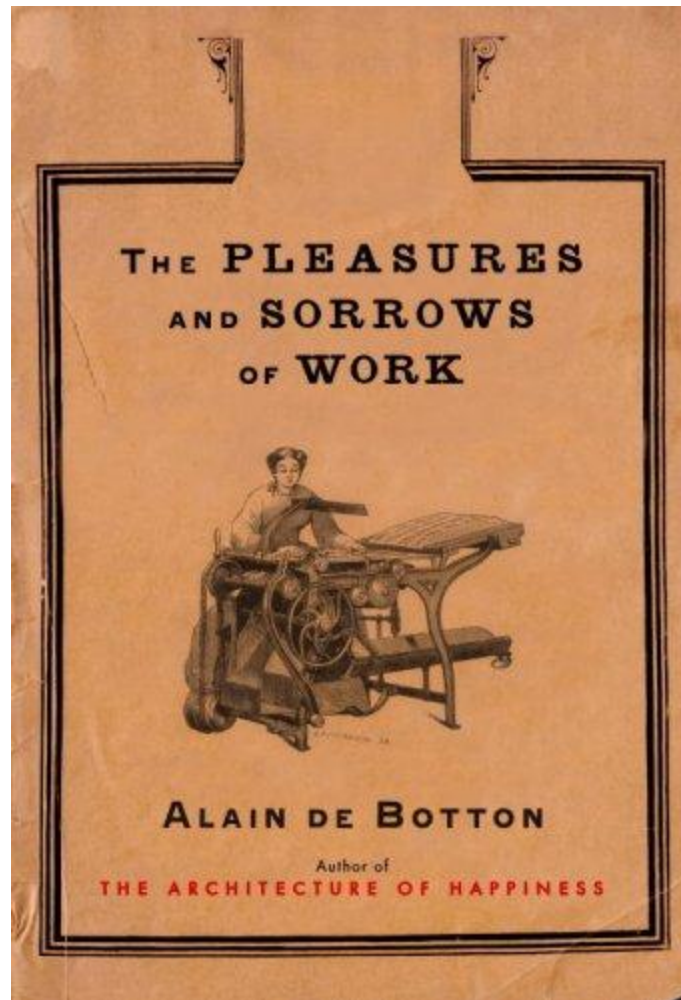


The Pleasures and Sorrows of Work: t/c by Alain De Botton



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Book Description We spend most of our waking lives at work—in occupations often chosen by our unthinking younger selves. And yet we rarely ask ourselves how we got there or what our occupations mean to us. *The Pleasures and Sorrows of Work* is an exploration of the joys and perils of the modern workplace, beautifully evoking what other people wake up to do each day—and night—to make the frenzied contemporary world function. With a philosophical eye and his signature combination of wit and wisdom, Alain de Botton leads us on a journey around a deliberately eclectic range of occupations, from rocket science to biscuit manufacture, accountancy to art—in search of what make jobs either fulfilling or soul-destroying.

Along the way he tries to answer some of the most urgent questions we can ask about work: Why do we do it? What makes it pleasurable? What is its meaning? And why do we daily exhaust not only ourselves but also the

planet? Characteristically lucid, witty and inventive, Alain de Botton's "song for occupations" is a celebration and exploration of an aspect of life which is all too often ignored and a book that shines a revealing light on the essential meaning of work in our lives.

Alain de Botton on The Pleasures and Sorrows of Work

I wrote *The Pleasures and Sorrows of Work* to shine a spotlight on the working world. I wanted to write a book that would open our eyes to the beauty and occasional horror of the working world—and I did this by looking at 10 different industries, a deliberately eclectic range from accountancy to engineering, from biscuit manufacture to logistics. The strangest thing about the world of work is the widespread expectation that our work should make us happy. For thousands of years, work was viewed as something to be done with as rapidly as possible and escaped in the imagination through alcohol or religion. Aristotle was the first of many philosophers to state that no one could be both free and obliged to earn a living. A more optimistic assessment of work had to wait until the eighteenth century and men like Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Benjamin Franklin, who for the first time argued that one's working life could be at the centre of any desire for happiness. It was during this century that our modern ideas about work were formed—at the very same time as our modern ideas about love and marriage took shape.

In the pre-modern age, it was assumed that no one could try to be in love and married: marriage was something one did for purely commercial reasons. Things were going well if you maintained a tepid friendship with your spouse. Meanwhile, love was something you did with your mistress, with pleasure untied to the responsibilities of child-rearing. Yet the new philosophers of love argued that one might actually aim to marry the person one was in love with rather than just have an affair. To this unusual idea was added the even more peculiar notion that one might work both for money and to realise one's dreams, an idea that replaced the previous assumption that the day job took care of the rent and anything more ambitious had to happen in one's spare time.

We are the heirs of these two very ambitious beliefs: that you can be in love and married, and in a job and having a good time. It has become as impossible for us to think that you could be out of work and happy as it had once seemed impossible for Aristotle to think that you could be employed and human. Thus is born *The Pleasures and Sorrows of Work*. —Alain de Botton

(Photo © Roderick Field)

Personal Review: The Pleasures and Sorrows of Work: t/c by Alain De Botton

So, do you live to work or work to live? The idea of finding fulfillment in work is a relatively new concept that emerged in the age of enlightenment. Alain De Botton is one of my very favorite authors. He brings the mind of a philosopher and the compassion of a loving friend to all his writing. In his latest book he explores our relationship with work.

From the book jacket, *The Pleasures and Sorrows of Work* is an exploration of the joys and perils of the modern workplace, beautifully evoking what other people wake up to do each day--and night--to make the frenzied contemporary world function. With a philosophical eye and his signature combination of wit and wisdom, Alain de Botton leads us on a journey around a deliberately eclectic range of occupations, from rocket science to biscuit manufacture, accountancy to art--in search of what make jobs either fulfilling or soul-destroying.

When I work with clients I often ask them, What would you do if you won the lottery? Its amazing how many very successful, wealthy people hate their work. For many it has become a set of golden handcuffs that keeps them obliged to continue due to supporting children and spouses in a high end lifestyle. They may indulge in material pleasures, but this only leads to momentary relief since the debt only keeps them even more attached to a life that no longer engages or fulfills them with any sense of meaning or purpose.

Theodore Millon, the father of the DSM-IV (American Psychiatric Diagnostic manual) view of personality theory, said that people can be divided along two lines. Those who actively seek out pleasure or those who passively seek to avoid pain. While reading this book it was amazing to see how many people are not even aware of the choices they make with their own lives.

Botton concludes that your view of work depends upon your ability to create a meaningful life, add value to something you believe in, and to receive appreciation for your efforts.

If you are in a job of sorrow, your life will require a combination of distraction, recuperation, coffee and alcohol. For those poor souls, self-awareness only adds to their misery and Botton describes these people as deserving pity, but being unaware of the need for it.

If you want to look at work and life through a wider lens, I strongly recommend this book.

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