

A Selection of Quotes from Henry David Thoreau

Individualism

The only obligation which I have a right to assume, is to do at any time what I think right. ~ “Civil Disobedience”

I feel it wholesome to be alone the greater part of the time. To be in company, even with the best, is soon wearisome and dissipating. I love to be alone. I never found the companion who was so companionable as solitude. ~ “Solitude,” *Walden*

I had three chairs in my house: one for solitude, two for friendship, three for society. ~ “Solitude,” *Walden*

The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation. What is called resignation is confirmed desperation. ~ “Economy,” *Walden*

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. ~ “Where I Lived, and What I Lived For,” *Walden*

I learned this, at least, by my experiment: that if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours. ~ “Conclusion,” *Walden*

If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away. ~ “Conclusion,” *Walden*

Our life is frittered away by detail. ... Simplify, simplify. ~ “Where I Lived, and What I Lived For,” *Walden*

The head monkey at Paris puts on a traveller’s cap, and all the monkeys in America do the same. ~ “Economy,” *Walden*

When sometimes I am reminded that the mechanics and shopkeepers stay in their shops not only all the forenoon, but all the afternoon too, sitting with crossed legs, so many of them – as if the legs were made to sit upon, and not to stand or walk upon – I think that they deserve some credit for not having all committed suicide long ago. ~ “Walking”

Government

I think that we should be men first, and subjects afterward. ~ “Civil Disobedience”

I ask for, not at once no government, but *at once* a better government. Let every man make known what kind of government would command his respect, and that will be one step toward obtaining it. ~ “Civil Disobedience”

The fate of the country does not depend on how you vote at the polls – the worst man is as strong as the best at that game; it does not depend on what kind of paper you drop into the ballot-box once a year, but on what kind of man you drop from your chamber into the street every morning. ~ “Slavery in Massachusetts”

Even voting *for the right* is *doing* nothing for it. It is only expressing to men feebly your desire that it should prevail. ~ “Civil Disobedience”

There will never be a really free and enlightened State, until the State comes to recognize the individual as a higher and independent power, from which all its own power and authority are derived, and treats him accordingly. ~ “Civil Disobedience”

Nature

In Wildness is the preservation of the World. Every tree sends its fibers forth in search of the Wild. ~ “Walking”

For many years I was self-appointed inspector of snow-storms and rain-storms, and did my duty faithfully; surveyor, if not of highways, then of forest paths and all across-lot routes, keeping them open...” ~ “Economy,” *Walden*

The universe is wider than our views of it. ~ “Conclusion,” *Walden*

If a man walk in the woods for love of them half of each day, he is in danger of being regarded as a loafer; but if he spends his whole day as a speculator, shearing off those woods and making earth bald before her time, he is esteemed an industrious and enterprising citizen. ~ “Life without Principle”

In short, all good things are wild and free. ~ “Walking”

Hope and the future for me are not in lawns and cultivated fields, not in towns and cities, but in the impervious and quaking swamps. ~ “Walking”

We need the tonic of wildness – to wade sometimes in marshes where the bittern and the meadow-hen lurk, and hear the booming of the snipe; to smell the whispering sedge where only some wilder and more solitary fowl builds her nest, and the mink crawls with its belly close to the ground. ~ “Spring,” *Walden*

I think that each town should have a park, or rather a primitive forest, of five hundred or a thousand acres, either in one body or several – where a stick should never be cut for fuel – nor for the navy, nor to make wagons, but stand and decay for higher uses – a common possession forever, for instruction and recreation. ~ “Huckleberries”