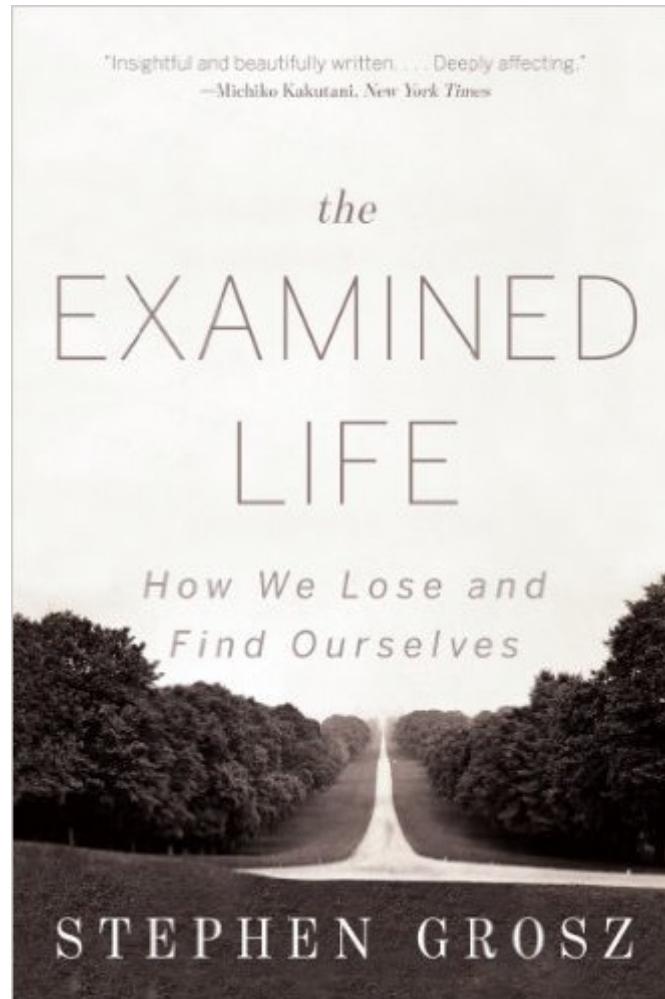


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The Examined Life: How We Lose And Find Ourselves



Synopsis

An extraordinary book for anyone eager to understand the hidden motives that shape our lives. We are all storytellers—we create stories to make sense of our lives. But it is not enough to tell tales. There must be someone to listen. In his work as a practicing psychoanalyst, Stephen Grosz has spent the last twenty-five years uncovering the hidden feelings behind our most baffling behavior. *The Examined Life* distills more than 50,000 hours of conversation into pure psychological insight without the jargon. This extraordinary book is about one ordinary process: talking, listening, and understanding. Its aphoristic and elegant stories teach us a new kind of attentiveness. They also unveil a delicate self-portrait of the analyst at work and show how lessons learned in the consulting room can reveal as much to the analyst as to the patient. These are stories about our everyday lives: they are about the people we love and the lies we tell, the changes we bear and the grief. Ultimately, they show us not only how we lose ourselves but also how we might find ourselves.

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Customer Reviews

This is one of those rare instances in which I have to say that many of the 1- and 2-star reviews are as accurate as the 5-star ones. The main difficulty is expectations. *The Examined Life* is, at a superficial level, a series of shared experiences from the author's casebook, suitably anonymized, but it differs from the more traditional collections of essays by practitioners (Oliver Sacks, Atul Gawande, or, reaching back decades, William Nolen) in being less structured, more focused on a specific insight that the reader is left to ponder, very possibly with ramifications for his own life. Each

of the chapters or sections is short; most are incomplete in the sense that they only touch on an individual patient's life without even giving an account of the arc of his treatment. They are like epiphanies distilled from case studies, tantalizingly brief but written with extraordinary lucidity and sensitivity. They are as good as many short stories in this sense, not by being obscure but by rewarding multiple readings. If you are expecting detailed accounts of a patient's life, followed by a description of diagnosis and treatment, you will likely be disappointed. But if you are willing to entertain the possibility that patient case histories can be used as a starting point for an experienced therapist's reflection, insight, and wisdom, you should not feel misled.

This is a book about the relationships between psychoanalysis and language. The central relationship concerns that which is not said - the silences in between propositions. Grosz's genius is to match form with function and relate his stories in a completely non-didactic manner, but so compellingly that the conclusion strikes the reader as sudden insight. This phenomenon is exactly the core event in the psychoanalytical process, and the main event of a good narrative tale. Grosz demonstrates both, repeatedly, and shows how psychoanalysis can affect the patient, the analyst and the reader (and by extension, the world). Individually, the stories are unique, moving and trans-formative.

This book is a wonderful series of stories about the way people deal with emotional and psychological difficulties. It does more than explain how and why people behave, it also opens up important philosophical questions that need to be discussed and examined in order for us to reach a state of self awareness, genuineness and honesty. Stephen Grosz writes with great humility and love of learning. A great read for anyone who is psychologically minded and likes to ask "why?"

I cried and laughed, felt sad and happy as I read this book. I identified to some extent with nearly all the patients and with the author. Human behaviour is complicated but there is always a reason and it is very easy to get stuck in a pattern. If you are interested in psychoanalysis you will enjoy this book. It's probably too late for me now to start but if I was going to I would like an analyst like Mr. Gross.

A couple reviews seemed to feel that the cases should have been 'wrapped up' with followup on how the patients fared later.....which, in my mind, is irrelevant. This is a small book with short chapters/synopses of a variety of patients, and the diagnoses/insights about each. I loved that (in

most, for me) there are defined passages of flashes of "aha! so THAT'S why/how" that I want to remember.....behavioral or personality traits that I can (suddenly) see and understand in situations and people in my own realm. Those who just go with the flow and have no interest in understanding how or why they --or others ----- act or react to life will probably not care for this book, but I flagged a dozen pages with the intent to pull it out and re-read them many times to refresh myself until I get those concepts drilled into my memory. While each was simple, coming across so many "aha's!" in one read was a bit of overload for me...my mind whirls with each one as I bump it against people and situations I encounter. Anyhow- anyone looking for complete case studies, from first visit to "cure/happy ending" :) should move on, this is not it.

These essays are appropriately enigmatic. I read the book quickly and might even return to the book at some future time. Yes, he could have elaborated more but seemed to capture whatever was essential. The chapter, "How Anger Can Keep Us From Sadness", was amazing. There seems to be no limit to compassion nor limits to how much love may be extended. Dr. Grosz seems to be a true humanitarian, first and foremost, a quality that may be more healing than any other. Perhaps his years of intimate contact with others have enriched him as much as his patients have been helped, and he is sharing bits of that enrichment, a fulfillment of the book's epigraph: "We receive and we lose, and we must try to achieve gratitude to embrace with whole hearts whatever of life that remains after the losses." Would love to read more books of this sort.

The author has a gift for capturing the essence of a psychoanalytic session. He is obviously a sensitive and caring doctor. My frustration with the book was that I felt he could have said more. True to the form of an old-school psychoanalyst, he says very little, and lets his patients talk, hoping they'll figure it out themselves. He expects the same of the reader. In most chapters he stopped just when I was starting to learn something. The book gave me the same feeling: suddenly it was just over, and I felt unsatisfied. A missed opportunity.

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