



# The Best Things in Life: A Guide to What Really Matters

*Thomas Hurka*

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For centuries, philosophers, theologians, moralists, and ordinary people have asked: How should we live? What makes for a good life?

In *The Best Things in Life*, distinguished philosopher Thomas Hurka takes a fresh look at these perennial questions as they arise for us now in the 21st century. Should we value family over career? How do we balance self-interest and serving others? What activities bring us the most joy? While religion, literature, popular psychology, and everyday wisdom all grapple with these questions, philosophy more than anything else uses the tools of reason to make important distinctions, cut away irrelevancies, and distill these issues down to their essentials. Hurka argues that if we are to live a good life, one thing we need to know is which activities and experiences will most likely lead us to happiness and which will keep us from it, while also reminding us that happiness isn't the only thing that makes life good. Hurka explores many topics: four types of good feeling (and the limits of good feeling); how we can improve our baseline level of happiness (making more money, it turns out, isn't the answer); which kinds of knowledge are most worth having; the importance of achieving worthwhile goals; the value of love and friendship; and much more. Unlike many philosophers, he stresses that there isn't just one good in life but many: pleasure, as Epicurus argued, is indeed one, but knowledge, as Socrates contended, is another, as is achievement. And while the great philosophers can help us understand what matters most in life, Hurka shows that we must ultimately decide for ourselves.

This delightfully accessible book offers timely guidance on answering the most important question any of us will ever ask: How do we live a good life?

## The Best Things in Life: A Guide to What Really Matters Details

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## **From Reader Review The Best Things in Life: A Guide to What Really Matters for online ebook**

### **Mike Cross says**

Very thorough, quick introduction into happiness and emotions. I especially enjoyed how the author compared and contrasted differing ideas and asked more questions than gave answers. This book will make you think, a lot!

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### **Dwpage says**

This is a good introduction to a value pluralist view, and is worth reading for both professionals and lay people. It engages other views that have been defended, is informed by both the historical and contemporary philosophical literature, and it is also written in a clear and almost colloquial style. Hurka claims that the fundamental values are pleasure (which he also calls 'happiness' and 'feeling good'), knowledge (of a certain sort), achievement, virtue, and perhaps also love. He also considers the value of different sorts of lives, with respect to both overall shape and extent. While I don't agree with all of his conclusions, I found every chapter illuminating.

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### **TerribleTamada says**

I first read it my freshman year of college, now I'm reading it 5 years later and I think my opinion is mostly unchanged. At times engaging, at other times not so much. It's an okay overview of how philosophers respond to life. The topics I found most interesting today were the analysis of flow, the idea of autonomy, and the chapter on love. Other than that I wish he would have spent more time engaging with other philosophers in a way that would inspire me to read them. He would put further reading at the end of each chapter, but none of his writing actually made me want to look into them.

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### **Will Corvin says**

Solid advice on how to live a good life. At the same time, it came off more as a self-help book than philosophy, and I did not feel that any of the claims made were all that profound.

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### **Venkat says**

Read this books via getabstract. This book deals with things that make life good and meaningful. Individual right balance on pleasure, happiness, knowledge, achievement, virtues, love and friendship makes a life good.

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## David says

Clearly written, intermittently funny, survey by a Canadian philosopher of basic questions about what makes a good life. Conclusions seem unamazing (there is more than one way to have a good life; pleasure is not the only good, but knowledge and achievement and friendship and love are important too; there are different kinds of knowledge, not all equally valuable; etc.) but the verbal fluency and methodical reasoning involved in getting to them are impressive.

Reminds me a little of the writing of the late philosopher Robert Nozick, who was one of the smartest people I ever met. I'm always ambivalent reading this sort of thing -- 50% "why are you deploying such a huge amount of brainpower to laying out in detail the basis of conclusions that are either obvious or, if not, then seemingly arbitrary?" and 50% "wow, these guys are really leading the life of the mind; this is fantastic stuff". Reaction probably varies mostly as a function of whether I'm able to follow the particular chapter I'm reading.

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## Disha says

So often, we tend to seek 'happiness' and confuse it with 'pleasure'. However, this book casts a light on other aspects of happiness. Knowledge, for one gives us a hierarchical understanding of how world works and allows us to process the world systematically. Thus, this allows us to have a better understanding of what constitutes as happiness. The processing of information also differentiates us from animals who process happiness differently.

Also, aiming for bigger achievements creates a ripple effect of "happiness". For example, an invention of a sustainable business provides for better utilization of existing resources while empowering local community. This book also touches upon other arenas of life, eg love and friendship. I particularly liked the fact that love involves understanding which creates happiness among couples and friends. Also, when you start building a history with someone the quirkiness and uniqueness of that individual fills up the "knowledge" part of that person which allows one to love them more as it allows them to know and appreciate what makes them unique.

I thoroughly enjoyed this book because it provides a fresh perspective on life, events and people - all of which provide for our purpose and happiness. Highly recommend to anyone who would like to question or critically analyze/compare their own thoughts!

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## Don says

I'm not sure how the title relates to the book, but it is really Hurka's personal moral philosophy and how said philosophy directs one to live and what to value. He draws a lot of varying schools of ethics, particularly Bentham and Utilitarianism, but also utilizes Kant and Aristotle in making his case for how we should value things in a modern world, and how those values interplay with our decision making. Hurka is very good at using analogies and thought experiments to make his points, and I thought that this was a strength of his book - it could be read by someone who has no idea who Bentham, Kant, or Aristotle were, let alone their particular thoughts on ethics. Interesting read, provides good material for intellectual digestion and internal dialogue.

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## **Hira Chowdhary says**

Recommended by Fareed Zakaria on his sunday morning program, GPS. Reading it on my kindle

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