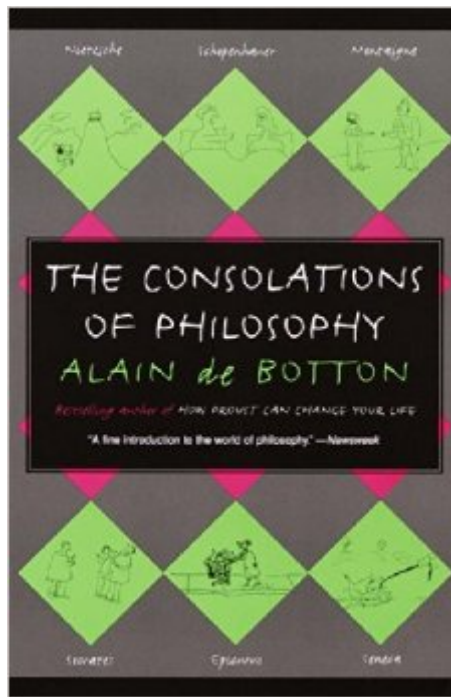


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The Consolations Of Philosophy



Synopsis

From the internationally heralded author of *How Proust Can Change Your Life* comes this remarkable new book that presents the wisdom of some of the greatest thinkers of the ages as advice for our day to day struggles. Solace for the broken heart can be found in the words of Schopenhauer. The ancient Greek Epicurus has the wisest, and most affordable, solution to cash flow problems. A remedy for impotence lies in Montaigne. Seneca offers advice upon losing a job. And Nietzsche has shrewd counsel for everything from loneliness to illness. *The Consolations of Philosophy* is a book as accessibly erudite as it is useful and entertaining.

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Customer Reviews

The easiest accusation one can make is to say that this book is 'shallow.' But really what de Botton is doing is extremely clever. Making it seem as though he is simply recording what certain great philosophers saying, he is actually serving up a very dazzling interpretation of them. It is made to look so easy that one might say 'This is just philosophy for dummies.' But it's really not. To summarize and elucidate the philosophy of, for example, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche is an incredible achievement. When de Botton wrote his book on Proust, lots of people said, 'He's just dunning down the great master.' It wasn't true of that book, and now in this book, it similarly isn't true that he is dunning anything down. The last reviewer from New York really made me mad. If *The Consolations of Philosophy* is pretentious, then I'm Socrates. Buy it, read it, and discover for yourself just what a joy this book is.

Somehow, I managed to get through high school and college without ever seriously reading any of the great Western philosophers. The *Consolations of Philosophy* is an excellent introduction and quick (I mean, QUICK) overview of six of these men. The deadwhitemales discussed are Socrates, Epicurus, Seneca, Montaigne, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche. The discussion is lively and thought-provoking--and amusingly illustrated. This book would serve as an excellent secondary text for an introduction to philosophy course. Even the most jaded undergraduate will want to learn more about the teachings of the philosophers covered. I found the chapters on Seneca ("Consolation for Frustration"), Montaigne ("Consolation for Inadequacy"), and Nietzsche ("Consolation for Difficulties") the most engaging and challenging. De Botton's writing and thinking are fresh and remind me, for some reason, of the cultural essays of Susan Bordo (and Camille Paglia in her more reasonable moments).

Having read Alain de Botton's highly amusing Proust book, I expected no less from *CONSOLATIONS OF PHILOSOPHY*; and I was not disappointed. Five philosophers (Socrates, Epicurus, Seneca, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche) and one giant of literature (Montaigne) are enlisted to help us deal with such universal problems as popularity, sexual rejection, poverty, and inadequacy. Curiously, none of these philosophers (with the possible exception of Epicurus) led happy lives. Seneca was ordered by his pupil Nero to commit suicide; Montaigne was tortured to the point of distraction by kidney stones; and Nietzsche went mad. De Botton, however, shows how each one exhibited great common sense on at least one area in their lives. The upshot of all this advice is to consider that others have it worse, buck up, and forge ahead despite all the obstacles. Not quite what Buddha discovered beneath the Bodhi Tree, but in this era of chicken soup for whatever ails you, it's a step up. Unlike most self-help books, this one instead of bloating two paragraphs into a 100,000-word book, leaves you hungry for more. Particularly useful are the notes in back, directing the reader to the sources and presumably further enlightenment. I was a little put out that de Botton left out all mention of Boethius, whose *CONSOLATION OF PHILOSOPHY* was one of the most influential books of the last 1,500 years and is still a very worthy book for accomplishing the same goals. As a skeptic, I was also disappointed that Lucian of Samosata was omitted. Oh, well, you can't criticise a book for what it was not. De Botton's selection is highly individual and, what is more, it works.

Entertaining and informative, thought-provoking and playful--that's Alain de Botton's new book for you. No wonder this is such a huge seller in Britain right now. Although I've not seen the television

series on which the book is based (or is it the other way around?), I do want to reassure my fellow readers that if they've liked any of de Botton's previous books (especially HOW PROUST CAN CHANGE YOUR LIFE), they won't be disappointed at all with this new work, which comes with those amusing illustrations that are a trade mark of a de Botton book. While I suppose it's possible to cavil at the book's "popularization" of philosophy, the short answer to such complaints is simply to ask those cranky readers to stick to the millions of dusty old academic monographs at their local university libraries and stay away from someone as fun and playful as de Botton. If philosophy has always been THIS fun, I tell you, there would never have been any need for the Cultural Wars and books like THE CLOSING OF THE AMERICAN MIND.

Philosophers used to want to talk to real people. Nowadays, they just mumble to their colleagues, stab each other in the back in the pages of academic journals, and basically disgrace themselves in the eyes of the tradition of philosophy begun by Socrates. But not Alain de Botton. He really takes seriously the idea that philosophers are capable of conceiving of life and experience in new ways that console us - make us feel less alone and persecuted. This might sound silly, but this book truly does console. It is also wonderfully informative and witty. I read a review of this book in the New York Times that actually encouraged me to read it - though it was a terrible review. The reviewer was so snifty and arrogant, I thought, 'I'm going to see if he's wrong.' Well, he certainly is. This is a small masterpiece. It's not a great great book - but it's what will be called a minor classic, a book that will be cherished and loved and passed around among friends. Incidentally, it's also got a great cover by that masterful Portland cartoonist, John Calahan

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