

# Aphorisms

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1. To analyze is deceitful above all things.
2. Critics did not arise in reaction to artists; artists arose in reaction to critics. (*Contra Nietzsche.*)
3. You do it in the moment. Later, memory gives you a good reason why.
4. It is beyond astonishing that, by dint of social institutions, humans have been able to continuously track the number of years between the present and some distant moment in the past (somewhere between, say, 2000 and 4000 BCE)—the end-to-end of somewhere between 200 and 300 human lives—even down to the correlation of happenings between distant places. There is no other achievement by the species to equal it.
5. The philosopher's complaint today: always a bride, never a bridesmaid. (Nietzsche would not be proud.)
6. It is a stroke of great good fortune for philosophers that reason and contemplation have proven to be the foundation of goodness, virtue and happiness.
7. A Kantian: one who cannot help but think that everyone else would be better off if they were more like him.
8. One *feels* shame. One *is* guilty of sin. One can be guilty of sin and not know it; one cannot feel shame and not know it. (Spinoza knew this: "Bad conscience is not remorse at what one has done, but regret that one is not the person one thought one was.")
9. One more willingly acts to gain the respect of those one hates than to show kindness to those one loves.
10. I tried recently not to give a shit. Vanity stopped me. But I couldn't give enough of a shit to do anything about it.
11. To let 1 die to save 100 is tactics; to let 1000 die to save 1 is strategy. The specificity of the name exculpates it. (To let them all die is to be at peace.)
12. On short and long time scales, most people are simple. It's in between that some of us let our freak flags fly.
13. We present ourselves to ourselves as we would have others perceive us; we present ourselves to others as we would really be.
14. Rembrandt's self-portraits: he gazes clearly and intently outwards, the better to contemplate his own inner life. (He is, after all, always looking at himself.)

15. Many believe only the negative they hear about themselves, many only the positive; few have the courage to be open to both.
16. It is easier to forgive a friend for being wrong about oneself than for being right.
17. *Free will*: the feeling that you're bettering yourself. *Determinism*: the fact that you're not.
18. The mind is the body's cruelty to itself.
19. "You will never disappoint me." You think so poorly of me? (You see no possibility in me?)
20. If there could be a god, it would be just big enough an asshole actually to exist; therefore, there is a god. (The Argument from Assholes.)
21. A metaphysician: one who says "it *must* be so"—and thinks he means something by it.
22. Another metaphysician: one who says "it *cannot* be so"—and does not doubt her doubt.
23. The Principle of Sufficient Reason: "When something happens to catch my eye, I will by god find something to say about it that will suffice to glut my interest in it."
24. One can come to metaphysics by any of a number of virtuous routes: cowardice, pride, avarice, sloth, arrogance, lust, envy, gluttony. (Why Christians are metaphysicians.)
25. A metaphysician: one who will argue (and believe) that the claim "nothing is something" is meaningful and true, but "something is nothing" is not.
26. "I can think of no other way it can be; therefore, it must be that way." A metaphysical argument.
27. Progress in philosophy—which can and does happen—consists at one time of a widening and deepening of the space of conceptual possibilities, and at another of a pruning and winnowing of it—in short, any fruitful modification to its content and structure.
28. I will show you the bridge can be built by walking across it.
29. To realize that what we had taken as a necessary idea or relation among ideas in thought is not necessary after all, and so need not reflect anything that holds of necessity in the world. To give up old "necessities" of thought and so open our mind to new conceptual possibilities. To free ourselves to look in new directions, to ask new questions and new forms of questions. That is the expression of a philosophical spirit.
30. "This thing did that; this is a thing of that kind; all things of that kind do that; that is why this thing did that." "This is its own peculiar thing; it did that, in its idiosyncrasy; that is why this thing did that." We count the former as an explanation, the latter not—which is to say, we have low standards for that kind of thing.

31. We are surprised when the world—in its structure, in its relations, in its motion—its state and its evolution—does not mirror our words. As though our words came first.
32. The mind rebels—but the world is apolitical.
33. The politics of the mind lie beneath the world’s notice.
34. One scientist displays mastery in the domination of the physical world, whether that be in experiment, in observation, in articulation of theory, or in the bondage of a physical system to obey the strictures of articulated theory. (Aristotle, Copernicus, Galileo, Newton, Lavoisier, Helmholtz, Boltzmann, Kelvin, Rutherford, Feynman, Wald.)
35. Another scientist submits wholly to the physical world to achieve culmination, ravished by the world, willingly and unwillingly, always both at once. (Kepler, Huygens, Newton, Thomas Young, Darwin, Maxwell, Hertz—this is not a modern attitude.)
36. A third scientist stands back and says, “this is,” because of the world and independent of the world, always both at once. (Plato, Archimedes, Ptolemy, Galileo, Newton, Carnot, Riemann, Maxwell, Lorentz, Planck, Einstein, Bohr, Heisenberg, Schrödinger, Penrose, Geroch.)
37. A fourth transcends the world, never having even been aware of its existence (Kepler, Lagrange, Hamilton, Poincaré, Eddington, Dirac, Wheeler); these also struggled with the physical, though they never understood that is what they were doing.
38. “It is not the intensity but the duration of high thought that makes high men.” – Nietzsche. Yes, but. . . : it is not the duration but the intensity of high thought that makes men high.
39. The less we try to find meaning in a thing, the more deeply we may understand it. (The world is a thing.)
40. Quine was wrong. Math and logic are put-up jobs; science is not. The world slaps science down like the bitch it is when it doesn’t behave. The world couldn’t give a piss against the wall about math and logic. (Insight into Quine’s psychology.)
41. Theory plays Boswell to the subtle and tragic clown of experiment’s Johnson.
42. Most conclusions don’t last. The observations that spur one to them, they are everything.
43. Science is conflict. Philosophy is engagement. One leads to comprehension, the other to wisdom. Both are good. Both are needed.
44. Philosophy is a belief and a hope, sophism a belief and a desire.
45. Realism is not a proposition whose truth-value can be affirmed. It is a way of thinking, an attitude, a style of moving forward in one’s cognitive work, shaping and informing but not contributing to the content. It is a Kierkegaardian leap of the absurd into faith, but at the same

time a sober reflection that is only one step in the ongoing dialectical dance of one's cognitive capacities in their attempt to explore the world, itself to be given over to instrumentalism—also a leap of the absurd—as the times demand. And that will give over in its turn back to realism, in the Corybantic whirl of thought, which, in the best of cases, settles down into the stately progression of the tragedy of understanding, and back again and again.

46. Realism is the vigor of life spending itself with all its extravagance, giving itself away in every sense of the word, instrumentalism the necessary decomposition that will in turn render the soil of the mind fertile and nourish new life. Only anti-realism is inanimacy. Rocks cannot nourish life, and a coffin of iron will not allow the decaying dead to give itself back as nutrient and substance of new and different living forms.
47. It's kind of like the truth... it's a proposition.
48. Truth is the best high, the most addictive drug.
49. A stream flowing over a ridge of rocks is the root of metaphor. One cannot make a metaphor for it. ("Fanny och Alexander")
50. One form of genius: the utter particular that, by virtue of its particularity, transcends its context to become universal—the expression of the universal in the most finely grained particular. One could write a book on that. A very particular book. (Hegel tried.)
51. Love is the triumph of optimism over a frank assessment of human nature—and, as such, a testament to it.
52. Cause and effect cannot make comedy. Accident cannot make comedy. Comedy is the conjugal union of cause-and-effect and accident. And tragedy? It is the subsequent and simultaneous cuckolding of each by the other.
53. Our sense of humor shows who we are more than our sense of tragedy.
54. Plato: "The affairs of human beings are not worthy of great seriousness; and yet we must take them seriously." An argument against suicide.
55. Baudelaire: "Time consumes existence pain with pain." Also an argument against suicide.
56. Aeschylus (by way of RFK): "Even in our sleep, pain which cannot forget falls drop by drop upon the heart until, in our own despair and against our will, comes wisdom, through the awful grace of god." An argument against suicide as well.
57. "I quote others only the better to express myself." – Montaigne
58. "*P*, I think." The basis of our rationality is the deepest—and most common—expression of our uncertainty. (At least in English!)

59. Apprehensive, conceited, judgmental, self-conscious, . . .—these are bad things? (At least in English!) And thoughtlessness?
60. Carnap was a Platonist in this way: an erotic lover of thought. And that in the purest sense, for he loved only thought—its cognitive content. He wrote drily to tame the intensity of the proposition.
61. “That is cheap and easy” (said to dismiss a philosophical position). Expensive and floridly Baroque is better?
62. Philosophy is the continual battle against the prejudice that one knows what one is talking about.
63. Sometimes to do nothing all day, and to do it well, is to accomplish something important.
64. Hendrix says: I make this. Homer says: this is. Why do I strongly feel one is more profound?
65. One artist displays mastery in the domination of the physical world, whether that be paint and canvas, sound waves, the linguistic articulation of mental states, or in the bondage of mental states to obey the strictures of articulated symbolic systems. (Moses, Sappho, the sculptor of “Winged Victory” in the Louvre, Caravaggio, Shakespeare, Bach, Kant, Beethoven, Barbara Stanwyck, Louis Armstrong of “Tight Like This”, Julia Child, Lee Friedman, Humphrey Bogart, Fellini, Hendrix, Plato of *Republic*.)
66. Another artist submits wholly to the physical world to achieve culmination, ravished by the world, willingly and unwillingly, always both at once. (Jesus, Tintoretto, Blake, Hume, Keats, Chopin, Eadward Muybridge, Rodin, Louis Armstrong of “What Did I Do to Be So Black and Blue”, Anna Akhmatova, Veronica Lake, Ralph Eugene Meatyard, James Dean, Kurosawa, The Beatles, The Velvet Underground, Plato of *Laws*.)
67. A third stands back and says, “this is,” because of the world and independent of the world, always both at once. (Homer, the Ecclesiast, Piero della Francesca, Rubens, Schubert, Jane Austen, Mark Twain, Nietzsche, Charles Sanders Peirce, A. A. Milne, Louis Armstrong of “Basin Street Blues”, Alexander Calder, Hemingway, Faulkner, Wallace Stevens, Katherine Hepburn, Yasujiro Ozu, Thelonius Monk, Garry Winogrand, Marcello Mastroianni, Andrei Tarkovsky, Thomas Pynchon, Plato of *Symposium*.)
68. A fourth transcends the world, never having even been aware of its existence (Fra Angelico, Jan van Eyck, Mozart, Laurence Sterne, Shelley, Odilon Redon, Rilke, Bertrand Russell, Chaplin, Louis Armstrong of “Potato Head Blues”, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Cary Grant, Marino Marini, Robert Adams, Jacques Tati, Plato of *Phaedo*); these also struggled with the physical, though they never understood that is what they were doing.
69. It is good to have heroes. It is better to overcome them.
70. It is good to have gyros. It is better to eat them.