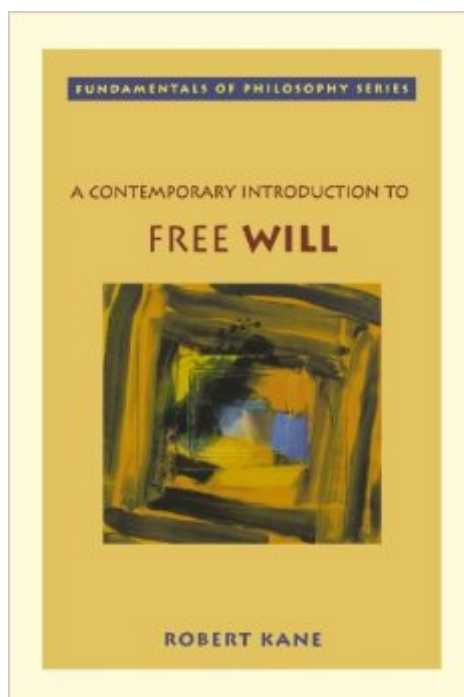


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A Contemporary Introduction To Free Will



Synopsis

Accessible to students with no background in the subject, *A Contemporary Introduction to Free Will* provides an extensive and up-to-date overview of all the latest views on this central problem of philosophy. Opening with a concise introduction to the history of the problem of free will--and its place in the history of philosophy--the book then turns to contemporary debates and theories about free will, determinism, and related subjects like moral responsibility, coercion, compulsion, autonomy, agency, rationality, freedom, and more. Classical compatibilist and new compatibilist theories of free will are considered along with the latest incompatibilist or libertarian theories and the most recent skeptical challenges to free will. Separate chapters are devoted to the relation of free will to moral responsibility and ethics; to modern science; and to religious questions about predestination, divine foreknowledge, and human freedom. Numerous down-to-earth examples and challenging thought experiments enliven the text. The book is an ideal addition to introduction to philosophy, metaphysics, and free will courses.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book gives a clear and concise description of various philosophical positions on the free will debate. Kane opens the discussion by defining the free will problem; he distinguishes between "surface" freedoms, which allow us to do what we want without constraints from external agents, versus "deeper" freedom, which implies that an individual's decision has alternate possibilities available (i.e., if the clock could somehow be turned back--given the exact same causal events of

history, individual experience, etc., leading up to a decision--that an individual could possibly make a different decision). In other words, surface freedom entails that individuals can do what they want while deeper freedom means that they can also will what they will. Kane then proceeds to discuss determinism (the idea that all actions/events are determined by previous actions/events) and the position that a deterministic universe is either compatible or incompatible with the notion of free will (i.e., compatibilism or incompatibilism, respectively). Kane also discusses moral responsibility, along with various arguments concerning its relationship to free will and determinism, and the free will problem as it applies to the traditional religious views of predestination and omniscience. I thought that Kane did an excellent job of presenting the arguments both for and against the various free will positions. He gave a number of bibliographical references in each chapter where the reader could go for more information on a particular position or argument. Kane seems to hold a libertarian view (i.e.

Let me warn the reader, Robert Kane's Book is "A CONTEMPORARY Introduction to Free Will", not an Introduction to free will. The Book focuses mostly on contemporary debates whose origin usually does not go back beyond the last quarter of the twentieth century. It is the reason that Kane's book is so relevant. It sums up for a wider public the collection of essays published by various authors in his "Oxford Handbook of Free Will". Kane is considered as one of the leading contemporary philosophers on free will and he has developed his own theory. Kane considers alternative possibilities as a necessary but insufficient condition of free will which requires "ultimate responsibility", i.e. a moral or rational control of the subject on his action. A free act is an act we can claim responsibility for and there must be sufficient reasons for acting the way we act. All chapter 12 is devoted to this question. Although Kane describes himself as a libertarian, his position often come close to compatibilism and when reading the first chapters of the book I found that the general tone of the book is leading more toward compatibilism than libertarianism. The contemporary discussion on Free Will is so complex that usually the public never hear about that important debate. Nevertheless Robert Kane has made a wonderful job, guiding us through all the arguments and counter arguments. It gives the impression of watching a chess contest by world class players. Each move seems to be decisive until comes the counter move. In another essay Kane has called free will a "labyrinth" and the general impression given by the book is that the debate will remain inconclusive. It is not to surprise me.

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