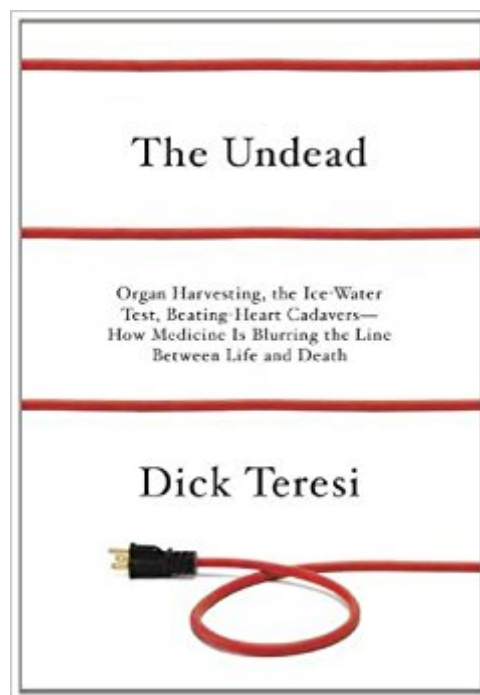




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# **The Undead: Organ Harvesting, The Ice-Water Test, Beating Heart Cadavers--How Medicine Is Blurring The Line Between Life And Death**



## Synopsis

Important and provocative, *The Undead* examines why even with the tools of advanced technology, what we think of as life and death, consciousness and nonconsciousness, is not exactly clear and how this problem has been further complicated by the business of organ harvesting. Dick Teresi, a science writer with a dark sense of humor, manages to make this story entertaining, informative, and accessible as he shows how death determination has become more complicated than ever. Teresi introduces us to brain-death experts, hospice workers, undertakers, coma specialists and those who have recovered from coma, organ transplant surgeons and organ procurers, anesthesiologists who study pain in legally dead patients, doctors who have saved living patients from organ harvests, nurses who care for beating-heart cadavers, ICU doctors who feel subtly pressured to declare patients dead rather than save them, and many others. Much of what they have to say is shocking. Teresi also provides a brief history of how death has been determined from the times of the ancient Egyptians and the Incas through the twenty-first century. And he draws on the writings and theories of celebrated scientists, doctors, and researchers—Jacques-Bénoigne Winslow, Sherwin Nuland, Harvey Cushing, and Lynn Margulis, among others—to reveal how theories about dying and death have changed. With *The Undead*, Teresi makes us think twice about how the medical community decides when someone is dead.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I was tempted to rate this book with five stars, as others have done, merely to counteract the work of reviewers who haven't read the text. But I cannot in good conscience do so. Instead I have rounded up from 3.5 to 4 stars. There is much to recommend this book, but I will not offer unadulterated praise. When deciding whether or not to buy or read this book, look at the dates of the reviews (noting that many of the one-star reviews were posted the day the book was released- I read well and fairly quickly, but a careful reading of the text took time) . Many such reviews admit to being based on a Wall Street Journal article rather than this book. I think it reprehensible to review a book one has not read. I find the impassioned hyperbole warning readers away from this book more dangerous than the hyperbole occasionally employed by the author, though the latter bothered me occasionally, as well. Disallowing these things to be said will not make them untrue or irrelevant. Do not think either that having received a donated liver makes a reviewer qualified to discuss the merits of this book without reading it. But I digress; this was not meant to be a review of reviews (but it clearly is that, too). My point is that if the issues discussed in the book interest you at all and you do not think that discussing something unpleasant should not be allowed, I recommend this book. As I suggested, Mr. Teresi does tend toward hyperbole. His refusal to dispense with the term "harvesting" in favor of the more palatable terms such as 'organ procurement' smacks of a desire render the entire process unpalatable. He implies several times that a DNR order is sometimes tantamount to "killing ... loved ones" (eg, pg 93). This narrow-mindedness was evident occasionally in the writing, though Mr. Teresi deserves much credit for looking at the issue of death and organ procurement/transplantation from many different angles. In addition to being well researched, the work is well cited, so the research is documented and fairly easy to replicate. I think that as a responsible thinker who sees the issues Mr. Teresi raises as alarming and worth pursuing, I must read as many of his sources as possible. I realize that not everyone has the time or desire to do this, but one should not declare well cited material to be "lies and fabrications" as some reviewers have, without investigation. I must say that I am distressed by reviewer S. Fitzpatrick's accusation that Mr. Teresi has altered his email transcript to suit his purposes. Such allegations should be carefully considered and investigated. This book has some problems, such as Mr. Teresi's repeated insistence that he has no cause to sway reader's opinions but only to report facts. This, he mixes in

with talk of killing grandma that will remind many bioethicists of "the daughter from California". But the information itself, the important piece of this puzzle, seems solid and well-researched, and more importantly, is very timely in the discussion of organ transplantation from 'dead' donors. This book's problems are worth moving beyond in the interest of learning from a great body of research on the historical and contemporary approaches to the problem of determining death and the implications thereof for organ transplantation from dead donors. Although the conversation will necessarily be uncomfortable for advocates of organ donation (as I have always been), it is essential and could actually advance the cause to address the issues Mr. Teresi raises, if done honestly, transparently, and thoroughly.

Modern medicine has made it no easier to say with certainty exactly when our conscious awareness has truly left the body. Are you dead when you are no longer you? or are you really and truly dead only when your body starts to putrefy? Are there fates worse than death? What if you are aware, but can not move or respond so you are treated as though you are a vegetable? What about your organs - shouldn't they be harvested when they would be of more use to someone else (obviously before your body starts to rot). What if that "brain dead" individual is aware of the pain when organs are "harvested" should these patients be anesthetized before opening them up (apparently the organs are healthier if no anesthesia is used to "harvest" them). Dick Teresi raises more questions than he answers, but they are questions that need to be raised and discussed.

This was a challenging read, but well worth the effort. It starts out a bit slow, but the historical background provides a strong foundation for the topic. I've been a life-long advocate for organ donation, but when I heard about the "apnea test" I was concerned. I had to do more research and the author provided a great deal of it in this book. My entire perspective is now changed and I'm no longer willing to be a donor. Maybe the solution to the need for organs could be better found in the laboratory by growing organs? This information really expanded my previous understanding of the subject. Definitely not a light read, but highly recommended.

This book opened my mind on a few issues regarding brain death and organ donation. And to me, at this point, there are still no clear cut answers. As a nurse and lawyer at a teaching hospital, I know that organ transplantation is a big business, but had no idea of the extent. I did revise my Healthcare POA documents to reflect that I want brain flow studies prior to being declared brain dead and the organs going procured. This book has raised so many issues in my mind. Now I need

to do more research and find the answers that satisfy me. This book is an excellent primer for anyone with a less than stellar knowledge of the issues. Easy, interesting read with a decent history of the concept of brain death.

"Anesthesiologists have been at the forefront of questioning the finality of brain death and whether beating-heart cadavers truly are unfeeling, unaware corpses. They have also begun wondering about what a 'pretty dead' donor may experience during a three- to five-hour harvest sans anesthetic, and they are speaking out on the subject."

this book is really scary! a definite must-read for anyone who may be in a position to make end-of-life decisions for a loved one.

This book has changed my thinking about organ donation. You may not like it - I didn't at first. But the guy clearly knows what he's talking about. You might want to read it.

This was such an interesting read. I recommend it to anyone that is an organ donor or is considering becoming one, Teresi brings up some very important things to think about.

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