for our own good. We can cry, wail and scream, hoping that some rescue force will hear our cry, take pity on us and save us. Or we can laugh” (page 182, Kindle Locations 2376-2379). Do you feel that laughter is an appropriate response to the “absurdity” of life? Are there times when laughter is more harmful than helpful in dealing with life’s challenges?

12. Constructive Love

1. In this chapter, Wine writes: “Love and anger tango with each other. When we feel vulnerable and alone, we want love. When we feel strong and self-sufficient, we want dignity. Balancing love and anger is never easy” (page 188, Kindle Locations 2428-2429). Can you relate to this in any way? Can you think of examples of incidents from your own life and relationships that bear this out?

2. Of the difference between “love” and “falling in love,” Wine writes: “Falling in love may be one of the possible beginnings to authentic love. But it presents a formidable problem. In an age when love relationships can be so easily entered into and left, few social pressures exist to encourage lovers to go beyond falling in love to love” (page 194, Kindle Locations 2510-2512). How would you describe the difference between “love” and “falling in love”?

3. In the section of this chapter entitled, “Conditional Love,” Wine articulates a view which some would perhaps find somewhat controversial. He writes: “Realistic people value love. But they do not value unconditional love. It does not make any sense to them. It appears to be nothing more than a form of irrational masochism. Love is very important for happiness and survival. But it cannot be the supreme value” (pages 199-200, Kindle Locations 2577-2579). Have you ever experienced “unconditional love” toward someone or something? Do you agree that this is irrational? Why or why not?

4. Towards the end of this chapter, Wine writes: “The drama of love requires us to play many parts. Sometimes we are the admiring audience. Sometimes we are the challenging friend. Sometimes we are the fun companion. Sometimes we are the protective parent. No single role is superior to another. Each is a response to the needs of our lover” (page 203, Kindle Locations 2627-2630). What are your reflections on this? Can you recall different occasions on which you have played different roles from this list? Are there others that come to mind for you?

13. Rational Guilt

1. Again, somewhat provocatively, Wine writes in this chapter: “Guilt is a perfectly normal emotion. Like all human emotions that have survived the test of evolution, it has its place in the human repertory of useful feelings. We human beings are ‘social animals.’ We are not loners....Guilt, like love, is the glue that keeps groups together and functioning” (page 208, Kindle Locations 2671-2674). What are your thoughts on this? Can guilt in fact be a positive human emotion?

2. A bit later in this chapter, Wine writes: “The dynamics of guilt is the opposite of personal autonomy and assertiveness. It is the ability and need to identify with ‘something greater than myself.’ That something is no otherworldly spirit. It is the worldly community that gives me life and helps me to survive” (page 209-210, Kindle Locations 2697-2699). Would you have thought to link guilt with the need to identify with something greater than yourself? Do the two impulses in fact stem from the same source?

3. In his discussion of guilt, Wine also writes of a related concept: “*Duty* is a word with a famous past. But it has fallen out of fashion in a world that finds guilt distasteful. Yet, there is no other word that can take its place, that can convey its unique meaning. Duty flows from obligation. Obligation comes from mutual dependency. Mutual dependency makes us feel tied to one another” (page 211, Kindle Locations 2722-2724). What do you make of words like *duty* in our day and age? Is it a feeling you still experience? How is it related to *responsibility*, a term still favored in some circles?

4. “Rational guilt is about keeping promises. It is about keeping promises that have never been formally made but that are just as real as a signed document. To live in society is to be part of an implied social contract. I will look out for you if you will look out for me” (page 212, Kindle Locations 2738-2739). Is there such a thing as “rational guilt,” in your opinion? How would you describe this feeling, and has it played a role in your own life?

14. Making Myself Strong

1. In this chapter, Wine writes: “In the end, there is no substitute for will. If it is strong, our life has a chance for sanity and purpose. If it is weak, then we become crazy wanderers in a crazy universe, victims of an equally crazy unconscious” (page 229, Kindle Locations 2945-2946). What is the “will”? Do you agree with Wine about its importance? Do you consider yourself “strong-willed” as a person?

2. Wine writes quite presciently for our present era in the section entitled, “My Opinion is Obviously My Opinion”: “In the new age of egalitarian politics and subjective truth, people are reluctant to be too pushy about what they believe. Parents and teachers are more cautious. They do not want to drive their children and students away. They do not want to appear authoritarian or dogmatic. They do not want to suggest that there may be some single objective truth” (page 230, Kindle Locations 2952-2954). Can you think of any issues in our time where you feel the debate is too charitable to one side, out of a misguided attempt to appear “unbiased”? How about the emergence of our “post-truth” era and the recent coinage of the term “alternative facts”? Is it still possible for us to “disagree without being disagreeable”?

3. In the section of this chapter entitled, “Postponing Decisions Has its Limits,” Wine writes: “Life does not give us the luxury of waiting forever. If we do not make decisions at the right time, the opportunity vanishes and we are left with useless speculation. Jobs demand decisions before we know everything about them. Friendships demand commitments before we are absolutely sure that they will work. Aging time-clocks push us to the wall before we know for sure that we will love having children. Most decisions have an *iffy* quality to them. They need to be made before we enjoy complete certainty. And waiting for complete certainty is like waiting for forever” (page 232, Kindle Locations 2984-2988). Have you ever had to make an important decision before you knew everything about the ramifications of that decision? Did it work out OK, as things have a way of doing sometimes? Have you ever waited too long to make a decision and missed or nearly missed a great opportunity?

4. In the section entitled, “Preferring Respect to Approval,” Wine writes: “Strong people repudiate their infant strategies. They do not want to be patronized. They want to be respected and admired. They know that the strategy of respect is quite different from that of reverent obedience. They know that the strategy of respect is not the same as worship and humility. The approval they desire is the approval that comes from equals. And that approval often begins with disapproval” (page 237, Kindle Locations 3046-3049). Can you relate to this advice? Have you ever earned someone’s approval after first earning their disapproval? What is the difference to you between “approval” and “respect”?

15. Search for Beauty

1. In this chapter, Wine proposes: “Beauty is not trivial. Without beauty life would be intolerable. Beauty softens the harshness of a world without meaning” (page 248, Kindle Locations 3155-3156). But defining beauty can be a bit slippery. What does “beauty” mean to you? What are some examples that come to mind? At some level, does it really only exist “in the eye of the beholder”?

2. Somewhat provocatively, Wine writes of art and aesthetics: “Where beauty is absent—art fails. Art does not need to be Pollyannish to be hopeful. But it does have to indicate even some *smidgeon* of human grandeur and resistance” (page 253, Kindle Locations 3231-3232). What do you make of this assertion? What genres or artists, if any, do you suppose Wine is responding to with this statement? Do you agree with Wine’s point of view, and do you consider his views on this topic universal?

3. Somewhat more provocatively, perhaps, Wine writes of another art form he considers too often overlooked: “The most successful art forms of contemporary culture are not recognized by artistic snobs. They are sports events. In the graceful ‘*dances*’ of baseball, football, basketball and hockey—in the vital energy of tennis, golf, swimming and running—heroes of risk and defiance display the beauty of their skills. Each contest is a testimony to human ingenuity and talent. A fast-moving basketball game, with its miracle passes and its mind-boggling bursts and turns, is a much more exciting ballet than standing on your toes. The ancient Greeks saw the connection between beauty and athletics. So does the sports-loving ‘philistine’ of the contemporary world, even though he may not be able to articulate his vision” (pages 253-254, Kindle Locations 3233-3238). Is Wine on to something, in your opinion? Are you interested in athletics, and do you feel the same way? Even if you disagree, can you respect this point of view and try to understand why Wine feels the way he does?

4. Again, intriguingly if a bit provocatively, Wine writes of nature’s beauties: “Nature is beautiful. But not all of it. From pesky mosquitoes to the volcanic ash of Mount Pinatubo, there are aspects of nature that are less than friendly to people. And from indoor plumbing to night life there are sides to city living that are very attractive. Most people stay in city environments—not because they hate them or because they cannot find work elsewhere—but because urban settings are more exciting and stimulating than natural ones” (page 255, Kindle Locations 3258-3261). What is your own experience with natural beauty, and has it changed over the course of your life? Do you yourself prefer the comforts and excitement of urban settings to untamed wilderness?

5. Wine’s last anecdote from personal experience is about Ed, a neighbor who changed his lifestyle for the better after a heart attack and bypass surgery. Wine writes that, after this incident, “he really saw his ugliness and was revolted by what he saw. With the help of his doctor, he instituted a new regimen. He dieted. He exercised. He lost weight. The shape of his body began to conform to his new awareness of health” (page 259, Kindle Locations 3309-3311). Are you inclined to think about your own physical appearance ever, and how it reflects your inner self? Have you ever made a conscious effort to improve your lifestyle, especially after a health incident of some kind? Do you think you are “beautiful”?