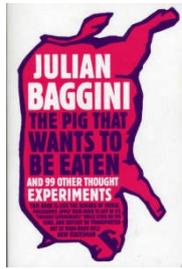


the one page book review



Title: The Pig That Wants to be Eaten and 99 other thought experiments
Author: Julian Baggini
Publisher: Granta
Price: £8.99

This is a highly entertaining and thought-provoking introduction to some of the big questions in philosophy. As the title suggests, the reader is introduced to a series of short problems or dilemmas and invited to think about them. The goal is often not to reach a solution, but to examine the assumptions and beliefs that sit behind each conundrum.

You can read this book in two ways. You can read it for its entertainment value; each chapter is only a few pages long and each follows the same format; a statement of the problem, some possible choices and a brief description of some of the philosophical thinking that is represented through each example. (There is no one answer to any of the problems). Very quickly you find yourself reading the book in a different way. As you start to contemplate a problem presented to you, you often find that it is not as simple as it may first appear, and sometimes a level of discomfort emerges as you become aware that you are confronting your own morality, your beliefs about fairness or your values or even reality itself.

Take problem 29, for example, which begins like the introduction to some 'B' horror movie; a man wakes up in hospital to find that his own and another person's survival are dependent on his own organs. It seems rather artificial and incredible, but with a deft change of context, Baggini, invites us to consider that the structure of the problem is the same as the one that lies behind the debate for/against abortion. Other seemingly frivolous examples invite us to contemplate the nature of reality by comparing it with that of Coronation Street, or our own morals through a 'bank error in your favour' (if it wasn't your fault and no one knew, would it be stealing?)

And the pig that wants to be eaten? This is taken from a scene in 'Hitch Hikers' Guide to the Galaxy' and while we might find the idea unfavourable we are also asked to consider if it would be better than eating a pig that does *not* want that particular outcome! (Are there any turkeys that vote for Christmas?) In one short study we are confronted with our views on animal cruelty, vegetarianism, life purpose, personal autonomy and morality! Not bad for two and a half pages of text!

Baggini has created a really superb introduction to thinking about the big things in life and in that respect this book is more than an entertaining read. You can use it to train your brain, to think better and harder, and also to raise our own self-awareness. We like to think that we are consistent in our approach, fair to all and rational-thinking beings. This book ever so gently exposes the lie. A really good read!