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## Reader comments

DEAR DR. ROBERTS:

Your “Facts and Ideas,” especially 2008;21(4):443–454—every word of which I read—have the makings of a fine Commonplace Book, a literary form in which I have long been interested. This is the introduction to my Commonplace Book, *A Collection of Aphorisms, Ambiguities, Maxims, Amphiboles, Proverbs & Quotations*:

The habit of knowledge is not human but divine.  
Thinking is one of the chief pleasures of the human race.  
—BERTOLT BRECHT

Things take indeed a wondrous turn,  
When learned men do stoop to learn.  
—COLLEGIUM ROMANUM

The contents include the following sections: Acting/Theatre, Ambiguities, Amphiboles, Aphorisms/Maxims, Classical Mythology and Literature, Culture, Education, Medicine, Philosophy, Politics, Proverbs, Quotations, Religion/Biblical, Science, War.

You might be interested in the following definitions:

*Aphorism*: From the Greek ἀφορισμὸς, to define. A term used to describe a principle expressed tersely in a few telling words or any general truth conveyed in a short and pithy sentence.

*Maxim*: A short statement of a general principle, especially one that imparts advice or guidance. La Rochefoucauld published his aphorisms as *Maximes* (1665). Benjamin Franklin published his aphorisms in *Poor Richard's Almanack* (1733–1758).

*Amphibole*: Latin *amphibolus*, ambiguous. From the Greek *amphibolos*, doubtful, ambiguous. An amphibole has two meanings, an intended meaning taken literally and an unintended inadvertent humorous meaning. An amphibole is sensible and nonsensical.

*Proverb*: From Old French *proverbe*, from Latin *prōverbium*: *prō-*, forth + *verbum*, word. A short, pithy saying of unknown authorship expressing a basic truth or practical precept. The Hebrew scriptures include the book of Proverbs.

*Quotations*: Aphorisms, maxims, and proverbs whose source is acknowledged.

*An aphorist*: Someone who formulates aphorisms. An aphorist “writes,” “utters,” “formulates,” “repeats,” or “collects” aphorisms.

James Geary organized, indexed, and translated aphorisms in *Geary's Guide*, which features classic writers like Voltaire, Twain, Shakespeare, and Nietzsche, but also surprising figures, such as Woody Allen, Muhammad Ali, Emily Dickinson, and Mae West.

The Finns have their own Aphorism Association as well as a National Aphorism Day and an annual award to the country's best aphorist. The Russians have the Moscow Aphoristic Circle, which holds competitions for composing the best aphorisms.

The Serbs have the Belgrade Aphoristic Circle. The Germans launched their second German Aphorism Convention.

—JOSEPH K. PERLOFF, MD  
Los Angeles, CA

DEAR DR. ROBERTS:

Thank you for another highly interesting article [“Our dependence on oil” in Facts and ideas from anywhere; 2008;21(3):348–357]. I own a Volkswagen Jetta TDI, but I bought it in 2006, so it's still “dirty” diesel technology. It's ideal for the commute I have. My average gas mileage is roughly 48 miles per gallon (almost all highway cruising at 70 mph). All new diesels here use common-rail technology, which is less efficient but a lot cleaner. In addition, Mercedes uses BlueTec, a two-stage nitrogen oxide-reducing system; one is a urea-based reductant (requiring a refill every 10,000 miles) in addition to a particulate filter. Volkswagen gets away without utilizing urea, but its engines are smaller and less powerful.

I just returned from Switzerland, where gas is 2 Swiss francs (now \$2 US) *per liter*, roughly \$8 per gallon, a huge incentive to watch your gas consumption. In fact, most larger vehicles such as minivans, SUVs, and essentially all trucks use diesel. Not surprisingly, Opel (which is GM) has plenty of diesel models (in order to compete), but none here. I'm looking for a diesel minivan for my family, but so far they are not available, and worse yet, there are no plans (yet) to introduce them to the US market.

I agree that making gas/diesel more expensive is the best for America. Many years ago I said jokingly that the USA should have \$4 gas. I had no idea it would happen that quickly. Nevertheless, reducing consumption is certainly the single most important thing we can do. Will public transportation ever catch on?

—MICHAEL R. WIEDERKEHR, MD  
Dallas, TX

DEAR DR. ROBERTS:

Facts and ideas from anywhere is always good, but this issue [with the quotations] is priceless!

—JOHN C. CARSON, MD  
San Diego, CA

DEAR DR. ROBERTS:

I thoroughly enjoyed reading your recent collection of quotations. As usual, they were all interesting. However, I found Publilius Syrus and Mark Twain most interesting. The all-time best for me was from the “Reverend” Vince Lombardi: “If you aren't fired with enthusiasm, you'll be fired with enthusiasm.” Thanks again.

—JOE BELLAMO, MD  
Lancaster, TX