



Freedom Regained: The Possibility of Free Will

By Julian Baggini

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Freedom Regained: The Possibility of Free Will By Julian Baggini

It's a question that has puzzled philosophers and theologians for centuries and is at the heart of numerous political, social, and personal concerns: Do we have free will? In this cogent and compelling book, Julian Baggini explores the concept of free will from every angle, blending philosophy, sociology, and cognitive science to find rich new insights on the intractable questions that have plagued us. Are we products of our culture, or free agents within it? Are our neural pathways fixed early on by a mixture of nature and nurture, or is the possibility of comprehensive, intentional psychological change always open to us? And what, exactly, are we talking about when we talk about "freedom" anyway?

Freedom Regained brings the issues raised by the possibilities—and denials—of free will to thought-provoking life, drawing on scientific research and fascinating encounters with everyone from artists to prisoners to dissidents. He looks at what it means for us to be material beings in a universe of natural laws. He asks if there is any difference between ourselves and the brains from which we seem never able to escape. He throws down the wildcards and plays them to the fullest: What about art? What about addiction? What about twins? And he asks, of course, what this all means for politics.

Ultimately, Baggini challenges those who think free will is an illusion. Moving from doubt to optimism to a hedged acceptance of free will, he ultimately lands on a satisfying conclusion: it is something we earn. The result is a highly engaging, new, and more positive understanding of our sense of personal freedom, a freedom that is definitely worth having.

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Editorial Review

Review

“Baggini is that happy thing—a philosopher who recognizes that readers go glassy-eyed if presented with high-octane philosophical discourse. And yet, as his latest book, *Freedom Regained*, makes clear, it is in all our interests to consider crucial aspects of what it means to be human. . . . [An] excellent book.”

(Salley Vickers, author of *The Boy Who Could See Death* *Guardian*)

“Excellent. . . . For most people, *Freedom Regained* will seem like a kind of Maginot line, defending a territory that is not under attack. This, however, is because the new enemies of freedom are not much evident in everyday life. They are mild-mannered, soft-spoken men and women in senior common rooms, not wild-eyed dictators raving through public address systems. Among its other virtues, the book reveals how many of these soft-spoken types engage in one of the oldest of all debating devices: setting up a straw man of the concept under fire so as the more conveniently to bowl it over.”

(Terry Eagleton, author of *Culture and the Death of God* *Guardian*)

“*Freedom Regained* is both balanced and convincing, and has many other virtues besides. While firmly rooted in the philosophical tradition, Baggini also gets out and talks to people for whom freedom—and lack of it—is a real and pressing matter. The result is a wide-ranging, wise and stimulating survey. Baggini is right that there are other ways to make sense of human freedom. He has written a stimulating book for those wishing to peel back some of the many layers of what it means to be free”—*Literary Review*

(*Literary Review*)

“*Freedom Regained* effectively argues that the concept of free will is anything but black and white. Instead, according to Baggini, free will occurs in varying degrees, and more often as a result of our ability to occasionally divert our course rather than completely pilot it. . . . For anyone who has ever given serious thought to the degree to which our actions are within our own control, *Freedom Regained* will give you a lot to chew on.”

(*Spectrum Culture*)

“Baggini, an independent British philosopher who writes primarily for a general audience, here develops arguments for, ostensibly, the existence and importance of free will. Counter to the growing trend—among neuroscientists, philosophers, et al.—toward deterministic views, Baggini believes that a robust sense of free will can and should be retained. Allowing that every event has a physical cause and every physical cause is ultimately outside the conscious control of the agent, he maintains that as long as one’s actions are not overtly constrained by outside forces, one is indeed free and can make choices. The author interviews scientists, political dissidents, psychologists, philosophers, and others and makes many fine points. Though Baggini’s view seems more compatibilist than libertarian, this is a friendly, well-written book that will suit those new to the free will debates. . . . Recommended.”

(*Choice*)

“Mr. Baggini, a British philosopher who specializes in translating academic theories for a popular audience, offers an entertaining tour of the ideas that try to address the conundrum of free will and responsibility.”

(Andrew Stark *Wall Street Journal*)

About the Author

Julian Baggini is founding editor of the *Philosopher's Magazine*. He is the author of many books, including *The Ego Trick: What Does It Mean to Be You?*, *What's It All About? Philosophy and the Meaning of Life*, and *The Pig That Wants to Be Eaten and 99 Other Thought Experiments*. He lives in the United Kingdom.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Mike Jones:

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Fred Howell:

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