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Eng101B

10 Dec. 2014

Who is Alain de Botton?

The author Alain de Botton has written many successful self-help books, but who is he as a person? His list of works includes *On Love*, *The Romantic Movement*, *Kiss and Tell*, *How Proust Can Change Your Life*, *The Art of Travel*, and *The Consolations of Philosophy*. He has become a fairly popular and successful philosopher and self-help author throughout the world has had his works translated into twenty different languages (de Botton , back cover). He seems to be a calm, patient, well educated person who desires to help his fellow human beings through the wisdom of long dead philosophers.

One way we can explore who Alain de Botton is is by watching “Seneca on Anger,” posted by spookybuk to Youtube, as a visual tie in to de Botton’s *The Consolations of Philosophy*. In the video you can see how de Botton interacts with other people while trying to explain senecan philosophy to them, and also to the viewer. The first person he interacts with is a man in Rome who drives every day for a living (spookybuk). As this man drives, he frequently becomes upset by other drivers that he believes shouldn’t be allowed to continue on the same roads because of their incompetence at driving (spookybuk). de Botton has a calm and level-headed conversation with the man despite the driver’s frustrations (spookybuk). By showcasing how he is able to avoid becoming upset while interacting with the frustrated man, the video gives us an example of de Botton being a calm and patient person. Now you may argue

that the video is scripted and it doesn't truly give us insight into de Botton as a person, but I believe that he came across as genuine rather than an actor playing a part.

Later on in the video we see him interact with another person, this time it is a marketing manager for a publishing company. He asks her about her job and her life to gauge what causes the most frustration in her life (spookybuk). He then tries to explain Seneca's beliefs to her to try to help her cope with her causes of frustration (spookybuk). Throughout the interaction he shows us that he genuinely wants to help her overcome these causes of frustration so that she can live a happier life. This act of helping others find happiness tells us that de Botton is a selfless person who endeavours to improve the life of those around him.

Perhaps it is this characteristic of wanting to help others that has led him to become a self-help author. Through writing, he is able to reach many more people than he would otherwise be capable of by walking through the streets one at a time like Socrates did (de Botton 14). Throughout his book *The Consolations of Philosophy* he uses sentence structure that is easy to follow, yet not so simple as to be condescending. He uses high level diction, such as the words "anthropomorphic," "oscillate," and "assiduously" that show that he is well educated and an experienced wordsmith (de Botton 92-93, 107). Throughout the video he also enunciates well and chooses his words deliberately (spookybuk). Based off of these reasons, de Botton appears to be a well educated man that is trying to spread the knowledge he has gained about life. Generally people tend to be more likely to take advice from someone they see as well educated, which likely aids de Botton in offering people help finding happiness.

Early in the video de Botton mentions that he sees anger as a large problem in our everyday lives (spookybuk). Maybe this was caused by personal experience dealing with angry

people as he grew up. Or maybe it was just based off of observing how frustrated people interacted with each other. While these are just guesses without more research into his earlier life, they do seem to align with de Botton's chosen goal of taking on anger and frustration. The fact that he has chosen anger and deal with the hostilities that come with it shows us that he truly wants to help people. If he was only writing self help-books for the money then perhaps he wouldn't have taken on as tough an issue as everyday frustration.

Throughout his works we can form an image of what kind of person Alain de Botton really is. Alain de Botton is clearly well educated. He is a calm and patient person who strives to improve the lives of other people he interacts with. He is selfless and continues to try to help people through their frustrations even when they are acting irrationally. Overall, he is a good person and he exemplifies many attributes which people should emulate if they wish to lead happier, more fulfilled lives.

Works Cited

de Botton, Alain. *The Consolations of Philosophy*. New York: Vintage, 2001. Print.

spookybuk. "03 - Seneca on Anger - Philosophy: A Guide to Happiness." YouTube. YouTube, 23 May, 2012. Web. 17 Oct. 2014