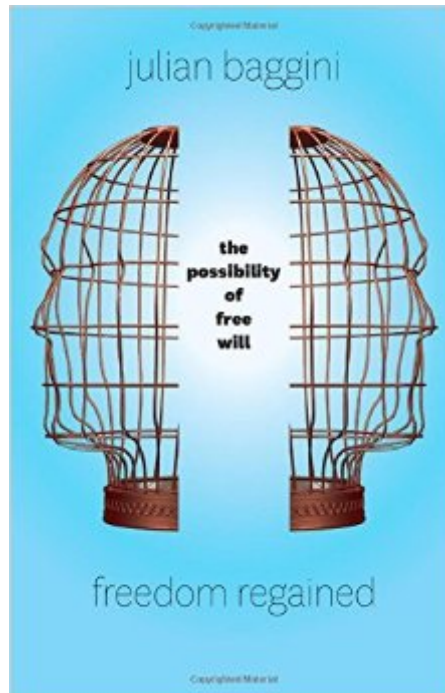


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Freedom Regained: The Possibility Of Free Will



Synopsis

Itâ™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 âœfreedomâ • anyway? Freedom Regained brings the issues raised by the possibilitiesâ ”and denialsâ ”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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Customer Reviews

Julian Baggini (`JG') begins by acknowledging that advances `in neuroscience has put wind into the sails of those who would deny free will' and elsewhere in the book he demolishes conventional (but outdated and flawed) arguments in favour of free will. Yet he asks, `So is the game really up for free will?' He does not think so. In his usual clarity JG has written an excellent book that explains the arguments in favour of free will and also the traditional arguments against them, taking into account the advancement in science (neuroscience and genetics especially) - scientists has shown that our body determines our action a fraction ahead of our thought, or, as JG puts it, `when we make some choices, the conscious self is the last to know'. But JG examines the gaps in science and by brilliantly excising the indefensible arguments of free will, he crafts a version of free will which he holds must exist. He says, for example, those who claim that we have the free will to believe in the existence of God demolish their own premise by holding the premise that God is omniscient. If He were, it means that He knows the future and what we would be doing. Nothing therefore is free because everything is determined before hand (otherwise God would not be omniscient). By taking into account our conscious self's ability to mould character, and thus determining, with our experience and rationality, that we have the option to do otherwise `in the future', we retain a freedom that is worthy of its name. His argument relies on autonomy and responsibility while accepting the things we cannot change. It is not that he has not taken into account the indelible marks of life-changing events, but he claims that we can act freely in spite of them.

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