

Ayn Rand

Quotations on Philosophy and Education

Entrepreneurism: “Throughout the centuries there were men who took first steps down new roads armed with nothing but their own vision.” (*The Fountainhead*, 1943)

The purpose of life: “[T]he achievement of your happiness is the only *moral* purpose of your life, and that *happiness*—not pain or mindless self-indulgence—is the proof of your moral integrity, since it is the proof and the result of your loyalty to the achievement of your values.” (*For The New Intellectual*, 1963)

“Man worship”: “The man-worshippers, in my sense of the term, are those who see man’s highest potential and strive to actualize it. . . . those dedicated to the *exaltation* of man’s self-esteem and the *sacredness* of his happiness on earth.” (“Introduction to *The Fountainhead*,” *The Objectivist*, March 1968)

“Benevolent universe”: “the inability to believe in the power or the triumph of evil. No matter what corruption one observes in one’s immediate background, one is unable to accept it as normal, permanent or *metaphysically* right. One feels: ‘This injustice (or terror or falsehood or frustration or pain or agony) is the exception in life, not the rule.’ One feels certain that somewhere on earth—even if not anywhere in one’s surroundings or within one’s reach—a proper, human way of life is possible to human beings, and justice matters.” (“The Inexplicable Personal Alchemy” [1969], *The Anti-Industrial Revolution*)

Metaphysics: “Actually, do you know what we can ascribe to the universe as such, apart from scientific discovery? Only those fundamentals that we can grasp about existence. Not in the sense of switching contexts and ascribing particular characteristics to the universe, but we can say: since everything possesses identity, the universe possesses identity. Since everything is finite, the universe is finite. But we can’t ascribe space or time or a lot of other things to the universe as a whole.” (*Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*, 2nd edition [1990])

The “Primacy of Existence”: “The primacy of existence (of reality) is the axiom that existence exists, i.e., that the universe exists independent of consciousness (of *any* consciousness), that things are what they are, that they possess a specific nature, an *identity*. The epistemological corollary is the axiom that consciousness is the faculty of perceiving that which exists—and that man gains knowledge of reality by looking outward.” (“The Metaphysical Versus the Man-Made” [1973], *Philosophy: Who Needs It*)

Empiricism: “Man’s senses are his only direct cognitive contact with reality and, therefore, his only source of information. Without sensory evidence, there can be

no concepts; without concepts, there can be no language; without language, there can be no knowledge and no science.” (“Philosophy: Who Needs It” [1974])

Cognitive *tabula rasa*: “At birth, a child’s mind is *tabula rasa*; he has the potential of awareness—the mechanism of a human consciousness—but no content. Speaking metaphorically, he has a camera with an extremely sensitive, unexposed film (his conscious mind), and an extremely complex computer waiting to be programmed (his subconscious). Both are blank. He knows nothing of the external world. He faces an immense chaos which he must learn to perceive by means of the complex mechanism which he must learn to operate.” (“The Comprachicos” [1970], *The Anti-Industrial Revolution*)

Francis Bacon: “Nature, to be commanded, must be obeyed.” (Quoted in “Who Is the Final Authority in Ethics?” *The Objectivist Newsletter*, February 1965)

Mind-body integration: “Man is an indivisible entity, an integrated unit of two attributes: of matter and consciousness and... he may permit no breach between body and mind, between action and thought, between his life and his convictions.” (*Atlas Shrugged*, 1957)

Tabula rasa and self-creation: “Man is a being of self-made soul.” (“Philosophy and Sense of Life” [1966], *The Romantic Manifesto*)

Skill *tabula rasa*: “No one is born with any kind of ‘talent’ and, therefore, every skill has to be acquired. Writers are made, not born. To be exact, writers are self-made.” (“Foreword” to *We the Living* [1936/1959])

Morality and rationality: “Man has a single basic choice: to think or not, and that is the gauge of his virtue. Moral perfection is an unbreached rationality—not the degree of your intelligence, but the full and relentless use of your mind, not the extent of your knowledge, but the acceptance of reason as an absolute.” (*Atlas Shrugged*)

Independence: “The vilest form of self-abasement and self-destruction is the subordination of your mind to the mind of another, the acceptance of an authority over your brain, the acceptance of his assertions as facts, his say-so as truth, his edicts as middle-man between your consciousness and your existence.” (*Atlas Shrugged*).

Productiveness: “Nothing is given to man on earth. Everything he needs has to be produced. And here man faces his basic alternative: he can survive in only one of two ways—by the independent work of his own mind or as a parasite fed by the minds of others. The creator originates. The parasite borrows. ... The creator’s concern is the conquest of nature. The parasite’s concern is the conquest of men.” (*The Fountainhead*)

Human potential: “If, in any two years of adult life, men could learn as much as an infant learns in his first two years, they would have the capacity of genius. . . . an infant’s tasks and achievements [are] not equaled by most men in the rest of their lives.” (“The Comprachicos” [1970], *The Anti-Industrial Revolution*)

The purpose of education: “The only purpose of education is to teach a student how to live his life—by developing his mind and equipping him to deal with reality. The training he needs is theoretical, i.e., conceptual. He has to be taught to think, to understand, to integrate, to prove. He has to be taught the essentials of the knowledge discovered in the past—and he has to be equipped to acquire further knowledge by his own effort.” (“The Comprachicos”)

Howard Roark on the purpose of schooling: “I came here to learn about building. When I was given a project, its only value to me was to learn to solve it as I would solve a real one in the future.” (*The Fountainhead*)

On Progressive education: “The academia-jet set coalition is attempting to tame the American character by the deliberate breeding of helplessness and resignation—in those incubators of lethargy known as “Progressive” schools, which are dedicated to the task of crippling a child’s mind by arresting his cognitive development. . . . It appears, however, that the ‘progressive’ rich will be the first victims of their own special theories: it is the children of the well-to-do who emerge from expensive nursery schools and colleges as hippies, and destroy the remnants of their paralyzed brains by means of drugs.” (“Don’t Let It Go” [1971], *Philosophy: Who Needs It.*)

On Montessori education: “The middle class has created an antidote which is perhaps the most hopeful movement of recent years: the spontaneous, unorganized, grass-roots revival of the Montessori system of education—a system aimed at the development of a child’s cognitive, i.e., rational, faculty.” (“Don’t Let It Go”)

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Context:

These quotations are compiled to work with Stephen Hicks’s video lecture on Objectivism and Montessori, which is Part 12 of his Philosophy of Education course.

The lecture is available at <http://www.stephenhicks.org/publications/philosophy-of-education/> and Youtube (<http://www.youtube.com/user/EducationPhilosophy>).

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