

We will be watching *Dead Poets Society* in Christian Philosophy to strive to apply what we have been learning in class. One benefit of watching movies such as *DPS* and *The Matrix* and esp. “*God’s Not Dead*,” is that they make accessible the thoughts of philosophical thinkers and writers, to us, the modern-day audience. Before we watch the movie, I want you know that this movie actually presents the error of living without the Christian Bible—it is nowhere in this movie. This first article is written from a Christian perspective, the other two (below), are not written from a Christian worldview. This first article says the theme of the movie is to ‘seize the day,’ this is correct. But, what this theme misses is that we are to then hope in the next life, which actually start the moment you are part of God’s kingdom (when you trust in Him as Savior and Lord). Paul said it best, “to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21). BOTH of these are true. Too often a depressed, hurt, angry, or upset Christian can act like Jonah. Too often a Christian can wrongly emphasize Paul’s words of ‘to die is gain,’ to the utter neglect of ‘to live is [indeed!] Christ! This living to Christ, is done both in your personal life and shared with the church family.

Bryan Gilde

DEAD POET’S SOCIETY: SEIZING THE DAY AND HOPING IN THE NEXT

December 6, 2016 · by [Brandon M. Terry](#) · in [Faith & Film](#) ·

Warning: Spoilers included in the post.



Dead Poet’s Society is a beloved movie for many movie buffs in our world. The combination of witty, sudden humor, awe inspiring scenery, and deep heart-wrenching moments creates a wonderful experience in this movie. Through this experience though, a fascinating struggle is portrayed to the audience. This struggle is held in the viewer’s mind by the commanding presence of John Keating (Robin Williams) as he shapes the lives of the protagonists. Keating comes into the lives of these young men in order to rip them out of their comfort zones by forcing them to ask the deep questions of life. One implicit question, which seems to shape the movie’s conflict throughout, is simple– “What makes life worth living?” The struggle to answer this question is most clearly seen in the impact Keating has on Neil Perry (Robert Sean Leonard).



We are introduced to our hero, Neil, early in the movie, as he submits to the overbearing will of his Father. Almost immediately you can see two things within Neil. First, his regularly carefree demeanor is quickly swallowed by his “submissive son” mentality whenever faced with his father. Second, Neil is profoundly sad. Throughout the whole movie, small hints are given to the audience of the deep sorrow that haunts Neil; a sorrow from which he perpetually fights to liberate himself. It is this profound sadness that shows the intensity of Keating’s impact on this boy.

Throughout the semester, Keating brings his students through various experiences designed at one thing: to make them free thinkers. He desperately wants to give these students freedom, which their tradition-soaked lives have prevented them from having. But why does this man care so much about making these boys free? His reasoning is, as he says, “we are food for worms.” In the face of impending death, Keating does not want these boys to waste their time. They must be free men in order to fulfill the (ever quoted) command to “*CARPE DIEM*” (Seize the Day). Keating strongly and impactfully demonstrates that freedom, the ability to be your own person and to experience life to its fullest, is what makes life worth living. This message reaches deep within the viewer and awakened his slumbering poet. Tragically, this freedom alone may not be enough to truly make life worth living; as we can see through Neil’s progression through the movie.



Neil takes to the freedom mentality presented by Keating with a passion that is vastly greater than his classmates. While he is embracing life and “seizing the day,” he seems truly happy for once in his life. The change is drastic and wonderful for the young man who is getting his first tastes of freedom. Unfortunately, this wonder is not meant to last. As the movie progresses, Neil is robbed of this freedom. At the climax, Neil’s father takes him out of Wellton and enrolls him in military school, an experience which Neil sincerely equates to a prison sentence. In light of this loss, Neil is forced to seek his only remaining option of “freedom”—he takes his own life. In the climax of this movie, our hero is defeated and ends his life in tragedy. While the movie argues that this only occurred because freedom, the most valuable aspect of life, was taken away, there must be a deeper truth to find.

While freedom is valuable, it cannot be the foundation for our life. Freedom is fleeting and elusive, as each person is bound in some way. Something more must be needed, alongside this freedom, to make life worth living. The movie does, in fact, give us some insight into this deeper truth by showing us what is not there at the end of Neil’s life. What Neil lacked was hope; hope in the next days of his life. As far as Neil could see he was given a prison sentence by being robbed of freedom, and once he died, that was it; he became food for worms. This is the tragic inadequacy of Keating’s view, it places everything in the present. With a view of freedom that is wholly focused on the present, the worth of life is based on your current condition and cannot overcome temporary condition because the temporary is all you have. Freedom is overcome by tragedy.



Hope, however, overcomes tragedy. Real sorrow, real loss, and real suffering cannot be ignored, and should be grieved. But in the end, hope prevails. If we are to expect that death ends it all, then death will always win no matter how much we embrace life. Only through hope does the enjoyment of life have victory over death and over daily loss. What Neil had was part of the puzzle, he knew that he live life to the fullest, but the fatal end of it all in hopelessness destroyed him. In the end, Keating only provided the boys with half the secret to life's worth, "Seize the day," but missed the latter half: "**Hope in the Next.**"

<https://faithfilm.wordpress.com/2016/12/06/dead-poets-society-seizing-the-day-and-hoping-in-the-next/>

The Flame

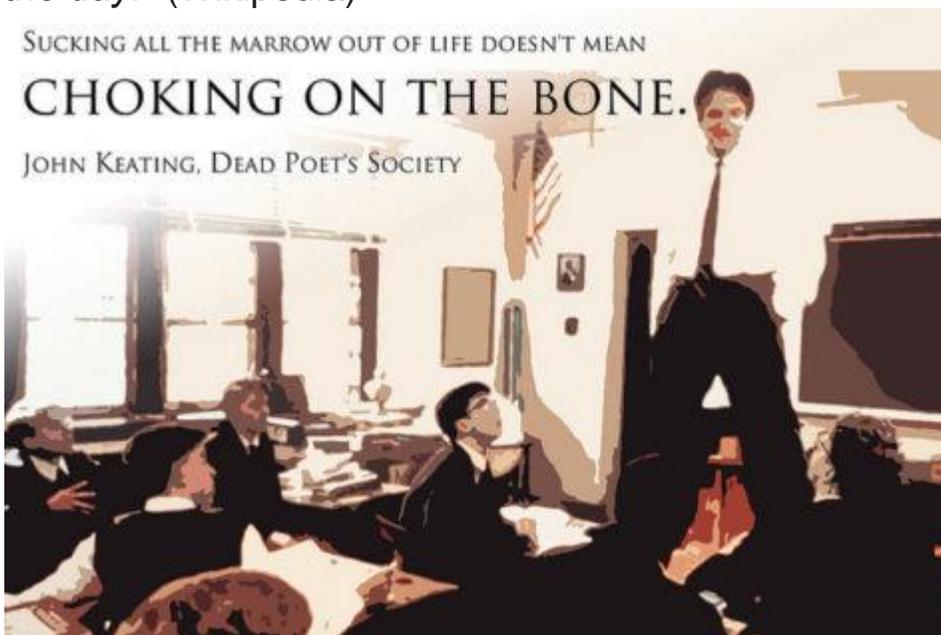
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"Dead Poets Society" and The Meaning of Life

Synopsis: “A new English teacher, John Keating (Robin Williams), is introduced to an all-boys preparatory school that is known for its ancient traditions and high standards. Using unorthodox methods to reach out to his students, who face enormous pressures from their parents and the school, Keating encourages students to break out of their shells, pursue their dreams and seize the day.” (Wikipedia)



John Keating Quote © Dennis Valente licensed under fair use

“You are here. And life exists. And identity. That the powerful play goes on and you may contribute a verse. What will your verse be?”

Every movie has the capacity to captivate, inspire, and empower; however, the extent of a movie’s impact is definitely variable.

Dead Poet’s Society is a movie with this undeniable capacity. It might not be a movie that would make people exclaim with excitement when talking about it to their friends, but for me, it’s a treasure. It’s a movie that I just want to keep to myself. It’s not cynical, but I wouldn’t categorize it as visionary either. I first

watched the movie when I was 15, and I was so in love with it that I kept a small pocket notebook filled with its quotes. To say the least, this movie has taught me lessons that continue to provoke my thinking. Like a symphony, it has soothing melodies and melancholic harmonies. It evokes emotion from deep within, and it is haunting and stirring.

Below I have listed some aspects of the movie that impacted me greatly.

Carpé Diem

*“Gather your rosebuds while you may. The Latin term for that sentence is **Carpé Diem. Carpé Diem.** That’s **seize the day**. Why does the author use this line? Because we are food for worms, lads. Because believe it or not, each and every one of us in this room is one day, going to stop breathing, turn cold, and die.”*

This is probably one of the most famous quotes from the movie. Professor Keating says this to his students on the first day of school at Welton Academy. This quote leaves the students, as well as the audience, in awe; Keating’s beliefs are exactly the unorthodox approaches to education that neither Welton nor the students’ parents support. Yet, it is this quote that rings true to his students.

At Welton, the students are programmed into following the same, old, boring, and predictable lifestyle that their fathers, their father’s fathers have lived. Therefore, Keating’s way of life immediately shoots down the “one size fits all” belief that is held at the academy. We are all going to die, no matter what kind of person we become. Because of that, we should live life to its fullest. While Welton sees sameness as what is needed to sustain life, Keating sees it as what is needed to die. Through this, we are able to see Keating’s aspiration as an educator: to inspire his students to follow their dreams and think for themselves.

However, a downfall of this teaching is the way many students misunderstood the idea of the end of the road. They believe that a meaningless life is one without creativity when they are supposed to believe that a meaningless life is one where they aren’t able to pursue their passions. Neil Perry, one of the main characters in the movie, dreams of becoming an actor but is oppressed by his father to go to Harvard and become a doctor. Neil takes his teacher’s advice, to seize the day, to heart and takes up the role of Puck in the school play.

However, when Mr. Perry finds out that his son had been neglecting his studies

for some theater bogus, he furiously pulls Neil out from the play and threatens to send the latter to Braden Military School. This is where Neil makes the mistake of twisting Keaton's words – while Keating says "live life to the fullest because we will all die", Neil hears "we should die if we can't live life to the fullest".

Standing on desks

"I stand upon my desk to remind myself that we should constantly look at things in a different way. See, the world looks very different from up here... Just when you think you know something, you have to look at it in another way. Even if it may seem silly, or wrong, you must try."

The idea of standing atop their desks is another recurring motif in the movie and holds great meaning. It originally serves to represent open-mindedness; it encourages thinking from different perspectives and thoughtfulness from outside the box. And Keating's teaching methods were cynical. He teaches them to look at things from different points of view by literally making them look from a different point of view. He also makes his students tear out the pages of their textbook to shut down the assumptions that you should just accept what is told to you, but rather you should think for your own self and make your own ideas.

"Now, when you read, don't just consider what the author thinks, consider what you think. You must strive to find your own voice. Because the longer you wait to begin, the less likely you are to find it at all. Faroes said most men lead lives of quiet desperation. Don't be resigned to that. Breakout. Don't just walk off the edge like lemmings. Look around you. Dare to strike out and find new ground."

In the first and last scenes where Keating makes his appearance, characters are directed to stand on desks – he stands on his desk in his first scene, and his students stand on their desks in the last. The last scene is also when the movie takes a turn (after the sacking of Mr. Keating), and the action serves to represent unity, togetherness, as well as rebellion against an unjust system. At the end of the movie, as Mr. Keating is shown to collect his belongings and leave his teaching position, his students, one by one, rise up and stand on their desks, saying: "O Captain, my Captain"...

"O Captain, my Captain"

It's also interesting to note that the line "O Captain, my Captain" appears twice along with the standing-on-desks action, and it's also an allusion to Walt

Whitman's poem about Abraham Lincoln who, as claimed by Whitman, died an unfair death despite sacrificing and working tirelessly to help his people. By appearing in Keating's first scene (and by being said by Keating himself), it may possible foreshadow the cruel sacking of Keating despite all that he's done for his fellow students; and by appearing in Keating's last scene (being said by Todd, one of the students), the line demonstrates the nonconformist that Keating has taught his students to be. This proves the immense influence that Keating had on his students despite only being around for less than a year – he has passed on to his students his enthusiasm, his passion, his love, and his freedom of mind.

My first time watching the movie was also my last. It's just that special to me, like an old CD that I only take out to look at and appreciate but not to listen to. Maybe another time; maybe a time when I am stuck or when I really need the comfort and empowerment, will I watch it again. But until then, I would just like to reminisce on and appreciate the lessons that the 15-year-old has learnt. Until then, just the comfort of knowing I have such a beautiful thing to turn to in times of trouble is good enough for me.



Tags: [lie](#), [movie review](#)

1 Comment

One Response to ““Dead Poets Society” and The Meaning of Life”

- Joe on April 28th, 2017 4:30 pm



Interesting thoughts. You raised some ideas I didn't realize before, like Neil's misunderstanding of Keaton's words. Good job, I enjoyed reading this.

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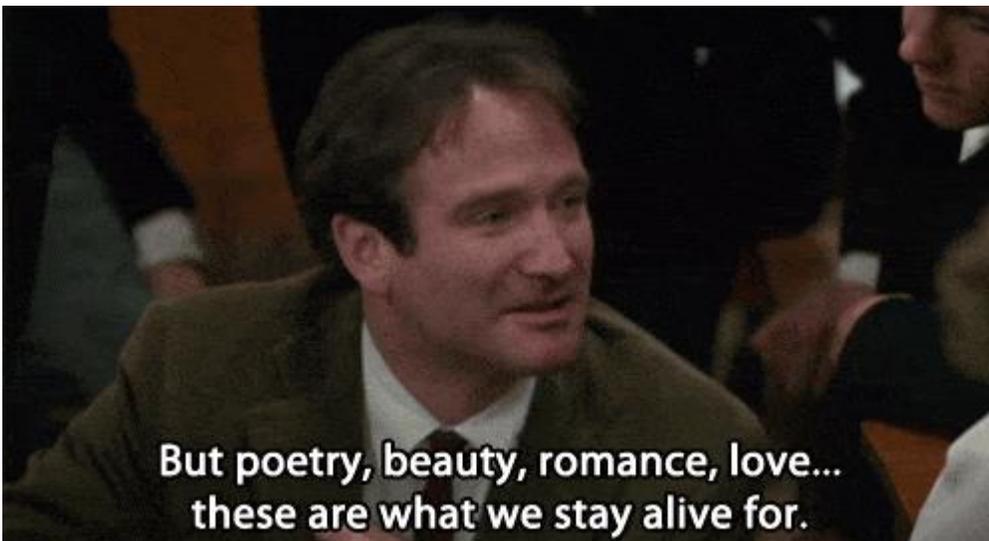


Medicine, law, business, engineering: these are noble pursuits and necessary to sustain life.

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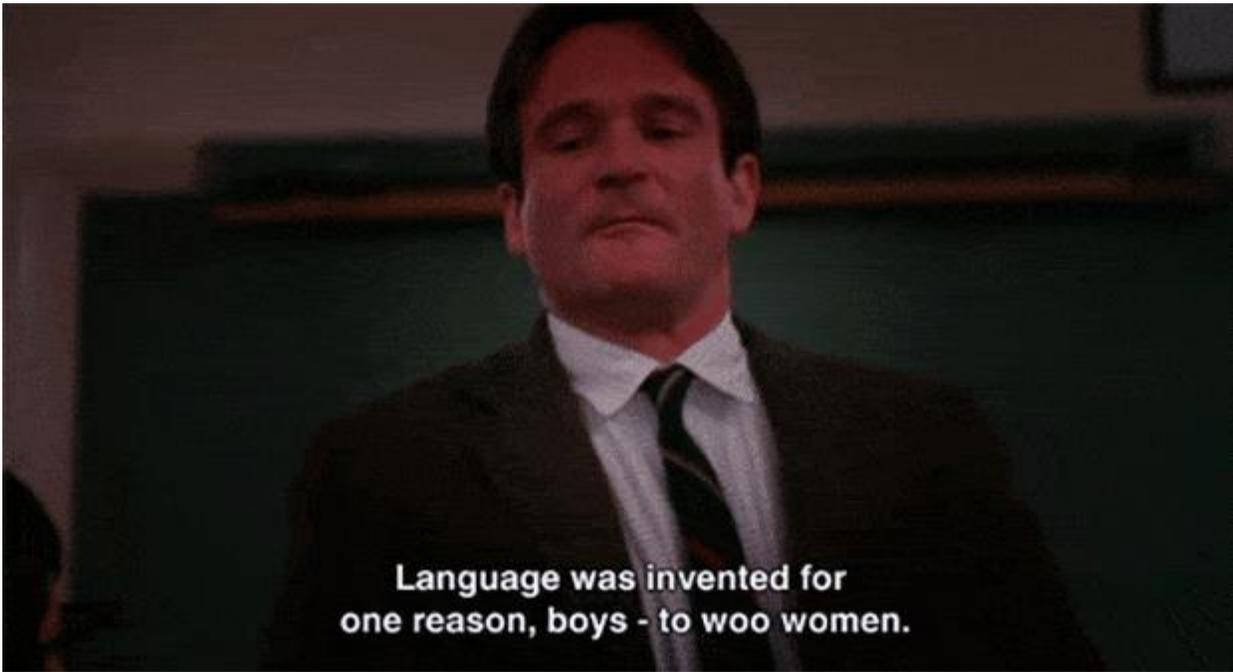


But poetry, beauty, romance, love... these are what we stay alive for.

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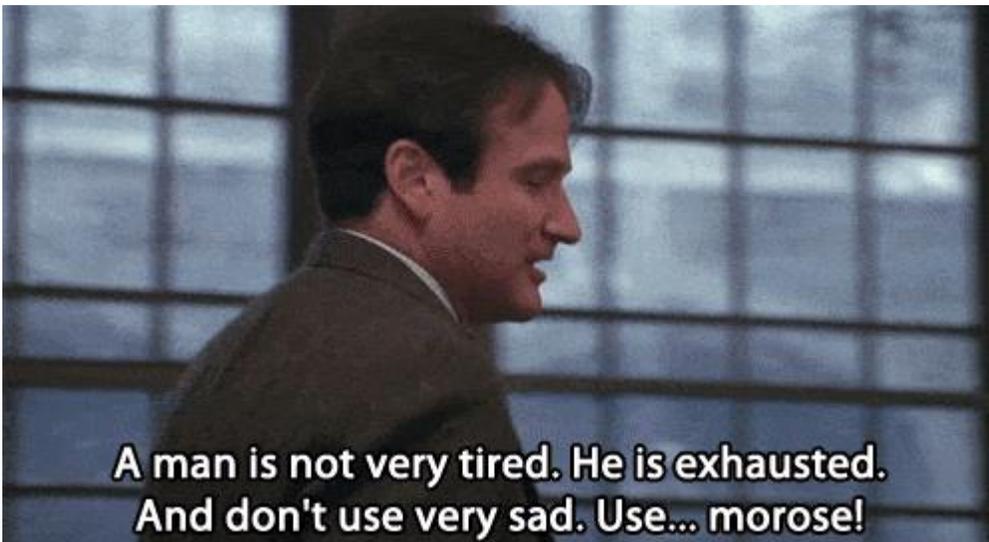
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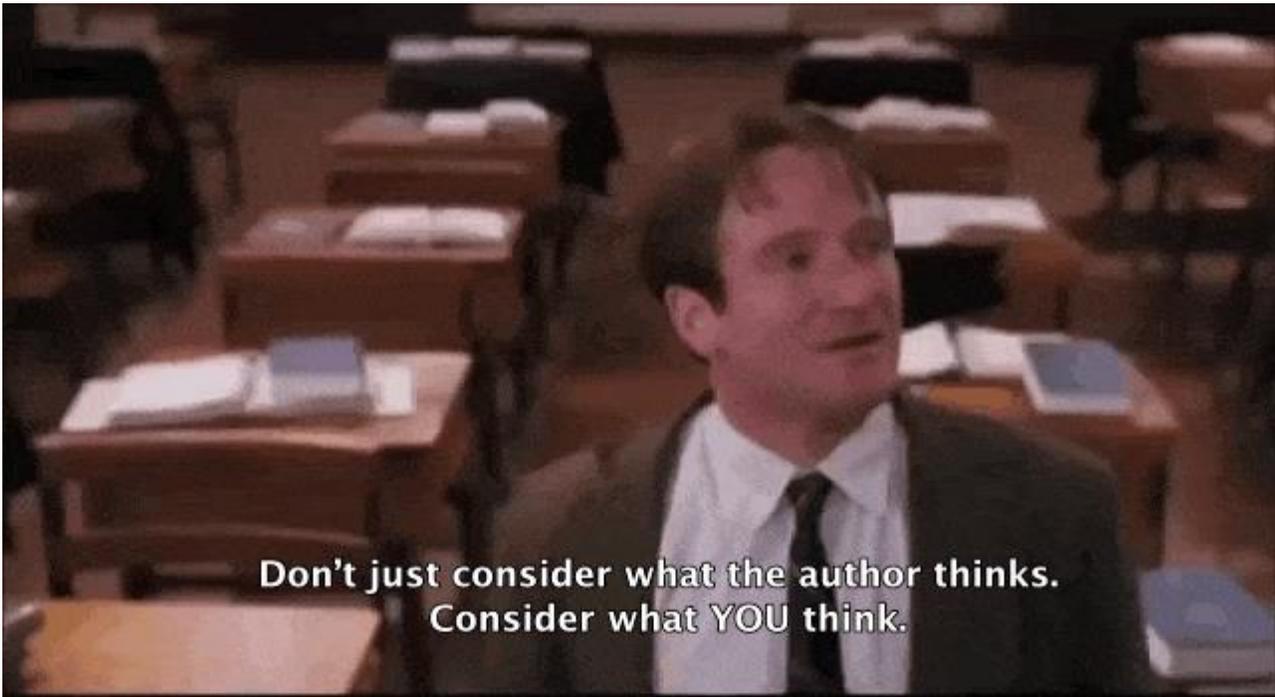
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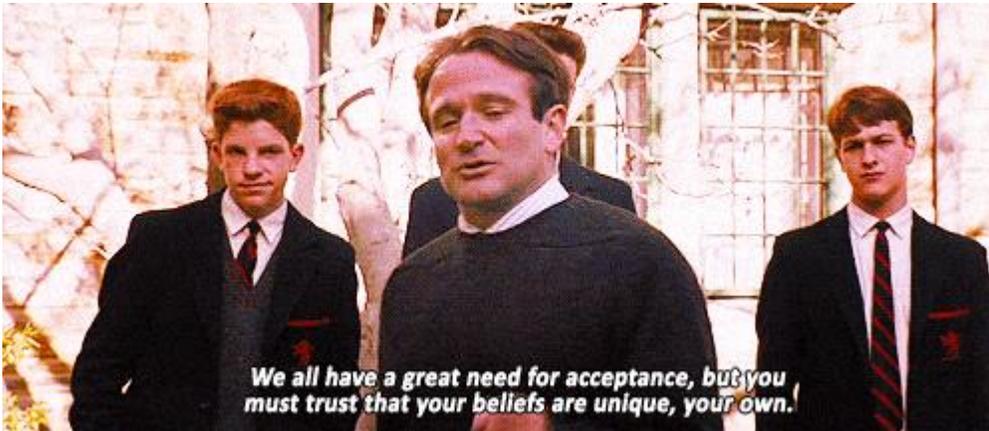


Don't just consider what the author thinks.
Consider what YOU think.

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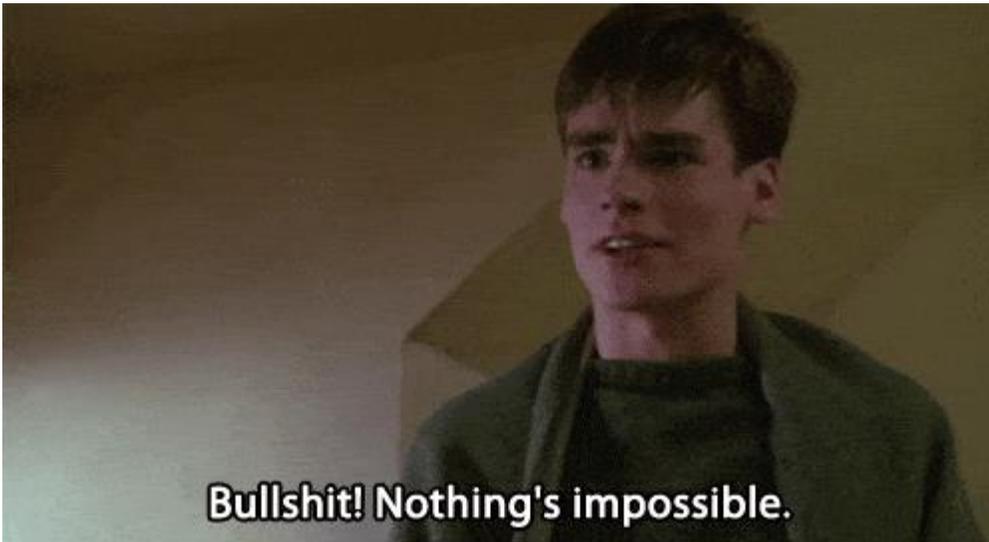


We all have a great need for acceptance, but you
must trust that your beliefs are unique, your own.

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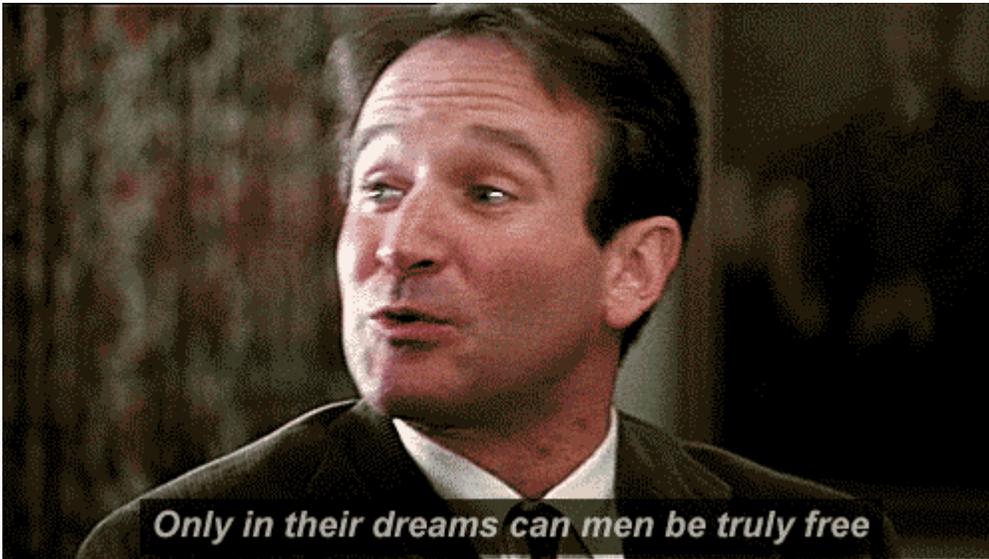
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