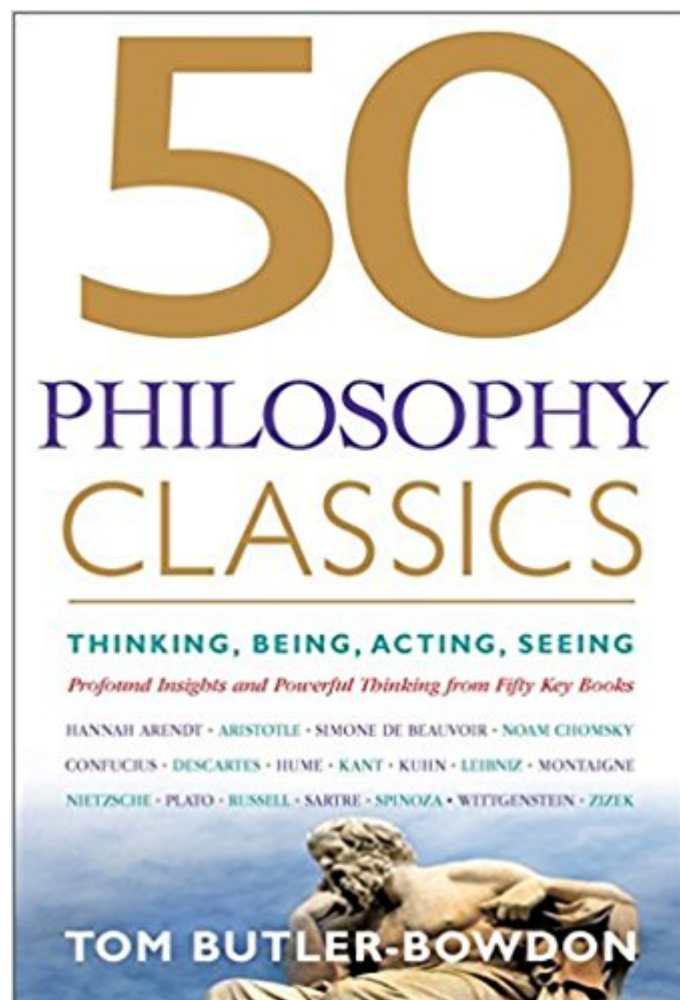




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# 50 Philosophy Classics: Thinking, Being, Acting, Seeing, Profound Insights And Powerful Thinking From Fifty Key Books (50 Classics)



## Synopsis

A stunning survey of the "king of disciplines," 50 Philosophy Classics seeks to enlighten and explain, rather than merely instruct. Tom Butler-Bowdon has compiled a remarkable group of thinkers and their seminal works to serve as a lively entry point to the field of philosophy. Analyses of ancient and modern philosophers show how philosophy helped shape the events human history.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This book explains and discusses briefly, but with remarkable lucidity, some of the ideas of fifty philosophical thinkers from ancient times to the present-day. Complex views on a whole range of important and enduring issues are made accessible to the general reader. A sympathetic account is given of each thinker and his or her thoughts, conveying the insights and capturing some of the excitement of seeing the world and human life from novel, distinctive, or unusual perspectives. The book is both enjoyable and instructive.â•C.L. Ten, Professor of Philosophy, National University of Singapore

Tom Butler-Bowdon is recognised as an expert on the personal development literature. His 50 Classics series has been hailed as the definitive guide to the literature of possibility, and has won numerous awards including the Benjamin Franklin Self-Help Award and the Foreword Magazine's Book of the Year Award. A graduate of the London School of Economics and the University of

Sydney, he lives and works in both the Oxford, UK and Australia, and runs a successful website:  
[www.butler-bowdon.com](http://www.butler-bowdon.com)

How could you not love this book, with our Philosophical heroes all line up like ducks in a row? The text is tightly written, without fluff or fat – as in, to the point. He hits the sweet spot of each Philosophy every time. Beautifully and tersely summarizing them before the fact, with deep and revealing epigrams. That, plus the meat of each philosopher's respective biographies, and what more can you ask of a single book? What more is there left to be said? Well, how about the summary of the philosophy of one of my heroes, Physicist, David Bohm, plus the summary of his life and career as well as a summary of his tour de force, "Wholeness and the Implicate Order (WATIO)"? I have read six books by him, including WATIO, and got only a tad bit more out of them than the author's condensed entry here. To wit: The universe is one flowing whole, a holomovement, as it were, where space is more like a "field" – pregnant with potential energy, and where matter is better understood as a form of energy than as a collection of individual atoms. Those tiny atoms, are just projections of a single totality. There is no empty space; the vacuum is teeming with activity of transient energy burst that go in and out of existence in an instance. Everything is a unified field and nowhere is there a break or a division. Atoms are like the patterns of flowers on a carpet. But it is only the trace of their energy potential that we can measure as matter. It thus makes no more sense to speak of atoms as being separate from the universe, as it does to speak of patterns of flowers as being separate from the carpet? Or, take the summary of Hanna Arendt's philosophy: We have become a society of jobholders. But is it not, she asks, a better life to become heroes in our own life stories? WHAT we are is our bodies; WHO we are are our actions disclosed in our words and deeds. It is our ability to act that gives our lives meaning and a new beginning – fully justifying hope and faith. History is just a chronicle of the ways we make heroes of ourselves, as we exceed our own expectations. Or, take the summary of Michel Foucault's philosophy: Every age turns its unconscious assumptions into categories of knowledge about how the world is ordered, making the flavor of knowledge quite different from one age to another. Knowledge thus is a cultural product, with different disciplines simply being different expressions of the prevailing world view. Or take the entry on Hegel's difficult "Phenomenology of the spirit": Hegel thinks it is either mad or lazy to restrict the "knowledge project," – including science – just to the material world. Full understanding requires taking into account everything, not just the material, but also the spiritual. Objective scientific analysis is thus an illusion because with it, things exist only in the

context of the perceptions of the observer. But subject, object and the act of observing, are all of one piece, therefore, scientific facts are an illusion "unless that is, consciousness is involved as a primary existential component. However, even here Hegel is speaking of a kind of consciousness that requires reason, and when feelings are applied to a consciousness that requires reason, its okay to say that god operates in the Universe, so long as he too does so under the canopy of reason. Only then is it okay to say that the god of reason is the universal. There is also Martin Heidegger's difficult "Being in Time," where he suggests that Analytical Philosophy, arguing over the existence of the world, or what we can know, is a waste of time. The real question for philosophy is: What is personhood? What is it like to be a human being bound by space and time? He rejects Schopenhauer's notion that the world is merely projections of the mind, and believes that consciousness truly exists "within the world." Thus, he concludes that there is much more to "being" than meets the eye, especially if you place consciousness out "in the world," as opposed to just allowing it to be "an observing consciousness." Descartes' "I think, therefore I am" is not the only way to know existence. Heidegger's "I care, therefore I exist" is also a way of doing so too. It is the emotional unfolding of our consciousness into the world that puts the "being" in human beings. Thus, Heidegger sees three modes of operating in the world: the "looking around" mode; the "looking at other beings" mode; and the "looking through ourselves" mode. As a unit of self-reflective consciousness of an individual, there is "being there" "that is, being thrown out into the world to construct meanings and to defend our survival through our own actions. Emotions are our guide-beam to actions. They enable us to "respond in the world," in the moment. The authentic individual realizes that he is free and is, within the limits of community, the master of his freedom. Or, Soren Kierkegaard's belief that the essence of knowledge is not doubt but passion, which he calls faith, or trust. People can be heroes in three ways: to themselves, to others, or to the absolute god. Faith means to not ever give up on our actions in the world. It is a leap of faith that unites us with what is universal in the world. And then there is the grand dean of philosophers, Friedrich Nietzsche, who reminds us in "Beyond Good and Evil," that while philosophy is seen as an expression of the "will to truth," this is just an arbitrary prejudice, it could just as easily have been a "will to untruth." There is no such thing as "moral phenomena," just "moral interpretations of phenomena." This being the case, we are all free to pursue our natural courses of self-preservation, a selfish course that could involve dissembling, distrust, evasion, etc. The sick ones are not those who are selfish,

but those who do otherwise? Then there is Schopenhauer, who tells us that mature people try to live beyond themselves, because they believe there is a reality beyond our senses that we can never know. What we sense is brain projections onto the screen we call *Ämind*. The brain projection works because the reality we cannot see is ordered. That is to say, it too is based on time and space and operates according to *Äcause and effect*. The past and the future are as empty and as unreal as any dream. History is a story told in the eye of the beholder. Our will, is just our primal urges, molded into our character. The primary urge is to survival, but mature people seek to transcend survival. Finally, there is Jean Paul Sartre's magisterial *ÄBeing and Nothingness (BAN)*: *Ä Consciousness exists for itself because it can comprehend itself. It is embedded within a body that is then embedded within the world. Even though existence precedes essence, people are born with no essential essence. What they find at the center of their being is nothing. But this nothing turns out to be something great, since it means that we are totally free to create the self or the life of meaning we want. Human reality does not exist first in order to act later. For human reality, to be, is to act. I act, therefore, I am.* BAN is thus a warning that life is not just about its facts, but also about how consciousness is free to guide our actions *Ä" that is, so long as we accept this freedom in good faith by taking responsibility for everything that happens to us.* See what I'm taking about? Touch *Ä to Mr. Butler-Bowdon, and five stars*

This is like holding a philosophical library in your hand. Read this book and you will know the most important information from 50 philosophy books. What better leverage of your time can you get.

This collection of summaries of 50 Philosophical classics is a fascinating read and a great conversation starter. The skillful summaries contain sufficient information to give the reader a working understanding of the key ideas in each volume, as well as a feel for the life and times of the author. I've found that the clever "In a nutshell" section captures the thesis of each book in a single sentence, and serves as a useful hook to start a discussion with like minded friends. Tom Butler-Bowden is using a very effective formula for his series of "50 Classics" and this latest example is highly recommended.

a great read. Stuffed with all the top thinkers and their ideas. The commentary is wonderful and insightful. I could of used this book years ago when I took philosophy.

Great book.

Tom is one of the best researchers and synthesizers of complex works I have ever known. He does a wonderful job of simplifying the complex, no easy feat when you look at the philosophers covered here. He makes important but obscure works accessible to the masses, and for that he truly is helping to move humanity forward. This is a definite must read along with his other "50 classics" books.

I am very pleased with this book, and I highly recommend all his series of books

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