

10 COMPARABLE/COMPETITIVE BOOKS

How In Conversations with the Great Philosophers Differs

1. *A Little History of Philosophy* — Nigel Warburton

What it does:

Warburton introduces major Western philosophers chronologically in forty short chapters, combining their lives with explanations of their principal ideas. It is one of the strongest comparisons because it is specifically designed to make philosophy approachable for the general reader.

How *In Conversations with the Great Philosophers*

differs:

Warburton tells the reader **about** philosophers. *In Conversations* lets the reader **meet** them.

Instead of primarily

explaining a philosopher's ideas from the outside, Roger sits down with the philosopher and asks the questions an ordinary reader might want to ask.

Each philosopher also

confronts the same Timeless Questions about happiness, failure, fear, becoming better, purpose, death, and mistakes.

Accessibility distinction:

The reader learns philosophy through conversation rather than exposition.

2. *The Consolations of Philosophy* — Alain de Botton

What it does:

De Botton uses the ideas of six philosophers to address ordinary human problems such as heartbreak, money, frustration, inadequacy, and difficulty.

How *In Conversations* differs:

This is an especially good comparison because both books believe philosophy should be useful in everyday life.

But de Botton interprets

philosophical ideas **for** the reader. Roger goes directly to the philosophers and engages them in imagined conversations.

In Conversations also has a much broader

cast of thinkers and allows their different approaches to the same fundamental human questions to emerge.

Accessibility distinction:

Instead of being told what a philosopher might teach us, the reader can experience the idea unfolding through questions, answers, disagreement, humor, and practical examples.

3. *Philosophy For Dummies* — Tom Morris**What it does:**

A broad, straightforward introduction to philosophy, ranging from ancient philosophy to contemporary questions and covering subjects such as knowledge, morality, happiness, responsibility, religion, and meaning.

How *In Conversations* differs:

For Dummies simplifies a large **subject**.

In Conversations humanizes the people who created the ideas.

Readers meet Socrates,

Nietzsche, Simone de Beauvoir, Spinoza, Marcus Aurelius and others as personalities with whom Roger can question, challenge, joke, and occasionally disagree.

Accessibility distinction:

It doesn't feel like studying a subject. It feels like joining an interesting conversation.

4. *Philosophy 101* — Paul Kleinman**What it does:**

A compact primer designed to introduce philosophical thinkers, schools, arguments, and concepts without the structure of a traditional academic textbook.

How *In Conversations* differs:

Philosophy 101 asks, essentially:

“What should a beginner know about philosophy?”

In Conversations asks:

“What would you ask these people if you could actually sit down with them?”

That changes the reading experience from instruction to discovery.

Accessibility distinction:

Readers don't have to master philosophical terminology before becoming involved. Roger can ask the naïve, practical, sometimes skeptical question on their behalf.

5. *The Philosophy Book: Big Ideas Simply Explained* — DK

What it does:

Explains more than 100 philosophers and philosophical ideas using concise text, graphics, diagrams, timelines, quotations, and other visual devices.

How *In Conversations* differs:

DK makes philosophy accessible **visually**.

In Conversations makes philosophy accessible

personally and conversationally.

Rather than reducing a

complicated idea to a diagram or summary, Roger can say, in effect:

“I understand your theory—but what does it mean for my life?”

Accessibility distinction:

Abstract philosophy becomes a human exchange and then a practical question the reader can apply to his or her own life.

6. *Think: A Compelling Introduction to Philosophy* — Simon Blackburn

What it does:

Introduces central philosophical problems—knowledge, mind, free will, reasoning, God and other fundamental questions—while showing how major philosophers approached them.

How *In Conversations* differs:

Blackburn organizes the journey largely around **philosophical problems**.

In Conversations organizes it around people and conversations.

A reader doesn't first

encounter “epistemology” or “metaphysics.” The reader encounters a human being with an extraordinary idea.

Accessibility distinction:

The philosopher becomes the doorway into the philosophy, rather than

philosophical terminology becoming the doorway to the philosopher.

7. *What Does It All Mean?* — Thomas Nagel

What it does:

Nagel introduces philosophy through fundamental questions about knowledge, mind, free will, morality, death, meaning, and other problems without requiring previous philosophical education.

How *In Conversations* differs:

This book is close to Roger's philosophy in one important respect: begin with questions.

But Nagel presents and examines the questions himself.

In Conversations asks many of those human questions **of the philosophers themselves**.

And because Roger asks the same Timeless Questions of different thinkers, readers can compare radically different answers.

Accessibility distinction:

The reader doesn't receive one philosophical exploration of a question. The reader hears many great minds wrestle with the same human problem.

8. *The Story of Philosophy* — Will Durant

What it does:

A classic work of popular philosophy presenting the lives and ideas of major Western philosophers to a general readership.

How *In Conversations* differs:

Durant helped make the great philosophers readable by telling their stories and explaining their thought.

In Conversations takes another step: it transforms those thinkers from historical subjects into conversational partners.

The philosopher is no longer simply someone who lived hundreds or thousands of years ago.

He or she is sitting across the table.

Accessibility distinction:

History becomes immediacy. Instead of asking only, “What did this philosopher believe?” the book asks, “What would this philosopher say to us today?”

9. *How to Be a Stoic* — Massimo Pigliucci

What it does:

Uses ancient Stoic philosophy—particularly Epictetus—as practical guidance for living in the modern world.

How *In Conversations* differs:

Pigliucci demonstrates the appeal of making one philosophical tradition practical.

In Conversations applies that principle across dozens of thinkers and traditions.

The reader can encounter Stoicism, existentialism, skepticism, rationalism, humanism and many other ways of understanding life without having to commit to any one school.

Accessibility distinction:

The reader is invited to compare approaches and decide:

“Which of these ideas works for me?”

10. *How to Think Like a Philosopher* — Julian Baggini

What it does:

Presents philosophy as a method for thinking and living well, drawing lessons from philosophers rather than treating philosophy merely as intellectual history.

How *In Conversations* differs:

Baggini teaches readers **how philosophers think**.

In Conversations dramatizes that thinking.

Roger asks a question. The philosopher answers. Roger follows up, challenges the answer, relates it to ordinary life—and sometimes the philosopher turns the questioning back on Roger.

Accessibility distinction:

The reader watches philosophical thinking happen rather than only reading an explanation of how it works.

THE CENTRAL DIFFERENCE

All ten books demonstrate
that there is a substantial readership for philosophy presented outside the
traditional academic textbook.

But **In Conversations with
the Great Philosophers** occupies a different position.

Warburton introduces the philosophers.

De Botton applies their wisdom to life.

Dummies and *Philosophy 101* simplify the
subject.

DK makes difficult ideas visual.

Nagel begins with life's great questions.

Pigliucci makes philosophy practical.

**In Conversations with the
Great Philosophers** combines elements of all of these—but adds something different:

CONVERSATION.

The reader does not simply
learn what Socrates, Spinoza, Nietzsche, Simone de Beauvoir, Marcus Aurelius,
Montaigne and the others believed.

The reader encounters them.

Roger asks the questions
many non-philosophers might be reluctant to ask.

The philosopher explains.

Roger questions again.

The ideas are translated
into ordinary life.

Then the philosopher
sometimes questions Roger.

And behind Roger is a third
participant:

THE READER.

The goal is not to make
philosophy merely simpler.

It is to make philosophy
feel **human, personal, practical—and alive.**