



Death

Todd May

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The fact that we will die, and that our death can come at any time, pervades the entirety of our living. There are many ways to think about and deal with death. Among those ways, however, a good number of them are attempts to escape its grip. In this book, Todd May seeks to confront death in its power. He considers the possibility that our mortal deaths are the end of us, and asks what this might mean for our living. What lessons can we draw from our mortality? And how might we live as creatures who die, and who know we are going to die? Todd May is Kathryn and Calhoun Lemon Professor of Philosophy at Clemson University, North Carolina.

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Nazanin says

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Razieh Shahverdi says

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Gabriela Ventura says

É bem verdade que peguei esse livro por conta de The Good Place. Não só o volume faz parte da bibliografia do Chidi, mas o Todd May é um dos filósofos consultores da série. Reza a lenda que o Michael Schur o contratou depois de ler Death, meio que por acaso. Imagina, num dia você é acadêmico de filosofia, no outro, consultor da NBC.

Mas divago.

Acabei sendo positivamente surpreendida por esse livrinho, um ensaio não-acadêmico (ou de divulgação científica de filosofia? autoajuda? - estamos naquele campo cinza) que discute a morte a partir da visão de algumas correntes e, se não oferece resposta definitiva, é porque não há, vamos todos morrer mesmo, são duas da manhã e eu tô digitando essa pseudoresenha. Preleções apocalípticas à parte: é um belo ensaio, o Todd May escreve muito bem. Recomendado para todo mundo que vai morrer um dia.

Brett Welch says

Finding Meaning in Life by pondering Death

This book is a deep and careful meditation on how the fragility of life affects us. What makes this book unique, is that it takes ideas from philosophy (such as Martin Heidegger, Thomas Nagel, and Lucretius) and from religion (such as Christianity, Buddhism, and Taoism), and interweaves them in meaningful ways that anyone can understand and pull meaning from. What May does in this book is present a wonderful - and sometimes personal - journey through some major themes and ideas of what death means to us and how it affects us, whilst drawing on different philosophical and religious views to add substance and perspective. The journey he takes the reader on gives them time to consider the implications for their own lives (there were several times when reading this book when I had to set it aside and think through what I had just read, not because it was difficult to understand, but because it was giving me a new way to look at and interpret what life meant). This is philosophy that has been humanized and made relevant for all of us.

One of the ways May gets us to ponder what life and death means, is by exploring what personal immortality might imply for how we would pursue life - how would being immortal affect how we lived? This exercise he presents to the reader adds to the insights of how we view and interpret mortal life.

If you want to explore and understand better how you think about and deal with death, then this book comes highly recommended. Regardless of your philosophical or religious orientation there is something here for all of us to learn from. You will not look at life the same way after.

Goatboy says

I'll be honest, I picked up and started reading Todd May's "Death" because it was mentioned on "The Good Place." And when in the first few pages May states that "Death is the most important fact about us" I was intrigued and excited. Thinking about death, and how it affects our lives, has been an ongoing preoccupation of mine. I wanted so much from this short book yet ultimately found myself disappointed by it. And that disappointment occurred even though I agree with most of May's main points.

Maybe it's because May was writing for young readers or readers only just coming to this subject matter for the first time. Regardless, it was hard to escape the feeling that May was avoiding the meat and depth of his subject in much the same way he suggests most people avoid facing the fact of their own future death. I could quibble and say that May sometimes jumps to conclusions not yet fully supported by his arguments, but really my disappointment lies with the way May takes what seems like a very long road to get to his main points without treading deeply enough to truly highlight the importance of those points or examine them in enough detail once there.

I have no doubt that these hesitations on my part would be put aside if I was ever lucky enough to have a conversation with May in which we could pause and dig more fully at the various junctions of his argument. Unfortunately a book does not allow that level of mutual investigation so that all I am left with is the argument as presented.

I am already well into May's book "A Significant Life" and am already finding it more engaging, so again I have to assume it was the format of this book and not May's thoughts which led to my general appraisal.

Megan says

The first chapter is a lot of stage-setting that mostly recaps background of existential thought. It can be summed up in like one or two really iconic sentences from Camus or Sartre, but I suppose for the layperson

who has never read either (and probably never will) it's a good read. It's the best part of the book in my opinion because the arguments that follow mostly rehash statements made and questions posed here but never resolve or answer them.

The second part is a deep dive into a contrapositive argument, considering immortality (or at least, the ways in which we can "not confront death" by eliminating it and what that would mean). There are some real missed opportunities here to discuss popular culture takes on this; in particular, he really glosses over the idea that there could be a "right time to die" by not considering an option where you could be immortal *until you chose not to be any longer* and that choosing to die when you feel ready, while never fearing any possibility of death before, is at least a philosophical option we could posit. The second part definitely makes you realize that while easy to read for a non-academic, this book is written by an academic philosopher. He really follows each thought to a logical conclusion. May is very good at keeping threads tightly woven throughout the book which I appreciate.

The third part of the book rehashes much of what was in parts one and two. Again, there were moments on page 90 or 100 I thought "This is a concept it's taken 100 pages to get to that's on like page 2 of *The Myth of Sisyphus* or page 5 of *Being and Nothingness*" but, again, not everyone is going to read those works. Maybe my expectations were high. This never really moves beyond existentialism or Camus's sort of absurdist existentialism; neither does it totally confront nihilism. We sort of leave things with a "just TRY" idea of living in the present with a certain amount of mindfulness (he doesn't explicitly address any concepts of this mindfulness falling into neuroticism or nihilism though) while also holding a hope for the future, even while accepting the absurdity and possibility of loss.

Another thing I wish were addressed more is that all of the concepts of how to look at death are from a very subjective and singular mind-frame. How to consider your OWN death. Very little is said about the connection between self and those others that one affects in life and how those threads are woven together. It could have come up naturally when talking about his concepts of projects or engagements; specifically at one point he mentions something like there are no consequences to choosing the right time to die if you're lucky enough to do so, which really ignores that presumably those left behind would be affected as well by your death.

I enjoyed reading about certain philosophers that I haven't delved into, especially ancient Greeks and Romans. Overall the book was engaging and accessible. It's a great read for anyone (which I think sadly is most people) who have never really considered ANY of these concepts. Unfortunately, it doesn't leave them with much to work with once they do. Even without getting prescriptive I wish maybe concepts like bad faith would have been addressed more; otherwise there's no convincing reason given for anyone to bother addressing concepts like "How should I think about death, and thus my life?" and I feel that encouraging self-examination on this (which leads to self-examination on other important concepts like "How should I treat other people?") should be at least a takeaway from reading this. Otherwise, the audience is largely people (like me) who already have considered these concepts in depth, and from better and more original sources, or people who maybe are being forced to read this and maybe won't get much out of it, and will forget it after they are done. Addressing more the ideas of "what happens when I remain blithely oblivious" could leave more of a mark on readers and make this useful and memorable to more audiences.

Frank says

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