

"Aphorisms" by Rich Norman

"An aphorism is a single white gem, a perfect ivory tooth loosened from truth's crooked smile."

Philosophy has existed for thousands of years. Two of the oldest means of philosophical expression are the aphorism and the epigram. An epigram is a short sentence with a pointed, often caustic, surprising and humorous meaning. Aphorisms are highly condensed, aesthetic expressions of large concepts, which cover a huge wealth of intellectual territory in but a few well crafted words. Often a single aphorism will have several meanings, some of which are quite unexpected.

Existential philosophy attempts to make sense of our human condition, without resorting to spiritual concepts such as God. How are we to justify this world and this life, how are we to embrace our lives considering the facts which are all too clear? We suffer and struggle to understand that time will swallow us all, and in a few hundred years, even the very most successful person will be forgotten, and in a few thousand more, perhaps the entire race of Man may perish! Be sure, the universe will not even blink! Existentialism acknowledges the meaninglessness of the human condition and offers a cure: we must place the meaning in our lives ourselves. We must create that meaning by hearing ourselves, hearing our anxiety and the fear of our death and mortality, and then: answering it! Death itself points the way to our authentic choices which make all of life precious. Let each drop be so sweet as the last! Perhaps we must acknowledge that this task is objectively impossible, so factually it may even be a lie of sorts, but subjectively we must believe our lives have the value we have placed in them and "create ourselves," and in so doing discover life is a truth borne upon the impossible.

Phenomenology is a philosophical discipline which deals with perception and reality. Our experience of reality is limited to our experience of our perceptions. We only experience our perceptions, never the world itself. Psychology teaches us that our perceptions are deeply colored by our feelings. With this in mind, you can see how one person may have one experience of an event, and another a much different experience of the same event. It is in the way that we each color perception, the individual way we interpret experience, that gives it its quality. As we never know the world directly, this interpretation is most individual and subjective, and we could well say that no two people have exactly the same idea of reality. From there, it is an easy step to wonder if we ever do know objective reality, and if

not, the next question becomes how close does our guess come, but not to reality—instead, we must aim at another mark with our perceptions and ask: How close do we come to what is useful?

Now look at how much more interesting and brief these ideas are when put in the form of aphorisms and epigrams. How much more thought comes of the same ideas when put philosophically! Here, follow me through a few aphorisms and you will see what I mean:

1. Each day is falsified as it is understood, and it is in the art of this, that the art of living is found.
2. A day well lived is one where we were well and properly deceived as to its "purpose."
3. It is those who believe their own lies who are best at the art of living.
4. It is those whose lies are worth believing who create new truth.
5. The philosopher believes: It is in truth that life is redeemed. This is the lie upon which his soul is nourished.
6. He who conjures the correct illusion to accompany reality, is truly wise.
7. "I am everything"— Truth lies here.
8. As truth is but an illusion of interpretation, there is nothing which can not be overcome.
9. The most hopeful statement: Each day, reality is lied into being.

Oregon resident Rich Norman, is a writer and musician with degrees in philosophy and music. Known as "The Laughing Recluse," he is the author of books spanning philosophy, psychology, and novels, with topics ranging from psychoanalytic theory to existential philosophy, verse and fiction. All text in this column is printed with the permission of, and remains the sole property of, the author, Rich Norman. Contact: rich@richnorman.com