

The Illusion of Death: What Jesus and Buddha Taught About Death and What Science Confirms

J. Thomas Devins

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With inquiries grounded in science, spirituality, and Gnosticism, The Illusion of Death is a stimulating philosophy text.

J. Thomas Devins's introspective, cross-disciplinary theological book *The Illusion of Death* asks what happens when people die, drawing on Bible passages, Christian teachings, and aspects of Buddhism to propose an answer.

Challenging conventional views of religion and mortality, the book is attributed to revelations from an all-knowing voice from beyond. Split into ten sections, it begins with the concept of religious awakening before working through New Testament accounts of the life and teachings of Jesus. Then, it moves on to critiquing notions of resurrection and ascension and features like the Shroud of Turin. Eastern thought is handled next, including Buddhist ideas of karma and reincarnation, which are used to explain some of the questions posed in the Bible.

While each section is clear and organized, the flow of information on the whole is disjointed, with Buddhist and Christian thought often kept too separate to help arguments juxtaposing them flow. Still, the book pushes the boundaries of Western and Eastern religious thought throughout, often by marrying the two. It works to uncover truths about the universe and human existence in the process. In the course of its pages, it highlights similarities between religions, including values of love and compassion and notions of transcendence, analyzing and comparing passages of Christian and Buddhist scholarship and scripture to do so. Noncanonical sources, including the Gospel of Thomas, are evaluated in addition to traditional ones. The differences between the religions are minimized in the process, though.

In addition to staking out the complex ideas found in both Western and Eastern religions, including notions of reincarnation, meditation, and the act of "rising from the dead," the book also juxtaposes its spiritual findings to ideas from quantum physics, near-death experiences, and neuroscience, though it cherry-picks scientific evidence to support its ultimate conclusions. Indeed, whether it is trying to use a Western argument of the "dematerialized state of mind and rematerialized state of body" to justify the impossibilities of a man resurrecting from the dead or using quantum physics to rearrange and redefine the collective notion of reality, its scientific and religious evidence is unpersuasive. In trying to use one worldview to explain another, the book engages in reinterpretations that strain credulity. Citing evidence as weak as Wikipedia at times, it falls short on substance.

Furthermore, while the book's language is accessible, its tone of absolutism is uninviting. Its integration of ideas from differing fields is quite forced at times, as the book often insinuates that doctrines like resurrection are wrong, while others, such as Buddhist dematerialization, are right and should be taken as fact. Such declarations are undersupported, making them unlikely to persuade outsiders.

With inquiries grounded in science, spirituality, and Gnosticism, *The Illusion of Death* is a stimulating philosophy text that challenges preconceived notions about death and spirituality.

EMMA STANTON (January 5, 2025)

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