

Emma Goldman Quotations

On Politics

In the struggle for supremacy the various political parties outdo each other in trickery, deceit, cunning, and shady machinations, confident that the one who succeeds is sure to be hailed by the majority as the victor. That is the only god—Success. As to what expense, what terrible cost to character, is of no moment.
—“Minorities versus Majorities” (1917)

He embodies the very worst element of mob psychology. A politician, he knows that the majority cares little for ideals or integrity. What it craves is display.
—“Minorities versus Majorities”

We say that if America has entered the war to make the world safe for democracy, she must first make democracy safe in America.
—“Address to the Jury” (1917)

It is significant that whenever the public mind is to be diverted from great social wrong, a crusade is inaugurated against indecency.
—“Anarchy and the Sex Question: Essays on Women and Emancipation, 1896–1926”

Every daring attempt to make a great change in existing conditions, every lofty vision of new possibilities for the human race, has been labeled Utopian. If “scientific” Socialism is to substitute stagnation for activity, cowardice for courage,

acquiescence for daring, submission for defiance, then Marx and Engels might never have lived, for all the service they have done to Socialism.

—“Socialism: Caught in the Political Trap” (1919)

Politicians promise you heaven before election and give you hell after.

—Living My Life

Some people never seem to learn from experience. No matter how often they had seen the lion devour the lamb, they continued to cling to the hope that the nature of the beast might change. If only the lion could get to know the lamb better, they argued, or talk matters over.

—Living My Life

Peace or harmony between the sexes and individuals does not necessarily depend on a superficial equalization of human beings; nor does it call for the elimination of individual traits and peculiarities. The problem that confronts us today, and which the nearest future is to solve, is how to be one's self and yet in oneness with others, to feel deeply with all human beings and still retain one's own characteristic qualities.

— Writings of Emma Goldman: Essays on Anarchism, Feminism, Socialism, and Communism (2013)

The individual whose vision encompasses the whole world often feels nowhere so hedged in and out of touch with his surroundings as in his native land.

—Red Emma Speaks: An Emma Goldman Reader (1996)

We shall soon be obliged to meet in cellars, or in darkened rooms with closed doors, and speak in whispers lest our

next-door neighbors should hear that freeborn citizens dare not speak in the open.

—Emma Goldman: Making speech free, 1902-1909 (2004)

On Religion

Puritanism in this the twentieth century is as much the enemy of freedom and beauty as it was when it landed on Plymouth Rock. It repudiates, as something vile and sinful, our deepest feelings; but being absolutely ignorant as to the real functions of human emotions, Puritanism is itself the creator of the most unspeakable vices.

—Anarchism and Other Essays (1910)

Speaking of Puritanism in relation to American art, Mr. Gutzon Borglum said: “Puritanism has made us self-centered and hypocritical for so long, that sincerity and reverence for what is natural in our impulses have been fairly bred out of us, with the result that there can be neither truth nor individuality in our art.” Mr. Borglum might have added that Puritanism has made life itself impossible. More than art, more than estheticism, life represents beauty in a thousand variations; it is, indeed, a gigantic panorama of eternal change. Puritanism, on the other hand, rests on a fixed and immovable conception of life; it is based on the Calvinistic idea that life is a curse, imposed upon man by the wrath of God. In order to redeem himself man must do constant penance, must repudiate every natural and healthy impulse, and turn his back on joy and beauty.

—Anarchy and the Sex Question: Essays on Women and Emancipation, 1896-1926

The entire history of asceticism proves this to be only too true. The Church, as well as Puritanism, has fought the flesh as something evil; it had to be subdued and hidden at all cost. The result of this vicious attitude is only now beginning to be recognized by modern thinkers and educators. They realize that “nakedness has a hygienic value as well as a spiritual significance, far beyond its influences in allaying the natural inquisitiveness of the young or acting as a preventative of morbid emotion. It is an inspiration to adults who have long outgrown any youthful curiosities. The vision of the essential and eternal human form, the nearest thing to us in all the world, with its vigor and its beauty and its grace, is one of the prime tonics of life.” But the spirit of purism has so perverted the human mind that it has lost the power to appreciate the beauty of nudity, forcing us to hide the natural form under the plea of chastity. Yet chastity itself is but an artificial imposition upon nature, expressive of a false shame of the human form. The modern idea of chastity, especially in reference to woman, its greatest victim, is but the sensuous exaggeration of our natural impulses. “Chastity varies with the amount of clothing,” and hence Christians and purists forever hasten to cover the “heathen” with tatters, and thus convert him to goodness and chastity.”

— Anarchism and Other Essays

Christianity is most admirably adapted to the training of slaves, to the perpetuation of a slave society; in short, to the very conditions confronting us today. The rulers of the earth have realized long ago what potent poison inheres in the Christian religion. That is the reason they foster it; that is why they leave nothing undone to instill it into the blood of the people. They know only too well that the subtleness of the Christian teachings

is a more powerful protection against rebellion and discontent than the club or the gun.

—“The Failure of Christianity” (Mother Earth Journal, 1913)

Everywhere and always, since its very inception, Christianity has turned the earth into a vale of tears; always it has made of life a weak, diseased thing, always it has instilled fear in man, turning him into a dual being, whose life energies are spent in the struggle between body and soul. In decrying the body as something evil, the flesh as the tempter to everything that is sinful, man has mutilated his being in the vain attempt to keep his soul pure, while his body rotted away from the injuries and tortures inflicted upon it.

—“The Failure of Christianity”

To inculcate Catholicism in the mind of the child until it is nine years of age is to ruin it forever for any other idea.

—Anarchism and Other Essays

The philosophy of Atheism has its root in the earth, in this life; its aim is the emancipation of the human race from all God-heads, be they Judaic, Christian, Mohammedan, Buddhistic, Brahmanistic, or what not. Mankind has been punished long and heavily for having created its gods, nothing but pain and persecution, have been man's lot since gods began. There is but one way out of this blunder. Man must break his fetters which have chained him to the gates of heaven and hell, so that he can begin to fashion out of his reawakened and illumined consciousness a new world upon the earth.

—“The Philosophy of Atheism” (1916)

On Philosophy

Anarchism is the only philosophy which brings to man the consciousness of himself

—Anarchism and Other Essays

“What I believe” is a process rather than a finality. Finalities are for gods and governments, not for the human intellect.

—What I Believe (1908)

Before we can forgive one another, we have to understand one another.

On Individualism

“Rugged individualism” has meant all the “individualism” for the masters, while the people are regimented into a slave caste to serve a handful of self-seeking “supermen.” America is perhaps the best representative of this kind of individualism, in whose name political tyranny and social oppression are defended and held up as virtues; while every aspiration and attempt of man to gain freedom and social opportunity to live is denounced as “un-American” and evil in the name of that same individuality.

—“The Individual, Society and the State” (1940)

So-called Individualism is the social and economic laissez-faire: the exploitation of the masses by the classes by means of legal trickery, spiritual debasement and systematic indoctrination of the servile spirit, which process is known as “education.”

—“The Individual, Society and the State”

The individual is the true reality of life. A cosmos in himself, he does not exist for the State, nor for that abstraction called “society,” or the “nation,” which is only a collection of individuals.

—Red Emma Speaks: An Emma Goldman Reader

Perhaps even more than constituted authority, it is social uniformity and sameness that harass the individual most.

— “The Place of the Individual in Society” (1940)

On Sexuality

It is essential that we realize once and for all that man is much more of a sex creature than a moral creature. The former is inherent, the other is grafted on.

—Red Emma Speaks: An Emma Goldman Reader

What's wrong with lust? You fancy your neighbor's husband so what are you supposed to do? Poke your eyes out so that you can't see him anymore? Acting on it is maybe a sin ... but my God, just lusting after someone? Is that so bad?

—“Marriage and Love” (1914)

Marriage and love have nothing in common; they are as far apart as the poles; are, in fact, antagonistic to each other.

—Anarchy and the Sex Question: Essays on Women and Emancipation, 1896-1926

The higher mental development of woman, the less possible it is for her to meet a congenial male who will see in her, not only sex, but also the human being, the friend, the comrade and

strong individuality, who cannot and ought not lose a single trait of her character.

—Anarchism and Other Essays

From all of this, your readers may recognize that any prejudice or antipathy towards homosexuals is totally foreign to me. On the contrary! Among my male and female friends, there are a few who are of either a completely Uranian or a bisexual disposition. I have found these individuals far above average in terms of intelligence, ability, sensitivity, and personal charm. I empathize deeply with them, for I know that their sufferings are of a larger and more complex sort than those of ordinary people. It is a tragedy, I feel, that people of a different sexual type are caught in a world which shows so little understanding for homosexuals, is so crassly indifferent to the various gradations and variations of gender and their great significance in life.

—From article “The Unjust Treatment of Homosexuals” (1923) in *Yearbook for Sexual Intermediate Types*, issued by the Scientific-Humanitarian Committee, Germany's leading homosexual rights organization. (Uranian was an English adaptation of Urning, a German neologism at the time meaning either “person assigned male at birth who expressed as female (and vice versa),” which is probably called “transgender” now, and bisexual is probably called “genderqueer” now.)

I regard it as a tragedy that people of a differing sexual orientation find themselves proscribed in a world that has so little understanding for homosexuals and that displays such gross indifference for sexual gradations and variations and the great significance they have for living. It is completely foreign to me to wish to regard such people as less valuable, less moral, incapable of noble sentiments and behavior.

—Anarchism: Top Crime Collections (2015)

True emancipation ... will have to do away with the absurd notion of the dualism of the sexes, or that man and woman represent two antagonistic worlds.

—Anarchism: Top Crime Collections

On Love

Man has bought brains, but all the millions in the world have failed to buy love. Man has subdued bodies, but all the power on earth has been unable to subdue love. Man has conquered whole nations, but all his armies could not conquer love. Man has chained and fettered the spirit, but he has been utterly helpless before love. Thus love has the magic power to make of a beggar a king. “Freedom, expansion, opportunity, and, above all, peace and repose, alone can teach us the real dominant factors of human nature and all its wonderful possibilities.”

—Anarchism and Other Essays.

A true conception of the relation of the sexes will not admit of conqueror and conquered; it knows of but one great thing; to give of one's self boundlessly, in order to find one's self richer, deeper, better.

—Anarchism and Other Essays.