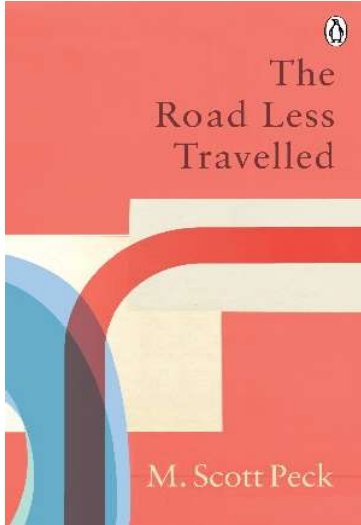


Book Review

The Road Less Travelled



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Morgan Scott Peck was an American psychiatrist and writer who received his education at Harvard and Case Western Reserve. He also pioneered community-building efforts and received numerous awards. In 2005, he passed away. However, he left an enduring legacy to the world. One of which is the timeless classic, *The Road Less Travelled* which once again was republished in celebration of its anniversary. Containing four sections, the book explores profound and intellectual topics.

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The book starts with section one, *Discipline*, which first reminds the readers that life is inherently full of suffering. This echoes one of the four noble truths in the Buddhist philosophy (Kozak, 2017). Indeed, to be a human is to suffer—such as inescapable. However, we tend to aggravate suffering because we tend to distract ourselves from the real issue—we go away, we pretend there is no problem, we do not solve it at all.

Some may even resort to gambling and drugs just to ignore problems. Unfortunately, we cannot solve problems through such a technique. Hence, the author posits that discipline is what we need—it is a tool to solve problems. It may cause us to suffer also but this one can make us grow. Disciplining ourselves is pivotal in life so as we can transcend and flourish in life. Peck elaborates that to be disciplined, we should (1) delay gratification; (2) accept accountability; (3) pursue truth; and (4) maintain balance.

Peck explains that delaying gratification refers to scheduling pain and pleasure, making the pain be experienced first before pleasure. This teaches us the virtue of perseverance and help us understand that in achieving a worthy goal, it takes effort and suffering. It also makes the goal meaningful and bring out the best in us.

He contends that the only way to solve the problem is to simply solve it. If we pretend it does not exist or we attribute the problem to others or to society, it will never be solved. It is not fine as well if we become overly responsible to problems, most especially if it is not ours, which according to the author is neurosis. We avoid responsibility because of the pain of the consequences of our behavior. Peck warns, if that continues, we

become a part of the problems of the society, we cannot acquire the wisdom upon solving it, and we do not become liberated.

The author continues that we have this mental map in which we use to perceive and respond to the world, which we started making in our childhood. However, we tend to stop updating it and inappropriately transfer this map to a new situation. Hence, when we receive new information, we tend to discard it. We do not challenge our outdated ideas. As a result, we do not become open-minded, we do not strive for truth, we do not grow spiritually. Peck articulates that the life dedicated to truth is tantamount to life which is open to be personally challenged. He says that one way is through psychotherapy. He warns that we also should not speak of falsehood to make us authentically free.

Balancing, according to the author, is *disciplining discipline*. To live wisely, we need to balance the various aspects of our lives and our actions. For example, on anger, we need to express anger and also withhold anger, at times. Sometimes, we need to do it loudly. Other times, we should do it calmly and quickly. There should be a balance. Balancing also entails giving off parts of ourselves like learned behaviors, established habits, or personality traits. According to Peck, it is painful to give up something, but the giving up required for the loss of balance is more painful. Giving up is part and parcel of life.

Section two, *Love*, defines love as extending oneself to nurture one's own or another's spiritual growth. Peck describes love as a curiously cyclical process and a technique of achieving growth. He observes that love occurs when we have effectively expanded our limitations and developed into a broader state of

being. He emphasizes that love comprises self-love as well as love for others, implying that our growth is also the growth of others. In other words, our love for ourselves may serve as a conduit for our love for humankind. They typically go hand in hand and are indistinguishable.

Furthermore, he adds that love involves work and that it is about more than just desire—it is about both action and intention. We do not love because we have to, but because we want to. He clarifies that falling in love is not the same as love. This is simply a transient lack of ego boundaries, which might lead to us committing to other people (Werbart, 2019). He does, however, indicate that it is part of the enigmatic design of love. He also claims that dependency is not love since it causes individuals to adhere to one another. It is not love. Dependency often leads to regression to infantilism rather than progress; it tries to receive rather than contribute; and it wants to limit rather than empower (Viorst, 2010).

Love, according to the author, is not cathecting. He defines cathecting as the process through which an item begins to be significant to us. We can cathect various things, including ideas, fame, careers, and possessions, as well as individuals (Sandle, 2019). He says that cathecting is just putting mental or emotional energy; it is ephemeral and has no regard for spiritual advancement.

He summarizes that love necessitates boldness and change; it is not afraid to venture into new and unexpected ground. Love teaches us to mature and become self-sufficient. It also compels us to commit, even if it means taking a personal

risk. Love means exercising power with humility while respecting the individuality of the person.

Section three, *Religion*, clarifies that all people have religion, even if they are atheist, agnostic, Christian, or do not conform with any traditional notion of religion. Here, Peck defines religion as a worldview. He enunciates that it is not completely known to us. He contends and that we acquire it from the culture that surrounds us, from our environment and, the most potent of all, from the family. He asserts that we get it not from our religion or religious denominations of our parents, but from their actions.

Peck sees that many people unfortunately tend to live their lives based on the religion of others, which does not encourage spiritual growth. Spiritual growth, he asserts, is venturing out from our small world to an even greater and vast world. To promote spiritual growth in our lives, we must continually strive to expand our horizon, consciousness, experiences, and revise the maps of our minds (Lowe & Lowe, 2018).

In actuality, it is easy for us not to undertake the mentioned activities and that we rely to our past and outdated mental maps. However, we will stagnate and staggeringly suffer. In such a case, we age but we have not become real, psychologically mature adults. He adds up that many scientists have this scientific tunnel vision—a tendency to have a view what is difficult to measure ought not worthy of measurement. They seem to have a psychological self-imposed set of blinders that does not aid them to spiritually grow. This kind of thinking

does not seek the uncertain and the unfamiliar, which are prerequisites for us to truly thrive.

In section four, *Grace*. Peck discusses the concept of grace by incorporating a synergy of Christian psychology and religion. He first defines grace as something that nurtures human life and spiritual growth; is incomprehensible and obscure, most especially in the scientific realm; is frequent and commonplace; and is beyond the conscious-decision-making. Using theological lessons, he discusses the doctrines of grace: (1) eminence, which states that grace comes from external God and is given to human beings; and (2) immanence, which conveys that grace is in the center of being a human for God is in us.

Further, Peck talks about the concept of God. He contends if people simplistically believe on the idea of a God who only nurtures and cares, it could lead to having infantile mindset which pushes them to laziness. Adhering to *God is the alpha and omega* concept, Peck believes that humans are geared toward godliness and that our aim in life is to be a *god*. He explains that, though it is a terrifying idea, it can make us responsible toward our own development. God is our destination.

The author asserts that the original sin is laziness, which takes form as fear. Laziness, in a sense, of being inactive to cultivating matters that will advance spiritual growth. He also continues that no matter how healthy a person is, there is an inclination to laziness, which is being comfortable to the status quo. Nonetheless he affirms too that no matter how sick a person is, there is an energy—however small—which wants to dare, mature, and spiritually grow.

Lastly, Peck recognizes that evil is real and that there are people and institutions which advance evil. They hate the light and promote hatred. He postulates that the most extreme form of evil is laziness. He clarifies that lazy people are not necessarily evil. They are just passive. Laziness is nonlove. Evil is antilove. Evil is actively promoting hatred, denying themselves from goodness. He, additionally, contends that these evil people are lazy and do not want to improve themselves. They are actively defending their biases, outdated mental maps, and defective reasoning, which lead them to spiritual atrophy.

Overall, I see this classic book compelling and transformative—it is no wonder that it is a bestseller in the field of psychology, self-help, and interpersonal relations. Reprinted and translated in different languages several times, the book is not deadening for the readers to understand the concepts, and it is free from difficult jargons. Not only that it is a smooth read, it also has author's personal narratives, case studies, and scientific literatures which fortify and vivify the lessons in the book.

Peck combines his scientific and religious views in approaching big and difficult topics like love, discipline, and grace; these two views do not contradict and instead support each other. With his passionate voice, which is moving, I find the lessons very helpful to my personal affairs. I assume other readers would have the same perception, as well.

As an academic, I recommend utilizing this book as a resource for university instructors in their courses, specifically in the arena of psychology, personal development, interpersonal communication, and other allied disciplines. As they do that, I anticipate that students will appreciate the lessons for they are practical and relatable to their own lives. Through such a

technique, students' education will not only be focused on theoretical and abstract concepts, but they could also get to learn practical and real-life lessons, which recognize and empower their socio-spiritual-emotional being.

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