

Critical essay of de bottons consolations of philosophy critical thinking example...

[Literature](#), [Books](#)



\n[[toc title="Table of Contents"](#)]\n

\n \t

1. [The philosophy of Nietzsche](#) \n \t
2. [Conclusions](#) \n \t
3. [Works Cited](#) \n

\n[/toc]\n \n

1. Introduction

This thesis shall be limited to a critical analysis of Alain de Botton's book, *The Consolations of Philosophy*; of the year 2000 which introduced a new perspective not only to the study of philosophy but also its application in our day to day lives. It is significant to point out that this book was a follow-up of the original *Consolation of Philosophy* that was written by Boethius in 524 A. D. basically, Boethius personified philosophy as a woman whereby he asserted paradoxical relationship between fortune and misfortune especially in relation to the phenomenon of human happiness. Therefore whilst the latter teaches men lessons about life, the former deceives men about the transitory and illusive nature of human happiness. In fact, Boethius' book was the first to advance the notion that "love makes the world go round" on an official basis.

A brief overview of de Botton's book reveals that the novel is revolutionary in nature. This implies that the book is unlike traditional philosophical works in the essence that it has more to do with the various circumstances and situations of life rather the philosophy of life. Thus author has intertwined aspects of everyday life with meditational aspects of philosophy that

stimulate critical thinking within people. It must be mentioned that this de Botton's literary style. The philosophical meditations included in the book were advanced by three modern and three ancient philosophers. Each of the philosophers' works in the book is meant to serve a different purpose; for instance Socrates wrote about unpopularity, Epicurus about poverty, Seneca about frustrations, Montaigne about inadequacy, Schopenhauer about heartbreak and finally Nietzsche about difficulties. This thesis shall therefore be limited to the critical analysis of de Botton's book and how the philosophies advanced in this book are beneficial to human life in the present day context.

2. Socrates Philosophies

Socrates was a Greek philosopher who lived in an era whereby all and sundry conformed to the philosophies of the day especially as far as life is concerned. In fact, it is significant to point out that popularity of Socrates is as a result of the unpopularity of his philosophies in life. To this effect, empirical data suggests that his philosophies about life that were unpopular by the standards of the rest of the society led to his ultimate death. To reiterate the fact that Socrates was the father of unpopular philosophies, the Athenian society condemned him to a trial and consequently sentenced him to death. In fact, de Botton asserts, that Socrates irked his fellow Athenians more by not only accepting his trial but also the death sentence imposed upon him. Therefore it is quite clear that Socrates' philosophies of life are based on critical reasoning rather than blindly following the norms and value system established by the society. It is however important to note that despite the fact that most of the philosophies of Socrates about life were

unpopular, they had a lot of similarities to those held by Plato.

Socrates' unpopular philosophies of life can be used in the modern day in several ways. First and foremost, his commitments to his philosophies to the point of death allude to resilience and undying belief in his school of thought. This is especially necessary in this age and era where mass thinking is the order of the day and hence unpopular decisions are frowned upon by the rest of the society. This implies that Socrates' unpopular philosophies of life assert the significance of personal opinion and commitment to them especially in this age where such are being stifled by peer pressure. In addition, Socrates philosophies establish the fact that decisions in life should be backed by reasoning instead of the norm that tends more than often to be as result of muddled and subjective intellectual thinking of our predecessors. Finally, Socrates' philosophies of life are the basis for unpopular decisions that we make in life in the present age. This is especially the case of the our decision-makers in all spheres of life who are charged with the responsibility of making objective decisions based on a holistic approach especially political leaders and healthcare givers.

3. The philosophy of Epicurus

Epicurus sought out to establish true happiness and how to best achieve it. According to Epicurus, human beings throughout history are always in search of happiness. This is the reason why Epicurus dedicated his works and studies to the philosophy of pleasure. Basically, according to Epicurus, all that an individual does is geared at ensuring that they rip maximum pleasure from these activities. His school of thought was motivated by the fundamental principle that philosophy is of no use to man if it does not help

alleviate one's sufferings. Based on this principle, Epicurus went further to discover that human beings are greatly impaired especially when it comes to figuring out the various aspects of life that contribute largely to their happiness. Through both insight and experience, Epicurus categorized the various desires of life into three subgroups; mandatory desires, optional desires and finally the not-necessary category. Mandatory desires must be there if one has any hope of being happy and they include friendship, freedom, time for meditation and the basic necessities of life. The optional category comprises of large houses, servants, pricy foods and other luxuries of life whilst the not-necessary category is mainly comprised of power and fame. Therefore the priority of one's desires should increase from the not-necessary category as one tends to the mandatory category of desires. Epicurus' philosophies of life are still relevant especially in this age and era where consumerism and materialism are the order of the day. In the search of happiness people have focussed more on the not-necessary and the optional categories of desires at the expense of mandatory desires. This is evident by the fact that as the years pass by, the various relationships in the society is deteriorating to the point where some are non-existent. All human beings care about is what they can do to get ahead of the pack regardless of the fact whether they need it or not. Life has been reduced to power and fame rather than friendships, freedom, meditation and the basic necessities. Therefore, Epicurus philosophies are the only hope for the salvation of the present day lost generation of man.

4. The Philosophy of Seneca

Seneca's school of thought advanced the notion that frustrations are a core

component of life. This is because due to the diversity and uniqueness of various aspects, collisions are unavoidable. Seneca asserts that man's frustrations in life as result of his optimistic view of the world and his fellow human beings. To this effect, Seneca was of the opinion that one ceases to be frustrated when they cease to be optimistic. This implies that the philosophies of Seneca are based on stoicism. Basically, stoicism can be defined as the state of being emotionally un-detached from the expected outcomes of various activities. This is because frustrations in life are as a result of the occurrence of the unexpected. As a result, human beings are more hurt by what they do not anticipate compared to what they expect. Therefore Seneca propose that man should learn to accept all possibilities including disasters and the imperfections of our fellow human beings if he's to effectively deal with frustrations.

Frustrations are still a key component of life in the present day. In fact, today man is more emotionally attached to the outcome of various events because a lot seems to be at stake. To this effect, anger outbursts as a result of frustrations are increasing as the year's progress rather than decreasing. Seneca's philosophies of life come in handy if the present day man is to effectively deal with frustrations. Today, we must accept the fact that frustrations are part and parcel of life. To make this possible, man must also accept the uniqueness of other individuals coupled with their imperfections. This implies that man should come to terms with the fact that he's capable of being evil. In addition, man must lower his expectations of the outcomes of various events because it anything is possible. Disasters always occur and even the best laid plans fall apart. Basically, Seneca alludes to the fact that

man is not in charge of his own destiny therefore it is useless being frustrated about it.

5. The philosophy of Montaigne

Unlike Seneca, Epicurus and Socrates, Montaigne is of the opinion that man's inadequacies in life is as a result of the assumption that every aspect of their existence can be reasoned out. Therefore, Montaigne asserts that human beings are not the most rationale of creatures and therefore should not be expected to be so. In fact, the expectation that man can be rationale is the core reason why man is inadequate. To this effect, Montaigne refers to man as being hysterical, demented, gross, agitated, and frail amongst other characteristics that asserts the inadequacy. Based on this premise, it is thus clear that man's adequacy is always subjective and based on less than half the knowledge available to man. Therefore, man should not claim to be a master various aspects of his life and consequently accept the fact the inadequacy is at the core of his very existence.

In the present day, there is a lot of pressure for one to have everything figured out. As earlier mentioned the advancement in human life has wrongfully been fuelled by the assumptions that as time passes by the stakes become higher. This is despite that the fact that many aspects of life today reek of inadequacy including parenting, education and achievements. Regardless of the presence of clear evidence that man is inadequate, the society at large still expects adequacy from them. Therefore, Montaigne's school of thought can be used to assert this notion within society thereby saving most individuals a lot of unnecessary pressure and stress. Based on Montaigne's philosophy, society should accept that man is inadequate and

henceforth bound to fail in one or more aspects of life. Application of Montaigne's philosophies will result to a significant reduction in depression, stress and many cases of suicide in the present day world. In addition, it is thus clear that one can only aspire to improve on their inadequacies if they accept that they are inadequate and thus need to work on their character.

6. The Philosophy of Schopenhauer

It must be mentioned that Schopenhauer is one of the greatest pessimists in the history of philosophy. Some of the ideologies he put forward include " We can regard our life as a uselessly disturbing episode in the blissful repose of nothingness," and " It is bad today and every day it will get worse, until the worst of all happens." Basically his ideologies were mainly focused on the place of philosophy in love specifically in the concept of heart breaks. The philosophy of Schopenhauer is best described by the words of renowned American actress, Joan Crawford, " Love is a fire. But whether it is going to warm your heart or burn down your house, you can never tell." To this effect, Schopenhauer died a bachelor at age of 72years and the only affection he preferred was that of poodles that he felt possessed some unique qualities that human beings lacked; gentleness and humility. His affection for poodles developed at age 45. This does not mean that Schopenhauer was never in any relationship. In fact at the age of 33, Schopenhauer engaged in a romantic relationship with a 19year old singer, Caroline Medon. However, Schopenhauer refused to marry Medon after dating her for record 10years citing that " To marry means to do everything possible to become an object of disgust to each other."

Despite the fact that Schopenhauer's school of thought was selfish and

pessimistic. It is still to some extent applicable in today's world. The greatest aspect of his school of thought is the fact that he introduced the concept of free-will to the study of and application of philosophy in life. Today, it is clear that the will-to-life far outweighs the concept of reason and logic and this can be attributed to Schopenhauer. However, Schopenhauer's cynical perceptions as far as love and heartbreaks is concerned have no place in today's world. This is because just as the old adage states no man is an island. The need for companionship cannot be separated from human life. In fact, the philosophies of Epicurus advance this notion. To this effect, most of the world's problems can be attributed the cynical nature of a significant portion of its inhabitants. The cynical perspective of heartbreaks can be trace back to Schopenhauer.

The philosophy of Nietzsche

Nietzsche is accredited for coming up with the consolation of philosophy specifically in relation to difficulties. His works were based on the premise that all who expect fulfillment in life should expect to encounter numerous obstacle and challenges. It must also be mentioned Nietzsche's philosophical perspective was to a large extent a critique of Schopenhauer's school of thought. As earlier mentioned, in his works, Schopenhauer painted a grim picture of life and summed it up that man should live in a tiny " fireproof world." After reading the works of Schopenhauer at the tender age of 21, Nietzsche embarked on a mission to disapprove his pessimistic colleague. This is the reason why his philosophies assert the fact that fulfillment can be attained if one " lives dangerously rather than in small fireproof world." He

further asserts that pain is part and parcel of life and thus should be embraced rather shunned.

Nietzsche's school of thought is still relevant in the present day world. This is especially the case because today's generations lack the decency to accept that no pain no gain. This is the reason why most today are trapped in tiny cocoons for fear of being burnt by the larger world. Man today unrealistically expects to be fulfilled without experiencing difficulties. Generally, Nietzsche's school of thought advances for people to embrace not only pain but also challenges and difficulties. In addition, Nietzsche encourages man to be outgoing.

Conclusions

It is clear that de Botton's *The Consolations of Philosophy* is not a typical philosophical book. This is because of the fact that the book focuses more on the stories behind the various philosophical leanings of various philosophers rather than their philosophies. De Botton's book focused on the lives of Epicurus, Seneca, Socrates, Montaigne, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche. As a result, the central themes of the book are the philosophical consolations of difficulty, heartbreak, inadequacy, unpopular decisions, frustrations and poverty in human life and their significance in the present day world.

Works Cited

Botton, Alain de. *The Consolations of Philosophy*. New York: Pantheon Books, 2000.

Hooft, Stan van. *Philosophy As Therapy*. Melbourne, 20 May 2007.

<https://assignbuster.com/critical-essay-of-de-bottons-consolations-of-philosophy-critical-thinking-examples/>

Millett, Stephan and Alan Tapper. “ Benefits of Collaborative Philosophical Inquiry in Schools.” Educational Philosophy and Theory, 2011 (2011): 1-22.

Scheer, Steven C. “ A Review of Alain de Botton's Consolations of Philosophy (New York: Pantheon Books, 2000).” 20 November 2000. Bay Review. 19 June 2012 .

Schranz, Ann. The Consolations of Philosophy by the Rev. Ann Schranz Monte Vista Unitarian Universalist Congregation August 17, 2008. California, 17 August 2008.