

Stephen Jay Gould

Quotes

Science, Evolution, People, Lying, Thinking, Views, Religion, Years, Men, Long, Progress, Book, Simple, Atheism, May, Two, Writing, Past, Animal, Data

Orchids were not made by an ideal engineer; they are jury-rigged from a limited set of available components.

~Stephen Jay Gould

I am, somehow, less interested in the weight and convolutions of Einstein's brain than in the near certainty that people of equal talent have lived and died in cotton fields and sweatshops.

~Stephen Jay Gould

Science is an integral part of culture. It's not this foreign thing, done by an arcane priesthood. It's one of the glories of the human intellectual tradition.

~Stephen Jay Gould

We cannot win this battle to save species and environments without forging an emotional bond between ourselves and nature as well - for we will not fight to save what we do not love.

~Stephen Jay Gould

Advocates for a single line of progress encounter their greatest stumbling block when they try to find a smooth link between the apparently disparate designs of the invertebrates and vertebrates.

~Stephen Jay Gould

Ordinary speciation remains fully adequate to explain the causes and phenomenology of punctuation.

~Stephen Jay Gould

Nothing is more dangerous than a dogmatic worldview - nothing more constraining, more blinding to innovation, more destructive of openness to novelty.

~Stephen Jay Gould

If genius has any common denominator, I would propose breadth of

interest and the ability to construct fruitful analogies between fields.

~Stephen Jay Gould

The center of human nature is rooted in ten thousand ordinary acts of kindness that define our days.

~Stephen Jay Gould

An old paleontological in joke proclaims that mammalian evolution is a tale told by teeth mating to produce slightly altered descendant teeth.

~Stephen Jay Gould

Creationist critics often charge that evolution cannot be tested, and therefore cannot be viewed as a properly scientific subject at all. This claim is rhetorical nonsense.

~Stephen Jay Gould

When people learn no tools of judgment and merely follow their hopes, the seeds of political manipulation are sown.

~Stephen Jay Gould

The real tragedy of human existence is not that we are nasty by nature, but that a cruel structural asymmetry grants to rare events of meanness such power to shape our history.

~Stephen Jay Gould

The enemy is not fundamentalism; it is intolerance. In this case, the intolerance is perverse since it masquerades under the "liberal" rhetoric of "equal time." But mistake it not.

~Stephen Jay Gould

Obsolescence is a fate devoutly to be wished, lest science stagnate and die.

~Stephen Jay Gould

Skepticism is the agent of reason against organized irrationalism--and is therefore one of the keys to human social and civic decency.

~Stephen Jay Gould

What you see is that the most outstanding feature of life's history is a constant domination by bacteria.

~Stephen Jay Gould

Transitional forms are generally lacking at the species level, but they are abundant between larger groups.

~Stephen Jay Gould

Nothing is more dangerous than a dogmatic worldview.

~Stephen Jay Gould

Life began three and a half billion years ago, necessarily about as simple as it could be, because life arose spontaneously from the organic compounds in the primeval oceans.

~Stephen Jay Gould

Misunderstanding of probability may be the greatest of all impediments to scientific literacy.

~Stephen Jay Gould

Nature is what she is - amoral and persistent.

~Stephen Jay Gould

Facts do not 'speak for themselves'; they are read in the light of theory.

~Stephen Jay Gould

The most erroneous stories are those we think we know best - and therefore never scrutinize or question.

~Stephen Jay Gould

Life is a copiously branching bush, continually pruned by the grim reaper of extinction, not a ladder of predictable progress.

~Stephen Jay Gould

We must [it has been argued] go beyond reductionism to a holistic recognition that biology and culture interpenetrate in an inextricable manner.

~Stephen Jay Gould

Science is all those things which are confirmed to such a degree that it would be unreasonable to withhold one's provisional consent.

~Stephen Jay Gould

Human life is the result of a glorious evolutionary accident.

~Stephen Jay Gould

We must shed the old stereotype of anarchists as bearded bomb throwers furtively stalking about city streets at night.

~Stephen Jay Gould

Evolution is an inference from thousands of independent sources, the only conceptual structure that can make unified sense of all this disparate information.

~Stephen Jay Gould

We pass through this world but once.

~Stephen Jay Gould

Pictures are not incidental frills to a text; they are essences of our distinctive way of knowing.

~Stephen Jay Gould

Death is the ultimate enemy - and I find nothing reproachable in those who rage mightily against the dying of the light.

~Stephen Jay Gould

Memory is a fascinating trickster. Words and images have enormous power and can easily displace actual experience over the years.

~Stephen Jay Gould

Look in the mirror, and don't be tempted to equate transient domination with either intrinsic superiority or prospects for extended survival.

~Stephen Jay Gould

Without a commitment to science and rationality in its proper domain, there can be no solution to the problems that engulf us. Still, the Yahoos never rest.

~Stephen Jay Gould

The proof of evolution lies in those adaptations that arise from improbable foundations.

~Stephen Jay Gould

Nothing matches the holiness and fascination of accurate and intricate detail.

~Stephen Jay Gould

In what I like to call the Great Asymmetry, every spectacular incident of evil will be balanced by 10,000 acts of kindness, too often unnoted and invisible.

~Stephen Jay Gould

But we all recognise the primary foible of frail humanity - our propensity for embracing hope and shunning logic, our tendency to believe what we desire rather than what we observe.

~Stephen Jay Gould

Details are all that matters; God dwells in these and you never get to

see Him if you don't struggle to get them right.

~Stephen Jay Gould

If I have any insight at all to contribute it is this: find out what you are really good at and stick to it.

~Stephen Jay Gould

The more important the subject and the closer it cuts to the bone of our hopes and needs, the more we are likely to err in establishing a framework for analysis.

~Stephen Jay Gould

Recapitulation provided a convenient focus for the persuasive racism of white scientists; they looked to the activities of their own children for comparison with normal adult behavior in lower races.

~Stephen Jay Gould

With copious evidence ranging from Plato's haughtiness to Beethoven's tirades, we may conclude that the most brilliant people of history tend to be a prickly lot.

~Stephen Jay Gould

The legends of fieldwork locate all important sites deep in inaccessible jungles inhabited by fierce beasts and restless natives, and surrounded by miasmas of putrefaction and swarms of tsetse flies.

~Stephen Jay Gould

Mary Anning [is] probably the most important unsung (or inadequately sung) collecting force in the history of paleontology.

~Stephen Jay Gould

At a minimum, in explaining evolutionary pathways through time, the constraints imposed by history rise to equal prominence with the immediate advantages of adaptation.

~Stephen Jay Gould

Our searches for numerical order lead as often to terminal nuttiness as to profound insight.

~Stephen Jay Gould

History employs evolution to structure biological events in time.

~Stephen Jay Gould

Fundamentalism is rigorously and systematically used to indoctrinate and subjugate young minds. It is a contraceptive designed to prevent intellectual fertilization.

~Stephen Jay Gould

The median isn't the message.

~Stephen Jay Gould

I picture several reviewers of my own books as passing a long future lodged between Brutus and Judas in the jaws of Satan.

~Stephen Jay Gould

Current utility and historical origin are different subjects.

~Stephen Jay Gould

The world, unfortunately, rarely matches our hopes and consistently refuses to behave in a reasonable manner.

~Stephen Jay Gould

We are the accidental result of an unplanned process ... the fragile result of an enormous concatenation of improbabilities, not the predictable product of any definite process.

~Stephen Jay Gould

The enemy of knowledge and science is irrationalism, not religion

~Stephen Jay Gould

Eternal vigilance, as they say, is the price of freedom. Add intellectual integrity to the cost basis.

~Stephen Jay Gould

Mass extinctions may not threaten distant futures, but they are decidedly unpleasant for species caught up in the throes of their power.

~Stephen Jay Gould

I can envision observations and experiments that would disprove any evolutionary theory I know.

~Stephen Jay Gould

What's important is that all human knowledge be made available to all intelligent people who want to learn it.

~Stephen Jay Gould

... no compelling data to support its anachronistic social Darwinism.

~Stephen Jay Gould

People may believe correct things for the damndest and weirdest of wrong reasons.

~Stephen Jay Gould

The invalid assumption that correlation implies cause is probably among the two or three most serious and common errors of human reasoning.

~Stephen Jay Gould

The equation of evolution with progress represents our strongest cultural impediment to a proper understanding of this greatest biological revolution in the history of human thought.

~Stephen Jay Gould

We are storytelling animals, and cannot bear to acknowledge the ordinariness of our daily lives.

~Stephen Jay Gould

We who revel in nature's diversity and feel instructed by every animal tend to brand Homo sapiens as the greatest catastrophe since the Cretaceous extinction.

~Stephen Jay Gould

Charles Darwin viewed the fossil record more as an embarrassment than as an aid to his theory.

~Stephen Jay Gould

The Darwinian revolution is about essence. The Darwinian revolution is about who we are, it's what we're made of, it's what our life means insofar as science can answer that question.

~Stephen Jay Gould

... a local, indigenous, American bizarre-ity.

~Stephen Jay Gould

World views are social constructions and they channel the search for facts. But facts are found and knowledge progresses, however fitfully.

~Stephen Jay Gould

So much of science proceeds by telling stories.

~Stephen Jay Gould

The dogmatist within is always worse than the enemy without.

~Stephen Jay Gould

The only universal attribute of scientific statements resides in their

potential fallibility. If a claim cannot be disproven, it does not belong to the enterprise of science.

~Stephen Jay Gould

The world is full of signals that we don't perceive.

~Stephen Jay Gould

Is uniformitarianism necessary?

~Stephen Jay Gould

It is the things we think we know - because they are so elementary or because they surround us - that often present the greatest difficulties when we are actually challenged to explain them.

~Stephen Jay Gould

As a word, ecology has been so debased by recent political usage that many people employ it to identify anything good that happens far from cities and without human interference.

~Stephen Jay Gould

Honorable errors do not count as failures in science, but as seeds for progress in the quintessential activity of correction.

~Stephen Jay Gould

I would rather label the whole enterprise of setting a biological value upon groups for what it is: irrelevant, intellectually unsound, and highly injurious.

~Stephen Jay Gould

The telephone is the greatest single enemy of scholarship; for what our intellectual forebears used to inscribe in ink now goes once over a wire into permanent oblivion.

~Stephen Jay Gould

No rational order of divine intelligence unites species. The natural ties are genealogical along contingent pathways of history.

~Stephen Jay Gould

...we must be wary of granting too much power to natural selection by viewing all basic capacities of our brain as direct adaptations.

~Stephen Jay Gould

Precise adaptation, with each part finely honed to perform a definite function in an optimal way, can only lead to blind alleys, dead ends, and extinction.

~Stephen Jay Gould

The world is too complex for subsumption under any general theory of change.

~Stephen Jay Gould

The board transported its jurisdiction to a never-never land where a Dorothy of the new millennium might exclaim: "They still call it Kansas, but I don't think we're in the real world anymore."

~Stephen Jay Gould

Theory-free science makes about as much sense as value-free politics.

~Stephen Jay Gould

No one-liner can ever be optimal.

~Stephen Jay Gould

Some evolutionists will protest that we are caricaturing their view of adaptation. After all, do they not admit genetic drift, allometry, and a variety of reasons for nonadaptive evolution?

~Stephen Jay Gould

All science is intelligent inference; excessive literalism is delusion, not a humble bowing to evidence.

~Stephen Jay Gould

Most books, after all, are ephemeral; their specifics, several years later, inspire about as much interest as daily battle reports from the Hundred Years' War.

~Stephen Jay Gould

Guessing right for the wrong reason does not merit scientific immortality.

~Stephen Jay Gould

Evolution is one of the two or three most primally fascinating subjects in all the sciences.

~Stephen Jay Gould

I don't think academic writing ever was wonderful. However, science used to be much less specialized.

~Stephen Jay Gould

I love the wry motto of the Paleontological Society, meant both literally and figuratively, for hammers are the main tool of our trade: Frango ut patefaciam - I break in order to reveal.

~Stephen Jay Gould

Always be suspicious of conclusions that reinforce uncritical hope and follow comforting traditions of Western thought.

~Stephen Jay Gould

The spandrels of San Marco and the Panglossian Paradigm.

~Stephen Jay Gould

Science is not a heartless pursuit of objective information; it is a

creative human activity.

~Stephen Jay Gould

Why, then, do I continue to claim that creationism isn't science? Simply because these relatively few statements have been tested and conclusively refuted.

~Stephen Jay Gould

Everything comes to us in fifteen-second sound bites and photo opportunities. All possibility for ambiguity - the most precious trait of any adequate analysis - is erased.

~Stephen Jay Gould

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