

# ETERNAL SUNSHINE OF THE SPOTLESS MIND

## SOCRATIC SEMINAR QUESTIONS

*DIRECTIONS: What to do with these questions will be posted online AFTER our viewing of the film.*

1. Do any of the characters in this movie have a recognizable mental health condition?
2. What do you think of the coping strategies of the characters in this movie?
3. Would it be ethical to make available the procedure of erasing someone's memories in the way practiced by the Lacuna Corporation in this movie?
4. Are there certain memories defining for one's experiences that it would be very damaging to lose?



5. What might some of the alternatives be for dealing with the painful memories that these characters experience?

6. When is the ability to forget as important for survival as the ability to remember?

7. I was reading an article on post-traumatic stress disorder. The article discussed the use of certain drugs to dull or eradicate traumatic memories associated with strong negative emotions. The article maintained that society has a vested interest in preventing these kinds of therapies. After all, if a rape victim has her memories altered there may be little hope of bringing the responsible party to justice. At the same time, we have to ask whether not treating the victim for this reason would be ethically justifiable. So, I'm asking you...What are the risks of not treating negative emotions? Does the source of the negative emotions make a difference?



8. Our memories are pretty crucial to our identity—even, our personality. If we change our memories this might involve changing who we are. Is there anything right or wrong about trying to change yourself in the ways shown in this movie?
9. In a compelling final scene, Joel and Clementine listen to tapes of each other justifying why they chose to erase each other from memory. If on a first date with someone, you could hear a tape of yourself in describing what it's like to be in a long-term relationship with that person, would you choose to listen to it?
10. Which is better: Joel's dysfunctional but emotionally comfortable relationship with his ex-fiancée Naomi, or his dysfunctional and turbulent relationship with Clementine? Why? Is your answer specific to Joel, or does it apply to relationships in general?
11. Was it a breach of ethics for Mary to mail all of Lacuna's clients their files and recorded tapes?
12. It's easy to see Dr. Mierzwiak's indiscretions with Mary as unethical. However, Dr. Mierzwiak's wife lays on him an additional layer of guilt when she realizes that he didn't tell Mary about their first affair. Why is this worse than if he had told Mary?
13. How could Dr. Mierzwiak have told Mary without rendering meaningless the erasure of her memory of their first affair?
14. Can you imagine a situation in which memory erasure is completely justified?
15. Is there value in suffering, even extreme suffering?

16. Why do you think Clementine had her memory erased first? Did you feel Joel wasn't as certain about the procedure? Why?
17. ~~Would you ever want to erase bad memories? Which ones, and why?~~
18. ~~How would you feel to be completely forgotten?~~
19. ~~What is your EARLIEST memory? Who here has the best memory?~~
20. Why is Clementine so distraught and confused after she has had the procedure?
21. Why do you think Clementine attracts the kind of men who believe she can 'save' them?
22. 'I'm always anxious I'm not living my life to the full' (Clementine). What does 'living life to the full' mean to Clementine? What does it mean to you?
23. 'She was not happy and wanted to move on. We provide that possibility' (Howard). How do people move on from difficult times in their lives?
24. 'I need your loving / like the sunshine / Everybody's gotta learn sometime' (song featured in the movie). How does Joel learn in this movie? How does he discover that he still loves Clementine? Do you think that he does really love her, or are his feelings only related to romantic memories of the early part of their relationship?
25. 'What a loss to spend that much time on someone and to find that she's a stranger' (Joel's recording of why he wants to erase Clementine from his memory). Why do you think Joel goes after Clem after the truth has been revealed? Why is he willing to accept the consequences of starting again?
26. 'It was important for me to put something out in the world that seems true. There's a lot of lying going on which has been very detrimental to my existence. Watching movies growing up, I thought, 'This is what I'm looking for in a relationship,' and because of those movies I constantly found less. This one comes with warts and all, and I refuse to put a moral on it' (Charlie Kaufman, *Empire*, May 2004). Where do you see truth in *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*? Where do you see untruth?
27. Is it really possible to forgive and forget? Which is better, to forgive or forget?

