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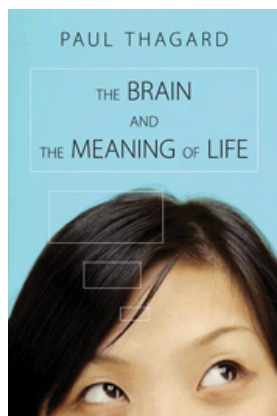
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For morality and theology, read biology

17:04 20 April 2010

Books



Amanda Gefter, books and arts editor

PAUL Thagard's book is a thoughtful and well-researched attempt to answer that most fundamental existential question: why not kill yourself? Or, to give it a positive spin, what gives life meaning?

Thagard lays out detailed arguments that reality is knowable through science, that minds are nothing other than material brains and that there are no ultimate rights and wrongs handed down by a supernatural being. Religious ideas such as free will and immortality have been undermined by science - and so, some might think, has the possibility for absolute statements about the meaning of life. Thagard says otherwise. He believes that achieving goals in love, work and play make life meaningful, not as a matter of philosophy but as a matter of biology.

For instance, animals that lack social bonds are unhealthier than those who enjoy close relationships, so pursuing goals in love makes life meaningful because it satisfies vital biological needs. By connecting moral questions to objective facts about the universal structure of brains, Thagard hopes to pave the way for a morality that is rooted in science rather than religion.

Book information:

The Brain and the Meaning of Life by Paul Thagard

Published by Princeton University Press

£20.95/\$29.95



tags brain morality philosophy

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