

Lewis Thomas

Quotes

Science, Thinking, Cells, Mind, Technology, Nature, Self, Life, Ignorance, Real, Writing, People, Mean, Dna, Trying, Running, Animal, Knowledge, Long, Brain

It is from the progeny of this parent cell that we all take our looks; we still share genes around, and the resemblance of the enzymes of grasses to those of whales is in fact a family resemblance.

~Lewis Thomas

The capacity to blunder slightly is the real marvel of DNA. Without this special attribute, we would still be anaerobic bacteria and there would be no music.

~Lewis Thomas

Statistically, the probability of any one of us being here is so small that you'd think the mere fact of existing would keep us all in a contented dazzlement of surprise.

~Lewis Thomas

In real life, every field of science is incomplete, and most of them - whatever the record of accomplishment during the last 200 years - are still in their very earliest stages.

~Lewis Thomas

We owe our lives to the sun... How is it, then, that we feel no gratitude?

~Lewis Thomas

It is in our genes to understand the universe if we can, to keep trying even if we cannot, and to be enchanted by the act of learning all the way.

~Lewis Thomas

The greatest single achievement of nature to date was surely the invention of the molecule DNA.

~Lewis Thomas

I would send the complete works of Johann Sebastian Bach into outer space on the Voyager spacecraft. But that would be boasting.

~Lewis Thomas

We leave traces of ourselves wherever we go, on whatever we touch.

~Lewis Thomas

Animals have genes for altruism, and those genes have been selected in the evolution of many creatures because of the advantage they confer for the continuing survival of the species.

~Lewis Thomas

Cats are a standing rebuke to behavioral scientists wanting to know how the minds of animals work. The mind of a cat is an unscrutable mystery.

~Lewis Thomas

At this early stage in our evolution, now through our infancy and into our childhood and then, with luck, our growing up, what our species needs most of all, right now, is simply a future.

~Lewis Thomas

Worrying is the most natural and spontaneous of all human functions.

~Lewis Thomas

The greatest of all the accomplishments of 20th century science has been the discovery of human ignorance

~Lewis Thomas

All of today's DNA, strung through all the cells of the earth, is simply an extension and elaboration of [the] first molecule.

~Lewis Thomas

Music is the effort we make to explain to ourselves how our brains work. We listen to Bach transfixed because this is listening to a human mind.

~Lewis Thomas

If an idea cannot move on its own, pushing it doesn't help; best to let it lie there.

~Lewis Thomas

The gift of language is the single human trait that marks us all genetically, setting us apart from the rest of life.

~Lewis Thomas

It hurts the spirit, somehow, to read the word environments, when the plural means that there are so many alternatives there to be sorted through, as in a market, and voted on.

~Lewis Thomas

The central task of science is to arrive, stage by stage, at a clearer comprehension of nature, but this does not at all mean, as it is sometimes claimed to mean, a search for mastery over nature.

~Lewis Thomas

The great thing about human language is that it prevents us from sticking to the matter at hand.

~Lewis Thomas

Science is founded on uncertainty. Each time we learn something new and surprising, the astonishment comes with the realization that we were wrong before.

~Lewis Thomas

Ants are so much like human beings as to be an embarrassment...They do everything but watch television.

~Lewis Thomas

We are built to make mistakes, coded for error.

~Lewis Thomas

I have always had a bad memory, as far back as I can remember.

~Lewis Thomas

If you want to use a cliché you must take full responsibility for it yourself and not try to fob it off on anon., or on society.

~Lewis Thomas

The great secret of doctors, known only to their wives, but still hidden from the public, is that most things get better by themselves; most things, in fact, are better in the morning.

~Lewis Thomas

For total greed, rapacity, heartlessness, and irresponsibility there is nothing to match a nation.

~Lewis Thomas

We have come a long way on that old molecule DNA.

~Lewis Thomas

Things are bound to begin happening if you've got your wits about you. You create the lucky accidents.

~Lewis Thomas

Cats - a standing rebuke to behavioural scientists . . . least human of all creatures.

~Lewis Thomas

Society evolves not by shouting each other down, but by the unique capacity of unique, individual human beings to comprehend each other.

~Lewis Thomas

Survival, in the cool economics of biology, means simply the persistence of one's own genes in the generations to follow.

~Lewis Thomas

Selfness is an essential fact of life. The thought of nonselfness, precise sameness is terrifying.

~Lewis Thomas

I don't think that the permanence of the individual human soul is an indispensable part of religious thought.

~Lewis Thomas

Some of the shrewdest insight into natural processes have been greeted at the outset by the exclamation 'But that's ridiculous'.

~Lewis Thomas

If we have learned anything at all in this century, it is that all new technologies will be put to use, sooner or later, for better or worse, as it is in our nature to do.

~Lewis Thomas

The most solid piece of scientific truth I know of is that we are profoundly ignorant about nature.

~Lewis Thomas

If we are to be destroyed we will do it ourselves by warfare with thermonuclear weaponry.

~Lewis Thomas

We need science, more and better science, not for its technology, not for leisure, not even for health or longevity, but for the hope of wisdom which our kind of culture must acquire for its survival.

~Lewis Thomas

We have yet to learn how to retain our humaneness when assembled in masses.

~Lewis Thomas

Any species capable of producing, at this earliest, juvenile stage of its development... the music of Johann Sebastian Bach, cannot be all bad.

~Lewis Thomas

Most things get better by themselves. Most things, in fact, are better by morning.

~Lewis Thomas

We pass thoughts around, from mind to mind, so compulsively and with such speed that the brains of mankind often appear, functionally, to be undergoing fusion.

~Lewis Thomas

It is my belief, based partly on personal experience but partly also arrived at by looking around at others, that childhood lasts considerably longer in the males of our species than in the females.

~Lewis Thomas

It's just plain learning something that you didn't know. There is a real aesthetic experience in being dumbfounded.

~Lewis Thomas

It is not a simple life to be a single cell, although I have no right to say so, having been a single cell so long ago myself that I have no memory at all of that stage of my life.

~Lewis Thomas

Left to ourselves, mechanistic and autonomic, we hanker for friends.

~Lewis Thomas

Everything here is alive thanks to the living of everything else.

~Lewis Thomas

The whole dear notion of one's own Self-marvelous old free-willed, free- enterprising, autonomous, independent, isolated island of a Self- is a myth.

~Lewis Thomas

Given any new technology for transmitting information, we seem bound to use it for great quantities of small talk. We are only saved by music from being overwhelmed by nonsense.

~Lewis Thomas

We are spectacular splendid manifestations of life. We have language. We have affection. And finally, and perhaps best of all, we have music.

~Lewis Thomas

I will confess that I have no more sense of what goes on in the mind of mankind than I have for the mind of an ant.

~Lewis Thomas

Chemical waste products are the droppings of science.

~Lewis Thomas

We are educated to be amazed by the infinite variety of life forms in nature. We are, I believe, only at the beginning of being flabbergasted by its unity.

~Lewis Thomas

It is not so bad being ignorant if you are totally ignorant; the hard thing is knowing in some detail the reality of ignorance.

~Lewis Thomas

Man is embedded in nature.

~Lewis Thomas

In the fields I know best, among the life sciences, it is required that the most expert and sophisticated minds be capable of changing course - often with a great lurch - every few years.

~Lewis Thomas

It is in our collective behavior that we are most mysterious.

~Lewis Thomas

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