



# The Browser Book of Quotations



# Preface

The quotations in this volume appeared on The Browser between 2009 and 2012. Most of them were taken from current writing and interviews; a few came from older sources, usually prompted by a new citation.

I salute our contributors, and I hope this collection brings pleasure to our readers.

Robert Cottrell,  
Editor, The Browser

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# Art & Artists

We have our Arts so we won't die of Truth

**Ray Bradbury**

Imagination is the shortest route between any two conceivable points

**J.G. Ballard**

All poetry can be seen as a conversation between poets over time

**Adam Kirsch**

The non-artists among us are always terribly busy, but finally disappear without  
a trace

**Helen Vendler**

What makes innovative work exciting is that you're never sure it's any good

**John Ashbery**

To admire an artist for his own sake, although certainly a compliment, can also be a way of suggesting that he has no place in the larger scheme of things

**Jed Perl**

A painting isn't finished when you put down your brush. That's when it starts.  
The public reaction is what supplies meaning and value

**Banksy**

Whatever happens next, it won't be what you expected. If it is what you expected, it isn't what's happening next

**Brian Eno**

Suspense consists of letting an audience know precisely what is about to happen, and then making them wait for it

**Alfred Hitchcock**

An actor is someone who has been trained to pretend he is not being watched

**Peter Greenaway**

Entertainment provides relief. Art provokes engagement

**David Foster Wallace**

In every work of genius we recognise our own rejected thoughts

**Ralph Waldo Emerson**

Taste is not stable and peaceful, but a means of strategy and competition.

Those superior in wealth use it to pretend they are superior in spirit

**Mark Greif**

If you watch 'Jaws' backwards, it's a movie about a shark that keeps throwing  
up people until they have to open a beach

**Anonymous**

A director only makes one movie in his life. Then he breaks into pieces and makes it again

**Jean Renoir**

From our artists and entertainers we expect originality, and resent it when we get it

**Charles Rosen**

You confuse two things: solving a problem, and stating a problem correctly. It is only the second that is obligatory for the artist

**Anton Chekhov**



# Belief

What distinguishes sacred values from secular ones is how people behave when asked to compromise them

**Adam Waytz**

We know too little to commit to atheism, and too much to commit to religion

**David Eagleman**

Liars add extra irrelevant detail to make their lies seem more believable. Religions do the same

**Robin Hanson**

We have to respect everyone's right to hold irrational beliefs, but we do not have to respect the irrational beliefs themselves

**Ophelia Benson**

We have convictions only if we have studied nothing thoroughly

**E.M. Cioran**

If the divine creator is unfindable through the methods of science, we will have an equally hard time finding the individual human person, at least in the way we ordinarily think about them

**Martin Mills**

So far as I can remember, there is not one word in the Gospels in praise of intelligence

**Bertrand Russell**

Societies become truly secular, not when they dispense with religion, but when they are no longer greatly agitated by it

**Terry Eagleton**

Whatever is forbidden is what's actually going on

**Andrew Brown**

His breakthrough was the aestheticization of weakness

**John Jeremiah Sullivan**, on Jesus Christ

No one comes to believe in God because they have been convinced by the arguments for God's existence

**Kenan Malik**

Given the strangeness of what one has to believe to be faithful even to the most mainstream creeds, it's odd that so many people think Mormonism especially peculiar

**Martin Peretz**

The error of modern atheism has been to overlook how many aspects of faiths remain relevant even after their central tenets have been dismissed

**Alain de Botton**

The opposite of faith is not doubt, it is certainty

**Richard Holloway**

Easter is a mixed-up affair. Fluffy bunnies and confectionery compete for attention with the tale of a young man being tortured to death

**Stephen Cave**

One of the central religious yearnings is for platitudes to be true

**Andrew Brown**

I don't know if God exists. But it would be better for his reputation if he didn't

**Jules Renard**

Anyone who says we are a society lacking belief is not paying attention. If anything, we are lacking doubt

**Alexander Nazaryan**



# Books & Critics

There are three secrets to writing a novel. Unfortunately nobody knows what they are

**Somerset Maugham**

It is as absurd to talk about progress in literature as it is to talk about progress in electricity. Both are natural resources awaiting different forms of activation

**James Wood**

There is comedy, and then there is something called the Comic Novel, and these are related to each other rather as the year is related to a pocket diary

**James Wood**

Crime fiction is one of our culture's main ways of discussing morality

**Andrew Brown**

Most books are old. This is not a disadvantage: this is precisely what makes them valuable. Even if they merely reflect the conventional wisdom of their own day, they say something different from what you hear all the time

**William Deresiewicz**

Reading is a protest against the insufficiencies of life

**Mario Vargas Llosa**

Life is always going to be stranger than fiction, because fiction has to be convincing and life doesn't

**Neil Gaiman**

Any book, no matter how worthy and somber, becomes pleasingly ludicrous when compressed into 90 seconds

**James Kennedy**

To want to meet an author because you like his books is as ridiculous as wanting to meet the goose because you like paté de foie gras

**Arthur Koestler**

One has to care rather a lot about one's reviews, to go to the trouble of not  
reading them

**Alain de Botton**

This is a short book that pulls you in and spits you back out before you have  
time to tire of it

**Dwight Garner**, on Bill Clegg

This book's bleak assessment of the selfishness and materialism that have taken  
root in Western societies will stick to your feet and muddy your floors

**Dwight Garner**, on Tony Judt

It's customary at about this point in a review to tell the reader what's in the  
book under investigation and how it proceeds. In this case, sadly, I wouldn't know  
where to stop

**Pico Iyer**, on William Vollmann

You want to hurl the book across the room at times, but with an awareness that  
you would then need to go over and pick it up to continue reading

**Scott McLemee**, on Christopher Hitchens

A village explainer. Excellent if you were a village, but if you were not, not

**Gertrude Stein**, on Ezra Pound

I can't help but feel that something must have been lost in publication

**Karl Smith**, on a paper by Ken Rogoff

Writing cannot be taught, though it can be learned

**Joseph Epstein**

There's no test of how well you've read a book, and that's why merely reading  
books doesn't quite feel like work

**Paul Graham**

The effort the writer does not put into writing, the reader has to put into read-  
ing

**Stephen Toulmin**

Writers are people who find writing more difficult than other people

**Thomas Mann**

Seeing your book turned into a film is like seeing your oxen turned into bouillon cubes

**John Le Carré**

When we say that we love a writer's work, we are always stretching the truth: what we really mean is that we love about half of it

**Martin Amis**

Everybody does have a book in them, but in most cases that's where it should stay

**Christopher Hitchens**

Two writers alone in a room will talk about royalties, not art

**Robert McCrum**

It is not expected of critics, as it is of poets, that they should help us make sense of our lives. They are bound only to attempt the lesser feat of making sense of the ways we try to make sense of our lives

**Frank Kermode**

Nobody reads a great novel to find out how it finishes

**Jay Rayner**

It's more comfortable to think you could write a novel, than to discover that you can't

**Hugh Grant**

Fiction and poetry are medicines. They heal the rupture that reality makes on the imagination

**Jeanette Winterson**

The human race is no longer sufficiently bored with life to be distracted by an art form as boring as the novel

**Toby Litt**

All writers overrate the impact of writing, or else they would choose another  
line of work

**Adam Mars-Jones**

Anyone who doesn't believe that books have the power to harm is not taking  
them seriously enough

**Ruth Franklin**

The short story is an exposition; the novel is an inquisition

**Malcolm Cowley**

Criticism can be instructive, in that it gives some information about the critic's  
intelligence

**Vladimir Nabokov**

Whatever style you have is dictated by what you learn to leave out

**Zadie Smith**

The secret of biography resides in finding the link between talent and achievement

**Leon Edel**

A classic is a book that has never finished saying what it has to say

**Italo Calvino**



# Business & Economics

The truly big investment idea can usually be explained in a short paragraph

**Warren Buffett**

Most people are surprised to hear that the world economy doubles roughly every fifteen years; when they think back fifteen years, the world doesn't seem that different

**Robin Hanson**

Apparently Steve Jobs had a lifelong battle with reality, and won

**Scott Adams**

A good first step towards selling your company is declaring that you'll never sell it

**Peter Thiel**

Neo-liberalism is a system for converting private sector financial crises into public sector ones

**Will Davies**

The best we can say about economics is that we know what not to do

**Philip Coggan**

If you put your clothes in a clothes dryer, the energy you spend is part of the measured economy. Hang them on the clothesline and they disappear from our economy

**Tim O'Reilly**

Banks don't accidentally hold too much capital. Oil companies don't accidentally take too many safety precautions. The mistakes only go one way

**James Kwak**

For every goal you put in front of someone, you should also put in place a counter-goal to restrict gaming of the first goal.

**Andy Grove**

This is the natural path of industrialization: invention, propagation, adoption,  
control

**Chris Anderson**

The foundations of standard microeconomic models envisage people as hedonistic sociopaths, and theorists prevent mayhem from breaking out in their models by the simple expedient of ignoring the possibility

**Cosma Shalizi**

The reason work is so important is that it structures social relations without depending on pleasure

**Will Davies**

The chance of being exploited in a long-term job is now experienced as a privilege

**Slavoj Žižek**

A footballer, artwork or body organ can be “priceless”, but only until the price is high enough. Rationalisation can be resisted, just not always or not forever

**Will Davies**

I struggle to understand how creating more claims on wealth adds to wealth itself; as if slicing a pizza into eight, not four, pieces creates more food

**Philip Coggan**

Partial equilibrium is shorthand for coming to a conclusion based on assumptions that could not survive the circumstances under which the conclusion would obtain

**Steven Randy Waldman**

Credit markets tomorrow won't behave like credit markets last year, because we know what happened last year

**Emanuel Derman**

Financial markets have a very safe way of predicting the future. They cause it

**George Soros**

Success in the last round is not a good predictor of success this time

**Richard Feynman**, on Russian roulette

Self-sufficiency is another word for poverty

**Matt Ridley**

Paying taxes is a sign of low status. You allowed the government to get your  
money

**Karl Smith**

The right price for a product is the highest price you can ask for, but with one  
condition: that your customers remain happy after they buy it

**Oliver Reichenstein**

You've found the market price when buyers complain but still pay

**Paul Graham**

If you don't know what you really want from a negotiation, don't be surprised  
if you don't get it

**Charles Crawford**

If failure doesn't make you a loser, then success doesn't really make you a winner

**Michael Arrington**

Success is dangerous because often you don't understand why you succeeded.  
You almost always know why you've failed

**Marc Pincus**

The bigger your ambition, the longer it's going to take, and the further you project into the future, the more likely you'll get it wrong

**Paul Ford**

Keynes advocated reducing unemployment by employing people to dig holes and fill them in again. Today it would be enough to employ them to fill the potholes that are already there

**John Kay**

Give a man a gun and he can rob a bank. Give a man a bank and he can rob the world

**Anonymous**



# Happiness & Other Emotions

One way to be more satisfied with life is to lower your standards

**Katja Grace**

There has been a boom in work on the economics of happiness. I've always wondered why we don't study the economics of unhappiness instead: after all, there's so much more data

**John Quiggin**

The pursuit of happiness and the pursuit of perfection are mutually exclusive

**Bob Mankoff**

Gratitude isn't an emotion. But the expectation of gratitude is a very lively one

**Vernon Royce**

Humour is the politeness of despair

**Boris Vian**

Chronic pain is common, whereas there is no such thing as chronic pleasure

**David Benatar**

Generally speaking, pain is what makes the body a particularly important concern for the individual

**A.J. Vetlesen**

Personal enjoyment has become a greater obligation than self-discipline, and brings an even greater sense of failure when it is not achieved

**Slavoj Žižek**

A new house or a new spouse will make you happier, but not much and not for long. Very few experiences affect us for more than three months

**Daniel Gilbert**

Being bored is a kind of diagnostic for the gap between what you might be interested in and your current environment

**Clay Shirky**

If you are immune to boredom, there is literally nothing you cannot accomplish

**David Foster Wallace**

Joy is a fleeting emotion, like a very long sneeze

**Augusten Burroughs**





# History

Santayana remarked that those who forget history are condemned to repeat it. But if you have forgotten history, you won't know you're repeating it, so it won't matter

**Charlie Brooker**

Everything that needs to be said has already been said. But since no one was listening, everything must be said again

**André Gide**

History is a solvent of illusions

**John Gray**

History is the enemy of reverence

**Simon Schama**

History cannot be shaped, only enacted

**Henry Kissinger**

Historians like bureaucracy because it feeds their hunger for written sources

**Robert Bartlett**

Peace comes when people plant vines, and ends when they dig for oil

**Roger Scruton**

Afghanistan is the place where theories of warfare go to die

**Robert Dreyfuss**

Civilisation is a process of extending tradition by argument

**Andrew Brown**

Civilisation is the process of turning the incomprehensible into the arbitrary

**Venkatesh Rao**

An autopsy of history would show that all great nations commit suicide

**Arnold Toynbee**

If futurism is visionary, history is revisionary

**Bruce Sterling**





# Human Nature

Human beings are quite simple. The apparent complexity of our behaviour is largely a reflection of the complexity of the environment in which we find ourselves

**Herbert Simon**

The desire for immortality explains all extraordinary achievements, both good and bad

**Martin Amis**

To become disillusioned you must earlier have been illusioned

**Paul Fussell**

Our desire for praise can be truly satisfied only if we deserve it. No one is satisfied merely to look praiseworthy

**Robert Shiller**

It is a great compliment for an honest person to be mistaken for a crook by a  
crook

**Nassim Nicholas Taleb**

Once you have ordinary intelligence, what you need is the temperament to control the urges that get other people into trouble

**Warren Buffett**

Ideals may tell us something important about what we would like to be. But compromises tell us who we are

**Avishai Margalit**

If I am made to walk the plank by a pirate, it is vain for me to offer, as a common-sense compromise, to walk along the plank for a reasonable distance

**G.K. Chesterton**

For trust to be relevant, there must be a possibility of betrayal

**Diego Gambetta**

Men, when they know they can blame nature, will behave badly

**Douglas Allen**

When people speak of their low self-esteem, they imply that they have a right  
to more of it

**Theodore Dalrymple**

It is by no means certain that people would be happier if they knew their condi-  
tion in life to correspond to their true capacities

**Irving Kristol**

Most of us view the world as more benign than it really is, our own attributes  
as more favorable than they truly are, and the goals we adopt as more achievable  
than they are likely to be

**Daniel Kahneman**

The hypocrite may serve, among other things, as a deformed ambassador of  
the truth

**James Wood**

An incentive is not an objective fact but a subjective interpretation

**Alex Tabarrok**

It is not that our social bonds are precarious, but that the precariousness is the  
bond

**Adam Phillips**, on society

Everyone needs someone to look down on, and the psychological need is the  
more urgent the more meritocratic a society becomes. This is because, in a meri-  
tocracy, a person's failure is his own

**Theodore Dalrymple**

Tennis, a sport for people who don't like sport. Golf, a sport for people who  
don't like people

**Kanishk Tharoor**

Anyone claiming to be an expert is selling something

**Aaron Bady**

Prosperity doesn't trickle down, but greed does

**John Naughton**

I don't think of it as procrastination. I think of it as allowing my work to accumulate urgency

**Maud Newton**





# Language

When confronted by a well-intentioned fund-raiser in the street who tells you that she is raising money "for breast cancer", does a little part of you not wish to reply: "Sorry, no, I'm against breast cancer?"

**Justin Smith**

Good ideas formulated in bad English either die or get repackaged

**Frans de Waal**

Foreign languages are unsettling. They remind us how arbitrary the mental world is

**Tim Parks**

As a general rule, conversations about people are interesting, and conversations about objects are dull

**Scott Adams**

A Freudian slip is when we say one thing and we mean a mother

**Rob Long**

Psychoanalysis is about what two people can say to each other if they agree not to have sex

**Adam Philips**

A good maxim allows you to have the last word without even starting a conversation

**Nassim Nicholas Taleb**

By defining people as residents of war zones, we have, so to speak, zoned them for war

**Judith Butler**

There is a negative relationship between precision and accuracy

**Richard Feynman**

The long sentence opens doors that the short sentence slams shut

**Pico Iyer**

An apostrophe is the difference between a business that knows its shit and a  
business that knows it's shit

**Kathryn Williams**

The poet's ultimate reward is to enter the language

**Jonathan Galassi**

A pretty gift for quotation is a serviceable substitute for wit

**Somerset Maugham**

She's like an intransitive verb. She can't take compliments

**Gabriel Olsen**

Brevity, like clarity, has its limitations. It is not good to feed horses on nothing  
but oats

**F.V. Lucas**

The only people who say lightning never strikes twice are people who have  
never been struck once

**Russell Banks**

Aphorisms are rogue ideas

**Susan Sontag**

He could write vivid lines filled with possibility without knowing exactly what  
those possibilities were

**Jonah Lehrer**, on Bob Dylan

It is better to be quotable than to be honest

**Tom Stoppard**

Seminal, a word used chiefly by academics to overpraise one another, tends  
vastly to underrate the power of semen

**Joseph Epstein**



# Love & Marriage

It is necessary to fall in love, if only to provide an alibi for all the random despair you are going to feel anyway

**Albert Camus**

Love is selective. Hatred is collective

**Umberto Eco**

Marriage has taken on the form of divorce: a prolonged and impassioned negotiation as to how things shall be divided

**Wendell Berry**

Our grandparents' marriages were largely about shared production, but contemporary marriage is largely about shared consumption

**Will Wilkinson**

Monogamy is probably the earliest and most successful human experiment in taming the power of markets and harnessing them to social use

**Andrew Brown**

Never marry a man you wouldn't want to be divorced from

**Nora Ephron**

When a man and woman kiss in Grand Central and then head for different trains I can tell you one thing: they are both cheating on their spouses

**James Altucher**

Children are inferior goods. That is, the richer we get the fewer we want

**Karl Smith**

In marriage, every desire becomes a decision

**Susan Sontag**

The only marriage that should be banned is between people who don't really  
love each other

**Susan Orlean**

If being married was roughly what one thought it would be like, every couple  
would stay married until death parted them

**Michelle Mirsky**

In my experience, a man having great fun is probably about to get divorced

**Leonard Michaels**

Well, I bought a ticket to the circus. I don't know why I was surprised to see ele-  
phants

**Mrs Norman Mailer**





# Media, Old & New

The basic currency of the Internet is human ignorance, and, frankly, our database holds a strong cash position

**Christian Rudder**

That's not a job any more. That's a button

**Clay Shirky**, on publishing

If you're never wrong, you're never interesting

**Felix Salmon**

Email is frozen conversation

**Virginia Postrel**

Twitter is like having a little part of you that's always down the pub

**Tom Stafford**

If Google can't predict what you're about to say, what you're saying is truly  
novel

**Matt Webb**, on autocomplete

Today's journalists are much too well-bred to stand in the crowd shouting "The emperor has no clothes!" They've worked with the tailors, they have had long background interviews with the tailors, they've been present for some of the fittings

**Walter Russell Mead**

The main thing one learns is that long-term trends continue

**Robin Hanson**, on news

Designating something as classified information does not keep it secret. On the contrary, it specifies a class of people with whom it can be shared

**George Dyson**

The threat of massive leaks will persist so long as there are massive secrets

**Max Frankel**

The art of letter writing is like the art of acting. It is the impression of spontaneity that makes a performance convincing

**John Stokes**

When information is cheap, attention becomes expensive

**James Gleick**

People are information-rich and theory-poor. If you can give them a way of organizing their experience, then their minds are wide open

**Malcolm Gladwell**

My God! This scandal goes all the way to the bottom!

**Jon Stewart**, on Rupert Murdoch

We've come to confuse communication with the exchange of explicit information. What can't be turned into data loses its perceived value

**Nicholas Carr**

The real problem of our day is how to escape being well informed

**Dwight Macdonald**

Once a thing is known it can never be unknown. It can only be forgotten

**Anita Brookner**

Whatever was true before is true now. We just have more information

**Karl Smith**



# Philosophy & Logic

Should a cow behind a haystack of ignorance choose the world with the highest expectation of utility? In which case, a world of many cows each destined for slaughter could well be preferable to one with many fewer but happier cows

**Alex Tabarrok**

The confined animal lives a life of brutality and is dispatched; the free-range animal lives a life of relative freedom and is dispatched. From the perspective of happiness lost, the latter scenario is more tragic

**James McWilliams**

Let's get something straight. A vegetarian is someone who doesn't eat meat. It's not someone who loves vegetables

**Ezra Klein**

One of the quickest ways to find out if you are wrong is to state what you believe

**Penn Jillette**

Questions are places in your mind where answers fit. If you haven't asked the question, the answer has nowhere to go

**Clay Christensen**

The law is agnostic about truth. It's very skeptical of ultimate truth. That's why freedom of speech permits lies to be told

**Alan Dershowitz**

Integrity is a neutral value. Hyenas have integrity. They are pure hyena

**Jonathan Franzen**

Moral systems can best be characterised, not by what their adherents believe, but by what emotions they rely on

**Drake Bennett**

All intellectual movements start with trenchant ways of understanding the world. But as these ideas gain currency they are used to explain more and more disparate phenomena, until the explanation loses its predictive power

**Dan Drezner**

The trouble with simplification is that things are complicated. The trouble with things being complicated is that we need to simplify them

**Charles Crawford**

When someone tells you something is too complex for you to understand, the usual reason is that they do not really understand it themselves

**John Kay**

Such is the nature of the inexplicable that, as long as it does not involve money, it can be ignored

**Glen David Gold**

What if free will exists, but not everyone has it?

**Scott Adams**

The truth will set you free, but first it will piss you off

**Gloria Steinem**

People who behave morally don't generally do it because they have greater knowledge; they do it because they have a greater sensitivity to other people's points of view

**David Brooks**

Morality is inversely proportional to the number of observers

**James Thompson**

Behaving morally has little to do with sympathy, and a lot to do with one's immoral options simply not coming to mind

**Will Wilkinson**

Try giving a good argument for why logic is reliable, that doesn't use logic

**Michael Lynch**

A cause is not a fact. It's a fiction that helps us make sense of facts

**Jonah Lehrer**

Explanations bind facts together. They help them make more sense. Where this propensity can go wrong is when it increases our impression of understanding

**Nassim Nicholas Taleb**

I can understand a random distribution, but is there such a thing as a random event?

**Emmanuel Derman**

When we hear that a raging forest fire has consumed millions of acres of forest, we don't assume that there was anything special about the initial spark

**Duncan Watts**

Fairness is a concept invented so dumb people could participate in arguments

**Scott Adams**

I have the habit of seeing two opposing sides of a question, both of them  
wrong

**George Kennan**

The point of seeing both sides isn't to hover between them but to be able to  
come down on the right side with the right degree of conviction

**Julian Baggini**

A tortoise resembles orthopaedic surgery in that neither can ride a bicycle

**Terry Eagleton**

We can study cars and all their physical relationships and know exactly how  
they work. It in no way prepares us to understand traffic

**Michael Gazzaniga**

If we do not understand what an escalator is, we might get on it intending to  
go a few meters, only to find that once we are on, it is difficult to avoid going all  
the way to the end. Similarly, once reasoning has got started it is hard to tell where  
it will stop

**Peter Singer**

It is like reading an explanation of global warming and mounting an indignant  
defense of greenhouses

**Steven Pinker**, on category error

The most terrifying fact about the universe is not that it is hostile, but that it is  
indifferent

**Stanley Kubrick**

It is the profession of philosophers to question platitudes that others accept  
without thinking twice. A dangerous profession, since philosophers are more easily  
discredited than platitudes

**David Lewis**

All dichotomies are false, but some are more of a bitch to transcend than oth-  
ers

**Venkatesh Rao**

There is no a priori reason for supposing that the truth, when it is discovered,  
will necessarily prove interesting

**Clarence Lewis**

As for the meaning of life, I do not believe that it has any, and this is a source  
of great comfort to me

**Isaiah Berlin**



# Politics & Diplomacy

Nothing is more dangerous than an idea, when it is the only one we have

**Emil Chartier**

Each political culture, like each culinary culture, creates its own cuisine, using elements that lack immediate appeal on their own, such as bitterness

**Jonathan Haidt**

Politics is the systematic organisation of hatreds

**Henry Adams**

There is no longer any dignity in loss. If you lose a fight for a just cause, you are merely a loser

**Leon Wieseltier**

The achievement of the great statesman is not to reach the best decision fastest, but to mediate effectively among competing views and values

**John Kay**

There is a subtext of male violence that runs through all politics, and only a fool would ignore it

**Jonathan Freedland**

Apparently it is a great idea to elect a president who is calm in a crisis. Except when there's a crisis. Then what you need is somebody to lead the nation in panic

**Clive Crook**

At the core of all successful societies are procedures for blocking the advancement of bad men

**Paul Collier**

Effective political ideas are those that can still do good in half-baked form

**Tyler Cowen**

Politicians know the lies a lot of people live, and they pitch to you accordingly

**Eric Joyce**

Politicians are in charge of the modern economy in much the same way as a sailor is in charge of a small boat in a storm

**Paul Seabright**

Politicians who complain about the press are like sailors complaining about the sea

**Enoch Powell**

There are few ironclad rules of diplomacy, but to one there is no exception. When an official reports that talks were useful, it can safely be concluded that nothing was accomplished

**J.K. Galbraith**

American diplomacy is transactional. Chinese diplomacy is psychological

**Andrew Nathan**

I sat next to her once. Thought she was beautiful. She's very happy in Alaska.  
And I hope she'll stay there

**Barbara Bush**, on Sarah Palin

Description is prescription. If you can get people to see the world as you do,  
you have unwittingly framed every subsequent choice

**David Brooks**

Order is difficult, mayhem is easy. Specifically, you can contribute significantly  
to mayhem by putting in an hour here or there

**Alex Harrowell**

The deepest puzzle is not occasional protest, but pervasive tranquility

**Donald Kinder**

Sometimes the art of diplomacy is to keep the obvious obscured

**Henry Kissinger**

Scandals often lead to reforms, but the reforms work to protect the agents of scandal rather than its victims

**Nicholas Dirk**

In politics, the angry person is generally understood to be the loser

**Peggy Noonan**

The ultimate show of power on the part of the ruling ideology is to allow what appears to be powerful criticism

**Slavoj Žižek**

Many of our leaders think there is a secret cabal running the world—and that they are in it

**David Brooks**

Before you study public opinion, you wonder why policy isn't far better. After you study public opinion, you wonder why policy isn't far worse

**Bryan Caplan**

Institutions will try to preserve the problem to which they are the solution

**Clay Shirky**

Politics is inherently controversial because human beings are passionately attached to their opinions by interests that have nothing to do with the truth

**Harry Jaffa**

Power expands through the distribution of secrecy

**John Le Carré**

We all know what to do, but we don't know how to get re-elected once we have done it

**Jean-Claude Juncker**, on the euro crisis

Conservatism is not a philosophy but a disposition

**Julian Baggini**

When the conservative looks upon a democratic movement, he sees a terrible disturbance in the private life of power

**Corey Robin**

In a crisis democracies can experiment with autocracy, but autocracies can't experiment with democracy

**David Runciman**

The point of lobbyists is not so much to change the votes, as to change the legislative agenda

**Ezra Klein**

If your policy is one of retrenchment and austerity, it is advisable to come up with something other than economic growth as a measure of your success

**Dominic Lawson**

The very power that makes government an effective enforcer of the commitments of other people renders it incapable of enforcing its own promises

**John Kay**

Any intelligent fool can make things bigger, more complex, and more violent. It takes genius to move in the opposite direction

**E.F. Schumacher**

You begin at your most popular and least capable, and end at your least popular and most capable

**Tony Blair**, on governing

In the United States, everyone may enjoy freedom of speech so long as it doesn't matter

**Curtis White**

I may not agree with you, but I'll defend to the death my right to tell you to shut up

**Andy Borowitz**

Communism is not some ideal that might exist at some point in the future. It's the way most of us act with people we really care about all the time

**David Graeber**

We appeal to legitimacy when we need to explain the persistence of political arrangements that defy our materialist predictions

**Jay Ulfeder**

Every politician wants you to believe he was born in a log cabin he built himself

**Bob Strauss**





# Science & Technology

In physics you're playing against God, and He doesn't change his laws very often. When you've checkmated Him, He'll concede

**Emanuel Derman**

There are 10 types of people in the world. Those who understand binary numbers, and those who don't

**John Rentoul**

Technology is only expensive when it doesn't work well. By the time it does, it's cheap enough to afford

**Ray Kurzweil**

Biology is a kind of reverse engineering. You start off with a machine—namely, the human being—and you figure out what purpose it was designed for

**Steven Pinker**

Science is an unending argument between a great multitude of voices. It resembles Wikipedia much more than it resembles the Encyclopaedia Britannica

**Freeman Dyson**

An occupational hazard of the medical profession is a tendency to overestimate the prevalence of illness

**Alison Lurie**

Humans are the reproductive organs of technology

**Kevin Kelly**

If you're not part of the solution, you're part of the precipitate

**Henry Tillman**

Science is not about certainty. Science is about finding the most reliable way of thinking, at the present level of knowledge

**Carlo Rovelli**

Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from nature

**Venkatesh Rao**

Our knowledge advances not when we have the best theory, or the best data, or the best lab, but when we have really good problems

**Jay Rosen**

Human beings cannot comprehend very large or very small numbers. It would be useful for us to acknowledge that fact

**Daniel Kahneman**

Tools extend the human; machines replace it

**William Deresiewicz**





# Youth & Age

Humans start their lives at the peak of their popularity. You will never regain the personal appeal you enjoyed as a baby

**Scott Adams**

Children are the R&D of the human species. Adults are the production and marketing

**Alison Gopnik**

Adulthood is the moment at which your expenditure on Christmas presents first exceeds the value of the gifts you can expect to receive

**John Kay**

This is what it's like to get old: You still feel 19, except your knees hurt

**J.D. Daniels**

We live half our lives in shock. And it's the second half

**Martin Amis**

The thing we value most of all is youth, which means that life automatically becomes depressing, because life consists, on the whole, of getting old

**Michel Houellebecq**

Spending your life concentrating on death is like watching a whole movie and thinking only about the credits

**Nicholson Baker**

If you want to accelerate someone's death, give him a personal doctor

**Nassim Nicholas Taleb**

I did not fully understand "terminal illness" until I saw Heathrow for myself

**Dennis Potter**