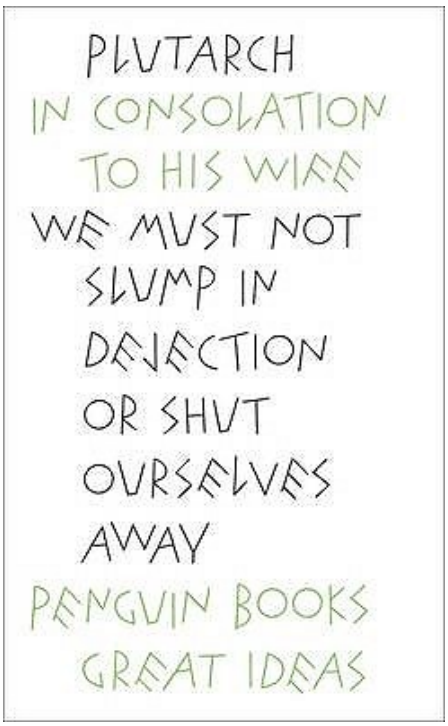

In Consolation to His Wife

Plutarch

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In Consolation to His Wife Plutarch
From an intimate and moving letter to his grieving wife on the death of their daughter, to elegant writings on morality, happiness and the avoidance of anger, Plutarch's powerful words of consolation and inspiration still offer timeless wisdom and guidance today.

Throughout history, some books have changed the world. They have transformed the way we see ourselves – and each other. They have inspired debate, dissent, war and revolution. They have enlightened, outraged, provoked and comforted. They have enriched lives – and destroyed them. Now Penguin brings you the works of the great thinkers, pioneers, radicals and visionaries whose ideas shook civilization and helped make us who we are.

In Consolation to His Wife Details

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From Reader Review In Consolation to His Wife for online ebook

Doug Newdick says

Plutarch and the ancient philosophy of stoicism still has a lot to teach us about how to live our modern hectic lives. This short book has some great advice about grief in the title essay, as well as ideas about how to manage anger and how to make yourself more content with your life. A great corrective to the current obsession with self-help literature.

Tim says

I had never read Plutarch. This is really superb philosophy, clearly written and argued. Consolations to his wife is especially touching. On Moral progress provides a wonderfully secular view on moral reasoning. Now starting the section on Controlling Anger.

Laurène Poret says

Whenever I read authors from Ancient Greece or Rome, I find it astonishing how it is still of actuality today. I realize now that it is mostly because of how great the influence of these civilization was onto ours and how much we still depend on it.

The letter from Plutarch to his wife was interesting but I largely preferred the 3 following chapters, because I can relate more to their subjects.
It is a short read but full of wise advices, and anyone should take a look at it!

Steve Mitchell says

The message of this book is basically cheer up and look on the bright side; only put much better than that.

Maya says

Fantastic, interesting, compact read about grief, moral progress, anger, and contentment. Highly recommend this for people interested in subjects including psychology, therapy, emotional adjustment, and/or philosophy.

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... when Zeus was distributing recognition among the gods, Grief asked for some as well; so Zeus allowed Grief to be acknowledged - but only by people who deliberately wanted to acknowledge it. (5) - as told by

Aesop

Mental distress abates and subsides to a great extent when it is dispersed in physical calm, as waves subside in fair weather, but if as a result of a bad regimen the body becomes sordid and foul and transmits to the mind nothing benign or beneficial, but only the harsh and unpleasant fumes of pain and distress, then even those who desire it find that recovery becomes too hard to achieve. (6)

... although when someone has an eye infection, people don't let just anyone touch it or treat the inflammation, people who are grieving sit and let everyone who comes by prod at their running sore, so to speak, and aggravate the condition, until instead of being an insignificant itching irritation, it erupts into a seriously disagreeable affliction. (7)

... happiness is a consequence of correctly using the rational mind for the goal of a stable state, ... (8)

... reason gradually illuminates and purifies the mind by pushing back imperfection as if it were darkness. (15)

p. 15 includes a paragraph in which Plutarch describes principles applicable to Applied Behavior Analysis, and a similar paragraph relating to CBT techniques on p. 18

Repeated effort levels the path. (18)

It is impossible to stop trying to conform to behavior the majority of people admire unless one has become accustomed to admire virtue instead. (20)

'We will not exchange our virtue for their wealth, since the one is permanent and stable, but different people have money at different times. (20) (quoting Solon)

[A king] is a greater man than me only if he is more moral. (20)

Antiphanes used to tell an amusing story about a city where, as soon as anyone spoke, the sound of his voice was frozen solid, and then later, when it thawed out in the summer, they heard what had been said in the winter; likewise, he added, what Plato said to people when they were still young only just got through to most of them much later, when they were old. (21)

... attention and repeated intense effort enable people to notice and absorb the implicit virtue in everything. (24)

If genuine love for a young man or for a woman does not seek witnesses, but reaps its harvest of pleasure even if it fulfills its desire in secret, then it is even more likely that someone who loves goodness and wisdom, who is intimate and involved with virtue because of his actions, will be quietly self-assured within himself, and will have no need of an admiring audience. (26)

Someone who dislikes actual iniquity more than he dislikes an adverse reputation does not avoid being reproached, and reproaching others himself, if the object is moral improvement. (30)

The more a person denies any defect, the more he immerses and imprisons himself in the vice. (30)

Commendation of virtue is also tepid and ineffective unless it nudges us and goads us to stop being envious

and instead to want - with a desire that demands satisfaction - to emulate good behavior. (35)

... those whose clay is at the stage when fingertips are required have the hardest task. (39) Polyclitus (Polykleitos) said this.

Anger can often be terrifying - but often ridiculous: that is why it is often the most hated and despised of the emotions; and it is useful to be aware of both these aspects. (46)

Anger is worse than undiluted wine at producing undisciplined and disagreeable results: wine's results are blended with laughter, jokes, and singing, while anger's results are blended with bitter gall; and anyone who is silent while drinking is irritating and annoying to his companions, whereas there is nothing more dignified than silence when angry, as Sappho recommends: 'When anger takes over your heart. guard your babbling tongue.' (49)

... most people mistake [anger's] turmoil for effectiveness, its menace for courage, its inflexibility for strength; and some people even call its callousness prowess, its stubbornness energy and its asperity righteous indignation. But this is wrong, because the actions, behavior, and conduct it prompts betray its pettiness and weakness. (50)

Reason is more authoritative than passion. (56)

Respect engenders in people the kind of fear which entails self-restraint, while non-stop, relentless flogging does not instill remorse for past misdeeds, but rather the intention to get away with it in the future. (56)

... people who want little are seldom disappointed. (61)

... anger seems to be a kind of conglomerate of emotional seeds. It contains elements extracted from pain and pleasure and arrogance; it has the gloating pleasure of spite, and also gets its method of grappling from spite, in the sense that the avoidance of its own suffering is not the purpose of its efforts, but it accepts harm to itself while destroying the other person; and one of its ingredients is the form of desire which is the most disagreeable of all, the longing to hurt someone else. (64-65)

... anger is pitiful to anyone who can see that its desires and its pleasures involve pain. (65)

How on earth can assets or a reputation or power at court contribute towards having a mind that is free of distress and a life that is calm as a millpond unless their possession and use are pleasant, but at the same time they are never missed if they are lacking? (70)

It is the shoe that bends along with the foot, not the other way around ... disposition moulds life. (74)

... it is rational intelligence which makes the life one already has both the best one and the most pleasant one. (74)

There's no point in getting angry with one's situation, because it is utterly indifferent; but success will accrue to anyone who treats the situation he encounters correctly. (74)

Thyme, the most acrid and dry of plants, provides bees with honey; and likewise intelligent people can invariably find something congruent with and useful to themselves from the most forbidding of situations. (75)

It is crazy to be upset about what one has lost and not feel happy about what one has kept; otherwise, we are behaving like little children who, when deprived of just one of their many toys, wail and scream and throw all the rest of their toys away. (80)

When you find yourself overawed by the apparent superiority of a man being carried in a sedan chair, make sure you look down and also see those who are keeping him off the ground... (83)

We habitually live, out of stupidity, with our attention on others rather than on ourselves. (84)

A major impediment to contentment is the failure to keep our desires furled or unfurled, so to speak, in a way which is commensurate with the prevailing potential. Instead, we give them too much slack through our hopes, and then when we fail, we blame fate and fortune, but not our own stupidity. We wouldn't describe as unfortunate anyone who wanted to shoot with his plough and hunt hares with his cow, now would we say that anyone who fails to capture deer or boar with fishing-baskets or seines is being opposed by bad luck; it is stupidity and silliness which are setting him to impossible endeavors. The chief cause is in fact self-love, which makes people ambitious and competitive whatever the situation, ... (85-86)

When flies settle on mirrors, they skid off the smooth parts but cling on to places which are rough and scratched; this is an analogy for how people slide away from happy, congenial matters and get caught up in their memories of unpleasant things. (91)

What we should do is treat the mind like a painting, and the events the mind recalls are like the colors, and so give prominence to what is bright and vivid, and push anything gloomy into obscurity of the background. (91)

In music there are low notes and high notes, and in grammar there are vowels and consonants, and musicianship and literacy do not come from disliking and avoiding one or the other extreme, but from knowing how to make use of them all, and how to blend them into an appropriate mixture. Events too contain polarity: as Euripides says, 'Good and bad are inseparable, but blending is possible, so make things fine.' (91-92)

Shawn says

Short read that I knocked out in a couple hours on a rainy day off in a bookstore.
Philosophical work broken down into four parts. Started out weak and got much better as it went on.
Each section was better than the last.

Sharon Hughes says

Soothes the sole.

Bryan says

This book has four of Plutarch's works which pretty much focus on how to deal with such things as grief,

moral progress, anger, and contentment. He uses wonderful analogies that are very relevant to today's world and I constantly found myself highlighting my favorites, chief among them was:

"The chief thing, then, to practice and pursue is the attitude exemplified by the man whose stone missed his dog and hit his stepmother: 'That's not bad either!' he said. It is possible to change opportunities so that they are no longer unwelcome."

Ana Rînceanu says

This was beautifully written, but a bit too formal for my comfort. I mean I get the whole Stoicism thing, but this is taking it a little too far for my 21st century sensibilities.

Michael E. says

Brilliant, and strong.

Daniel Wright says

Plutarch is more well-known as a biographer, but as this short selection of essays/letters shows (from the *Moralia*), he was also a philosopher of some acuity and intelligence, as well as deep sincerity and wisdom.

In consolation to his wife

People in the developed world these days, when reading in history about the families that lost children - almost all of them, quite often, and quite often many in quick succession - tend to (somewhat patronisingly) console themselves with the idea that they were used to it back then, because it was more common, and so a child's death would not be greeted with the emotional devastation that we would feel. Sadly, though, this idea is a self-made lie, as the primary evidence of people actually had to deal with such loss shows. Once such incident is this letter of Plutarch to his wife on the death of their daughter. He speaks of the child with moving sensitivity and affection. But what is most striking about it is the consolation he offers. He proposes an absolute shut-down of all the feelings of grief and loss: not to dwell on it, not to talk about it or think about it, even to avoid all situations that might serve as reminders of it. In our post-Freudian world we all have subliminal ideas about 'repression', and worry about the lasting effects of this; but perhaps we would do better to listen to some ancient wisdom.

On being aware of moral progress

Do you ever get into that irritating spiral of thought where you start by feeling pleased with yourself, and then you feel bad about feeling good about yourself, and then you feel good about feeling bad about feeling good about yourself, and so on? With hindsight, of course, and in description, it's just absurd and amusing, and the real solution is to stop thinking about yourself at all. It is, at any rate, an age-old problem: how can you become virtuous, Plutarch asks, while concentrating on becoming virtuous? But how can you avoid the easy backslide into vice without supreme efforts of the will? How do knowledge of your own virtue, other peoples' knowledge of your virtue, and your knowledge of other peoples' virtue, relate to each other? He

offers no easy answers, but plentiful and perceptive advice that bears a good deal of contemplation.

On the avoidance of anger

When painters work on a painting, they should constantly be looking over their work, says Sulla in this dialogue, re-examining it, forming in their minds a continuous familiarity with it. Likewise, says Fundanus, it is with anger; we should never cease to impose our rational will upon our passions, until by force of habit we attain patience and disinterested justice. This is something else we would do well to learn. I have been told, too many times, by the well-meaning but misguided, that 'bottling up' anger is dangerous, and the best thing to do is 'let it all out'. But in this modern science agrees with ancient philosophy. Controlling anger is hard, and we should not make it harder by troubling ourselves with wishful thinking.

On contentment

This last one was a little disappointing, but that, I think, is mostly a mark of how much I enjoyed the previous ones. Here, Plutarch explicitly opposes Epicurus to advise not the avoidance of pain, but the cultivation of the correct and virtuous attitude towards it.

Alan says

If this anthology had just been the first letter *In Consolation to His Wife* I'd have probably given this book two stars -- luckily it's not. Plutarch is so clear and his message is timeless: keep a clear head and look forward to whatever comes --the good and the bad.

In Consolation to His Wife is a troubling letter, and it does not stand well by today's norms. I can't imagine telling your beloved to 'remember a time before our daughter existed' or to 'pretend she never existed at all'. At some times Plutarch is quite touching, but overall his stoic approach to tragedy seems a bit misplaced.

On Being Aware of Moral Progress, On the Avoidance of Anger and *On Contentment* are really where this anthology shines. Each essay is so unbelievably lucid that I still can't believe this is my first Plutarchian text. It's as if I'm reading a self-help book written in 2018. Plutarch is a testament to the human experience and well worth the read -- I look forward to reading the rest of his writings.

Amanda says

A long time friend of mine recommended this letter to me. It was a short read and excellent. It was emphatic and compassionate. The description of grief and the recommendations of coping with it are adaptive and mature. The next time that I loose something major in my life I hope that I have the sense to re-read this letter.

Ryan Holiday says

Grief and the relief of grief is a theme in Greek and Roman literature-some say meant more for publication than actual consolation-but that doesn't make them any less powerful. The Roman Stoic philosopher Seneca's

best Consolation is his essay to his mother, written after two of his children died and he had been sent into exile. Astoundingly, the letter is FROM him to HER, trying to make her feel better. Plutarch's is to his wife after learning that their two-year-old daughter had died. He has a great line that I think applies to anyone who has tried to comfort someone who is grieving. When someone's house is on fire, he says, we rush to throw water on it to put the fire out. Yet, when someone's mind is on fire-when they are mad with grief-the neighbors bring fuel. They bring memories (and their own tears and emotions) and try to talk about the person and tell them how it's all O.K. and all the other nonsense we spout in these times. What they don't do is try to put the fire out. Plutarch's "In Consolation to his Wife" is here to put that fire out.

Tony says

Charming. The section on anger is excellent.
