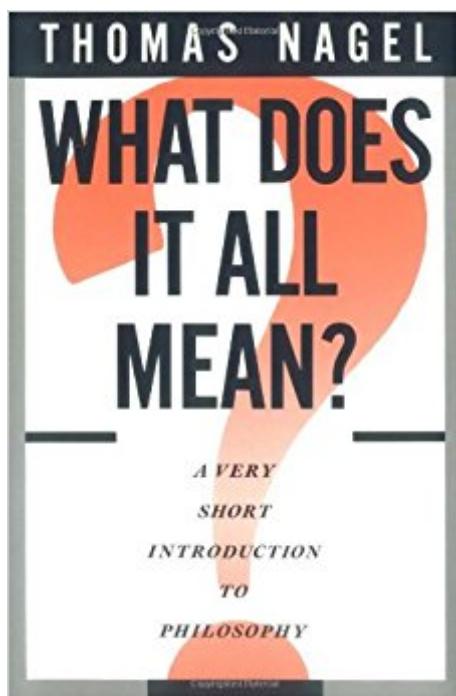


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# What Does It All Mean?: A Very Short Introduction To Philosophy



## **Synopsis**

In this cogent and accessible introduction to philosophy, the distinguished author of *Mortal Questions* and *The View From Nowhere* sets forth the central problems of philosophical inquiry for the beginning student. Arguing that the best way to learn about philosophy is to think about its questions directly, Thomas Nagel considers possible solutions to nine problems--knowledge of the world beyond our minds, knowledge of other minds, the mind-body problem, free will, the basis of morality, right and wrong, the nature of death, the meaning of life, and the meaning of words. Although he states his own opinions clearly, Nagel leaves these fundamental questions open, allowing students to entertain other solutions and encouraging them to think for themselves.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

"A very well written book...great for introducing the topics to an intro-level class. It touches on key issues and brings up the relevant points, yet all in relatively short and easy-to-understand chapters. Would be a great supplement for a course in metaphysics."--Jack Bowen, DeAnza College"An excellent introduction; it introduces students to some of the important philosophical questions without overwhelming them with terminology or history."--Jason A. Beyer, College of Lake County"A phenomenal amount of material in a tiny book coupled with humor."--Joan Anderson, Orange Coast College, CA"A good philosophy book for neophytes. It is penetrable for the beginner and comprehensive enough to elucidate a spectrum of traditional philosophic issues."--David Wolf, SUNY at Albany"A good, clearly interesting book to use for an Introduction to Philosophy course. Thomas Nagel has done a fine job."--Stephen Joseph, Framingham State College"This little book by

Nagel is quite simply the best introduction to philosophy ."--Graham Oddie, University of Colorado at Boulder"The perfect title for a writing that offers no answers while helping the student formulate their own responses to life's greatest questions."--JoAnn L. Smith, North Central Bible College"An outstanding introductory textbook to philosophy. The best textbook I know to give freshmen an idea of what philosophy is."--Ran Lahay, Southern Methodist University"We are already using this book as a text, and we are enjoying it."--Martin E. Bayang, New Mexical State University"An outstanding introductory framework to many of the most important problems in philosophy. It is clear and simple--even my freshman can read it--yet never simplistic...Ties in well with many traditional theories."--Richard M. Wolters, Doane College

Thomas Nagel is at New York University.

This is a very short yet captivating introduction to central philosophical questions in different areas by one of the famous analytic philosophers of our current day. In extremely clear and simple prose, Nagel tries to demonstrate the uniqueness of philosophical problems and questions. His presentation is inevitably non-neutral, however. For example, in the chapters about morality, death, and meaning, one clearly recognizes details from his arguments in "The View from Nowhere" and "Mortal Questions".

WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN? was forwarded to me by my daughter while she was attending college. She read it as part of her philosophy course syllabus. At first I thought it too slim of a volume to have substantial philosophical merit. How can the meaning of existence be even broached in one hundred pages? But Thomas Nagel has done just that. Be it read as introductory or review, one can satisfactorily cover the basics of philosophy in about an hour. That in itself is quite an accomplishment. This book examines and acquaints the reader with the major questions of philosophy. As many other reviewers have pointed out, Nagel is remiss where it comes to giving answers, but I don't believe that was ever his intention with this short work. This is not a tract on "how to live," rather a primer for "what to think about?"

At about 100 pages in a somewhat large font, this book is indeed very short; you can read it in a day or two, if you have some time. I've read and thought about philosophy a lot over the years, so I didn't actually need to read another introduction to the subject, but I've recently read some of Thomas Nagel's essays and I was impressed, so I thought I'd give this book a try. Overall, I'm not

disappointed. Nagel displays the rigorous hairsplitting characteristic of analytic philosophy, but he applies this rigor to big and important questions, rather than intellectual trivia which is of only academic interest. As a result, he's a penetrating and balanced philosopher, so he manages to cover a lot of ground in this book. He wrestles earnestly with the questions, and thus shows us what philosophy looks like when it's done well. He writes unpretentiously, but these questions are difficult, so you have to focus and engage actively with the material. In fact, rather than claiming to answer the questions, he shows that the questions lead to further questions, with firm conclusions being seemingly or actually impossible. He does state his opinions (and I agree with nearly all of them), but he does this only as an aside, thus emphasizing that readers need to evaluate the arguments and potential conclusions for themselves. The only drawback is that, because the book is so short, many readers will be left wanting a lot more, and readers already well versed in philosophy might not get much from the book. But for an audience which is new to philosophy, the book packs in plenty of content, and such readers may be shocked to discover how philosophical enquiry can contradict and undermine 'common sense'. From that perspective, I'm almost tempted \*not\* to recommend this book!

Great book.

#### GOOD READ, SCHOOL REQUIRED

I found the book a great way to be introduced to the subject of philosophy. As the title suggests, what does it all mean? At its most basic level you can obtain a true understanding of the social science called philosophy. It is in very simple language and it provides some practical understanding of how to view the subject. It somehow causes you to think that this is all there is. But when you actually start to read true philosophical works, you tend to realize how the great philosophers had some deeper meaning with their works which in fact become more fascinating and mind boggling. If you read "what does it all mean", you can feel you have acquired some basic understanding of philosophy.

I think highly of Thomas Nagel as a serious philosopher. If you don't have a clue about philosophy, this is probably about as good an introduction as you can get. Nagel writes about philosophical problems that have haunted human minds throughout the ages. It is intentionally ahistorical for the good reasons that Nagel gives. If you have had exposure to philosophy in, say, a college level

course, this book will be much too simple for you. But if you want something to grease the neurons to start thinking in the abstract way that is philosophical in character, then this book is for you. It's probably a great text for kids in a high school course or adults who are just realizing the benefit of stepping back from life for a moment or two to reflect on what it all means.

Thought it was for class I found it to cover a lot within a short length. It was a great read overall.

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