

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. The title of the movie derives from the following passage in the poem *Eloisa to Abelard*, by Alexander Pope:

*How happy is the blameless Vestal's lot!  
The world forgetting, by the world forgot;  
Eternal sunshine of the spotless mind!  
Each pray'r accepted, and each wish resign'd.*

Why was this title chosen for this movie?

2. John Locke, in one of the first modern accountings of consciousness and identity, argued that personal identity is defined not by the physical body or the “soul”, but by repeated self-identification. Thus, according to Locke, memory is an integral aspect of the self. Are Clementine and Joel different people after they have their memories erased? In other words, have their identities changed in some meaningful way?

3. Does this movie help confirm or deny Locke's thesis?

4. Consider that elective plastic surgery might be a real-life analogue to the memory-erasing procedure. On the American TV show “Extreme Makeover”, people are given plastic surgery as part of a radical image upgrade. Do these peoples' identities change in any meaningful way?

5. Does your answer to the previous question help confirm or deny Locke's idea of identity?

6. 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?

7. Which is better: Joel's dysfunctional but emotionally comfortable relationship with his ex-fiancée Naomi, or his dysfunctional and turbulent relationship with Clementine? Why?

8. Is your answer specific to Joel, or does it apply to relationships in general?

9. Ignoring financial aspects, was it a breach of ethics for Mary to mail all of Lacuna's clients their files and recorded tapes?

10. Suppose a former client of Lacuna demanded to know whether the procedure had been done: which is more important, the wishes of someone before they had the procedure done, or their wishes after?

11. Was Joel's friend Rob acting in Joel's best interest when he revealed that Clementine had Joel erased from her memory? Why or why not?

12. Why did Rob's wife Carrie disagree with Rob's decision to reveal this?

13. It's easy to see Dr. Mierzwiak's indiscretions with Mary as unethical. However, Dr. Mierzwiak's wife confers 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?

14. How could Dr. Mierzwiak have told her without rendering meaningless the erasure of her memory of their first affair?

15. Can you imagine a situation in which memory erasure is completely justified?

16. Is there value in suffering, even extreme suffering?