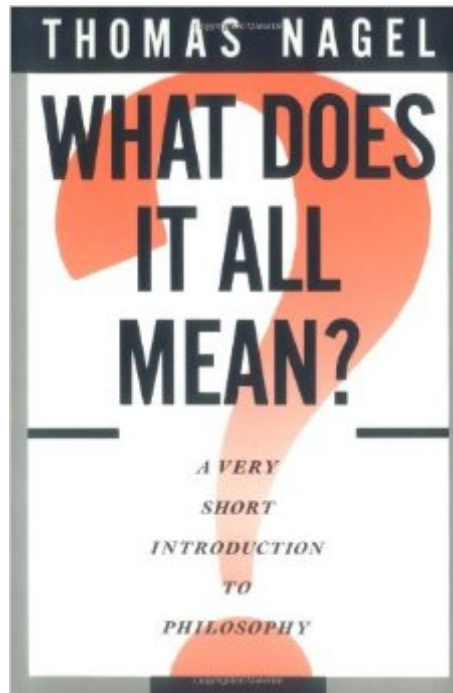


The book was found

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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During that first week of the first semester of the freshman year, before the social fraternities might have planned and executed their first parties, before the sports tryouts, play auditions, talent shows, and football games can begin in earnest, for those very few days, the meaning of college and a scholarly endeavor can still be shaped by a teacher. In those two or three class meetings, while others are still defining the field, deriving the Greek origin of the course title, explaining his/her own teaching approach, reading the syllabus, updating roll books, and breaking the ice, in those few days I try to capture students' attention. I will need it for the rest of the semester and I see it as an important part of my job to win it. But I have only a few days to hook them. Those who I can not ensnare are usually lost to the hard stuff, hookah, and hormones. So it's vital that I catch them, and fast. Luckily, I teach Philosophy and History. Understanding this challenge, the first assignment

should both engage and prepare the student for the next readings. Getting through the initial chapters should be an encouraging experience. If an advanced high school student could complete the readings for the second class meeting, spending about three hours to do so, and then successfully use the material in the next class discussion, then that reading is a perfect first selection. And a broad description of philosophical thinking, in language that provides a freshman with better than even chances to succeed, can still be found in Thomas Nagel's *What Does It All Mean? A Very Short Introduction to Philosophy*. Nine chapters of about ten pages each make this readable little book ideal for the first week of an introductory course in Philosophy.

Here is perhaps the best book to give to someone who asks "what is this philosophy stuff all about anyway?" In this short 100-page book the basic problems of philosophy receive coherent, meaningful, and very down to earth treatment. Nearly anyone can read this book. It includes no large imposing technical terms or obscure opaque theories. The language and subject matter of the book take aim at the true beginner and hit every time. Anyone with no background in philosophy, but with a curious streak for the subject, should read this book cover to cover. Another interesting approach this book takes involves the complete absence of the names of eminent philosophers. Plato, Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, Descartes, Nietzsche, Russell, Quine; none of their names appear. This focuses the book on the nitty gritty subject matter, not the "big names" that pack most introductory philosophy texts. It also focuses readers on themselves. The questions asked and subjects covered can be directly related to the reader's own experience and life. One doesn't have to have read Descartes' "Meditations on The First Philosophy" to follow the first four chapters. They can be read and related to one's own experience, for some very basic questions get unearthed here: How do I know anything? How do I know that other people have minds? Am I a mind and a body or just a body? How do I figure out what words mean? And so on. This makes for a very welcoming introduction for newcomers. The book empowers those with little background rather than batting them down with "great names" or "great theories". Hopefully the text will whet the appetite for more (don't stop here by any means). For those with a philosophy background (I have a B.A.) the book can still be refreshing in its simplicity.

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