

How To Be a Cynic and an Idealist (at the Same Time!)

Is it better to be a cynic or an idealist? Should you give up on dreams or pursue them? Is the universe fundamentally friendly or hostile to happiness?

Maybe you don't have to choose.

Cynicism is right in throwing down our idols and our dreams of utopia. It helps us see reality more clearly for what it is in its worst moments.

Idealism is right in holding up perfection as a standard. It helps us see reality more clearly for what it could be in its best moments.

Cynicism and idealism should be allies, not binary poles.

You will find the best course by accepting the perfect standard and accepting that you'll never meet that perfect standard.

Yes, you do have to accept an impossible task – meeting a standard of perfection. By struggling to meet an impossible standard, you will be transformed. And because your standard is unreachable, so will be the limit on your transformation and growth.

You'll be an idealist about going further and becoming better, but you will always (rightly) be a cynic about finally reaching a “destination”. Your cynicism will remind you that growth is an endless road, and your idealism will keep you walking.

If you can do that, you will avoid the one-sided totalitarian utopianism and the one-sided stagnant conservatism that is so destructive in individual lives and great nations. Be a cynical idealist – and an idealistic cynic – instead.