



# The Meanings of Life

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Notice that I call this little essay "The Meanings of Life," using the plural form. That's because there is no single Meaning, except perhaps for some ultra-religious souls.

Here are the Meanings:

**1. Enjoy friendship.** The pleasure of others' company helps sustain us through life. Friendships must be cultivated or they will wither. It's also wise to cultivate new friends, as this will add to the richness of our lives. A wiser person than me once said: "You can only have six good friends." There is truth to this even if six i(6) s a weird or spurious number. You only have so much time to spare, to give proper

attention to your friends, so this limit makes some kind of sense.

**2. Contribute to the public good.** Make the world a better place somehow. I am assuming that Altruism is a virtue. If you disagree, that is a subject for a different long and interesting discussion.

**3. Help a specific person or group of people.** For most of us, rewards will result in terms of personal connections and feelings of having helped a particular individual. In contrast, working for social causes alone or being solely philanthropic each have limitations.

**4. Appreciate art.** Is all art worthwhile? No. If "Keeping up with the Kardashians" is your idea of art, for you my friend, there is no hope. But seriously, Art in so any forms can enhance your life and many others'. I will not attempt to prove that here.

**5. Engage in meaningful work.** You define it; now go out and get it. This may seem obvious, but sometimes it needs saying: Working at something you love, will make you happier. "Meaningful" is surely a word that needs clarifying. But you must do it.

**6. Cultivate your physicality.** By physicality, I mean to include all sports, dance, exercise, hiking and sex. All of these activities can give pleasure to your life as well as enhance your health. As you can tell, I believe unapologetically that cultivating pleasure is an aspect of happiness. Body, yes. Mind, yes. Body without mind, no. Mind without body, no. Witness the epidemic of cell phone users walking into walls and worse.

**7. Live in the moment - but not all of the time.** "Mindfulness" is all the rage. And it is important. But it is also important to plan, so as to achieve your goals or avoid dangers. Also, for me at least, one of life's great pleasures is to savor the best

moments and achievements of our personal pasts.

**8. Learn from history.** We have much to comprehend from great achievements as well as from the notorious follies of past eras. Naziism is but one obvious example. More recently, I have been learning of the crimes of Imperialism under the Golden Age of Greece in the time of Pericles. Pride and arrogance are just two of the dangers that can hurt or obliterate our species. In contrast, the invention of the Salk Vaccine or the writing of the songs of West Side Story and of The Beatles, or the music of Mozart show that humans can - appearances notwithstanding -- achieve greatness!

Now what do YOU think? Thanks in advance for your thoughts!

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