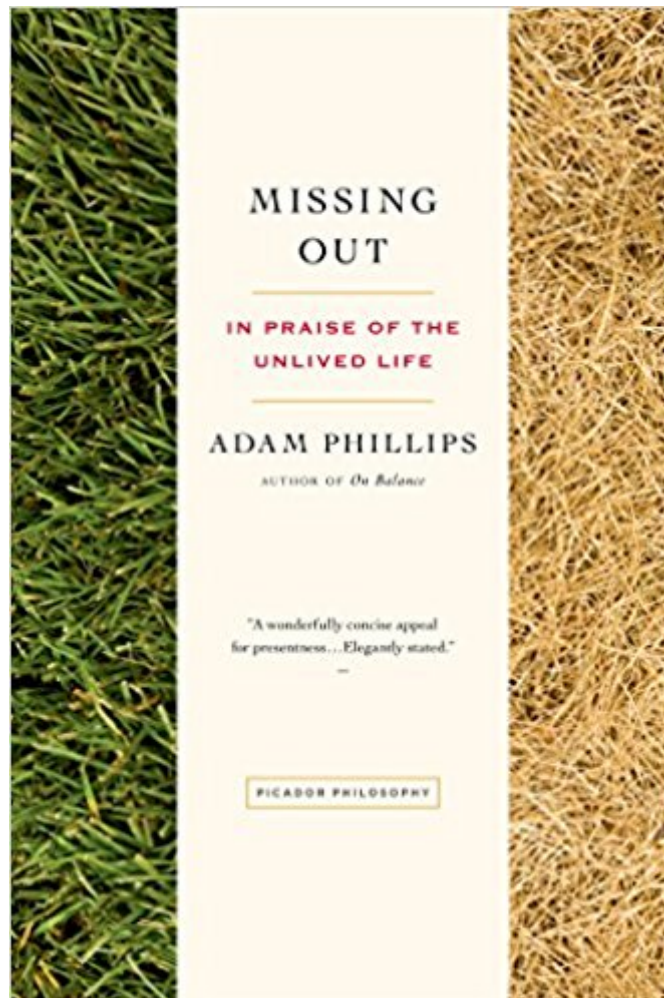




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Missing Out: In Praise Of The Unlived Life



Synopsis

A TRANSFORMATIVE BOOK ABOUT THE LIVES WE WISH WE HAD AND WHAT THEY CAN TEACH US ABOUT WHO WE ARE. All of us lead two parallel lives: the one we are actively living, and the one we feel we should have had or might yet have. As hard as we try to exist in the moment, the unlived life is an inescapable presence, a shadow at our heels. And this itself can become the story of our lives: an elegy to unmet needs and sacrificed desires. We become haunted by the myth of our own potential, of what we have in ourselves to be or to do. And this can make of our lives a perpetual game of falling short. But what happens if we remove the idea of failure from the equation? With his flair for graceful paradox, the acclaimed psychoanalyst Adam Phillips suggests that if we accept frustration as a way of outlining what we really want, satisfaction suddenly becomes possible. To crave a life without frustration is to crave a life without the potential to identify and accomplish our desires. In *Missing Out*, an elegant, compassionate, and absorbing book, Phillips draws deeply on his own clinical experience as well as on the works of Shakespeare and Freud, of D. W. Winnicott and William James, to suggest that frustration, not getting it, and getting away with it are all chapters in our unlived lives—and may be essential to the one fully lived.

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Customer Reviews

"In Praise of the Unlived Life," the subtitle of Adam Phillips' new book, his seventeenth, hooked me. Not so surprising since Stephen Vizinczey's classic "In Praise of Older Women - The Amorous Reflections of A.V." sits next to "Thy Neighbor's Wife" by Gay Talese in my bookcase. So what, I

wanted Phillips to tell me, am I missing out on? Quite a lot, it turns out. Paradoxically, he asserts, we have become experts in what we don't know and know-little's about what we think we do know. When the going gets tough at work or at home, as our frustration builds with the knots we tie ourselves up in, we develop "omniscience" about what awaits us in our unlived lives. It's not until we leave the job or abandon the family that the green pastures we projected turn out to be less nourishing than the life we confidently expected awaited us. There are a couple of reasons for this. Not only is it impossible to fully know ourselves, more importantly, we can never know what goes on with anyone else, not our children, not our parents, not our wives or sweethearts. So we can't know how things will turn out if we stay put and try to work out solutions to our frustrations, and we certainly can't know how we will feel with the new job or partner in the unlived life we opted for. To that degree, the book's subtitle title is, if not misleading, disingenuous. Since we can't know the unlived life - we never reach it -- the praise we cloak it in is a mirage. Phillips, a psychoanalyst with years of practice under his belt, has extensive experience to support his conclusions. Moreover, he is sharp as a tack, extremely well read in his field and out, and a writer the New York Times described as "poetic, paradoxical, repetitive and punning."

I purchased the Kindle version of this book because I believed the author's basic premise was an important one and I wanted to read more about how I can spend less time regretting what didn't happen in my life and more time focusing on living the life I have. I was disappointed to discover that although the author had a good idea for a book, he had no idea what to write about it. The author does a fair job of explaining the premise of the book in the prologue, which I believe can be summarized in one sentence: You are devoted to ruining the life you have by fretting over the life or lives that you didn't have. I expected that the author would follow up the prologue with some suggestions that would help people realize the importance of enjoying and appreciating the life they are living, while at the same time avoiding regret and sadness over what they perceive to be unfulfilled potential, bad luck, mistakes, wrong turns, and so on. Instead, it seems the author conceived of this book as a philosophical treatise on the meaning of frustration and satisfaction. I could accept this if it were meaningful and well-written, but it is not. The author writes long, wordy, and pretentious sentences that seemed designed to impress us with the profundity of his thought and the erudition of his learning. In addition, he has the annoying habit of interrupting his own sentences with hyphenated clauses, as well as randomly inserting the phrase, "whatever it is" throughout the book. Here is a sample of his so-called sentences: "What experiences are made possible by not getting it, and what getting it, whatever it is, might protect us from."

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