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## Midgley's "What is philosophy for?" (book review)

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# Book Review

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Midgley, M. (2018). *What is philosophy for?* New York: Bloomsbury. 223 pp. \$25.95. ISBN 9781350051072

The author published *What Is Philosophy For?* less than a month before her death at age 99. Mary Midgley was a retired professor of moral philosophy at University of Newcastle Upon Tyne in England and wrote many books and articles. Ever a proponent of holism and an ardent critic of materialism, in this her final book, Midgley argued for the reality of nature and human nature and the use of philosophy to bring the two together to guide our lives. In the final chapter, she stated that the purpose of the book was to correct scientism and to show that mind is as real as matter.

Like many of Midgley's other books, she wrote *What Is Philosophy For?* for educated laypeople. In 24 short, interesting, and thought-provoking chapters she discussed the importance of philosophy and the limitations of science. For her, philosophy challenges fragmentation and helps people gain meaning through a larger context and be tolerant of other ideas. Philosophy also guards people from reducing nature to materialism and human nature to machines.

The book is unique in that it addresses the philosophy of science and scientism on a popular level. In his book slightly dated, *Theory of Science: A Philosophical Investigation into the Symbolic Reduction of Experience*, Roscoe also used several short chapters to address the same subject, but he addressed more advanced issues than Midgley. *Scientism: Prospects and Problems*, edited by de Ridder, Peels, and van Woudenberg, and *Scientism: The New Orthodoxy* by Williams and Robinson (by the same publisher) addressed the same subject but in a more comprehensive and scholarly way. These books are worthwhile reads, but they go beyond the purpose of Midgley's book. Her book refers to a minimum of resources and appeals to the layperson mostly through logic and illustrations. For a Christian perspective on the subject, I recommend two other books written for educated laypeople, i.e. *The Restoration of Man: C.S. Lewis and the Continuing Case Against Scientism* by Aeschliman and *The Immortal in You: How Human Nature is More Than Science Can Say* by Augros. The latter title, however, only criticized a materialist view of human nature instead of the broader topic of scientism.

While the reader might wish for more conciseness, the author has given us an interesting and easy-to-read critique of scientism. Though the author does not write with a Christian perspective, her thoughts expressed in this volume are compatible with Christianity. I recommend this unique book to educated laypeople who are interested in this subject.

**Reviewer**

Jeff Gates, Cedarville University