



Life Under Compulsion: Ten Ways to Destroy the Humanity of Your Child

Anthony M. Esolen

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How to raise children who can sit with a good book and read? Who are moved by beauty? Who delight in innocence? Who have no compulsions - who don't have to buy the latest this or that vanity? Who are not bound to the instant urge, wherever it may be found?

Thoughtful parents everywhere ask such questions but struggle to find answers. But now, in this eagerly anticipated follow-up to his acclaimed book *Ten Ways to Destroy the Imagination of Your Child*, Anthony Esolen shows the way.

Although freedom has become a byword of our age, Esolen shows why the common understanding of freedom - as a permission slip to do as you please - is narrow, misleading ... and dangerous. He draws on great thinkers of the Western tradition, from Aristotle and Cicero to Dante and Shakespeare to John Adams and C.S. Lewis, to remind us what human freedom truly means.

Life Under Compulsion shows why our children are not free at all but in fact are becoming slaves to compulsions. Some compulsions come from without: government mandates that determine what children are taught, and even what they can eat in school. Others come from within: the itches that must be scratched, the passions by which children (like the rest of us) can be mastered.

Common Core, smartphones, video games, sex ed, travel teams, Twitter, politicians, popular music, advertising, a world with more genders than there are flavours of ice cream - these and many other aspects of contemporary life come under Esolen's sweeping gaze in *Life Under Compulsion*.

This elegantly written book restores lost wisdom about education, parenting, literature, music, art, philosophy, and leisure. It also restates the importance of concepts so often dismissed today: truth, beauty, goodness, love, faith, and virtue. But above all else, it reminds us of a fundamental truth: that a child is a human being. Countercultural in the best sense of term, *Life Under Compulsion* is an indispensable guide for any parent who wants to help a child remove the shackles and enjoy a truly free, and full, life.

Life Under Compulsion: Ten Ways to Destroy the Humanity of Your Child Details

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From Reader Review Life Under Compulsion: Ten Ways to Destroy the Humanity of Your Child for online ebook

Michael Fitzgerald says

It was not long ago that this would have been firmly in the realm of speculative fiction. How quickly things change.

Corey says

This book makes me want to sing. And that's significant, because I don't sing.

Emily says

I don't think words can express how good or how profound this book is...but if it can be expressed in words, Anthony Esolen is the person who could do it satisfactorily. He has a knack for solidifying thoughts I didn't quite realize I was already thinking. I suppose that's what happens when truth is spoken. It seems to be instantly recognizable for what it is.

I recommend this book to everyone.

Stef says

if you read only one book this year, make this IT.

Katie Fitzgerald says

Anthony Esolen is a conservative Catholic college professor and social commentator whose blog posts and articles about topics such as free speech have been very interesting to me following the 2016 election. In this book (published in 2015), Esolen uses lovely allusions to classic works of literature to build compelling arguments against much of the political correctness, revisionist history, and cultural corruption he observes in the US. He writes beautifully, confidently and passionately about the need for parents to protect their children from the influences of a Godless relativistic culture, and I found myself nodding along as I read, thrilled to have someone articulate so simply what has been bothering me for a long time. Esolen is a brilliant writer and thinker, and whether you have kids or not, this book is worth reading. I've heard that his 2010 book Ten Ways to Destroy the Imagination of Your Child is even better, and I can't wait to read that next!

Aimee says

Every parent needs to read this one!!

Laura says

You... probably shouldn't read this book.

It almost offended me every once in awhile, and I'm pretty conservative. Esolen is like the Jon Stewart of conservatives. It's that level of snark, only turned against those who live without God, those whom he considers "a commuter at best, or a tourist, or a prisoner" riding on the bus of Evolutionary Progress or The Right Side of History or whatever other contemporary brand of self-assurance might seem to offer purpose and meaning to life without God.

And yet, I was continually in awe of Esolen's knowledge of history. I read so few books that appeal to historical precedent with such confidence, and even fewer books where Shakespeare is quoted so casually, so perfectly, and so frequently. Perhaps the best way I can describe Esolen's work is to say that he unplugs all the buzzing machinery of the current age, and you can suddenly hear the quiet hum of crickets again. Esolen is trying to strip away the distractions and get to the simple core of what it means to be alive.

I kept wanting to put it down, but I kept picking it back up again, curious to see what he would tackle next with his sometimes clever and sometimes scathing critiques. It was refreshing at times, bracing at others, and downright irritating on occasion, too.

If you believe that Conservative is a code word for ignorant, selfish, or uneducated, perhaps Esolen will change your mind? But I think he's probably too bellicose to really speak to anyone who is outside of his fold. (I send my kids to public schools, and he dismisses this as an option in pretty much every chapter, so I'm certainly out.) Read it for curiosity, read it for shock value (which seems obvious given the title), but just don't expect to get many solutions out of him. He's just here to ridicule.

Kelly says

Esolen analyzes modern culture in this thought-provoking and sometimes heart-wrenching book, describing what an ideal culture might look like and how far modern culture is from that ideal. A Lewis-like wandering writing style was my only complaint, but otherwise this book is well worth the read.

Angela Boord says

Anthony Esolen's critique of modern atheistic, state-controlled culture given through the lens of education and how we raise our children can in places be devastating, but I found his tone off-putting at times -- somewhat mocking and condescending. Since I agreed with everything criticism he made, I never put the book down, but I wonder if someone else picked up the book -- someone who needed a little convincing that

the current set of liberal cultural givens need examining and ultimately, to be rejected -- would that reader be able to finish the book, or would she simply close it, feeling only insulted? Esolen's conclusions are spot-on for the most part and do not deserve to be watered down. I would unhesitantly recommend the book. But Esolen's tone is the reason I gave 4 and not 5 stars to this book.

JInpeacock Peacock says

The book is excellent in analyzing the problems that face us today and cause our children, as well as ourselves, to be less than what we can and should be. Read the book and explore the ways in which to broaden your child's world and help them to become a fuller and richer created being.

Amy says

Contrary to the title, this book is not just for parents, but for anyone interested in restoring sanity and grace to her life, especially if she is a little too cozy with facebook or twitter. I love a book that challenges me to think about things in a different way, to see things as I had not seen them before--in this case, all the compulsions that crowd my life, and what they might be doing to interfere with my freedom (for the opposite of compulsion is freedom). So many good things to think about in here. Plus Esolen quotes Jacques Maritain, which earns him an extra star from this philosophy major. He weaves references to literature, art, and even the "Twilight Zone" into his writing, and I am glad to have ideas for more authors to read (like Sigrid Undset--how have I missed her?). In the end, one is left with hope, and gratitude.

Matt Simmons says

A very, very Roman Catholic, Thomist, natural law-driven version of the critique made by Wendell Berry, G. K. Chesterton, C.S. Lewis, the Nashville Agrarians, and, in a way, Michel Houellebecq, amongst others: Western man's putative 'freedom' is not truly liberating, but rather merely license to indulge in things our cultural, economic, and political elites *compel* us into believing we *must* indulge in. Though he never mentions them, Esolen's critique suggests that the classic mid-20th century dystopias created by Bradbury, Orwell, and Huxley are, indeed, correct assessments of modern man; we take our soma and think we are fulfilled, not realizing that our freedom is our slavery, not recognizing that in denying all the things that circumscribe and announce human existence as finite, we have lost the very things that make us truly human and provide for us intermediaries for approaching the infinite and transcendent.

Esolen doesn't write with the *élan* of Chesterton, the poetry of Berry, the withering brutality (and nigh-pornography) of Houellebecq, the black comedy of Walker Percy--but he writes in a tradition in which they, and so many other, serious writers have participated in over the last hundred years. And, if one is put off by Esolen's strident anti-progressivism or his ardent Roman Catholicism, one is perhaps better suited to read one of those other critics. Nevertheless, Esolen produces a lucid, compelling, offensive, overly-earnest, and damning assessment of our modern (notice I say *modern*, not 'contemporary') malaise: that we, libido-driven cogs in the neoliberal machine, confuse an existentially-deadening licentiousness and consumerism with the freedom of meaning, home, wonder, and awe at existence.

Steven Wedgeworth says

I really enjoyed this book, as Esolen continues themes already sketched out by folks like Chesterton, Lewis, Wendell Berry, and many "paleo-cons" on the dehumanizing effects of the modern liberal-progressive way of looking at the world. By this description, I do not mean the far left or radical progressives, but rather the ordinary and normal technocratic egalitarian pragmatism that most everyone assumes about life. Esolen points us back to a classical vision of "freedom," goodness, and a rich life.

The book's subtitle and cover image are misleading. I bought the book thinking that it would be something of a parenting manual. I expected it to be a heady parenting manual, but still, I thought it would have something to say about *how* to teach a child. It does not. That marketing approach sits confused and uneven throughout the book. This book is instead an socio-philosophical contrast between a classical humanistic philosophy and modern times, what Esolen dubs "life under compulsion." His thesis is that having been promised unfettered freedom, we are actually constantly compelled to follow base urges, conform to consumptive market forces, and to live isolated lives that do not afford us the necessary conditions for true freedom. We do what we do because we don't see any way to do anything else.

The criticisms are the best parts of this book, and it is certainly a combative book. But it's written with that sort of dry erudite wit that one would expect of the crustier English prof. In one chapter, Esolen subjects President Obama's first inaugural speech to a devastating literary critique.

The book is less strong when it comes to positive proposals. It does say to read great books, have kids, build a home, and go to church. That's good. But it doesn't get into the specifics of why those things are so hard these days-- no real discussion of job restrictions, city planning, travel, etc. As such, this book is definitely a form of preaching to the choir.

But it's good preaching.

Peter says

This was the first (and still only) book I read in Kindle, which was an interesting experience. Once I figured out how Kindle works - bookmarking, highlighting, the ability to look up words, it was fun. However, I still prefer actually holding the book and making notes and observations as needed.

I have become familiar with Esolen over the last few years reading his essays - How the Church Changed the World - in the monthly Magnificat. He has a very fluid style, reminiscent of forms of writing history - using a story to tell history. He is an English professor at Providence College in RI, so that would explain his style of writing. I think it is refreshing and engaging. In this book, he takes on living as a person of faith, with an attachment to traditional culture and learning (permanent things), and how increasingly difficult that is in today's world. That such people feel under increasing pressure to either conform or at least to be quiet - to keep their thinking and reasoning to themselves. Hence the title. For educators and parents, and anyone concerned with the state of our culture, I think this is a worthwhile read.

Winston Elliott III says

Anthony Esolen challenges the reader to live a life of true freedom. Many Americans today worship "liberty" as a religion of choice. Esolen encourages the reader to avoid using "freedom/liberty" as abstract "virtue" terms as most do in the modern understanding where these terms are almost universally meant as choice without government compulsion, without the greater responsibility of moral duty. This concept of "liberty/freedom" is in direct contradiction to an understanding of the dignity of the human person. Reading this very fine book will help us to define liberty as including a substantive understanding of the human person as a creature of the Creator. Without that "freedom" is just another utilitarian path to the inferno.

Dr. Esolen is a marvelous story teller and illuminates the way that we, and our children, may make to a fuller humanity through literature, art, and a well appreciated re-found leisure. This is a book to aid us as parents and educators as we seek to offer children the love of God found in family and faith. There is Hope in a fallen world, it is to be found in truth, beauty and goodness, the gifts of our Creator. In gratitude, let us pray.
