



## Maxims and Reflections

*Johann Wolfgang von Goethe*

[Download now](#)

[Read Online ➔](#)

# Maxims and Reflections

*Johann Wolfgang von Goethe*

**Maxims and Reflections Johann Wolfgang von Goethe**

**Thoughts and ideas from the versatile and brilliant German writer and statesman.**

The German author of *Faust* takes a detour from his usual literary endeavors and offers snippets of his musings on life, literature, science, nature, politics, and the human condition. Essential for fans of Goethe's works, it provides a unique insight into the mind of the last true Renaissance man.

*This ebook has been professionally proofread to ensure accuracy and readability on all devices.*

## Maxims and Reflections Details

Date : Published April 11th 2017 by Open Road Media (first published 1833)

ISBN :

Author : Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Format : Kindle Edition 107 pages

Genre : Philosophy, Nonfiction, Classics, European Literature, German Literature, Literature

 [Download Maxims and Reflections ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Maxims and Reflections ...pdf](#)

**Download and Read Free Online Maxims and Reflections Johann Wolfgang von Goethe**

---

# From Reader Review Maxims and Reflections for online ebook

## Akita says

A compilation of thoughts.

---

## Joshie says

"In some quiet hour when they were sociably together, Faith, Love and Hope felt an urge to fashion something new; they set to work together and created a lovable new quality, a higher kind of Pandora: Patience."

This book was quite ineffective. I don't know what I really expected when I got it from the bookstore and saw it's cheaper compared to other books. Subconsciously, I was probably hoping for another perspective a la Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*. To be fair, Goethe's 1,413 *Maxims and Reflections* criticizes and reflects on a wide spectrum of things from literature, art, relationships, and life but it was lacking due to how some seemed to be incomplete in thought and meaning. They were derived from Goethe's voluminous works and he could be criticizing an author from his era then praising an artist in another which some rang a bell but with others, I have limited knowledge with. Nevertheless, the division is well-structured and organized although I noticed some maxims/reflections were repeated in some form or another. Still, Goethe's wit is infectious and wonderful. It is comparable with someone's attempt of creating a symmetrical face by cutting off facial parts from magazines. Quite symmetrical but odd-looking. I did feel that reading Penguin's Little Black Classics, *Sketchy, Doubtful, Incomplete Jottings* would suffice.

I loved the sections *POSTHUMOUS: On Literature and Life*, *POSTHUMOUS: On Nature and Natural Science*, *FROM ART AND ANTIQUITY: Vol. I, issue 3: Naïvety and Humour*, and *FROM ART AND ANTIQUITY: Vol. V, issue 3: Individual Points*.

Some things to reflect on:

- \*\* "Our passions are a genuine phoenix. As the old one burns down, the new one immediately arises out of the ashes."
- \*\* "We don't get to know people when they come to us. We have to go to them to discover how things stand."
- \*\* "We are never further away from our desires than when we imagine we possess what we desire."
- \*\* "No one is more of a slave than the one who thinks he is free without freedom."
- \*\* "It's really a person's mistakes that make him endearing."
- \*\* "You ask which form of government is the best? Whichever teaches us to govern ourselves."
- \*\* "The most attractive form of metempsychosis is when we see ourselves appear in someone else."
- \*\* "A great failing: to see yourself as more than you are and to value yourself at less than your true worth."
- \*\* "You can't get rid of what really belongs to you, even if you throw it away."
- \*\* "When you praise someone, you are putting yourself on a par with him."
- \*\* "It doesn't do to dally too long in the realm of the abstract — what is esoteric is damaging when it strives to be exoteric. Life is best taught by what is alive."
- \*\* "We look back on our life as a thing of broken pieces, because our mistakes and failures are always the first to strike us, and outweigh in our imagination what we have accomplished and attained."

---

## Vaishali says

Thoughts and quips from Germany's most prolific polymath - 590 in all - plus a bonus section of wonderful reflections on Mother Nature. Also features critiques on writers from Kalidas to Shakespeare.

Very difficult to cull these faves :

---

9. Unqualified activity, of whatever kind, leads at last to bankruptcy.
12. Our plans and designs should be so perfect in truth and beauty, that in touching them the world could only mar. We should thus have the advantage of setting right what is wrong, and restoring what is destroyed.
17. In botany, one species of plants is termed "incompletæ." In the same way some men are incomplete and imperfect. Their desires and struggles are disproportional to their actions and achievements.
25. From all sides he is threatened by the spirit of the day, and nothing is more necessary than to make him see early enough the direction in which his will has to steer.
30. If I am to listen to another man's opinion, it must be expressed positively. Of things problematical I have enough in myself.
33. Everything that frees our spirit without giving us control of ourselves is ruinous.
65. Generosity wins favor from everyone, especially when accompanied by modesty.
81. What a man does not understand, he does not possess.
108. It is as certain as it is strange that truth and error come from one and the same source. Thus we're not free to do violence to error, because at the same time we violate truth.
147. The masses cannot dispense with men of ability, and such men are always a burden to them.
152. Ingratitude is always a kind of weakness. I have never known men of ability to be ungrateful.
209. Despotism promotes general self-government, because from top to bottom it makes the individual responsible, and so produces the highest degree of activity.
211. Enthusiasm is of the greatest value, so long as we are not carried away by it.
222. There is no use in reproving vulgarity, for it never changes.
239. To live in a great idea means to treat the impossible as though it were possible. It is just the same with a strong character; and when an idea and a character meet, things arise which fill the world with wonder for thousands of years.

249. In the world people take a man at his own estimate, but he must estimate himself at something. Disagreeableness is more easily tolerated than insignificance.

264. A man's manners are the mirror in which he shows his portrait.

276. Fools and wise folk are alike harmless. It is the half-wise, and the half-foolish, who are the most dangerous.

278. Difficulties increase the nearer we come to our aim.

291. By nothing do men show their character more than by the things they laugh at.

300. Passions are good or bad qualities, only intensified.

309. The real scholar learns how to evolve the unknown from the known, and draws near the master.

319. Where I cannot be moral, my power is gone.

323. To praise a man is to put oneself on his level.

330. The greatest difficulties lie where we do not look for them.

332. Nothing is more highly to be prized than the value of each day.

335. If a man lives long in a high position, it's true he does not experience all that a man can experience... but he experiences things like them, and perhaps some things that have no parallel elsewhere.

358. "I stumbled over the roots of the tree which I planted."... said a very, very old forester.

375. It does not look well for monarchs to speak through the press, for power should act and not talk.

389. The public must be treated like women: they must be told absolutely nothing except what they like to hear.

414. A man who has no acquaintance with foreign languages knows nothing of his own.

415. We must remember that there are many men who, without being productive, are anxious to say something important, and the results are most curious.

417. Some books seem to have been written not to teach us anything, but to let us know that the author has known something.

461. If one has not read newspapers for some months, but then suddenly reads them all, one sees - as one never saw before - how much time is wasted with this literature type.

467. What a day it is when we must envy the men in their graves!

481. The Beautiful is a manifestation of secret natural laws, which, without its presence, would never have been revealed.

489. Nothing is more frightful than imagination without taste.

532. Ignorant people raise questions which were answered by the wise thousands of years ago.

566. There is nothing more odious than the majority; it consists of a few powerful leading men, accommodating rascals, submissive weaklings, and the masses who trot after them without knowing their own mind in the least.

571. If a man devotes himself to the promotion of science, he is first opposed, and then informed that his ground is already occupied. Men first value nothing we tell them, and then they behave as if they knew it all themselves.

---

### **Arthur Cravan says**

Nah, I don't know. This book irked me. I got a lot of neat sayings from it - I'll type them up later & add some, if I remember - but it's just not me. It had little spurts of things that resembled sweet pathways to me, but a lot of it felt like a slog. I think the big difference is that Goethe was an old man, & I am a young man. Also, I think it's fair to say I much more enjoyed the maxims than the reflections. Some of them being

broken apart made no sense to me - they literally don't work without one another & quite obviously were just broken in half when in fact the text continues imperceptibly.

Would I recommend this book to others? I'd say to flick through a few different sections - if you find stuff you like, it's not really a long read, so it could be worth going through. I'm not sure I found any of his ideas revolutionary (but I'm not 100% sure on that - there might have been one or two minor revolutions of the mind. But even minor revolutions of the mind are revolutionary & not to be swept under the rug) but there were definitely dozens of great nuggets to take home to the wife & kids on a hungry night.

Goethe was German.

---

### **Joe says**

The introduction makes an excellent accidental case that this is a printout of Goethe's Facebook status updates:

"Goethe probably regarded his reflections as miniature creative language events to be shared with his readers, reflecting the time- and life-sequence of his personal reactions."

So, you have wonderful little maxims like this:

"How could a man claim to be a master of his subject if he has taught nothing that's unnecessary!"

and

"Bonus vir semper tiro."

And you also have head scratchers and weird little lines like these:

"One brother broke pots, the other brother broke pitchers. Destructive goings-on!"

or

"As soon as good works and their merits cease, sentimentality immediately takes over in the case of Protestants."

OMG!

---

### **Pedro says**

Espero que isto me ajude a desenvolver melhor a segunda etapa de minha pesquisa.

Algumas hipóteses:

1. O fenômeno originário é a particularidade elevada de Burckhardt.

## 2. O movimento histórico é um movimento de metamorfose.

### Urphänomen

“Fenômeno originário: ideal, real, simbólico, idêntico.

Empiria: crescimento ilimitado do mesmo; daí esperança de ajuda, desespero quanto à perfeição.

Fenômeno originário:

Ideal enquanto o derradeiro cognoscível,

Real enquanto conhecido,

Simbólico porque comprehende todos os casos,

Idêntico a todos os casos” (15)

“A percepção imediata dos fenômenos originários transpõe-nos para uma espécie de angústia: sentimos nossa insuficiência; somente vivificados pelo jogo eterno da experiência eles nos alegram” (16)

### Natureza

“É um negócio agradável pesquisar ao mesmo tempo a si mesmo e a natureza, não violentando nem o seu espírito nem a ela, mas equilibrando-os por meio de uma suave influência recíproca” (248)

### Condicionado/incondicionado

“Não há nada mais triste de vislumbrar do que o anseio imediato pelo incondicionado em meio a este mundo completamente condicionado; no ano de 1830, isto talvez pareça mais importante do que nunca” (252)

### Teoria

“O mais elevado seria compreender que tudo o que é fáctico já é teoria. O azul do céu revela-nos a lei fundamental da cromática. Não se deve buscar nada por detrás dos fenômenos: eles mesmos são a doutrina” (488)

---

### Rick says

Goethe is a combination Emerson, Whitman, James, Franklin, and whoever might be America's best playwright. He is the kind of artist for whom the adjective Renaissance was invented: poet, playwright, novelist, scientist, philosopher, and engineer. He probably did windows and could parallel park a coach pulled by six horses as well. This slender volume is filled with aphorisms, observations, maxims, and various other nuggets of wisdom. Witness some randomly pulled examples: “Error is continually repeated in action and that is why we must not tire of repeating in words what is true.” “The senses don't deceive, judgment deceives.” “Behavior is a mirror in which everyone shows his image.” “When a rainbow has lasted as long as a quarter of an hour we stop looking at it.” “You ask which form of government is the best? Whichever teaches us to govern ourselves.” “Somebody said: ‘Why do you bother about Homer? Especially since you don't understand him?’ I don't understand the sun, the moon, the stars high above my head, and I recognize myself in them even as I look at them and contemplate their wonderful regular course, wondering as I gaze whether I too might one day come to some good.”

The reflections run a gamut of topics and themes, from art to science, literature to politics, culture to religion. Goethe had a richly philosophical mind and the various thoughts here cover both the range and depth of his thinking and make provocative reading.

---

### **Erik Rostad says**

This is a pretty short book of sayings that is divided into four sections - Life and Character, Literature and Art, Science, and Nature: Aphorisms. Some of the sayings were pithy and enjoyable, others were more complex and required some chewing. It's sort of like reading the book of Proverbs. There's not a general storyline, so you could pick it up at random times and just take in a few sayings. While reading it, I was thinking this would be a great book to leave by the toilet to take a few pages in every now and then.

---

### **Eadweard says**

To communicate is natural; to accept what is communicated is an acquired art.

-

What kind of shortcomings are we allowed to keep, indeed cultivate in ourselves? The kind that flatter, rather than hurt, other people.

-

Passions are faults or virtues, only heightened ones.

-

There is no way of more surely avoiding the world than by art, and it is by art that you form the surest link with it.

-

It is easier to imagine the mental state of a man who labours under total error than the state of mind of someone deluding himself with half-truths.

-

Anyone who doesn't know foreign languages knows nothing of his own.

-

What you don't understand, you don't possess.

-

A person who doesn't rate himself too highly is worth much more than he imagines.

-

No wonder that we more or less prefer to be surrounded by mediocrity because it leaves us in peace; it gives us the cosy feeling of consorting with the likes of our own selves.

-

There is nothing more dreadful than active ignorance.

-

You have to distance yourself from beauty and intelligence if you don't want to become their vassal.

---

What friends do for us and with us is also a part of our living experience because it strengthens and furthers our personality. What enemies undertake against us is not part of our own living experience; it merely comes to our knowledge; we repudiate it and protect ourselves against it as we would against frost, storm, rain and hail, or other outer evils which are to be expected.

---

In the works of man as in those of nature, what most deserves notice is his intention.

---

When you praise someone, you are putting yourself on a par with him.

---

You only know those who cause you suffering.

---

You only keep a watch on those who cause you suffering. If you want to remain unknown to the world, all that's needed is not to hurt anyone.

---

### **Douglas Dalrymple says**

Was Goethe an example of the universal man, or merely the embodiment of the German spirit of his era? I don't know. I only know that I struggle to admire and enjoy Goethe. Perhaps I'm insufficiently Teutonic. Forgive me, there are worthy passages here – I did my share of marking up the text – but the good stuff is scattered amongst a great deal of dry and (to my mind) unnecessary stuffing.

---

### **Fatma says**

? love this reflections book- ? read it and read it since 15 years and can't get enough of it- it is so rich with moving thoughts

---

### **Rosa Ramôa says**

"Igualdade não é Liberdade

Todos os homens são iguais em sociedade. Nenhuma sociedade se pode fundamentar noutra coisa que não seja a noção de igualdade. Acima de tudo não pode fundamentar-se no conceito de liberdade. A igualdade é qualquer coisa que quero encontrar na sociedade, ao passo que a liberdade, nomeadamente a liberdade moral de me dispor à subordinação, transporta-a comigo.

A sociedade que me acolhe tem portanto que me dizer: «É teu dever ser igual a todos nós». E não pode acrescentar mais que isto: «Desejamos que tu, com toda a convicção, de tua livre e racional vontade,

renuncies aos teus privilégios».

O nosso único passe de mágica consiste no facto de prescindirmos da nossa existência para podermos existir. A mais elevada finalidade da sociedade é consequência das vantagens que assegura a cada um. Cada um sacrifica racionalmente a essa consequência uma grande quantidade de coisas. A sociedade, portanto, muito mais. Por causa da dita consequência, a vantagem pontual de cada membro da sociedade anda perto de se reduzir a nada".

---

### **andy says**

This isn't a book that one reads start to finish, but some great observations to take in.

---

### **Eustacia Tan says**

I'm not sure why I decided to borrow this book, but I did. Basically, it's a collection of Goethe's passing thoughts, which is really strange because I don't think I've read Goethe before (I know, I'm terrible. I should probably remedy that soon).

Maxims and Reflections is basically a book of quotes. Some, I really liked, such as:

"Books, we find, are like new acquaintances. To begin with, we are highly delighted if we find an area of general agreement, if we feel a friendly response concerning some important aspect of our life. It is only on closer acquaintance that differences begin to emerge, at which point the great thing is not immediately to recoil, as may happen at a more youthful age, but to cling very firmly to areas of agreement and fully to clarify our differences without on that account aiming at identity in our views."

or

"Fairytale: presents impossible events under possible or almost impossible conditions as though they were possible.

Some, I disagreed with (although I can't really find one, because I made way too many bookmarks). And there are more than a few that I think will cause debate, such as

"Anyone who doesn't know foreign languages knows nothing of his own"

and

"None clamour for freedom of the press except those who want to misuse it."

Basically, although this book is full of short quotes, it's going to take a very long time to read. In fact, I think the best way to read it is in short bits and pieces, thinking over what he says. Which is why this book took me much longer than I expected to read it, and got a bit too heavy for me at the end (or rather, I decided to

read the last third in one sitting and the last section really just flew by me).

Perhaps I should come back to this book one day in the future, when I have more time/a paperback copy and don't have to return it in 21 days.

This review was first posted at [Inside the mind of a Bibliophile](#)

---

### **Ossian's Dream says**

Goethe the man is often more interesting than his words, manly and freedom loving maxims nonetheless.

---