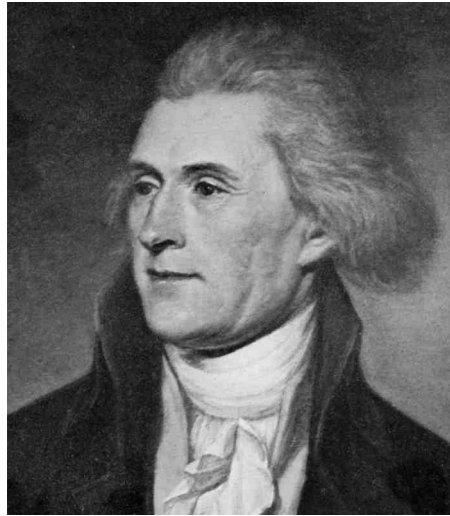


68 QUOTATIONS



Thomas Jefferson

(1743-1826)

Thomas Jefferson wrote *The Declaration of American Independence* (1776), became President of the United States and is one of the most quoted people in history—as in “All men are created equal.” His *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1784-85) and Crèvecoeur’s *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782) established the cultural tradition of agrarian pastoralism that counters the tradition of getting ahead in the City established by the Puritans and by Benjamin Franklin in his *Autobiography* (1789). Both Franklin and Jefferson are models of Neoclassical aesthetics, but Jefferson also has a transcendental dimension in both his writing and his architecture, as in his domed Monticello.

ORDER OF TOPICS: youth, books, education, autobiographical, liberalism, agrarian pastoralism, reason, liberty, religious freedom, newspapers, censorship, political correctness, rebellion, slavery, equality, Democracy, minority rights, government, money, spending, Socialism, guns, conquest, foreign policy, enemies, war, friends, religion, character, wisdom, health, Epicurus, happiness, old age, last words, future of America:

YOUTH

I was bold in the pursuit of knowledge, never fearing to follow truth and reason to whatever results they led, and bearding every authority which stood in their way.

BOOKS

I cannot live without books.

A lively and lasting sense of filial duty is more effectually impressed on the mind of a son or daughter by reading *King Lear*, than by all the dry volumes of ethics, and divinity, that ever were written.

Books constitute capital. A library book lasts as long as a house, for hundreds of years. It is not, then, an article of mere consumption but fairly of capital, and often in the case of professional men, setting out in life, it is their only capital.

EDUCATION

He who knows best knows how little he knows.

The natural course of the human mind is certainly from credulity to skepticism.

There is not a truth existing which I fear...or would wish unknown to the whole world.

He who knows nothing is closer to the truth than he whose mind is filled with falsehoods and errors.

To penetrate and dissipate these clouds of darkness, the general mind must be strengthened by education.

If a nation expects to be ignorant and free, in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be.

Educate and inform the whole mass of the people.... They are the only sure reliance for the preservation of our liberty.

Enlighten the people generally, and tyranny and oppressions of body and mind will vanish like evil spirits at the dawn of day.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL

Power is not alluring to pure minds.

I have no ambition to govern men, it is a painful and thankless office.

Politics is such a torment that I advise everyone I love not to mix with it.

It takes time to persuade men to do even what is for their own good.

The second office in the government is honorable and easy; the first is but a splendid misery.

No duty the Executive had to perform was so trying as to put the right man in the right place.

When a man assumes a public trust he should consider himself a public property.

No man will ever carry out of the Presidency the reputation which carried him into it.

The glow of one warm thought is to me worth more than money.

There is not a sprig of grass that shoots uninteresting to me.

I like dreams of the future better than the history of the past.

LIBERALISM

The earth belongs to the living, not to the dead.

I believe that every human mind feels pleasure in doing good to another.

AGRARIAN PASTORALISM

No occupation is so delightful to me as the culture of the earth, and no culture comparable to that of the garden.

Those who labour in the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever he had a chosen people, whose breasts he has made his peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue. It is the focus in which he keeps alive that sacred fire, which otherwise might escape from the face of the earth. Corruption of morals in the mass of cultivators is a phenomenon of which no age nor nation has furnished an example...generally speaking, the proportion which the aggregate of the other classes of citizens bears in any state to that of its husbandmen, is the proportion of its unsound to its healthy parts.

The mobs of great cities add just so much to the support of pure government, as sores do to the strength of the human body.

When we get piled upon one another in large cities, as in Europe, we shall become as corrupt as Europe.

REASON

Fix reason firmly in her seat, and call to her tribunal every fact, every opinion. Question with boldness even the existence of a God; because, if there be one, he must more approve of the homage of reason, than that of blindfolded fear.

The moment a person forms a theory, his imagination sees in every object only the traits which favor that theory.

Resort is had to ridicule only when reason is against us.

LIBERTY

Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty.

The boisterous sea of liberty is never without a wave.

Nothing is unchangeable but the inherent and unalienable rights of man.

All tyranny needs to gain a foothold is for people of good conscience to remain silent.

I would rather be exposed to the inconveniences attending too much liberty than those attending too small a degree of it.

A Bill of Rights is what the people are entitled to against every government, and what no just government should refuse, or rest on inference.

Rightful liberty is unobstructed action according to our will within limits drawn around us by the equal rights of others. I do not add 'within the limits of the law' because law is often but the tyrant's will, and always so when it violates the rights of the individual.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

It does me no injury for my neighbor to say there are twenty gods or no God.

Difference of opinion is advantageous in religion. The several sects perform the office of a Censor over each other.

I never will, by any word or act, bow to the shrine of intolerance or admit a right of inquiry into the religious opinions of others.

NEWSPAPERS

Information is the currency of democracy.

Where the press is free and every man able to read, all is safe.

Whenever the people are well-informed, they can be trusted with their own government.

Were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate to prefer the latter.

I do not take a single newspaper, nor read one a month, and I feel myself infinitely the happier for it.

The advertisement is the most truthful part of a newspaper.

CENSORSHIP

Errors of opinion may be tolerated where reason is left free to combat it.

I have sworn upon the altar of God, eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man.

It behooves every man who values liberty of conscience for himself, to resist invasions of it in the case of others, or their case may, by change of circumstances, become his own.

I am mortified to be told that, in the United States of America, the sale of a book can become a subject of inquiry, and of criminal inquiry too. Are we to have a censor whose imprimatur shall say what books may be sold and what we may buy? Shall a layman, simple as ourselves, set up his reason as the rule for what we are to read? It is an insult to our citizens to question whether they are rational beings or not.

POLITICAL CORRECTNESS

Taste cannot be controlled by law.

To compel a man to furnish funds for the propagation of ideas he disbelieves and abhors is sinful and tyrannical.

When the people fear their government, there is tyranny; when the government fears the people, there is liberty.

REBELLION

A coward is much more exposed to quarrels than a man of spirit.

Timid men prefer the calm of despotism to the tempestuous sea of liberty.

Mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed.

The spirit of resistance to government is so valuable on certain occasions that I wish it to be always kept alive.

And for the support of this declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor. [*The Declaration of American Independence*, 1776]

I hold it, that a little rebellion, now and then, is a good thing, and as necessary in the political world as storms in the physical.

The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants.

What country before ever existed a century and a half without a rebellion?

SLAVERY

The whole commerce between master and slave is a perpetual exercise of the most boisterous passions, the most unremitting despotism on the one part, and degrading submissions on the other. Our children see this, and learn to imitate it.

EQUALITY

We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

DEMOCRACY

I have no fear that the result of our experiment will be that men may be trusted to govern themselves without a master.

Sometimes it is said that man cannot be trusted with the government of himself. Can he, then, be trusted with the government of others? Or have we found angels in the form of kings to govern him? Let history answer the question.

I know of no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them but to inform their discretion.

The flames kindled on the 4th of July, 1776, have spread over too much of the globe to be extinguished by the feeble engines of despotism; on the contrary, they will consume these engines and all who work them.

The republican is the only form of government which is not eternally at open or secret war with the rights of mankind.

Leave no authority existing not responsible to the people.

MINORITY RIGHTS

A democracy is nothing more than mob rule, where fifty-one percent of the people may take away the rights of the other forty-nine.

All, too, will bear in mind this sacred principle, that though the will of the majority is in all cases to prevail, that will to be rightful must be reasonable, that the minority possess their equal rights, which equal law must protect, and to violate would be oppression.

GOVERNMENT

History, in general, only informs us of what bad government is.

That government is the strongest of which every man feels himself a part.

That government is best which governs least, because its people discipline themselves.

The care of human life and happiness, and not their destruction, is the first and only object of good government.

Experience hath shewn, that even under the best forms of government those entrusted with power have, in time, and by slow operations, perverted it into tyranny.

Freedom of religion; freedom of the press, and freedom of person under the protection of the *habeas corpus*, and trial by juries impartially selected. These principles form the bright constellation which has

gone before us, and guided our steps through an age of revolution and reformation. The wisdom of our sages and the blood of our heroes have been devoted to their attainment.

If the present Congress errs in too much talking, how can it be otherwise in a body to which the people send one hundred and fifty lawyers, whose trade it is to question everything, yield nothing, and talk by the hour?

MONEY

Money, not morality, is the principle commerce of civilized nations.

Experience demands that man is the only animal which devours his own kind, for I can apply no milder term to the general prey of the rich on the poor.

I hope we shall crush in its birth the aristocracy of our monied corporations which dare already to challenge our government to a trial by strength, and bid defiance to the laws of our country.

Merchants have no country. The mere spot they stand on does not constitute so strong an attachment as that from which they draw their gains.

SPENDING

Never spend your money before you have earned it.

It is incumbent on every generation to pay its own debts as it goes. A principle which if acted on would save one-half the wars of the world.

We may consider each generation as a distinct nation, with a right, by the will of its majority, to bind themselves, but none to bind the succeeding generations more than the inhabitants of another country.

SOCIALISM

Every government degenerates when trusted to the rulers of the people alone.

It is error alone which needs the support of government. Truth can stand by itself.

The natural progress of things is for liberty to yield and government to gain ground.

I own that I am not a friend to a very energetic government. It is always oppressive.

My reading of history convinces me that most bad government results from too much government.

Dependence begets subservience and venality, suffocates the germ of virtue, and prepares fit tools for the designs of ambition.

I predict future happiness for Americans if they can prevent the government from wasting the labors of the people under the pretense of taking care of them.

A wise and frugal government, which shall leave men free to regulate their own pursuits of industry and improvement, and shall not take from the mouth of labor the bread it has earned, this is the sum of good government.

GUNS

No freeman shall be debarred the use of arms.

One loves to possess arms, though they hope never to have occasion for them.

For a people who are free, and who mean to remain so, a well-organized and armed militia is their best security.

Every citizen should be a soldier. This was the case with the Greeks and Romans, and must be that of every free state.

The constitutions of most of our States assert that all power is inherent in the people; that...it is their right and duty to be at all times armed.

None but an armed nation can dispense with a standing army. To keep ours armed and disciplined is therefore at all times important.

The strongest reason for the people to retain the right to keep and bear arms is, as a last resort, to protect themselves against tyranny in government.

CONQUEST

We did not raise armies for glory or for conquest.

The spirit of this country is totally adverse to a large military force.

Conquest is not in our principles. It is inconsistent with our government.

If there is one principle more deeply rooted in the mind of every American, it is that we should have nothing to do with conquest.

FOREIGN POLICY

Commerce with all nations, alliance with none, should be our motto.

We confide in our strength, without boasting of it; we respect that of others, without fearing it.

I hope our wisdom will grow with our power, and teach us, that the less we use our power the greater it will be.

Peace and abstinence from European interferences are our objects, and so will continue while the present order of things in America remains uninterrupted.

ENEMIES

An enemy generally says and believes what he wishes.

As our enemies have found we can reason like men, so now let us show them we can fight like men also.

An association of men who will not quarrel with one another is a thing which has never yet existed, from the greatest confederacy of nations down to a town meeting or a vestry.

WAR

I have seen enough of one war never to wish to see another.

I abhor war and view it as the greatest scourge of mankind.

War is an instrument entirely inefficient toward redressing wrong; and multiplies, instead of indemnifying losses.

Whensoever hostile aggressions...require a resort to war, we must meet our duty and convince the world that we are just friends and brave enemies.

It is our duty to endeavor to avoid war, but if it shall actually take place, no matter by whom brought on, we must defend ourselves. If our house be on fire, without inquiring whether it was fired from within or without, we must try to extinguish it.

We are not to expect to be translated from despotism to liberty in a featherbed.

The Creator has not thought proper to mark those in the forehead who are of stuff to make good generals. We are first, therefore, to seek them blindfold, and then let them learn the trade at the expense of great losses.

I think with the Romans, that the general of today should be a soldier tomorrow if necessary.

The most successful war seldom pays for its losses.

FRIENDS

An injured friend is the bitterest of foes.

One travels more usefully when alone, because he reflects more.

Friendship is but another name for an alliance with the follies and the misfortunes of others. Our own share of miseries is sufficient: why enter then as volunteers into those of another?

But friendship is precious, not only in the shade, but in the sunshine of life, and thanks to a benevolent arrangement the greater part of life is sunshine.

I never considered a difference of opinion in politics, in religion, in philosophy, as cause for withdrawing from a friend.

RELIGION

I have recently been examining all the known superstitions of the world, and do not find in our particular superstition (Christianity) one redeeming feature. They are all alike founded on fables and mythology.

In every country and every age, the priest has been hostile to Liberty.

The way to silence religious disputes is to take no notice of them.

The God who gave us life, gave us liberty at the same time.

It is in our lives and not our words that our religion must be read.

CHARACTER

One man with courage is a majority.

Honesty is the first chapter in the book of wisdom.

I find that the harder I work, the more luck I seem to have.

Do you want to know who you are? Action will delineate and define you.

Only aim to do your duty, and mankind will give you credit where you fail.

There is a natural aristocracy among men. The grounds of this are virtue and talents.

Whenever a man has cast a longing eye on offices, a rottenness begins in his conduct.

The good opinion of mankind, like the lever of Archimedes, with the given fulcrum, moves the world.

Determine never to be idle. No person will have occasion to complain of the want of time who never loses any. It is wonderful how much may be done if we are always doing.

He who permits himself to tell a lie once, finds it much easier to do it a second and third time, till at length it becomes habitual; he tells lies without attending to it, and truths without the world's believing him. This falsehood of the tongue leads to that of the heart, and in time depraves all its good dispositions.

Nothing can stop the man with the right mental attitude from achieving his goal; nothing on earth can help the man with the wrong mental attitude.

Nothing gives one person so much advantage over another as to remain always cool and unruffled under all circumstances.

When you reach the end of your rope, tie a knot in it and hang on.

WISDOM

Delay is preferable to error.

Be polite to all, but intimate with few.

Always take hold of things by the smooth handle.

How much pain they have cost us, the evils which have never happened.

Do not bite at the bait of pleasure, till you know there is no hook beneath it.

In matters of style, swim with the current; in matters of principle, stand like a rock.

In truth, politeness is artificial good humor; it covers the natural want of it, and ends by rendering habitual a substitute nearly equivalent to the real virtue.

Whenever you do a thing, act as if all the world were watching.

HEALTH

We never repent of having eaten too little.

When angry count to ten before you speak. If very angry, count to one hundred.

Leave all the afternoon for exercise and recreation, which are as necessary as reading. I will rather say more necessary because health is worth more than learning.

A strong body makes the mind strong. As to the species of exercises, I advise the gun. While this gives moderate exercise to the body, it gives boldness, enterprise and independence to the mind. Games played with the ball, and others of that nature, are too violent for the body and stamp no character on the mind. Let your gun therefore be your constant companion on your walks.

Walking is the best possible exercise. Habituate yourself to walk very fast.

EPICURUS

I am an Epicurean. I consider the genuine (not the imputed) doctrines of Epicurus as containing everything rational in moral philosophy which Greek and Roman leave to us.

HAPPINESS

Happiness is not being pained in body or troubled in mind.

It is neither wealth nor splendor, but tranquility and occupation which give you happiness.

Our greatest happiness does not depend on the condition of life in which chance has placed us, but is always the result of a good conscience, good health, occupation, and freedom in all just pursuits.

I find that he is happiest of whom the world says least, good or bad.

OLD AGE

Bodily decay is gloomy in prospect, but of all human contemplations the most abhorrent is body without mind.

My only fear is that I may live too long.

LAST WORDS

Is it the Fourth? [July 4th, 1826]

FUTURE OF AMERICA

Men by their constitutions are naturally divided into two parties: (1) Those who fear and distrust the people, and wish to draw all powers from them into the hands of the higher classes. (2) Those who identify themselves with the people, have confidence in them, cherish and consider them as the most honest and safe, although not the most wise depository of the public interests. In every country, these two parties exist; and in every one where they are free to think, speak, and write, they will declare themselves.

Our country is now taking so steady a course as to show by what road it will pass to destruction, to wit: by consolidation of power first, and then corruption, its necessary consequence.

If God is just, I tremble for my country.

