



# The Meaning of Life: How to Discover Your Purpose in Life

*Richard Brand*

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## **The Meaning of Life: How to Discover Your Purpose in Life** Richard Brand

In *The Meaning of Life*, author, professor, and productivity coach **Richard Brand** takes a personal look at his own life to explore the question that has been on the minds of everyone from Socrates to Aristotle, that question being: *What is the best possible life?* Many people have attempted to provide an answer to this question. One of the most popular answers in self-help today is happiness. We're told to do what makes us most happy. Seek pleasure. Avoid pain. Almost everything I've read about personal development uses some variation of happiness as the ultimate goal of life.

But I think happiness is a cop-out answer. Happiness is just an emotion. And placing my entire life in the service of achieving and maintaining a particular emotional state is clearly suboptimal. For one, I'm very emotionally resilient, and it doesn't take much to make me happy and content. Happiness and well-being can be maintained largely with a very healthy diet and lots of exercise. I'm already good at managing my emotions and being happy, so I'm certain I can do better than this.

Even if we extend happiness into the realm of fulfillment or flourishing, it's still a cop-out. By giving such an answer to the question of how to live, all we're doing is tossing the question over to our emotional intelligence. We're saying that the answer to how to live is whatever our emotions say is the answer. The assumption is that if we feel fulfilled, that we must be living optimally. I see no logical reason this answer would be correct, given what I know about how emotions work. Not good enough.

For these reasons I rejected any answers that suggested the optimal manner of living was to be found in some kind of emotional state or feeling. I can consciously choose to feel whatever I want just by changing my focus. There isn't any particular course of action that will induce a feeling in me I can't achieve just by directing my imagination. I can self-emote.

And then we have a whole host of other self-help gurus who seem to define the goal of life in terms of being successful, becoming wealthy, having fulfilling relationships, etc. Well, as you probably suspect, that's just marketing fluff with no real substance behind it. Most of these books are aimed at trying to show you how to achieve optimal results within the pre-existing social context, but as we've already seen, even if you can manage to hit the supposed peak there, you'll still be living suboptimally. You'll only spend your whole life trying to climb a molehill and will leave most of your potential greatness untapped.

The way I chose to tackle this question in *The Meaning of Life* was to look at my life in the context of the big picture of my clearest understanding of reality. This meant looking at the history of life to the degree we understand it, the possible future of life and where it might lead, and the present condition of life. I felt that a consideration of the best possible human life would have to be placed within the framework of all of life, past, present, and projected future.

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