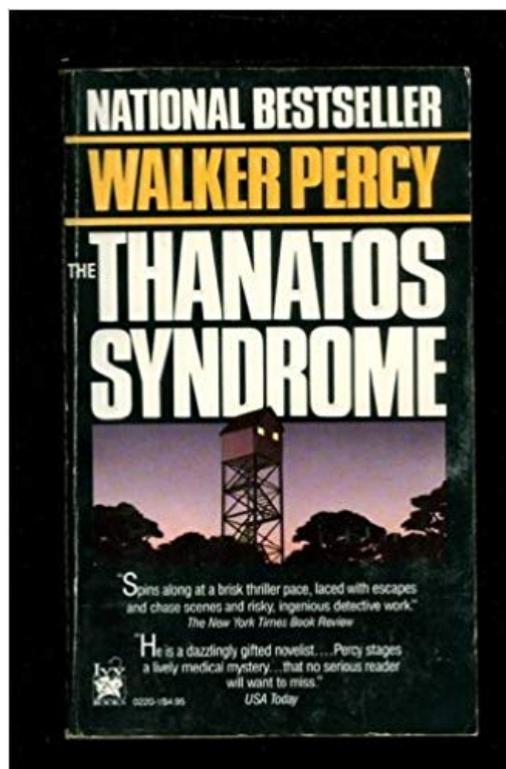


## The Thanatos Syndrome *by* Walker Percy



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**Author:** Walker Percy

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When Dr. Tom More is released on parole from state prison, he returns to Feliciana, Louisiana, the parish where he was born and bred, where he practiced psychiatry before his arrest. He immediately notices something strange in almost everyone around him: unusual sexual behavior in women patients, a bizarre loss of inhibition, his own wife's extraordinary success as bridge tournaments, during which her mind seems to function like a computer. With the help of his attractive cousin, Dr. Lucy Lipscomb, Dr. More begins to uncover a criminal experiment to "improve" people's behavior by drugging the local water supply. But beyond this scheme are activities so sinister that Dr. More can only wonder if the whole world has gone crazy -- or he has . . .



## Reviews of the [The Thanatos Syndrome](#) *by* Walker Percy

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This is a book about morality.

In a way it is vertigo-inducing in its complex navigation of moral belief systems and groups forming around them, against them, or against those that are against them.

In a way, it's not complex at all. It's just people trying to make meaning and feel that time is worthwhile in the face of a terrifying sea of vast information and vast freedom.

SPOILERS:

An eccentric ideologue tries using the threat of prison versus the prospect of a vast fortune as a consultant to keep our protagonist quiet about a certain conspiracy to drug the public water supply.

The ideologue believes in earnest that the drugging does good for society, and for good reason, and that the financial safety is better than prison. Our protagonist believes that the drugging is not good, and for good reason, and that prison can be a better option than the lucrative consulting gig along with its dread.

The protagonist is actually quite happy in prison, with no ability to choose what he'd rather do. He's happy to escape prison and come back, happy to navigate the shifting morality of the guard, the sheriff, Comeaux, the depressed priest in the watch tower, and to get by. He's even happy to take action in the rare instance that he has that option.

krot

Walker Percy is my favorite writer. The guy is fascinating--and just had his finger on the pulse of the 20th century.

That said, I would discourage anyone from reading *The Thanatos Syndrome*—unless you are already a Percy fanatic and have read his first four novels: *The Moviegoer*, *The Last Gentleman*, *Love in the Ruins*, and *Lancelot*, which are much worthier of your time. (And, fyi, *The Thanatos Syndrome* is actually a sequel to *Love in the Ruins*.) It is generally accepted, even by his truest admirers--especially by his truest admirers--that Percy lost his powers with age. That--and he became more didactic. Being the last novel he wrote, this one does not have the magic of the early novels. Check those out first.

caster

I just read this book for the third time in 20 years. It gets better every time I read it. It's so multi-layered, and there is so much going on underneath the story line: existentialism, Catholicism, psychology, societal behavior control. This book is deep as an abyss: You just keep going down into it, and you discover more and more (no pun intended).

My favorite line in the book is an observation by the protagonist and narrator, Dr. Tom More. He has been caught writing prescriptions for amphetamines to help long-distance truck drivers stay awake on their long hauls. Since it's a minor crime and he is well-respected in his community, he is jailed for only a few days. Dr. More finds that he kind of likes jail because his daily activities are scheduled and pre-determined. He says, "There is something to be said for having no choice in what one does." I can't think of a more perfect commentary on the great struggle of existentialism.

After my third reading of this book, I have decided that Walker Percy is my favorite writer of all time. That's no small statement. This man is a genius, but he's more that just that: He's a gifted storyteller and an insightful social commentator. And don't forget his other books, including the non-fiction. They're all incredible.

(Sigh). I was at my local neighborhood pool the other day, and people were lying around in their beach chairs reading James Patterson, et al. I wanted to scream at them: OPEN YOUR MINDS AND READ PERCY. But I didn't. Walker Percy is for the minority who appreciate great literature that makes our lives richer.

Excellent

The Thanatos Syndrome relies upon a flimsy detective story to examine the greatest issues facing Americans (perhaps all of Western culture) as we enter the 21st century. Not that the genre device fails, but that it seems so inconsequential next to the ideas which hang upon it, like the rod that supports the wardrobe of existence, itself.

Although this novel was written in the late 20th century, it feels as if it could be today or tomorrow. We are introduced to themes that are totally familiar, yet somehow bizarre: sex detached from love (and/or procreation), emphasis on results at play/work/and school, social engineering, amorality, mercy-killing, faith in the rightness of science/technology/and progress, abandonment of our humanity. All this, and yet readable, engaging, absorbing and memorable.

If you are interested in an entertainment that makes you think and ponder the great issues of existence, while keeping you turning the pages, I highly recommend this book.

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