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Quotes by Hoffer, Eric

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Eric Hoffer (July 25, 1902 – May 21, 1983) was an American social writer. He produced ten books and won the Presidential Medal of Freedom in February 1983 from Ronald Reagan. His first book, *The True Believer*, published in 1951, was widely recognized as a classic. This book, which he considered his best, established his reputation, and he remained a successful writer for most of his remaining years.

Our greatest pretenses are built up not to hide the evil and the ugly in us, but our emptiness. The hardest thing to hide is something that is not there.

- Hoffer, Eric

Old age equalizes -- we are aware that what is happening to us has happened to untold numbers from the beginning of time. When we are young we act as if we were the first young people in the world.

- Hoffer, Eric

The end comes when we no longer talk with ourselves. It is the end of genuine thinking and the beginning of the final loneliness.

- Hoffer, Eric

To grow old is to grow common. Old age equalizes -- we are aware that what is

happening to us has happened to untold numbers from the beginning of time. When we are young we act as if we were the first young people in the world.

- Hoffer, Eric

The world leans on us. When we sag, the whole world seems to droop.

- Hoffer, Eric

Disappointment is a sort of bankruptcy -- the bankruptcy of a soul that expends too much in hope and expectation.

- Hoffer, Eric

The greatest weariness comes from work not done.

- Hoffer, Eric

The chemistry of dissatisfaction is as the chemistry of some marvelously potent tar. In it are the building stones of explosives, stimulants, poisons, opiates, perfumes and stench.

- Hoffer, Eric

Though dissenters seem to question everything in sight, they are actually bundles of dusty answers and never conceived a new question. What offends us most in the literature of dissent is the lack of hesitation and wonder.

- Hoffer, Eric

The beginning of thought is in disagreement -- not only with others but also with ourselves.

- Hoffer, Eric

Dissipation is a form of self-sacrifice.

- Hoffer, Eric

We do not really feel grateful toward those who make our dreams come true; they ruin our dreams.

- Hoffer, Eric

We have perhaps a natural fear of ends. We would rather be always on the way than arrive. Given the means, we hang on to them and often forget the ends.

- Hoffer, Eric

Man staggers through life yapped at by his reason, pulled and shoved by his appetites, whispered to by fears, beckoned by hopes. Small wonder that what he craves most is self-forgetting.

- Hoffer, Eric

It is by its promise of a sense of power that evil often attracts the weak.

- Hoffer, Eric

The pre-human creature from which man evolved was unlike any other living thing in its malicious viciousness toward its own kind. Humanization was not a leap forward but a groping toward survival.

- Hoffer, Eric

Thought is a process of exaggeration. The refusal to exaggerate is not infrequently an alibi for the disinclination to think or praise.

- Hoffer, Eric

It is not so much the example of others we imitate as the reflection of ourselves in their eyes and the echo of ourselves in their words.

- Hoffer, Eric

The individual who has to justify his existence by his own efforts is in eternal bondage to himself.

- Hoffer, Eric

Facts are counterrevolutionary.

- Hoffer, Eric

They who lack talent expect things to happen without effort. They ascribe failure to a lack of inspiration or ability, or to misfortune, rather than to insufficient application. At the core

of every true talent there is an awareness of the difficulties inherent in any achievement, and the confidence that by persistence and patience something worthwhile will be realized. Thus talent is a species of vigor.

- Hoffer, Eric

There is no loneliness greater than the loneliness of a failure. The failure is a stranger in his own house.

- Hoffer, Eric

Absolute faith corrupts as absolutely as absolute power.

- Hoffer, Eric

Men weary as much of not doing the things they want to do as of doing the things they do not want to do.

- Hoffer, Eric

Our greatest weariness comes from work not done.

- Hoffer, Eric

The pleasure we derive from doing favors is partly in the feeling it gives us that we are not altogether worthless. It is a pleasant surprise to ourselves.

- Hoffer, Eric

Fear of becoming a has been keeps some people from becoming anything.

- Hoffer, Eric

Fear comes from uncertainty. When we are absolutely certain, whether of our worth or worthlessness, we are almost impervious to fear. Thus a feeling of utter unworthiness can be a source of courage.

- Hoffer, Eric

The basic test of freedom is perhaps less in what we are free to do than in what we are free not to do.

- Hoffer, Eric

There can be no real freedom without the freedom to fail.

- Hoffer, Eric

Friendship Never explain -- your friends do not need it, and your enemies will not believe it anyway. A real friend never gets in your way, unless you happen to be on the way down. A friend is someone you can do nothing with and enjoy it. However much we guard ourselves against it, we tend to shape ourselves in the image others have of us. It is not so much the example of others we imitate, as the reflection of ourselves in their eyes and the echo of ourselves in their words.

- Hoffer, Eric

However much we guard ourselves against it, we tend to shape ourselves in the image

others have of us. It is not so much the example of others we imitate, as the reflection of ourselves in their eyes and the echo of ourselves in their words.

- Hoffer, Eric

It is the awareness of unfulfilled desires which gives a nation the feeling that it has a mission and a destiny.

- Hoffer, Eric

We are more prone to generalize the bad than the good. We assume that the bad is more potent and contagious.

- Hoffer, Eric

There is sublime thieving in all giving. Someone gives us all he has and we are his.

- Hoffer, Eric

Our achievements speak for themselves. What we have to keep track of are our failures, discouragements and doubts. We tend to forget the past difficulties, the many false starts, and the painful groping. We see our past achievements as the end results of

- Hoffer, Eric

Man is the only creature that strives to surpass himself, and yearns for the impossible.

- Hoffer, Eric

The superficiality of the American is the result of his hustling. It needs leisure to think things out; it needs leisure to mature. People in a hurry cannot think, cannot grow, nor can they decay. They are preserved in a state of perpetual puerility.

- Hoffer, Eric

Glory is largely a theatrical concept. There is no striving for glory without a vivid awareness of an audience.

- Hoffer, Eric

To the excessively fearful the chief characteristic of power is its arbitrariness. Man had to gain enormously in confidence before he could conceive an all-powerful God who obeys his own laws.

- Hoffer, Eric

A great man's greatest good luck is to die at the right time.

- Hoffer, Eric

Wise living consists perhaps less in acquiring good habits than in acquiring as few habits as possible.

- Hoffer, Eric

The search for happiness is one of the chief sources of unhappiness.

- Hoffer, Eric

Passionate hatred can give meaning and purpose to an empty life.

- Hoffer, Eric

A heresy can spring only from a system that is in full vigor.

- Hoffer, Eric

The game of history is usually played by the best and the worst over the heads of the majority in the middle.

- Hoffer, Eric

Man was nature's mistake --she neglected to finish him -- and she has never ceased paying for her mistake.

- Hoffer, Eric

Naivete in grownups is often charming; but when coupled with vanity it is indistinguishable from stupidity.

- Hoffer, Eric

When people are free to do as they please, they usually imitate each other.

- Hoffer, Eric

It almost seems that nobody can hate America as much as native Americans. America

needs new immigrants to love and cherish it.

- Hoffer, Eric

It is the individual only who is timeless. Societies, cultures, and civilizations --past and present --are often incomprehensible to outsiders, but the individual's hungers, anxieties, dreams, and preoccupations have remained unchanged through the millennia.

- Hoffer, Eric

It would be difficult to exaggerate the degree to which we are influenced by those we influence.

- Hoffer, Eric

Intolerance is the Do Not Touch sign on something that cannot bear touching. We do not mind having our hair ruffled, but we will not tolerate any familiarity with the toupee which covers our baldness.

- Hoffer, Eric

We find it hard to apply the knowledge of ourselves to our judgment of others. The fact that we are never of one kind, that we never love without reservations and never hate with all our being cannot prevent us from seeing others as wholly black or white.

- Hoffer, Eric

Kindness can become its own motive. We are made kind by being kind.

- Hoffer, Eric

In a time of drastic change it is the learners who inherit the future. The learned usually find themselves equipped to live in a world that no longer exists.

- Hoffer, Eric

We lie loudest when we lie to ourselves.

- Hoffer, Eric

Animals often strike us as passionate machines.

- Hoffer, Eric

The self-styled intellectual who is impotent with pen and ink hungers to write history with sword and blood.

- Hoffer, Eric

There would be no society if living together depended upon understanding each other.

- Hoffer, Eric

It is remarkable by how much a pinch of malice enhances the penetrating power of an idea or an opinion. Our ears, it seems, are wonderfully attuned to sneers and evil reports about our fellow men.

- Hoffer, Eric

Rudeness is a weak imitation of strength.

- Hoffer, Eric

There is a grandeur in the uniformity of the mass. When a fashion, a dance, a song, a slogan or a joke sweeps like wildfire from one end of the continent to the other, and a hundred million people roar with laughter, sway their bodies in unison, hum one song or break forth in anger and denunciation, there is the overpowering feeling that in this country we have come nearer the brotherhood of man than ever before.

- Hoffer, Eric

The real antichrist is he who turns the wine of an original idea into the water of mediocrity.

- Hoffer, Eric

A dissenting minority feels free only when it can impose its will on the majority: what it abominates most is the dissent of the majority.

- Hoffer, Eric

A soul that is reluctant to share does not as a rule have much of its own. Miserliness is here a symptom of meagerness.

- Hoffer, Eric

When you automate an industry you modernize it; when you automate a life you primitivize it.

- Hoffer, Eric

It is the stretched soul that makes music, and souls are stretched by the pull of opposites --opposite bents, tastes, yearnings, loyalties. Where there is no polarity --where energies flow smoothly in one direction --there will be much doing but no music.

- Hoffer, Eric

Nationalist pride, like other variants of pride, can be a substitute for self-respect.

- Hoffer, Eric

Nature is a self-made machine, more perfectly automated than any automated machine. To create something in the image of nature is to create a machine, and it was by learning the inner working of nature that man became a builder of machines.

- Hoffer, Eric

The necessary has never been man's top priority. The passionate pursuit of the nonessential and the extravagant is one of the chief traits of human uniqueness. Unlike other forms of life, man's greatest exertions are made in the pursuit not of necessities but of superfluities.

- Hoffer, Eric

A grievance is most poignant when almost redressed.

- Hoffer, Eric

It is easier to love humanity as a whole than to love one's neighbor.

- Hoffer, Eric

The birth of the new constitutes a crisis, and its mastery calls for a crude and simple cast of mind -- the mind of a fighter -- in which the virtues of tribal cohesion and fierceness and infantile credulity and malleability are paramount. Thus every new beginning recapitulates in some degree man's first beginning.

- Hoffer, Eric

To the old, the new is usually bad news.

- Hoffer, Eric

More significant than the fact that poets write abstrusely, painters paint abstractly, and composers compose unintelligible music is that people should admire what they cannot understand; indeed, admire that which has no meaning or principle.

- Hoffer, Eric

To spell out the obvious is often to call it in question.

- Hoffer, Eric

It still holds true that man is most uniquely human when he turns obstacles into opportunities.

- Hoffer, Eric

It sometimes seems that intense desire creates not only its own opportunities, but its own talents.

- Hoffer, Eric

Perhaps our originality manifests itself most strikingly in what we do with that which we did not originate. To discover something wholly new can be a matter of chance, of idle tinkering, or even of the chronic dissatisfaction of the untalented.

- Hoffer, Eric

There is in most passions a shrinking away from ourselves. The passionate pursuer has all the earmarks of a fugitive.

- Hoffer, Eric

That which corrodes the souls of the persecuted is the monstrous inner agreement with the prevailing prejudice against them.

- Hoffer, Eric

The real persuaders are our appetites, our fears and above all our vanity. The skillful propagandist stirs and coaches these internal persuaders.

- Hoffer, Eric

It is the child in man that is the source of his uniqueness and creativeness, and the

playground is the optimal milieu for the unfolding of his capacities and talents.

- Hoffer, Eric

The remarkable thing is that it is the crowded life that is most easily remembered. A life full of turns, achievements, disappointments, surprises, and crises is a life full of landmarks. The empty life has even its few details blurred, and cannot be remembered with certainty.

- Hoffer, Eric

Those in possession of absolute power can not only prophesy and make their prophecies come true, but they can also lie and make their lies come true.

- Hoffer, Eric

Power corrupts the few, while weakness corrupts the many. The resentment of the weak does not spring from any injustice done to them but from the sense of their inadequacy and impotence. They hate not wickedness but weakness. When it is in their power to do so, the weak destroy weakness wherever they see it.

- Hoffer, Eric

The unpredictability inherent in human affairs is due largely to the fact that the by-products of a human process are more fateful than the product.

- Hoffer, Eric

Sometimes we feel the loss of a prejudice as a loss of vigor.

- Hoffer, Eric

Propaganda does not deceive people; it merely helps them to deceive themselves.

- Hoffer, Eric

We all have private ails. The troublemakers are they who need public cures for their private ails.

- Hoffer, Eric

We need not only a purpose in life to give meaning to our existence but also something to give meaning to our suffering. We need as much something to suffer for as something to live for.

- Hoffer, Eric

To know a person's religion we need not listen to his profession of faith but must find his brand of intolerance.

- Hoffer, Eric

To have a grievance is to have a purpose in life.

- Hoffer, Eric

The main effect of a real revolution is perhaps that it sweeps away those who do not know how to wish, and brings to the front men with insatiable appetites for action, power and all

that the world has to offer.

- Hoffer, Eric

We used to think that revolutions are the cause of change. Actually it is the other way around: change prepares the ground for revolution.

- Hoffer, Eric

The remarkable thing is that we really love our neighbor as ourselves: we do unto others as we do unto ourselves. We hate others when we hate ourselves. We are tolerant toward others when we tolerate ourselves. We forgive others when we forgive ourselves. We are prone to sacrifice others when we are ready to sacrifice ourselves.

- Hoffer, Eric

The savior who wants to turn men into angels is as much a hater of human nature as the totalitarian despot who wants to turn them into puppets.

- Hoffer, Eric

Where everything is possible miracles become commonplaces, but the familiar ceases to be self-evident.

- Hoffer, Eric

Every new adjustment is a crisis in self-esteem.

- Hoffer, Eric

The hardest arithmetic to master is that which enables us to count our blessings.

- Hoffer, Eric

Self-esteem and self-contempt have specific odors; they can be smelled.

- Hoffer, Eric

No matter what our achievements might be, we think well of ourselves only in rare moments. We need people to bear witness against our inner judge, who keeps book on our shortcomings and transgressions. We need people to convince us that we are not as bad as we think we are.

- Hoffer, Eric

People who bite the hand that feeds them usually lick the boot that kicks them.

- Hoffer, Eric

Many of the insights of the saint stem from their experience as sinners.

- Hoffer, Eric

A successful social technique consists perhaps in finding unobjectionable means for individual self-assertion.

- Hoffer, Eric

Social improvement is attained more readily by a concern with the quality of results than with the purity of motives.

- Hoffer, Eric

With some people solitariness is an escape not from others but from themselves. For they see in the eyes of others only a reflection of themselves.

- Hoffer, Eric

A man by himself is in bad company.

- Hoffer, Eric

Our passionate preoccupation with the sky, the stars, and a God somewhere in outer space is a homing impulse. We are drawn back to where we came from.

- Hoffer, Eric

Man is eminently a storyteller. His search for a purpose, a cause, an ideal, a mission and the like is largely a search for a plot and a pattern in the development of his life story -- a story that is basically without meaning or pattern.

- Hoffer, Eric

An empty head is not really empty; it is stuffed with rubbish. Hence the difficulty of forcing anything into an empty head.

- Hoffer, Eric

One of the marks of a truly vigorous society is the ability to dispense with passion as a midwife of action --the ability to pass directly from thought to action.

- Hoffer, Eric

Action is at bottom a swinging and flailing of the arms to regain one's balance and keep afloat.

- Hoffer, Eric

The link between ideas and action is rarely direct. There is almost always an intermediate step in which the idea is overcome. De Tocqueville points out that it is at times when passions start to govern human affairs that ideas are most obviously translated into political action. The translation of ideas into action is usually in the hands of people least likely to follow rational motives. Hence, it is that action is often the nemesis of ideas, and sometimes of the men who formulate them. One of the marks of the truly vigorous society is the ability to dispense with passion as a midwife of action the ability to pass directly from thought to action.

- Hoffer, Eric

We are least open to precise knowledge concerning the things we are most vehement about.

- Hoffer, Eric

When we believe ourselves in possession of the only truth, we are likely to be indifferent

to common everyday truths.

- Hoffer, Eric

When people are bored it is primarily with themselves.

- Hoffer, Eric

There is always a chance that he who sets himself up as his brother's keeper will end up by being his jail-keeper.

- Hoffer, Eric

Capitalism is at its liberating best in a noncapitalist environment. The crypto-businessman is the true revolutionary in a Communist country.

- Hoffer, Eric

To become different from what we are, we must have some awareness of what we are.

- Hoffer, Eric

There are no chaste minds. Minds copulate wherever they meet.

- Hoffer, Eric

The suspicious mind believes more than it doubts. It believes in a formidable and ineradicable evil lurking in every person.

- Hoffer, Eric

We are told that talent creates its own opportunities. But it sometimes seems that intense desire creates not only its own opportunities, but its own talents.

- Hoffer, Eric

We never say so much as when we do not quite know what we want to say. We need few words when we have something to say, but all the words in all the dictionaries will not suffice when we have nothing to say and want desperately to say it.

- Hoffer, Eric

Where there is the necessary technical skill to move mountains, there is no need for the faith that moves mountains.

- Hoffer, Eric

There is a totalitarian regime inside every one of us. We are ruled by a ruthless politburo which sets our norms and drives us from one five-year plan to another. The autonomous individual who has to justify his existence by his own efforts is in eternal bondage to himself.

- Hoffer, Eric

It is a talent of the weak to persuade themselves that they suffer for something when they suffer from something; that they are showing the way when they are running away; that they see the light when they feel the heat; that they are chosen when they are shunned.

- Hoffer, Eric

The wisdom of others remains dull till it is writ over with our own blood. We are essentially apart from the world; it bursts into our consciousness only when it sinks its teeth and nails into us.

- Hoffer, Eric

Youth itself is a talent -- a perishable talent.

- Hoffer, Eric

Perhaps a modern society can remain stable only by eliminating adolescence, by giving its young, from the age of ten, the skills, responsibilities, and rewards of grownups, and opportunities for action in all spheres of life. Adolescence should be a time of useful action, while book learning and scholarship should be a preoccupation of adults.

- Hoffer, Eric

Compassion is the antitoxin of the soul: where there is compassion even the most poisonous impulses remain relatively harmless.

- Hoffer, Eric

Nonconformists travel as a rule in bunches. You rarely find a nonconformist who goes it alone. And woe to him inside a nonconformist clique who does not conform with nonconformity.

- Hoffer, Eric

What greater reassurance can the weak have than that they are like anyone else?

- Hoffer, Eric

When cowardice is made respectable, its followers are without number both from among the weak and the strong; it easily becomes a fashion.

- Hoffer, Eric

Our credulity is greatest concerning the things we know least about. And since we know least about ourselves, we are ready to believe all that is said about us. Hence the mysterious power of both flattery and calumny.

- Hoffer, Eric

Death has but one terror, that it has no tomorrow.

- Hoffer, Eric

How frighteningly few are the persons whose death would spoil our appetite and make the world seem empty.

- Hoffer, Eric

It is a sign of a creeping inner death when we no longer can praise the living.

- Hoffer, Eric

The nature of a society is largely determined by the direction in which talent and ambition flow by the tilt of the social landscape.

- Hoffer, Eric

It is cheering to see that the rats are still around the ship is not sinking.

- Hoffer, Eric

The compulsion to take ourselves seriously is in inverse proportion to our creative capacity. When the creative flow dries up, all we have left is our importance.

- Hoffer, Eric

How much easier is self-sacrifice than self-realization!

- Hoffer, Eric

Retribution often means that we eventually do to ourselves what we have done unto others.

- Hoffer, Eric

It is probably true that business corrupts everything it touches. It corrupts politics, sports, literature, art, labor unions and so on. But business also corrupts and undermines monolithic totalitarianism. Capitalism is at its liberating best in a noncapitalist environment.

- Hoffer, Eric

There are similarities between absolute power and absolute faith: a demand for absolute obedience, a readiness to attempt the impossible, a bias for simple solutions to cut the knot rather than unravel it, the viewing of compromise as surrender. Both absolute power and absolute faith are instruments of dehumanization. Hence, absolute faith corrupts as absolutely as absolute power.

- Hoffer, Eric

There is probably an element of malice in the readiness to overestimate people; we are laying up for ourselves the pleasure of later cutting them down to size.

- Hoffer, Eric

We can remember minutely and precisely only the things which never really happened to us.

- Hoffer, Eric

It is loneliness that makes the loudest noise. This is as true of men as of dogs.

- Hoffer, Eric



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