

Source: *Education's End: Why Our Colleges and Universities Have Given Up on the Meaning of Life*

By Anthony T. Kronman

[://www.amazon.com/Educations-End-Colleges-Universities-Meaning/dp/0300122888](http://www.amazon.com/Educations-End-Colleges-Universities-Meaning/dp/0300122888)

Summary:

What is the meaning of life? The author examines why this question has fallen into disuse in most of higher education, where it once played a central role at colleges and universities in America. Even in the humanities, the author contends, “political correctness” of the past 40 years has stifled professors from exploring what used to be a vital question. Professor Kronman says that teachers and students alike do seek to address the meaning of life, and he suggests the means to that end is a return to more reading of the great works of literature and philosophy.

Supporters: Supporters of Kronman contend that the higher education has suffered from “political correctness” and narrow career training. Taking the place of addressing deep questions about life are science and religious fundamentalism, both of which are flawed in their narrow approaches to explaining life’s purpose and meaning. Moreover, colleges and universities are trending toward becoming purely vocational schools for undergraduates and places where professors and graduate students are mainly focused on research and publishing instead of teaching. A return to studying the classics is the best remedy for feeding students’ souls, and Kronman defends Eurocentrism as actually being more tolerant than “political correctness.”

Detractors: Detractors of Kronman point out that globalization is not westernization and the basic questions of life do not necessitate a study of a mostly western canon. Kronman contends that students should be first and foremost concerned with their home culture. Critics point to his lack of understanding that classrooms have many people with various backgrounds and cultures, and that students and professors can learn a great deal from people and texts with multi-cultural perspectives. His rather narrow view of defending a western focus limits what can be learned from, and about, the wider humanity.

Detractors also point out that professors too rarely know and understand what interests students (particularly young students) and how professors might better engage with their

students. Concerning spirituality, they argue that students may be more excited and connected with a canon beyond just the “great works.” Furthermore, professors may connect better to students if they understand the dynamics of how and why students use social media in their quest for expression and meaning. Writes reviewer Doug Anderson, “This overvaluing & overpraising classic texts & undervaluing & underpraising self can be dehumanizing.”