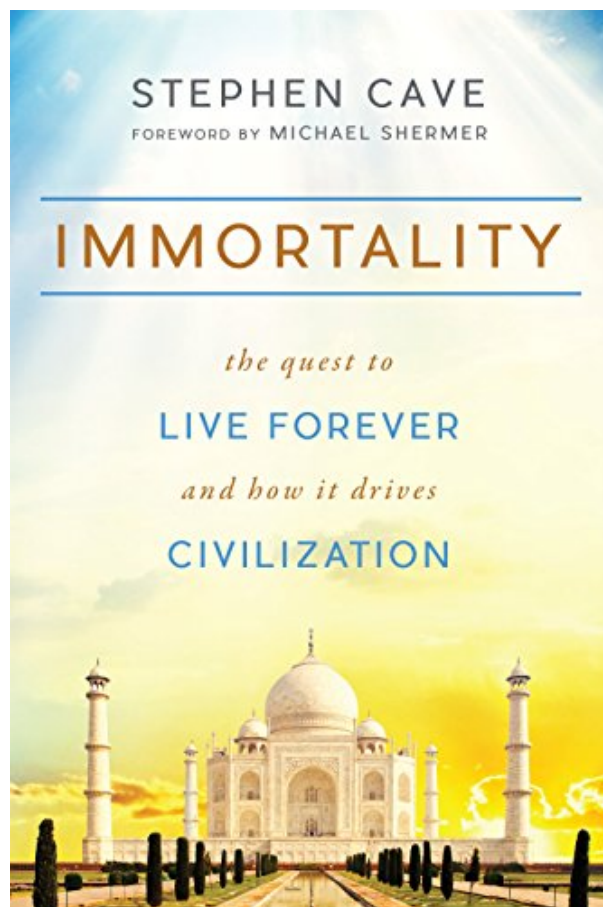
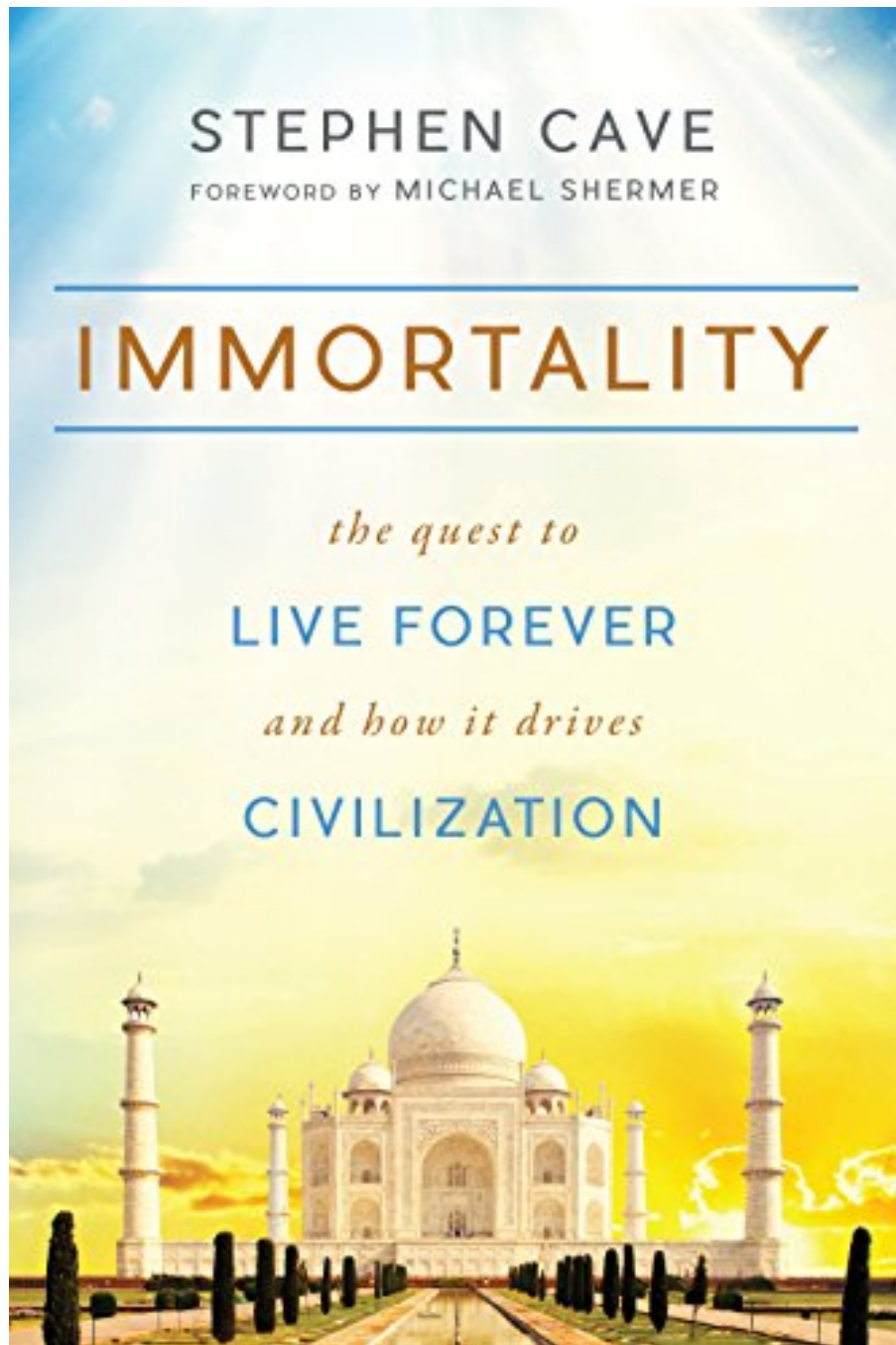


# IMMORTALITY: THE QUEST TO LIVE FOREVER AND HOW IT DRIVES CIVILIZATION BY STEPHEN CAVE



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## Review

"This book by Stephen Cave offers a helpful framework for understanding the various different kinds of immortality. Cave employs this framework to analyze these types of immortality and to argue that the quest for immortality is misguided. Cave's insights throughout the book are deep, and his argumentation is compelling and well-informed by all of the relevant literature. It is also a beautifully written and highly accessible book. I recommend it highly." —John Martin Fischer leader of the Templeton Foundation's Immortality Project, and author of *Near-Death Experiences*

“Cave has produced a strikingly original and compelling exploration of the age-old conundrum: Can we live forever, and do we really want to?” —John Horgan, author of *The End of Science*

## About the Author

Stephen Cave is a senior research fellow at the University of Cambridge and a director of the Leverhulme Centre for the Future of Intelligence. He has also served as a British diplomat and written widely on philosophical and scientific issues, including for the *Atlantic* and the *New York Times*. Stephen lives in Berlin, Germany.

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# IMMORTALITY: THE QUEST TO LIVE FOREVER AND HOW IT DRIVES CIVILIZATION BY STEPHEN CAVE PDF

A fascinating work of popular philosophy and history that both enlightens and entertains, Stephen Cave's *Immortality* investigates whether it just might be possible to live forever and whether we should want to. But it also makes a powerful argument, which is that it's our very preoccupation with defying mortality that drives civilization.

In drawing back the curtain on what compels humans to "keep on keeping on," Cave engages the reader in a number of mind-bending thought experiments. He teases out the implications of each immortality gambit, asking, for example, how long a person would live if they did manage to acquire a perfectly disease-free body. Or what would happen if a super-being tried to round up the atomic constituents of all who've died in order to resurrect them. Or what our loved ones would really be doing in heaven if it does exist. Or what part of us actually lives in a work of art, and how long that work of art can survive.

Toward the book's end, we're confronted with a series of brain-rattling questions: What would happen if tomorrow humanity discovered that there is no life but this one? Would people continue to care about their favorite sports team, please their boss, vie for the title of Year's Best Salesman? Would three-hundred-year projects still get started?

*Immortality* is a deeply satisfying book, as optimistic about the human condition as it is insightful about the true arc of history.

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- 344 pages

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Most helpful customer reviews

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful.

The author presents very good arguments showing there is no soul

By Show-Me Skeptic

A very well-written book. The author presents very good arguments showing there is no soul, no reincarnation and no immortality.

For example, Chapter 7: "The Lost Soul"

Pages 186-187.

If your optic nerves in your brain are sufficiently badly damaged, you will no longer be able to see -- you will go blind. This tells us very clearly that the faculty of sight is dependent upon functioning optic nerves. Yet curiously, when many people imagine their soul leaving their body, they imagine being able to see -- they imagine, for example, looking down on their own corpse or on their own funeral procession. They believe, therefore, that their immaterial soul has the faculty of sight. But if the soul can see when the entire brain and body have stopped working, why can't it see when only the optic nerves have stopped working? In other words, if blind people have a soul that can see, why are they blind?

This question has no satisfactory answer, and indeed some thoughtful theologians, such as Thomas Aquinas, have accepted that a soul without a body cannot see -- seeing is something that is done by a body and brain with eyes and optic nerves in working order.

But we now know that, just as damage to the optic nerve can destroy the faculty of sight, so damage to other parts of the brain can destroy faculties like memory and reason. Increasingly, evidence suggests that all aspects of the mind and personality are in this way dependent on the brain. So, paralleling our question about the blind person, we can ask about someone with brain damage who is unable to think rationally or feel emotions:

"If they actually have a soul that is able to think rationally or feel emotions, why can't they think rationally or feel emotions? Why would localized brain damage stand in the way when destruction of the whole brain and body does not?"

24 of 26 people found the following review helpful.

An Everlasting Book! Fantastic!

By Book Shark

Immortality: The Quest to Live Forever and How it Drives Civilization by Stephen Cave

"Immortality" is the fascinating and thought-provoking book about life, death and civilization. It's about humankind's quest by one or a combination of four paths that promise immortality and whether any of these paths can deliver on that promise. Finally, with the newfound wisdom it's about following a philosophy of life that provides us with a meaningful existence. Stephen Cave holds a Ph.D. in philosophy from Cambridge

University and a writer who skillfully provides the reader with a gem of a book that is enlightening and a joy to read. This 338-page book is broken out into four parts that correspond to the four narratives of immortality and a conclusion: Part I. Staying Alive, Part II. Resurrection, Part II. Soul, and Part IV. Legacy.

Positives:

1. A well written, accessible book for the masses.
2. A mesmerizing topic: immortality. The author treats the topic with utmost care and respect.
3. A fantastic format that follows logically with the author's overall thesis.
4. The four immortality narratives: Staying Alive, Resurrection, Soul, and Legacy. The entire book revolves around these four main paths.
5. The author clearly presents three main goals upfront and thoroughly succeeds in achieving them.
6. Each chapter begins with an interesting historical vignette in which the author highlights the main topic of the chapter.
7. In the first path of immortality the author goes through a number of examples that clearly show how the determination to stay alive and reproduce is one thing that all life forms have in common.
8. The Morality Paradox. The immortality narratives were created to resolve the paradox.
9. Great use of secular, religious and scientific viewpoints to go through all the arguments. Great stuff!
10. Thought-provoking quotes and ideas: "These psychologists were testing the hypothesis that we have developed our cultural worldviews in order to protect ourselves from the fear of death". Interesting.
11. The author goes through various and diverse civilizations to explain his thesis. Thus keeping the book fresh and interesting. "Civilization is built on the promise of immortality".
12. Attempts to engineer immortality. The Engineering Approach to immortality. Transhumanists...
13. The significance of resurrection and the three major problems with it.
14. The impact of Paul to Christianity.
15. The importance of rituals, "This is the function of religion at its grandest: enabling mere mortals to attain cosmic significance, to become one with their gods and so to attain immortality."
16. Cryonics, interesting stuff.
17. My favorite section of the book, the thorough debunking of the soul.
18. The idea of the soul, its claims and the implications.
19. The history and evolution of the concept of the soul. From soul to self...
20. The argument from neuroscience against the existence of the soul.
21. The concepts of heaven.
22. Scientific and religious looks at the soul. Eastern and Western religions.
23. Legacy what it means and how it is achieved. Great examples.
24. Great quotes, "Jean Rostand wrote in 1939, "Kill one man, and you are a murderer. Kill millions of men, and you are a conqueror. Kill them all, and you are a god."
25. Fascinating facts, " By spring 2011, Facebook, had over 600 million active users and counting."
26. The "bundle theory" of the self and the problems associated with it.
27. Nation's myth of common ancestry.
28. Planet Earth, the biggest superorganism, Gaia. Global consciousness.
29. The author does a wonderful job of summarizing his finding into a satisfying conclusion.
30. A positive, secular outlook to death. The Wisdom Narrative.
31. Some great closing thoughts that will stick with me, " This is no doubt why medieval European rulers found Christianity so useful--it taught their exploited subjects to avert their eyes from the horror of their daily lives and dream instead of a future paradise."
32. How these narratives contribute to what our civilizations are.
33. A look at the impact of infinity. Enlightening.
34. The three virtues on our view of life and death.
35. A page turner of a book.

Negatives:

1. No formal bibliography.
2. A notes section was provided but it was not linked to the body of the book.
3. The author overstays his welcome a tad with the last chapter. That is, it was too long and started becoming preachy but if that's the worst thing I can find about this book well you know you got yourself a gem.
4. Charts and illustrations would have added value. For example, a chart illustrating the worldview on immortality would have been welcomed.

In summary, I really enjoyed this book. First of all, this is philosophy at its best. It asks the big questions and it follows a path that is logical and reasonable. It tackles fascinating topics surrounding immortality and it ends with a satisfying conclusion. My favorite part of this book was Part III. The Soul; finally, an author who spends some time addressing the soul in a comprehensive manner. This book was a real treat for me, treat yourself and get it! I highly recommend it.

Further suggestions: "Physics of the Future: How Science Will Shape Human Destiny and Our Daily Lives by the Year 2100" by Michio Kaku, "Paranormality: Why we see what isn't there" by Richard Wiseman, "Scientific Paranormal Investigation: How to Solve Unexplained Mysteries" by Benjamin Radford, "The Demon-Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark" by Carl Sagan, "The Believing Brain: From Ghosts and Gods to Politics and Conspiracies---How We Construct Beliefs and Reinforce Them as Truths" and "Why People Believe Weird Things: Pseudoscience, Superstition, and Other Confusions of Our Time" by Michael Shermer, "The Problem Of The Soul: Two Visions Of Mind And How To Reconcile Them" by Owen Flanagan, "God Soul Mind Brain: A Neuroscientist's Reflections on the Spirit World (LeapSci)" by Michael S. A. Graziano, "The Brain and the Meaning of Life" by Paul Thagard, and "The Belief Instinct: The Psychology of Souls, Destiny, and the Meaning of Life" by Jesse Bering.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

An interesting book. Ultimately asks questions it is unable ...

By Will

An interesting book. Ultimately asks questions it is unable to answer, but offers some interesting insights along the way.

See all 85 customer reviews...



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