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# The Meaning of Life: A Very Short Introduction

By Terry Eagleton



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## The Meaning of Life: A Very Short Introduction By Terry Eagleton

The phrase "the meaning of life" for many seems a quaint notion fit for satirical mauling by Monty Python or Douglas Adams. But in this spirited *Very Short Introduction*, famed critic Terry Eagleton takes a serious if often amusing look at the question and offers his own surprising answer.

Eagleton first examines how centuries of thinkers and writers--from Marx and Schopenhauer to Shakespeare, Sartre, and Beckett--have responded to the ultimate question of meaning. He suggests, however, that it is only in modern times that the question has become problematic. But instead of tackling it head-on, many of us cope with the feelings of meaninglessness in our lives by filling them with everything from football to sex, Kabbala, Scientology, "New Age softheadedness," or fundamentalism. On the other hand, Eagleton notes, many educated people believe that life is an evolutionary accident that has no intrinsic meaning. If our lives have meaning, it is something with which we manage to invest them, not something with which they come ready made. Eagleton probes this view of meaning as a kind of private enterprise, and concludes that it fails to hold up. He argues instead that the meaning of life is not a solution to a problem, but a matter of living in a certain way. It is not metaphysical but ethical. It is not something separate from life, but what makes it worth living--that is, a certain quality, depth, abundance and intensity of life.

Here then is a brilliant discussion of the problem of meaning by a leading thinker, who writes with a light and often irreverent touch, but with a very serious end in mind.

**About the Series:** Combining authority with wit, accessibility, and style, **Very Short Introductions** offer an introduction to some of life's most interesting topics. Written by experts for the newcomer, they demonstrate the finest contemporary thinking about the central problems and issues in hundreds of key topics, from philosophy to Freud, quantum theory to Islam.



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## Editorial Review

### Review

"This is a brief, ambitious, and satisfying book. As a survivor of the theory wars, Terry Eagleton has emerged as a critic and thinker who will help us theologues ponder not only life's meaning but the next steps we should take as even postmodernism fades into cultural history. If there is a cultural life for us all in the aftermath of the conflict between essentialism and relativism, Eagleton's provocative essay will point the way both to making and discovering its meaning."--Gary R. Hall, *Anglican Theological Review*

"Eagleton's witty eclecticism is perfect for such a lofty subject, but would it be inappropriate to ask for more?"--Leopold Froelich, *Playboy*

"*The Meaning of Life* may be 'lie' relative to how much more a scholar like Mr. Eagleton might have said, but it is still a work that demands close attention from readers who are already well grounded in literature and philosophy."--Mark Grannis, *The Washington Times*

"The news that Terry Eagleton has tackled the meaning of life in a book of a mere 185 pages shouldn't raise any eyebrows. If anyone can pull it off, it's probably him. Eagleton, unsurprisingly, has written an elegant, literate, cogent consideration of a maddeningly slippery topic, one whose conclusions run contrary to conventional wisdom, especially in this country."--Laura Miller, *Salon.com*

"Eagleton's is unlike most works on life's meaning, in which writers often invoke theology. Eagleton's notion of love may seem to lead back to theism, but he shows us we can have meaningful lives whatever our theology, and he invites us all to choose. He deserves a place in most collections."--Leslie Armour, *Library Journal*

"Regardless of whether you agree with him, you'll find yourself challenged by this little book."--*Houston Chronicle*

### About the Author

**Terry Eagleton** is Professor of Cultural Theory and John Rylands Fellow at the University of Manchester. His literary criticism includes *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger*, and *After Theory*. He has also written a novel, *Saints and Scholars*, several plays and a memoir, *The Gatekeeper*. He divides his time between Manchester, Dublin and Derry.

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#### **Anthony Powell:**

In this 21st millennium, people become competitive in every single way. By being competitive now, people have to do something to make them survive, being in the middle of often the crowded place and notice by simply surrounding. One thing that at times many people have underestimated that for a while is reading. Yep, by reading a publication your ability to survive increases then having a chance to stay than other is high. For yourself who want to start reading some sort of book, we give you this kind of *The Meaning of Life: A Very Short Introduction* book as basic and daily reading guide. Why, because this book is more than just a book.

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#### **Michael Emery:**

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