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Quotes by James, William

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Acceptance of what has happened is the first step to overcoming the consequences of any misfortune.

- James, William

How can the moribund old man reason back to himself the romance, the mystery, the imminence of great things with which our old earth tingled for him in the days when he was young and well?

- James, William

To give up pretensions is as blessed a relief as to get them ratified.

- James, William

Events are influenced by our very great desires.

- James, William

If you care enough for a result, you will most certainly attain it.

- James, William

A chain is no stronger than its weakest link, and life is after all a chain.

- James, William

We forget that every good that is worth possessing must be paid for in strokes of daily effort. We postpone and postpone, until those smiling possibilities are dead.

- James, William

There can be no existence of evil as a force to the healthy-minded individual.

- James, William

Our esteem for facts has not neutralized in us all religiousness. It is itself almost religious.

Our scientific temper is devout.

- James, William

The god whom science recognizes must be a God of universal laws exclusively, a God who does a wholesale, not a retail business. He cannot accommodate his processes to the convenience of individuals.

- James, William

I am often confronted by the necessity of standing by one of my empirical selves and relinquishing the rest. Not that I would not. If I could, be... a great athlete and make a million a year, be a wit, a born -- vivant and a lady killer, as well as a philosopher, a philanthropist ... and saint. But the thing is simply impossible. The millionaire's work would run counter to the saint s; the bon-vivant and the philanthropist would trip each other up;

the philosopher and the lady killer could not well keep house in the same tenement of clay. Such different characters may conceivably, at the outset of life. Be alike possible for a man. But to make any one of them actual, the rest must more or less be suppressed. So the seeker of his truest, strongest, deepest self must review the list carefully and pick out on which to stake his salvation. All other selves thereupon become unreal, but the fortunes of this self are real. Its failures are real failures, its triumphs real triumphs carrying shame and gladness with them.

- James, William

Failure, then, failure! so the world stamps us at every turn. We strew it with our blunders, our misdeeds, our lost opportunities, with all the memorials of our inadequacy to our vocation. And with what a damning emphasis does it then blot us out! No easy fine, no mere apology or formal expiation, will satisfy the world's demands, but every pound of flesh exacted is soaked with all its blood. The subtlest forms of suffering known to man are connected with the poisonous humiliations incidental to these results.

- James, William

There is but one cause of human failure. And that is man's lack of faith in his true Self.

- James, William

Our faith is faith in someone else's faith, and in the greatest matters this is most the case.

- James, William

Faith means belief in something concerning which doubt is theoretically possible.

- James, William

It is wrong always, everywhere, and for everyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence.

- James, William

Nothing is so fatiguing as the eternal hanging on of an uncompleted task.

- James, William

Individuality is founded in feeling; and the recesses of feeling, the darker, blinder strata of character, are the only places in the world in which we catch real fact in the making, and directly perceive how events happen, and how work is actually done.

- James, William

Fatalism, whose solving word in all crises of behavior is All striving is vain, will never reign supreme, for the impulse to take life strivingly is indestructible in the race. Moral creeds which speak to that impulse will be widely successful in spite of inconsistency, vagueness, and shadowy determination of expectancy. Man needs a rule for his will, and will invent one if one be not given him.

- James, William

Only necessity understood, and bondage to the highest is identical with true freedom.

- James, William

Human beings are born into this little span of life of which the best thing is its friendship and intimacies, and soon their places will know them no more, and yet they leave their friendships and intimacies with no cultivation, to grow as they will by the roadside, expecting them to keep by force of inertia.

- James, William

Genius... means little more than the faculty of perceiving in an inhabitual way.

- James, William

To spend life for something which outlasts it.

- James, William

We, the lineal representatives of the successful enactors of one scene of slaughter after another, must, whatever more pacific virtues we may also possess, still carry about with us, ready at any moment to burst into flame, the smoldering and sinister traits of character by means of which they lived through so many massacres, harming others, but themselves unharmed.

- James, William

If merely feeling good could decide, drunkenness would be the supremely valid human experience.

- James, William

The sway of alcohol over mankind is unquestionably due to its power to stimulate the mystical faculties of human nature, usually crushed to earth by the cold facts and dry criticisms of the sober hour. Sobriety diminishes, discriminates, and says no; drunkenness expands, unites, and says yes.

- James, William

Smitten as we are with the vision of social righteousness, a God indifferent to everything but adulation, and full of partiality for his individual favorites, lacks an essential element of largeness.

- James, William

The minute a man ceases to grow, no matter what his years, that minute he begins to be old.

- James, William

Habit is thus the enormous fly-wheel of society, its most precious conservative agent. It alone is what keeps us all within the bounds of ordinance, and saves the children of fortune from the envious uprisings of the poor.

- James, William

We must make automatic and habitual, as early as possible, as many useful actions as we can...in the acquisition of a new habit, we must take care to launch ourselves with as strong and decided initiative as possible. Never suffer an exception to occur till the new

habit is securely rooted in your life.

- James, William

Happiness comes of the capacity to feel deeply, to enjoy simply, to think freely, to risk life, to be needed. which give happiness. Thomas Jefferson We never enjoy perfect happiness; our most fortunate successes are mingled with sadness; some anxieties always perplex the reality of our satisfaction.

- James, William

Mankind's common instinct for reality has always held the world to be essentially a theatre for heroism. In heroism, we feel, life's supreme mystery is hidden. We tolerate no one who has no capacity whatever for it in any direction. On the other hand, no matter what a man's frailties otherwise may be, if he be willing to risk death, and still more if he suffer it heroically, in the service he has chosen, the fact consecrates him forever.

- James, William

Act in earnest and you will become earnest in all you do.

- James, William

The further limits of our being plunge, it seems to me, into an altogether other dimension of existence from the sensible and merely understandable world. Name it the mystical region, or the supernatural region, whichever you choose. So far as our ideal impulses originate in this region (and most of them do originate in it, for we find them possessing us in a way for which we cannot articulately account), we belong to it in a more intimate

sense than that in which we belong to the visible world, for we belong in the most intimate sense wherever our ideals belong.

- James, William

A new idea is first condemned as ridiculous and then dismissed as trivial, until finally, it becomes what everybody knows.

- James, William

An idea, to be suggestive, must come to the individual with the force of revelation.

- James, William

If you want a quality, act as if you already had it. Try the as if technique.

- James, William

The best argument I know for an immortal life is the existence of a man who deserves one.

- James, William

There is no more miserable human being than one in whom nothing is habitual but indecision, and for whom the lighting of every cigar, the drinking of every cup, the time of rising and going to bed every day, and the beginning of every bit of work, are subjects of express volitional deliberation.

- James, William

Knowledge about life is one thing; effective occupation of a place in life, with its dynamic currents passing through your being, is another.

- James, William

We don't laugh because we're happy -- we're happy because we laugh.

- James, William

Everybody should do at least two things each day that he hates to do, just for practice.

- James, William

The great use of life is to spend it for something that will outlast it.

- James, William

Is life worth living? It all depends on the liver.

- James, William

We are doomed to cling to a life even while we find it unendurable.

- James, William

The deepest principle of human nature is the craving to be appreciated.

- James, William

When we of the so-called better classes are scared as men were never scared in history at material ugliness and hardship; when we put off marriage until our house can be artistic, and quake at the thought of having a child without a bank-account and doomed to manual labor, it is time for thinking men to protest against so unmanly and irreligious a state of opinion.

- James, William

Metaphysics means nothing but an unusually obstinate effort to think clearly.

- James, William

A little cooling down of animal excitability and instinct, a little loss of animal toughness, a little irritable weakness and descent of the pain-threshold, will bring the worm at the core of all our usual springs of delight into full view, and turn us into melancholy metaphysicians.

- James, William

The prevalent fear of poverty among the educated classes is the worst moral disease from which our civilization suffers.

- James, William

If the grace of God miraculously operates, it probably operates through the subliminal door.

- James, William

Be willing to have it so. Acceptance of what has happened is the first step to overcoming the consequences of any misfortune.

- James, William

For morality life is a war, and the service of the highest is a sort of cosmic patriotism which also calls for volunteers.

- James, William

Most people never run far enough on their first wind to find out they've got a second. Give your dreams all you've got and you'll be amazed at the energy that comes out of you.

- James, William

As there is no worse lie than a truth misunderstood by those who hear it, so reasonable arguments, challenges to magnanimity, and appeals to sympathy or justice, are folly when we are dealing with human crocodiles and boa-constrictors.

- James, William

To be a real philosopher all that is necessary is to hate some one else's type of thinking.

- James, William

I know that you, ladies and gentlemen, have a philosophy, each and all of you, and that the most interesting and important thing about you is the way in which it determines the

perspective in your several worlds.

- James, William

Philosophy is at once the most sublime and the most trivial of human pursuits.

- James, William

The greatest discovery of my generation is that human beings can alter their lives by altering their attitudes of mind.

- James, William

It is our attitude at the beginning of a difficult task which, more than anything else, will affect its successful outcome.

- James, William

Compared to what we ought to be, we are only half awake. We are making use of only a small part of our physical and mental resources. Stating the thing broadly, the human individual thus lives far within his limits. He possesses power of various sorts which he habitually fails to use.

- James, William

Whenever two people meet there are really six people present. There is each man as he sees himself, each man as the other person sees him, and each man as he really is.

- James, William

Most people live, whether physically, intellectually or morally, in a very restricted circle of their potential being. They make very small use of their possible consciousness, and of their soul's resources in general, much like a man who, out of his whole bodily organism, should get into a habit of using and moving only his little finger.

- James, William

Everyone knows that on any given day there are energies slumbering in him which the incitement's of that day do not call forth. Compared with what we ought to be, we are only half awake. The human individual usually lives far within his limits.

- James, William

If any organism fails to fulfill its potentialities, it becomes sick.

- James, William

We have grown literally afraid to be poor. We despise anyone who elects to be poor in order to simplify and save his inner life. If he does not join the general scramble and pant with the money-making street, we deem him spiritless and lacking in ambition.

- James, William

What every genuine philosopher (every genuine man, in fact) craves most is praise -- although the philosophers generally call it recognition!

- James, William

I am done with great things and big plans, great institutions and big success. I am for those tiny, invisible loving human forces that work from individual to individual, creeping through the crannies of the world like so many rootlets, or like the capillary oozing of water, which, if given time, will rend the hardest monuments of pride.

- James, William

To study the abnormal is the best way of understanding the normal.

- James, William

The greatest use of life is to spend it for something that will outlast it.

- James, William

There must be something solemn, serious, and tender about any attitude which we denominate religious. If glad, it must not grin or snicker; if sad, it must not scream or curse.

- James, William

Give up the feeling of responsibility, let go your hold, resign the care of your destiny to higher powers, be genuinely indifferent as to what becomes of it all and you will find not only that you gain a perfect inward relief, but often also, in addition, the particular goods you sincerely thought you were renouncing.

- James, William

It is only by risking our persons from one hour to another that we live at all.

- James, William

Man lives for science as well as bread.

- James, William

Success plus Self-esteem equals Pretensions.

- James, William

There is a voice inside which speaks and says: This is the real me!

- James, William

A man has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him.

- James, William

Spiritual energy flows in and produces effects in the phenomenal world.

- James, William

If you want a trait, act as if you already have the trait.

- James, William

I will act as if what I do makes a difference.

- James, William

Do something everyday for no other reason than you would rather not do it, so that when the hour of dire need draws nigh, it may find you not unnerved and untrained to stand the test.

- James, William

Action seems to follow feeling, but really action and feeling go together; and by regulating the action, which is under the more direct control of the will, we can indirectly regulate the feeling, which is not.

- James, William

Act as if what you do makes a difference. It does.

- James, William

Belief creates the actual fact.

- James, William

Believe that life is worth living, and your belief will help create the fact.

- James, William

As a rule we disbelieve all the facts and theories for which we have no use.

- James, William

We want all our friends to tell us our bad qualities; it is only the particular ass that does so whom we can't tolerate.

- James, William

We are all ready to be savage in some cause. The difference between a good man and a bad one is the choice of the cause.

- James, William

No matter how full a reservoir of maxims one may possess, and no matter how good one's sentiments may be, if one has not taken advantage of every concrete opportunity to act, one's character may remain entirely unaffected for the better.

- James, William

I have often thought the best way to define a man's character would be to seek out the particular mental or moral attitude in which, when it comes upon him, he felt himself most deeply and intensely active and alive. At such moments there is a voice inside which speaks and says: This is the real me!

- James, William

It is well for the world that in most of us, by the age of thirty, the character has set like plaster, and will never soften again.

- James, William

The hell to be endured hereafter, of which theology tells, is no worse than the hell we make for ourselves in this world by habitually fashioning our characters in the wrong way.

- James, William

The path to cheerfulness is to sit cheerfully and to act and speak as if cheerfulness were already there.

- James, William

Thus the sovereign voluntary path to cheerfulness, if cheerfulness be lost, is to sit up cheerfully and to act and speak as if cheerfulness were already there.

- James, William

Why should we think upon things that are lovely? Because thinking determines life. It is a common habit to blame life upon the environment. Environment modifies life but does not govern life. The soul is stronger than its surroundings.

- James, William

We never fully grasp the import of any true statement until we have a clear notion of what the opposite untrue statement would be.

- James, William

The attitude of unhappiness is not only painful, it is mean and ugly. What can be more

base and unworthy than the pining, puling, mumping mood, no matter by what outward ills it may have been engendered? What is more injurious to others? What less helpful as a way out of the difficulty? It but fastens and perpetuates the trouble which occasioned it, and increases the total evil of the situation. At all costs, then, we ought to reduce the sway of that mood; we ought to scout it in ourselves and others, and never show it tolerance.

- James, William

Whatever universe a professor believes in must at any rate be a universe that lends itself to lengthy discourse. A universe definable in two sentences is something for which the professorial intellect has no use. No faith in anything of that cheap kind!

- James, William

Every man who possibly can should force himself to a holiday of a full month in a year, whether he feels like taking it or not.

- James, William

The art of being wise is the art of knowing what to overlook.

- James, William

Wisdom is learning what to overlook.

- James, William

If you believe that feeling bad or worrying long enough will change a past or future event, then you are residing on another planet with a different reality system.

- James, William

The sovereign cure for worry is prayer.

- James, William

Where quality is the thing sought after, the thing of supreme quality is cheap, whatever the price one has to pay for it.

- James, William

Footnotes -- little dogs yapping at the heels of the text

- James, William

When you have to make a choice and don't make it, that in itself is a choice.

- James, William

If this life be not a real fight, in which something is eternally gained... it is no better than a game of private theatricals from which one may withdraw at will.

- James, William

Men's activities are occupied into ways -- in grappling with external circumstances and in striving to set things at one in their own topsy-turvy mind.

- James, William

Hardly ever can a youth transferred to the society of his betters unlearn the nasality and other vices of speech bred in him by the associations of his growing years. Hardly ever, indeed, no matter how much money there be in his pocket, can he ever learn to dress like a gentleman-born. The merchants offer their wares as eagerly to him as to the veriest swell, but he simply cannot buy the right things.

- James, William

Our normal waking consciousness, rational consciousness as we call it, is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the filmiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different.

- James, William

Much of what we call evil is due entirely to the way men take the phenomenon. It can so often be converted into a bracing and tonic good by a simple change of the sufferer's inner attitude from one of fear to one of fight; its sting can so often depart and turn into a relish when, after vainly seeking to shun it, we agree to face about and bear it...

- James, William

I am against bigness and greatness in all their forms, and with the invisible molecular moral forces that work from individual to individual, stealing in through the crannies of the world like so many soft rootlets, or like the capillary oozing of water, and yet rending the hardest monuments of mans pride, if you give them time. The bigger the unit you deal with, the hollower, the more brutal, the more mendacious is the life displayed. So I am against all big organizations as such, national ones first and foremost; against all big successes and big results; and in favor of the eternal forces of truth which always work in

the individual and immediately unsuccessful way, under-dogs always, till history comes, after they are long dead, and puts them on top. You need take no notice of these ebullitions of spleen, which are probably quite unintelligible to anyone but myself.

- James, William

The most violent revolutions in an individuals beliefs leave most of his old order standing. Time and space, cause and effect, nature and history, and ones own biography remain untouched. New truth is always a go-between, a smoother-over of transitions. It marries old opinion to new fact so as ever to show a minimum of jolt, a maximum of continuity.

- James, William



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