

Edward Abbey - My Favorite Quotes

Post by "Joshua" of July 11, 2019 at 7:57 PM

Edward Abbey was an iconoclast, a contrarian, a gadfly, and a radical. He was a desert ranger, a poet, a novelist, a student of philosophy, and a keen observer of nature and human life. He was an aesthetic, a sensualist, an atheist, a materialist, and in general terms an antagonist. A provocateur.

In a list of his favorite poets, he names first Anacreon and then Lucretius . He is, after Thoreau, my second favorite essayist.

Here are a few of my favorite quotes:

Quote

My loyalties will not be bound by national borders, or confined in time by one nation's history, or limited in the spiritual dimension by one language and culture. I pledge my allegiance to the damned human race, and my everlasting love to the green hills of Earth, and my intimations of glory to the singing stars, to the very end of space and time. from his journal; (cf. Diogenes of Oenoanda)

Quote

Has joy any survival value in the operations of evolution? I suspect that it does; I suspect that the morose and fearful are doomed to quick extinction. Where there is no joy there can be no courage; and without courage all other virtues are useless. Desert Solitaire (places joy prior to virtue)

Quote

As for the "solitary confinement of the mind," my theory is that solipsism, like other absurdities of the professional philosopher, is a product of too much time wasted in library stacks between the covers of a book, in smoke-filled coffeehouses (bad for brains) and conversation-clogged seminars. To refute the solipsist or the metaphysical idealist all that you have to do is take him out and throw a rock at his head: if he ducks he's a liar. His logic may be airtight but his argument, far from revealing the delusions of living experience, only exposes the limitations of logic. -Desert Solitaire (relevant to a lot of arguments, like free will and determinism)

Quote

From the point of view of a tapeworm, man was created by God to serve the appetite of the tapeworm.

Quote

If my decomposing carcass helps nourish the roots of a Juniper tree or the wings of a vulture-that is immortality enough for me. And as much as anyone deserves.

Quote

Paradise is not a garden of bliss and changeless perfection where the lions lie down like lambs (what would they eat?) and the angels and cherubim and seraphim rotate in endless idiotic circles, like clockwork, about an equally inane and ludicrous -- however roseate -- unmoved mover. That particular painted fantasy of a realm beyond time and space which Aristotle and the church fathers tried to palm off on us has met, in modern times, only neglect and indifference passing on into oblivion it so richly deserved, while the paradise of which I write and wish to praise is with us yet, the here and now, the actual, tangible, dogmatically real earth on which we stand. -Desert Solitaire

Well, that's enough to be going on.

-josh

Post by "Cassius" of August 31, 2025 at 10:25 AM

Joshua can you please add the frog quote here?

Post by "Joshua" of August 31, 2025 at 10:39 AM

Quote

The rain-filled potholes, set in naked rock, are usually devoid of visible plant life but not of animal life. In addition to the inevitable microscopic creatures there may be certain amphibians like the

spadefoot toad. This little animal lives through dry spells in a state of estivation under the dried-up sediment in the bottom of a hole. When the rain comes, if it comes, he emerges from the mud singing madly in his fashion, mates with the handiest female and fills the pool with a swarm of tadpoles, most of them doomed to a most ephemeral existence. But a few survive, mature, become real toads, and when the pool dries up they dig into the sediment as their parents did before, making burrows which they seal with mucus in order to preserve that moisture necessary to life. There they wait, day after day, week after week, in patient spadefoot torpor, perhaps listening—we can imagine—for the sound of raindrops pattering at last on the earthen crust above their heads. If it comes in time the glorious cycle is repeated; if not, this particular colony of *Bufo* is reduced eventually to dust, a burden on the wind.

Rain and puddles bring out other amphibia, even in the desert. It's a strange, stirring, but not uncommon thing to come on a pool at night, after an evening of thunder and lightning and a bit of rainfall, and see the frogs clinging to the edge of their impermanent pond, bodies immersed in water but heads out, all croaking away in tricky counterpoint. They are windbags: with each croak the pouch under the frog's chin swells like a bubble, then collapses.

Why do they sing? What do they have to sing about? Somewhat apart from one another, separated by roughly equal distances, facing outward from the water, they clank and croak all through the night with tireless perseverance. To human ears their music has a bleak, dismal, tragic quality, dirgelike rather than jubilant. It may nevertheless be the case that these small beings are singing not only to claim their stake in the pond, not only to attract a mate, but also out of spontaneous love and joy, a contrapuntal choral celebration of the coolness and wetness after weeks of desert fire, for love of their own existence, however brief it may be, and for joy in the common life.

Has joy any survival value in the operations of evolution? I suspect that it does; I suspect that the morose and fearful are doomed to quick extinction. Where there is no joy there can be no courage; and without courage all other virtues are useless. Therefore the frogs, the toads, keep on singing even though we know, if they don't, that the sound of their uproar must surely be luring all the snakes and ringtail cats and kit foxes and coyotes and great horned owls toward the scene of their happiness.

What then? A few of the little amphibians will continue their

metamorphosis by way of the nerves and tissues of one of the higher animals, in which process the joy of one becomes the contentment of the second. Nothing is lost, except an individual consciousness here and there, a trivial perhaps even illusory phenomenon. The rest survive, mate, multiply, burrow, estivate, dream, and rise again. The rains will come, the potholes shall be filled. Again. And again. And again.

-Edward Abbey, *Desert Solitaire*

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Post by “Cassius” of August 31, 2025 at 11:15 AM

This is my favorite part:

Quote

Has joy any survival value in the operations of evolution? I suspect that it does; I suspect that the morose and fearful are doomed to quick extinction. Where there is no joy there can be no courage; and without courage all other virtues are useless.

Post by “SillyApe” of August 31, 2025 at 1:02 PM

I love these, especially the one about all the absurdities that the "professional Philosopher" creates in his head. For a time, these abstractions scared me away from Philosophy. Had I not found Epicurus, I'd still detest it.

I think Goethe once criticized Hegel over this same subject. He said that while the British were taking over the World through their study of nature and Science, the Germans were stuck in endless metaphysical arguments.