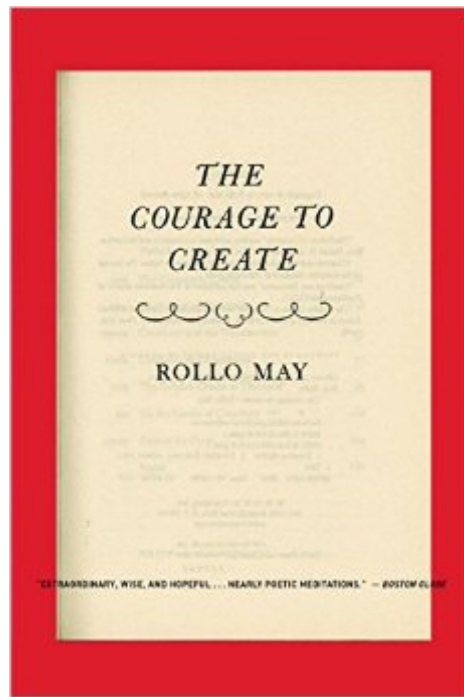


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The Courage To Create



Synopsis

"Extraordinary, wise, and hopeful... nearly poetic meditations." •Boston Globe What if imagination and art are not, as many of us might think, the frosting on life but the fountainhead of human experience? What if our logic and science derive from art forms, rather than the other way around? In this trenchant volume, Rollo May helps all of us find those creative impulses that, once liberated, offer new possibilities for achievement. A renowned therapist and inspiring guide, Dr. May draws on his experience to show how we can break out of old patterns in our lives. His insightful book offers us a way through our fears into a fully realized self.

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Customer Reviews

Rollo May was personally very familiar with the creative process: he was not only a pioneering psychotherapist, philosopher, prolific and poetic author, and sought after teacher and lecturer, but also a gifted watercolorist with great appreciation for art and music. So, in these hundred-or-so pithy and entertaining pages, he shares with readers some core truths about creativity and its psychology. Courage, as the book's apt title implies, is at the very heart of creativity, since to be creative requires us to risk seeing reality anew, and to try (typically not wholly successfully) to express our experiences in creative work, despite the anxiety such soul-searching and self-revealing endeavors inevitably engender. Creativity always requires taking a chance on one's self-- meeting one's unconscious, or shadow, or what May called the daimonic--and moving ahead despite self-doubts, discouragement and anxiety. Courage, as May makes clear, is not the absence of insecurity, fear, anxiety or despair, but resides in the decision to move through these feelings as

constructively or creatively as possible. For anyone struggling with the creative process, this classic meditation on creativity can provide welcome encouragement.

I have taught a Psychology of Creativity course for over 13 years now and this has been the only book I have ordered for every single course. Not only does May describe the creative process (e.g., the encounter), blocks (fear of life/death), environment (history, mythology) but he DOES offer real-life practical solutions in terms of self-questioning. A Humanistic, Transpersonal, Existential psychologist, May expounds on the "life is a journey" worldview: it is what we make it, yes, but not the "it is what "I" make it. WE, not "I". Laid out like a recipe, May discusses at least two paradoxes of creativity that other psychological theories might refer to as indicative of error. First, his definition of courage is the willingness to take action DESPITE despair. I interpret this not that creativity derives from despair but that it is better measured within the context of despair, for example John Nash "A Brilliant Mind." Secondly he defines creativity as the willingness to be fully committed while keeping in mind we might be wrong (which brings to mind the cognitive concept of functional fixedness). Tolerance for ambiguity is a key characteristic of creative personalities. A willingness to move beyond the "ok" solution in preference for the "original idea". Physical, Moral, Social and Creative courage are each discussed in practical terms. Unlike many books which incorporate "creativity" in the title, this book truly focuses one possible reason creativity continues to elude empirical measurement, not unlike Heisenberg's "uncertainty principle." We can know about the world/nature-at-large but it depends on what we ask. Perhaps there is another side to what it means "to know." If this question intrigues you then read, and re-read The Courage to Create. It is a guidebook for lifetime existential quest that doesn't kick aside practical application. Tolerance for ambiguity--that's the key.

Some books age like vintage wines, gathering a film of dust that disuse protects until that happy "discovery" by an old friend. Rollo May's "The Courage to Create" was written in 1975 - in a time when the presence of the atom bomb created an anxiety that prevented people to create for a future that was unsure, at best. Now in 2000, twenty five years of cosmic angst have intensified to a fear of the limits of even a glimpse of a future and it is reaffirming to return to Rollo May to regain the courage to "rage against the dying of the light." In eloquent but inordinately accessible language May surveys the entire concept of Creativity with terse, well-selected passages from Plato and the ancients to Cezanne to Tillich and Kierkegaard and Thomas Wolfe. This is not a "How To" book or self-help rapid-read to solve superficial problems. This little book, when read slowly and thoughtfully,

guides us through concepts that allow us to regain a state of positive thinking in a time when it is far more popular to dwell on our day to day foibles and transient misjudgements. The discovery of the self is his most important driver, yet he doesn't stop there. Taking that newly discovered self and building the courage to acknowledge encounters, engagements, epiphanies, and a usable acceptance of limits - this sounds so simple in a review, but when May has your complete attention, more happens to us than just learning about creativity: we learn about really living.

This book, while being a psychology book, is not for psychologists. It's essentially for everyone else; for all those whom deem themselves creative but don't know how to create. The title 'Courage to Create' epitomizes the core understanding of what is true creativity. In a nutshell, author Rollo May explains that to have courage is to move forward "in spite of despair." This is where creativity is borne out of: out of despair. May then cites many examples of artists, mathematicians, musicians, and other forms where creative thought can be applied. He does not give the reader a step by step process in how one can apply techniques, but empowers the reader with an attitude. The attitude of perseverance, encounter relationship, and expression of the deepest levels of our psyche. To be in constant search of ourselves is to be, in one sense, in despair and yet, to challenge that despair is to have the courage. And by expressing that challenge, one begins to understand creativity. When we have worked and overworked ourselves, then frustration ensues where we leave our work. In this silence, our unconscious is still at work. Then we look bright-eyed and say 'Aha!'. We have created. Author May also includes other aspects that will be helpful to the reader in gaining more awareness and insight to anxiety levels and what the artist may be suppressing emotionally or cognitively. A wonderful book I highly recommend that will challenge your limitations.

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