

Sir Isaac Newton: Compilation of Famous Quotations

Source: http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Isaac_Newton

- *Amicus Plato — amicus Aristoteles — magis amica veritas*
 - **Plato is my friend — Aristotle is my friend — but my greatest friend is truth.**
 - These are notes in Latin that Newton wrote to himself that he titled: *Quaestiones Quaedam Philosophicae* [Certain Philosophical Questions] (c. 1664)
 - Variant translations: Plato is my friend, Aristotle is my friend, but my best friend is truth. Plato is my friend — Aristotle is my friend — truth is a greater friend.
- **If I have seen further it is only by standing on the shoulders of giants.**
 - Modernized variants: **If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.** If I have seen farther it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.
 - Letter to Robert Hooke (15 February 1676) [dated as 5 February 1675 using the Julian calendar with March 25th rather than January 1st as New Years Day, equivalent to 15 February 1676 by Gregorian reckonings]
- **I have not been able to discover the cause of those properties of gravity from phenomena, and I frame no hypotheses;** for whatever is not deduced from the phenomena is to be called a hypothesis, and hypotheses, whether metaphysical or physical, whether of occult qualities or mechanical, have no place in experimental philosophy.
 - Letter to Robert Hooke (15 February 1676) [5 February 1675 (O.S.)]
- **To explain all nature is too difficult a task for any one man or even for any one age. 'Tis much better to do a little with certainty, & leave the rest for others that come after you, than to explain all things by conjecture without making sure of any thing.**
 - Statement from unpublished notes for the Preface to *Opticks* (1704) quoted in *Never at Rest: A Biography of Isaac Newton* (1983) by Richard S. Westfall, p. 643
- **The folly of Interpreters has been, to foretell times and things by this Prophecy, as if God designed to make them Prophets. By this rashness they have not only exposed themselves, but brought the Prophecy also into contempt.**

The design of God was much otherwise. **He gave this and the Prophecies of the Old Testament, not to gratify mens curiosities by enabling them to foreknow things, but that after they were fulfilled they might be interpreted by the event, and his own Providence, not the Interpreters, be then manifested thereby to the world.** For the event of things predicted many ages before will then be a convincing argument that the world is governed by Providence. For, as the few and obscure prophecies concerning Christ's first coming were for setting up the Christian religion, which many nations have since corrupted, so the many and clear prophecies concerning the things to be done at Christ's second coming, are not only for predicting, but for effecting a recovery and re-establishment of the long lost truth, and setting up a kingdom where righteousness dwells. The event will prove the Apocalypse; and this prophecy, thus proved and understood, will open the old Prophets, and altogether will make known the true religion and establish it. **There is already so much of this prophecy fulfilled, that, as many as will take pains in this study, may see sufficient instances of God's providence; but then the signal revolutions, predicted by all the holy Prophets, will at once both turn men's eyes upon considering the predictions, and plainly interpret them. Till that period, we must content ourselves with interpreting what has been already fulfilled.**
- *Observations Upon The Apocalypse Of St. John* (published posthumously 1733)

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- **I have studied these things — you have not.**
 - Reported as Newton's response, whenever Edmond Halley would say anything disrespectful of religion, by Sir David Brewster in *The Life of Sir Isaac Newton* (1831). This has often been quoted in recent years as having been a statement specifically defending Astrology. Newton wrote extensively on the importance of Prophecy, and studied Alchemy, but there is little evidence that he took favourable notice of Astrology. Brewster attributes the anecdote to the astronomer Nevil Maskelyne who passed it on to Oxford professor Stephen Peter Rigaud.
- **I do not know what I may appear to the world, but to myself I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the sea-shore, and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me.**
 - *Memoirs of the Life, Writings, and Discoveries of Sir Isaac Newton* (1855) by Sir David Brewster (Volume II. Ch. 27). Compare: "As children gath'ring pebbles on the shore", John Milton, *Paradise Regained*, Book iv. Line 330.
- **Oh, Diamond! Diamond! thou little knowest what mischief thou hast done!**
 - This is from an anecdote found in *St. Nicholas* magazine, Vol. 5, No. 4, (February 1878) :

Sir Isaac Newton had on his table a pile of papers upon which were written calculations that had taken him twenty years to make. One evening, he left the room for a few minutes, and when he came back he found that his little dog "Diamond" had overturned a candle and set fire to the precious papers, of which nothing was left but a heap of ashes.

- **It is the perfection of God's works that they are all done with the greatest simplicity. He is the God of order and not of confusion.** And therefore as they would understand the frame of the world must endeavor to reduce their knowledge to all possible simplicity, so must it be in seeking to understand these visions.
 - Cited in *Rules for methodizing the Apocalypse*, Rule 9, from a manuscript published in *The Religion of Isaac Newton* (1974) by Frank E. Manuel, p. 120, quoted in *Never at Rest: A Biography of Isaac Newton* (1983) by Richard S. Westfall, p. 326, in *Fables of Mind: An Inquiry Into Poe's Fiction* (1987) by Joan Dayan, p. 240, and in *Everything Connects: In Conference with Richard H. Popkin* (1999) by Richard H. Popkin, James E. Force, and David S. Katz, p. 124
- **Truth is ever to be found in simplicity, and not in the multiplicity and confusion of things.**
 - Cited in *Rules for methodizing the Apocalypse*, Rule 9, from a manuscript published in *The Religion of Isaac Newton* (1974) by Frank E. Manuel, p. 120, as quoted in *Socinianism And Arminianism : Antitrinitarians, Calvinists, And Cultural Exchange in Seventeenth-Century Europe* (2005) by Martin Mulso, Jan Rohls, p. 273.
 - Variant: Truth is ever to be found in the simplicity, and not in the multiplicity and confusion of things.
 - As quoted in *God in the Equation : How Einstein Transformed Religion* (2002) by Corey S. Powell, p. 29
- **God created everything by number, weight and measure.**
 - As quoted in *Symmetry in Plants* (1998) by Roger V. Jean and Denis Barabé, p. xxxvii, a translation of a Latin phrase he wrote in a student's notebook, elsewhere given as *Numero pondere et mensura Deus omnia condidit*. This is similar to Latin statements by Thomas Aquinas, and even more ancient statements of the Greek philosopher **Pythagoras**.