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THE CONSOLATIONS OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

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my notes

Socrates' confidence was not from courage. It had been grounded in philosophy. Philosophy supplied Socrates with convictions in which he had been able to have rational, as opposed to hysterical, confidence when faced with disapproval.

Questioning conventions seems bizarre, even aggressive.

Conventions' judgements are deemed plainly too sensible to be the targets of scrutiny.

It seems implausible that our society could be gravely mistaken in its beliefs and at the same time that we would be alone in noticing the fact.

We stifle our doubts and follow the flock because we cannot conceive of ourselves as pioneers of hitherto unknown, difficult truths.

Our will to doubt can be just as powerfully sapped by an internal sense that societal conventions must have a sound basis, even if we are not sure exactly what this may be, because they have been adhered to by a great many people for a long time.

People may be wrong even when they are espousing beliefs held for centuries by vast majorities.

Look at Greece in the fifth century BC: They believed in many gods, sacrificed animals, owned one slave to every three of the free population. Women were unable either to inherit property or to own money.

A wealthy man can be admirable, but this depends on how wealth was acquired.

Just as poverty can not by itself reveal anything of the moral worth of an individual.

Examine beliefs logically.

A correct statement is one incapable of being rationally contradicted. A statement is true if it cannot be disproved.

Locate a statement confidently described as common sense.

Search for situations where the statement would not be true.

If found, the definition must be false or at least imprecise.

The initial statement must be nuanced to take the exception into account.

The product of thought is superior to the product of intuition.

We acquire a misplaced respect for others when we concentrate solely on their conclusions – which is why Socrates urged us to dwell on the logic they used to reach them.

One shouldn't respect all human opinions, but only those of people with understanding.

The validity of an idea or action is determined not by whether it is widely believed or widely reviled but by whether it obeys the rules of logic.

We seek doctors because they understand bodily maladies better than we can.

We should turn to philosophers for the same reason when our soul is unwell.

It's senseless to alarm yourself in advance about death - a state which you will never experience.

There is nothing terrible in not living.

Recipe book:

1. Identify a project for happiness: In order to be happy on holiday, I must live in a villa.
2. Imagine that the project may be false. Look for exceptions to the supposed link between the desired object and happiness. Could one possess the desired object but not be happy? Could one be happy but not have the desired object? Could I spend money on a villa and still not be happy? Could I be happy on holiday and not spend as much money as on a villa?
3. If an exception is found, the desired object cannot be a necessary and sufficient cause of happiness. It is possible to have a miserable time in a villa if I feel friendless and isolated. It is possible for me to be happy in a tent if I am with someone I love and feel appreciated by.
4. In order to be accurate about producing happiness, the initial project must be nuanced to take the exception into account. In so far as I can be happy in an expensive villa, this depends on being with someone I love and feel appreciated by. I can be happy without spending money on a villa, as long as I am with someone I love and feel appreciated by.
5. True needs may now seem very different from the confused initial desire. Happiness depends more on the possession of a congenial companion than a well-decorated villa.

Expensive objects can feel like plausible solutions to needs we don't understand.

Wealth beyond what is natural is of no more use than water to a container that is overflowing.

Businesses stimulate unnecessary desires in people who fail to understand their true needs.

Choice:

- * societies which stimulate unnecessary desires but achieve enormous economic strengths as a result

- * societies which would provide for essential material needs but could never raise living standards beyond subsistence, no technological advances, and little incentive to trade with distant continents.

It is this discontent that has driven life steadily onward, out to the high seas.

The only way to evaluate their merits is according to the pleasure they inspire.

Avoid superiors, patronization, infighting, and competition.

Philosophy helps us overcome conflicts between wishes and reality.

Attain wisdom by learning not to aggravate the world's obstinacy through our own responses, through spasms of rage, self-pity, anxiety, bitterness, self-righteousness and paranoia.

We best endure those frustrations which we have prepared ourselves for and understand, and are hurt most by those we least expected.

Anger results not from an uncontrollable eruption of the passions, but from a basic (and correctable) error of reasoning.

Because we are injured most by what we do not expect, we must expect everything.

Assume that what you fear may happen is certainly going to happen.

They believed there was somewhere on earth where they might be wholly safe. It's dangerous innocence.

The expectation of a future formed on the basis of probability, however rare, is a possibility we must ready ourselves for.

Fortune did not evaluate her victims.

Reassurance can be the cruellest antidote to anxiety.

Bad things probably will occur, but they are unlikely ever to be as bad as we fear.

There would be few great human achievements if we accepted all frustrations.

What need is there to weep over parts of life? The whole of it calls for tears.

Everything is too complicated for men to be able to understand.

Misplaced confidence in reason is the well-spring of idiocy.

A friend is someone kind enough to consider more of us normal than most people do.

Only that which makes us feel better may be worth understanding.

We prefer to quote rather than speak and think for ourselves
- to be immune from the most cruel attacks that can befall
original works - to not be held responsible for the ideas.

I am valued the more the farther from home knowledge of
me has spread.

Few men have been wonders to their families.

We are educated to associate virtue with submission to
textual authorities, rather than with an exploration within
ourselves.

We can derive greater insights from ourselves than from all
the books of old.

Whoever recalls to mind his last bout of anger sees the
ugliness of this passion better than in Aristotle.

Eradicate from our minds the erroneous notion that the
world has a great deal to offer us.

Readers not only recognized themselves, they also
understood themselves better as a result, for Goethe had
clarified moments that his readers would previously have
lived through, though would not necessarily have fathomed.

Direct our aim not to what is pleasant and agreeable in life, but to the avoidance, as far as possible, of its numberless evils.

The happiest lot is that of the man who has got through life without any very great pain, bodily or mental.

Fulfilment was to be reached not by avoiding pain, but by recognizing its role as a natural, inevitable step on the way to reaching anything good.

Goethe: These four men were perhaps the richest clues for what Nietzsche came in his maturity to understand by a fulfilled life. They had much in common. They were curious, artistically gifted, and sexually vigorous. Despite their dark sides, they laughed, and many of them danced, too; they were drawn to 'gentle sunlight, bright and buoyant air, southerly vegetation, the breath of the sea [and] fleeting meals of flesh, fruit and eggs'. Several of them had a gallows humour close to Nietzsche's own – a joyful, wicked laughter arising from pessimistic hinterlands. They had explored their possibilities, they possessed what Nietzsche called 'life', which suggested courage, ambition, dignity, strength of character, humour and independence (and a parallel absence of sanctimoniousness, conformity, resentment and prissiness).

How can anyone become a thinker if he does not spend at least a third of the day without passions, people and books?

Happiness can not be attained painlessly.

Timid slaves in the Roman Empire lacked the stomach to climb to the tops of mountains, so built themselves a philosophy claiming that their bases were delightful.

They wished to enjoy the real ingredients of fulfilment but did not have the courage to endure the difficulties these goods demanded.

We profess indifference to what we secretly long for but do not have.

Source: [The Consolations of Philosophy - by Alain De Botton | Derek Sivers](#)