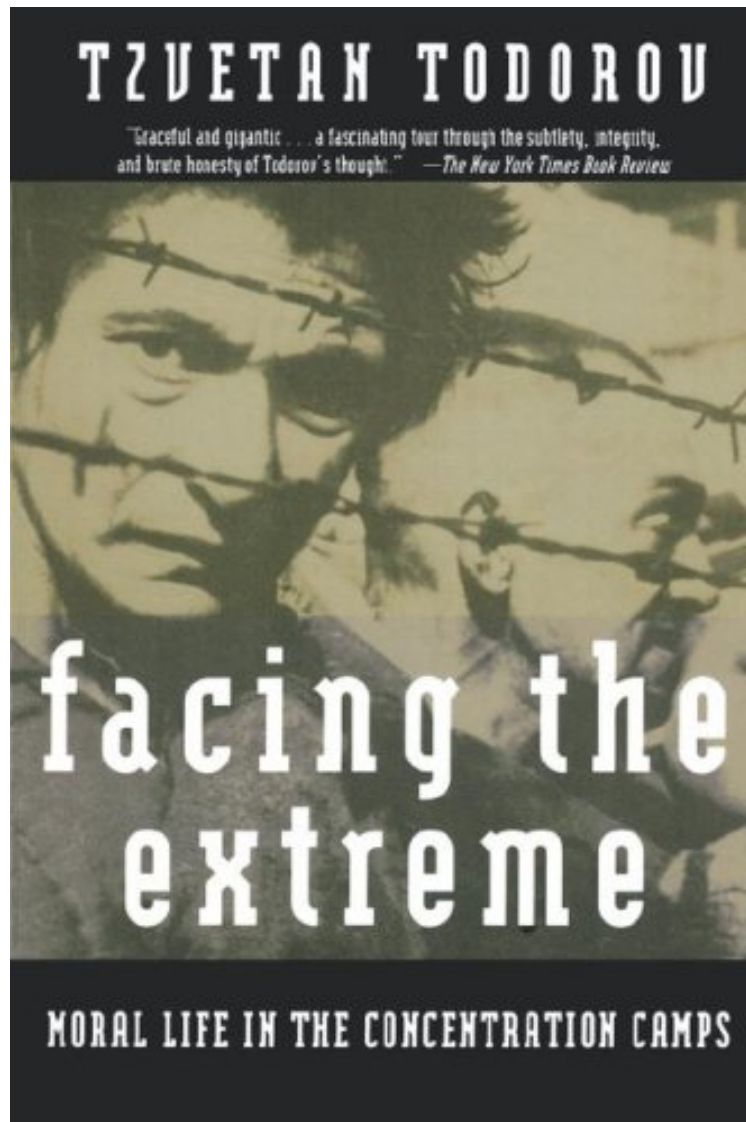


(Free) Facing The Extreme: Moral Life in the Concentration Camps

Facing The Extreme: Moral Life in the Concentration Camps

Tzvetan Todorov

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Tzvetan Todorov : Facing The Extreme: Moral Life in the Concentration Camps before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Facing The Extreme: Moral Life in the Concentration Camps:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Difficult, but dynamic By Danita Moore I read this for a paper on moral ambiguity in concentration camps. It is an incredible book. It theorizes about human behavior while telling the

stories of inmates. I cried through a lot of it, but I learned a lot. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars By Walter J Gordon Highly recommended. Wise, clear, one of the best. 18 of 18 people found the following review helpful. a gripping study of the moral life under duress By A Customer There are no shortage of books that deal with the Holocaust, but this work by the Bulgarian writer Todorov offers a rare and sensitive insight into how we understand and cope with evil. The writer has the courage to challenge the tendency by victims to own the historical atrocities they witnessed. He worries that by allowing the victims to define the evil of the oppressors we turn past genocides into monuments that do not speak to us. He explores the nature of complicity, heroism, myth and resistance in political and moral dimensions. He uncovers the potential in all of us to be, if not camp guards, then silent accomplices to mass murder. The book explores in disturbing detail the darkness that is part of the human condition. It has been a long time since I marked up a book like this. He stands alongside writers such as Primo Levi.

The Nazi concentration camps and the Soviet gulag provide the context for this acclaimed examination of the human capacity for moral life. Drawing on a striking array of documents, Tzvetan Todorov reconstructs a vivid portrait of the conduct of those who ran the camps and those who suffered their outrages. Challenging the widespread view that moral life was extinguished in the extreme circumstances of the camps, he uncovers instead a rich moral universe, composed not of grand acts of heroism but of ordinary gestures of dignity and care, compassion and solidarity. A complex and profound study, *Facing the Extreme* restores a lost dimension to this anguished history, even as it offers an eloquent plea for the recognition of everyday virtues as a basis for contemporary morality.

.com It is an understatement to call the Nazi and Soviet death camps "outposts of hell on earth," as we know from the testimony of a powerful body of witnesses. Todorov looks inside these camps, and there he finds hope for all humankind, arguing that innumerable instances of heroism, self-sacrifice, and caring show that "moral reactions are spontaneous, omnipresent, and eradicable only with the greatest violence" and that "morality cannot disappear without a radical mutation of the human species." Even in a regime of terror and depersonalization, the ordinary virtues survived and sometimes even flourished, Todorov maintains. His wide-ranging study bears him out, and it makes for fascinating reading. From Publishers Weekly The concentration camp—including the Nazi death camps and the Soviet gulag—marks a defining attribute of our century, declares Todorov (*The Conquest of America*), and the extreme experiences there make questions of virtue and vice more stark. In this resonant analysis, the Bulgarian-born, Paris-based critic draws on reports from Primo Levi, Victor Frankl and others, as well as on such philosophers as Sartre and Rousseau. Todorov's meditation is dense but accessible, raising a rich set of questions, even as he occasionally interjects harsh self-scrutiny about his family's life under Communism. He delves into the distinction and link between heroic virtues (courage) and ordinary ones (caring), the "banal roots" of monstrous behavior and the morality of recounting horrors (he finds Gitta Sereny's biography of Albert Speer more worthy than Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah*). Though the camp experience seems to confirm that human good never expired, Todorov fears that our technological mentality has made it easier to demonize and depersonalize others. This book was first published in France. BOMC, History Book Club, Reader's Subscription alternate. Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Scientific American In a world that continues to devalue human life, Todorov leaves us with a sense of hope that morality, with its ultimate action and caring, will not disappear.