



# Life without principle: Three essays

*Henry David Thoreau*

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## **Life without principle: Three essays** Henry David Thoreau

Life Without Principle is an essay by Henry David Thoreau that gives his program for right livelihood.

- Don't cheat people by conspiring with them to protect their comfort zones.
- Don't make religions and other such institutions the sort of intellectual comfort zone that prevents you from entertaining ideas that aren't to be found there.
- Don't cheat yourself by working primarily for a paycheck. If what you do with your life free-of-charge is so worthless to you that you'd be convinced to do something else in exchange for a little money or fame, you need better hobbies.
- Furthermore, don't hire someone who's only in it for the money.
- Sustain yourself by the life you live, not by exchanging your life for money and living off of that.
- It is a shame to be living off of an inheritance, charity, a government pension, or to gamble your way to prosperity - either through a lottery or by such means as prospecting for gold.
- Remember that what is valuable about a thing is not the same as how much money it will fetch on the market.
- Don't waste conversation and attention on the superficial trivialities and gossip of the daily news, but attend to things of more import: "Read not the Times. Read the Eternities."
- Similarly, politics is something that ought to be a minor and discreet part of life, not the grotesque public sport it has become.
- Don't mistake the march of commerce for progress and civilization - especially when that commerce amounts to driving slaves to produce the articles of vice like alcohol and tobacco. There's no shortage of gold, of tobacco, of alcohol, but there is a short supply of "a high and earnest purpose."

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