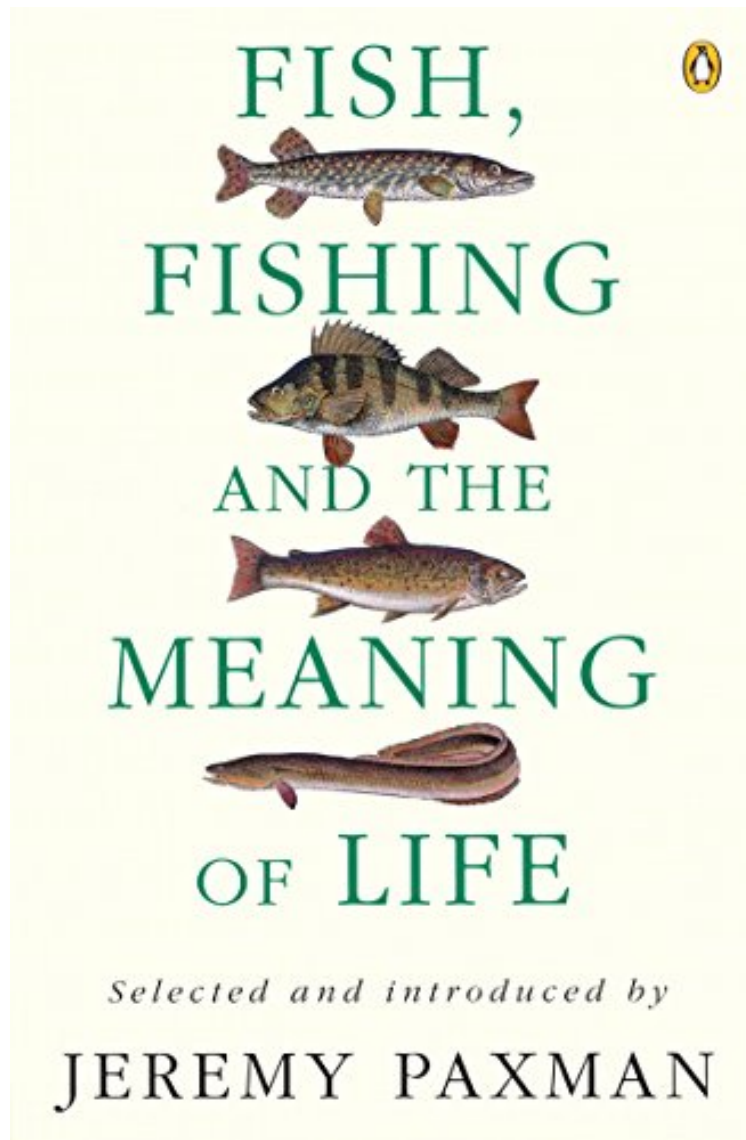


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Fish Fishing And The Meaning Of Life

Jeremy Paxman

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Jeremy Paxman : Fish Fishing And The Meaning Of Life before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Fish Fishing And The Meaning Of Life:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Three Stars By CustomerSatisfied, have not read totally yet 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Even those who are not fishermen will enjoy this remarkable anthology By Ralph Blumenau Five lyrical pages about fishing in Jeremy Paxmans A Life in Questions (see my review) led me, although I am not a fisherman, to get this anthology compiled by him all 540 pages of it, of quite small print, with a

bibliography running to more than 8 pages. Each of its ten chapters has a short introduction by Paxman, and these are beautifully written. And in many of the pieces he has selected there is also some lovely writing. I suppose a lover of fishing can never have enough of pieces describing its joys and thrills; but there is a certain sameness between many of the extracts within several of the chapters. In the first, *Idylls*, the writers convey the beauty of getting away from it all, and the way the fisherman is at one with nature and aware not only of the fish and the water, but also of other aquatic creatures, of the birds, of the trees and plant-life on the river-banks, of the light, and of the satisfaction felt at the end of the day. Many of them describe the thrill of playing and landing a fish and how, out of season, the angler dreams of the next one and lovingly puts together the flies for when fishing can resume. When they describe the flies, they rarely mention the hooks underneath them, and they do not refer to the suffering of the fish. In his introduction to the last chapter, *The Ethics of Fishing*, Paxman pours scorn on the little band of fanatics who cannot bear the thought that people are enjoying themselves; he denies that fish feel pain like any warm-blooded creature (which is the case made by some scientists, though others reject it), and he even implies that in any case the fish has it coming to it because it dies as a consequence of its own greed, hunger or aggression. The fish has free choice. As opposed to killing thousands of fish caught in trawler nets, catching and killing individual fish by angling and gaffing is a noble activity: honourable single combat instead of mass slaughter. There are several pieces in this chapter saying similar things, though it also quotes Lord Byron's opinion that fishing involves so much cruelty that no angler can be a good man. But the book conveys very well and engagingly what attracts so many thousands of people to the sport. The chapter on *Fish* records many stories about and observations of various species. We read about wondrous fish like the small Alaskan *Dallia pectoralis* and the mighty Mahseer of India (look them up on Google Images). I particularly liked the sermon that St Anthony is said to have preached to fishes; the story of a frog getting the better of that savage creature, a pike; and of what brandy can do to a carp that seems to have died. The chapter on *Tactics* tells you of the remarkable and risky way the Gilbertese bait an octopus; and there are accounts of fishing with spears, harpoons, gaffs, arrows, leisters (look them up on Google Images I would have appreciated a Glossary), baits of dry fly, wet fly (looked down upon by many dry fly anglers), live frogs (ugh!), hooks attached to geese (!), or by hand (trout tickling). The chapter on *Rods, Reels and Bottles of Gin* contains pieces of often amusing advice not only on fishing tackle, but on the clothes to wear and on what other things, from frying pans to tobacco and alcohol, that will sustain the angler. There is a pleasure in buying tackle and bait from a specialist shop, but there is also advice on how to make your own. Then there is a chapter about the *Ones that Got Away*, often after a long struggle (ten hours in one instance), remembered and recalled in great detail, and about the emotions felt by the angler if the fish are as they usually are of exceptional size. No tall tales, as far as I can make out. (There are some nice tall tales in the last chapter.) This particular chapter ends with a great whale admittedly not a fish - that got away, and the next one, on the *Ones that Didn't Get Away*, begins with the whale that inspired *Moby Dick* being slain. Again we have many a titanic struggle, and this time the feelings of triumph. The next two chapters are about *The Dangers of Fishing*. The first of them is about the angler damaging himself, or losing his footing on a bank or when wading in fast-flowing streams; there are encounters with bulls and cows, with wasps, horse-flies, midges, ants and adders; and there are some humorous and self-deprecating accounts of various kinds of mishaps. An obsession with fishing may even imperil a marriage. The next chapter, about *Fish that Bit Back* has nothing amusing about it: it is about some fish which can inflict severe damage and worse. Some have fearsome teeth even rows of them. Some have venomous spines: if you step on a stone fish lying among rocks, its poison will kill you. There are accounts of the ferocious piranha which can amputate fingers or toes and strip the flesh off a drowned man; barracuda; shark in New Jersey in 1916 one killer shark took nine men or boys in ten days, some in a creek 20 miles inland from the ocean; swordfish which can pierce the hull of a boat. There is a story of a man being swallowed whole by a sperm whale which was soon afterwards killed and cut open he was still alive and made a full recovery. Among Paxman's most evocative introductions and also, at six pages, the longest - is the one to the chapter on *Fishing Inns and Fishing Accomplices*, and, to my mind, it is actually better than most of the pieces he has selected. And so back to that last chapter on *Ethics*. Several pieces in this selection are devoted to the human qualities and temperaments that make for a good fisherman. A writer of 1845 says that he has almost invariably found [anglers] persons of good and charitable dispositions. Properly conducted, fishing, says a text of 1496, is good for the health of your body and specially of your soul. In 1933 one writer said that angling is like playing tennis with God. Some make much of the fact that there were several fishermen among Christ disciples. I am not sure what Paxman means by *The Meaning of Life*. Does it lie in the feeling that devotees have, that fishing makes them part of nature? Or in the ancient struggle between not too ill-matched creatures, Man and powerful fish? Or in the qualities and temperaments that make for a good fisherman which also make, according to the lovers of the sport, for men of good and charitable dispositions? Or does it simply mean that, for the passionate fisherman, fishing gives his life more meaning than any other activity? 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. My Father - Your Captain Ahab By Kim Your Captain Ahab was my father - a lot of license taken in your telling of this story and you have his name wrong - KV

In *Fish, Fishing and the Meaning of Life* Jeremy Paxman has created the perfect literary catch for fellow angling enthusiasts in this rich and varied anthology. Ten thoroughly entertaining themed chapters include 'Ones That Got

Away', 'Ones That Didn't Get Away' and 'Fish That Bit Back'. Each is introduced by Paxman's own sharp, humorous observations and features both contemporary and historical writing about fishing in prose and verse, covering everything from tench tickling to piranha attacks. Some pieces are well known favourites, others are obscure, every one is a delight. 'A superb compilation because it roams from carp to cod, trout to tarpon and does not regurgitate the same old clippings. Paxman has clearly read widely and wisely in putting this together ... probably the definitive anthology of angling writing.' Keith Elliott, Independent on Sunday. Jeremy Paxman is a journalist, best known for his work presenting Newsnight and University Challenge. His books include Empire, On Royalty, The English and The Political Animal. He lives in Oxfordshire.

About the AuthorJeremy Paxman is a journalist, best known for his work presenting Newsnight and University Challenge. His books include Friends in High Places, The English and The Political Animal. He lives in Oxfordshire.