

The Wit and Wisdom of [Karl Kraus](#) (1874-1936)

1. An aphorism can never be the whole truth; it is either a half-truth or a truth-and-a-half.
2. The closer the look one takes at a word, the greater distance from which it looks back.
3. My unconscious knows more about the consciousness of the psychologist than his consciousness knows about my unconscious.
4. Progress, under whose feet the grass mourns and the forest is turned into the paper from which the newspaper plants grow, has subordinated the purpose of life to the means of subsistence, and turned us into nuts and bolts, used by tools.
5. Education is a crutch with which the foolish attack the wise to prove that they are not idiots.
6. Sentimental irony is a dog that bays at the moon while pissing on graves.
7. How is the world ruled and led to war? Diplomats lie to journalists, and then believe these lies when they see them in print.
8. Experiences are savings which a miser puts aside. Wisdom is an inheritance which a wastrel cannot exhaust.
9. Journalist: a person without any ideas but with an ability to express them; a writer whose skill is improved by a deadline: the more time he has, the worse he writes.
10. This is something that I cannot get over – that a whole line could be written by half a man, that a work could be built on the quicksand of a character.
11. A writer is someone who can make a riddle out of an answer.
12. War: first, one hopes to win; then one expects the enemy to lose; then, one is satisfied that he too is suffering; in the end, one is surprised that everyone has lost.
13. If the reporter has killed our imagination with his truth, he threatens our life with his lies.
14. A man's eroticism is a woman's sexuality.
15. It is the style of idealism to console itself for the loss of something old with the ability to gape at something new.
16. Democracy divides people into workers and loafers. It makes no provision for those who have no time to work.
17. The ultimate aim of psychoanalysis is to attribute art to mental weakness, and then to trace the weakness back to the point where, according to analytic dogma, it originated – namely, the lavatory.
18. The psychoanalysts pick our dreams as if they were our pockets.
19. When a culture feels that its end has come, it sends for a priest.

20. Scandal begins when the police put a stop to it.
21. Morality is a venereal disease. Its primary stage is called virtue; its secondary stage, boredom; its tertiary stage, syphilis.
22. The immorality of men triumphs over the amorality of women.
23. News reports stand up as people, and people wither into editorials. Clichés walk around on two legs, while men are having theirs shot off.
24. Culture is the tacit agreement to let the means of subsistence disappear behind the purpose of existence. Civilisation is the subordination of the latter to the former.
25. Democracy means the opportunity to be everyone's slave.
26. The discovery of the North Pole is one of those realities which could not be avoided. It is the wages which human perseverance pays itself when it thinks that something is taking too long. The world needed a discoverer of the North Pole, and in all areas of social activity, merit was less important here than opportunity.
27. The sound principle of a topsy-turvy lifestyle in the framework of an upside-down world order has stood every test.
28. Adults who still derive childlike pleasure from hanging gifts of a ready-made education on the Christmas tree of a child waiting outside the door to life do not realise how unreceptive they are to making the children sensitive to everything that constitutes the true surprise of life.
29. Corruption is worse than prostitution. The latter might endanger the morals of an individual, but the former invariably endangers the morals of the entire country.
30. Children play soldiers. That makes sense. But why do soldiers play children?
31. The aesthete stands in the same relation to beauty as the pornographer stands to love, and the politician stands to life.
32. A child learns to discard his ideals, whereas a grown-up never wears out his short pants.
33. Squeeze human nature into the straitjacket of criminal justice, and crime will appear.