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A Philosophy Of Walking



Synopsis

It is only ideas gained from walking that have any worth. • "Nietzsche In A Philosophy of Walking, a bestseller in France, leading thinker Frédéric Gros charts the many different ways we get from A to B – the pilgrimage, the promenade, the protest march, the nature ramble – and reveals what they say about us. Gros draws attention to other thinkers who also saw walking as something central to their practice. On his travels he ponders Thoreau's eager seclusion in Walden Woods; the reason Rimbaud walked in a fury, while Nerval rambled to cure his melancholy. He shows us how Rousseau walked in order to think, while Nietzsche wandered the mountainside to write. In contrast, Kant marched through his hometown every day, exactly at the same hour, to escape the compulsion of thought. Brilliant and erudite, A Philosophy of Walking is an entertaining and insightful manifesto for putting one foot in front of the other. From the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

What we have here is a number of short chapters, each having to do with walking in some way. The emphasis is on public and literary figures who did a lot of walking (Nietzsche, Gérard de Nerval, Rimbaud, Gandhi etc.) or who mention walking in their writing (Proust's Guermantes and Swann's Ways, for example). The book is clearly inspired by and modeled on Thoreau's long essay Walking, which is available for free on the internet and is very much worth reading or re-reading. Like Thoreau, the author goes quite far afield, using walking as a jumping-off place for his own personal ideas, which often seem like random personal comments and biographical

summaries of the authors mentioned. I had hoped to hear more on just what how they used walking to shape their ideas, or how their ideas shaped their walking activities, but the author just seemed to use walking as a clothesline to hang some of his own views on. Some of the chapters do have interesting and perceptive comments: as he points out, sporting events typically involve an attempt to overcome gravity, while walking is a matter of yielding to it: completing it, rather than transgressing it, as he puts it (of course, I might have disagreed with this while walking up Mount Katahdin a couple years ago). Gros doesn't give much insight into the role of walking in today's society: why is it that instead of walking and climbing in the open air, people willingly pay hundreds of dollars to gyms to use treadmills and stair climbers, activities which served as punishment for criminals in previous centuries! And the book short-changes long-distance hikes like the Appalachian Trail, Pacific Crest Trail, and similar hikes in Europe. As an AT hiker, I was looking forward to what the author might tell us about the meaning which such hikes (and their increasing popularity) might have for today's society or for their participants. No such luck. The book does discuss the Santiago de Compostela pilgrimage, but only in terms of its medieval aspects, and in the context of penance. I suspect that most of the thousands who follow that route today would have a different outlook on it. And competitive walking (hiking speed records or heel-and-toe racewalking) is completely ignored: in the first chapter, he actually denies its existence, perhaps through wishful thinking. Gandhi's Salt March is described at length, but the book never mentions marches for civil rights and gay rights, mass protest marches (Europe, China, the Arab Spring, etc.) And the book has a number of factual errors: Santiago de Compostela is not at Europe's westernmost point, for example. On the whole, I didn't feel that I got a great deal of insight into the meaning of walking in life today. I'd suggest reading Thoreau instead.

A daily walker who believes strongly in the power of the "E-word" (exercise), I jumped at the chance to order this book. What I expected was a series of essays about the author's walking experiences and his insights and epiphanies during these experiences. I was wrong. This book is much, much more than that. Divided into 25 short chapters, the reader can begin with Chapter One and continue in a systematic chapter-by-chapter manner, or she can jump around, start at the end and work backwards, or dip into the book and read selected paragraphs at random. Whatever the reading choice, the passages are thought provoking and informative. I started with Chapter One, "Walking is Not a Sport," and then moved on to Chapter Three about Nietzsche. I knew that he was an almost fanatical walker, but I didn't know that he became mad and was cared for by his mother who "washed and tidied him, consoled him, took him for walks, watched over him night and day. For

seven years." I also learned that Rousseau claimed to be incapable of thinking properly or finding inspiration except when he was walking. And then there's Gandhi who valued the spiritual and political benefits of walking. The book is a must-read for walkers. Not only will they get those "aha moments" when reading the author's insights, but they will also learn much about famous folks who have loved the activity of being out in nature strolling, ambling, marching, tromping, striding, or traipsing.

I cannot say enough good things about this book! There is usually a book I go wild for each year and this is this year's book. It will be given to friends who will appreciate and wind up adoring this book. Granted, this is not a book for everyone though. This is truly a philosophy book and it says it right in the title. This is a book about the essence of walking, the experience of walking, the disdain of walking, and famous walking philosophers. Due to this, it is not a mass market book. I am a contemplative who enjoys thinking while walking or running. I resonated with many of the points the author made about slowing down, enjoying the essence of life, and breathing it all in. This hit every pleasure nerve in my contemplative body, hence the excitement behind this book. This is a book about why we walk and the experience of walking rather than about walking. If you enjoy philosophy, contemplation, and really deep and rich writing, walk (don't run) and grab this one. My first truly exciting 5 star of the year.

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