

Bryan Hall, *An Ethical Guidebook to the Zombie Apocalypse: How to Keep Your Brain Without Losing Your Heart*
(New York: Bloomsbury, 2020)

Hunkered down in a bunker, distancing myself from other people and the pandemic above, I read *An Ethical Guidebook to the Zombie Apocalypse: How to Keep Your Brain Without Losing Your Heart*. My book collection already contains various survival guides, but none that teach ‘how to go beyond surviving and begin flourishing in this undead world’ (p. 44). If you are looking for an answer to the question that haunts us all, namely ‘why continue living?’, then this is the book for you.

The content of the book is presented from the perspective of an unnamed character attempting to flourish in a zombie apocalypse (although the ‘Message from the Archivist to the Reader’ indicates that the fictional author probably did not survive in the end). This framework allows the reader to digest the philosophical content from the character’s perspective, thus making the content more accessible, and the horror content makes the book more enjoyable than a typical ethics primer. The delivery mode also provides the reader with an opportunity to critique the character’s presentation of the content. We must ask ourselves whether the author can be trusted, and if they are getting things right. The reader is compelled to participate in a way not required by other ethics texts. All of this makes the guidebook valuable not only for the individual reader, but also a useful tool for teachers.

This ethical guidebook has it all. It covers meta-ethics (cultural relativism, divine command theory, egoism), normative theory (contractarianism, Kant’s ethical theory, utilitarianism, and Aristotle’s virtue ethics), and a wide range of moral problems (personhood, suicide, euthanasia). Each chapter includes field exercises, or case studies, in which ethical theory is put into practice. In the field exercises, we encounter the ‘cracked up’ (infected individuals not quite undead yet) and a variety of zombies (sprinters, shamblers, moaners, and more). The zombie content, which makes for entertaining zombie fiction in its own right, is seamlessly incorporated into the philosophical content. Each chapter begins with fictional quotations from ‘philosophical literature [...] highly derivative of pre-apocalyptic sources’ (p. ix) and each chapter concludes with a ‘Further Study’ section that contains useful notes by the author about additional resources. The chapters on hordeology (‘the study of the ethical dilemmas arising from horde diversion,’ pp. 98-99), stronghold ethics, and the moral status of zombies stand out at the very least for being refreshing takes on trolley problems, the tragedy of the commons, and personhood.

By the end of the book, the author has come to understand an important lesson gleaned from Aristotle – namely that one cannot live the good life merely through theoretical study; rather, one must become good by practice and with the help of virtuous friends. It may, therefore, be the case that the good life eludes us during the apocalypse, but we should strive for it anyway. Why else continue to live? Friendship, however, involves helping one another to become better. No book is perfect, and no true friend of an author would claim it is. Thus, in the spirit of true friendship with the author, I offer the following constructive criticism. The guidebook is relatively heavy on Kant, sometimes uncharitable to utilitarianism, and comparatively light on virtue ethics. In fact, if I must stress one point of contention with the author, it is their treatment of virtue ethics. In the ‘Further Study’ section of the chapter on virtue ethics, the author misleadingly presents Susan Wolf’s ‘Moral Saints’ as a problem solely for Aristotle’s virtue ethics, when it is equally problematic for Kantian and utilitarian ethics (p. 209).

Furthermore, the author’s claim that, according to Aristotle, ‘virtues are good since they allow us to achieve individual goals or satisfy social needs’ (p. 205) implies a less nuanced conception of virtue than is actually present in Aristotle’s ethics. According to Aristotle, the good life consists in a life of virtuous activity. Although some virtues are instrumentally good (the virtues by which I make an effective zombie trap, for example), the goodness of the virtues that are constitutive of the good life are not instrumental. If they were, they would be in the same category as the instrumental goods recommended by all the other survival guides, thus diminishing the value of this guidebook. It is because of the very fact that a life of virtuous activity constitutes the good life that learning how to live a virtuous life is of ultimate importance, perhaps especially during the zombie apocalypse. These interpretive disagreements may be moot, however, because, fortunately for the author, they come around to a more complete understanding of virtue and the good life in the end (before ultimately ‘cracking up’). Among their concluding words are these: ‘By consistently striving to live a life of complete virtue, you pursue the best life you can hope for notwithstanding the brutal, violent, post-apocalyptic hellscape you find yourself within’ (p. 214).

For an introductory text, *An Ethical Guidebook to the Zombie Apocalypse* contains a good mix of depth and breadth, and it maintains a good pace. It covers a lot of ground, but without ever becoming cumbersome. The book challenges the premise of most zombie-survival guides – namely that survival is the only thing that matters. Survival guides may help one merely survive, but ethics makes survival worthwhile. As the author puts it, ‘survival at

all costs ends up costing each of us so much that surviving loses its value. This is the point at which the specter of suicide reemerges. As this book has argued, flourishing in the land of the undead requires acting morally' (p. 212). To that end, *An Ethical Guidebook to the Zombie Apocalypse* is essential reading.

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