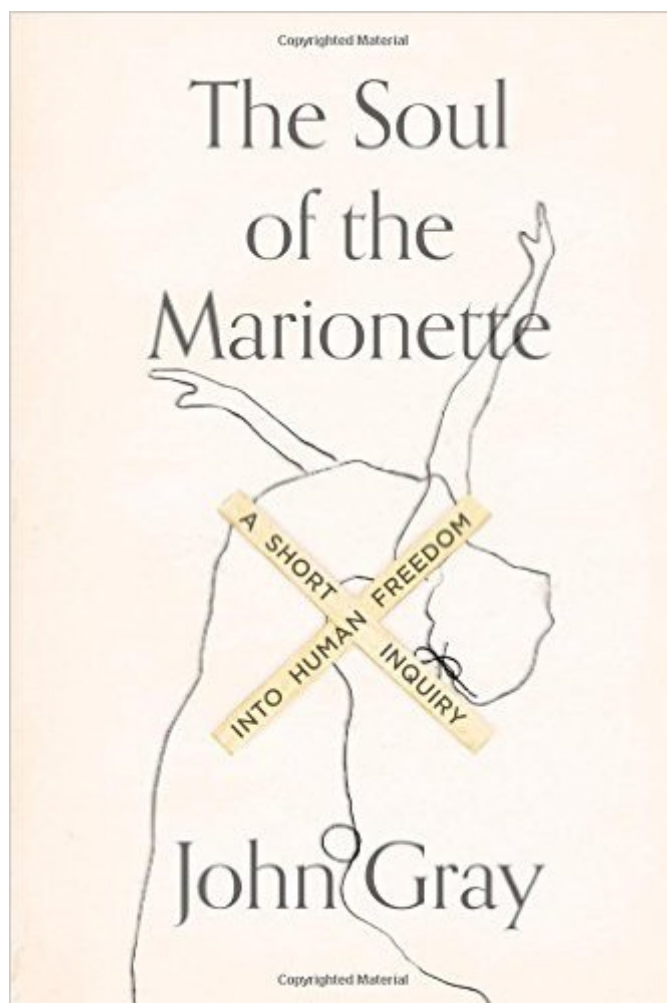


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The Soul Of The Marionette: A Short Inquiry Into Human Freedom



Synopsis

Compared with that of humans, the life of the marionette looks more like an enviable state of freedom. In his brilliantly enjoyable and freewheeling new book, John Gray draws together the religious, philosophic, and fantastical traditions that question the very idea of human freedom. We flatter ourselves about the nature of free will and yet the most enormous forces logical, physical, metaphysical constrain our every action. Many writers and intellectuals have always understood this, but instead of embracing our condition we battle against it, with everyone from world conquerors to modern scientists dreaming of a "human dominion" almost comically at odds with our true state. Filled with wonderful examples and drawing on the widest possible reading (from the Gnostics to Philip K. Dick), "The Soul of the Marionette" is a stimulating and engaging meditation on everything from cybernetics to the fairground marionettes of the title."

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In this book, John Gray covers familiar ground, eloquently. He plunders obscure writers and leans heavily on his knowledge of history to build an argument that deconstructs human exceptionalism and to dispel the notion that people, society and culture progress in some linear fashion. His thesis is that humans create the illusion of order because the alternative — embracing the certainty that we are mortal and meaningless creatures (— œflawed, intermittently lucid animals— •) in an indifferent world — fills many of us with paralyzing dread. That created sense of order was once overseen by invented gods, then an invented god and now by science (which, in a sense, elevates human ingenuity to the status of an invented god). Regardless of how it is embodied, the underlying

impulse is to create a sense of purpose and progress that he, of course, considers false. The title is based on a short story that brings to life the crux of the issue. Which is truly free, the marionettes (who have no control over their actions and are free to simply allow external forces to work upon them) or the person at the end of the strings (who, ostensibly, must constantly impose " and question the veracity and quality " of their plan). In the case of humans, our sense of self (the part of us that thinks we are unique) can be thought of as the puppet master while our physical bodies are the puppets. We look to our puppet master concept of existence (that we exert meaningful agency upon our actions, our selves and our world) when in fact we are enslaved by the unlimited freedom facing us because, as Gray puts it, " human life is spent anxiously deciding how to live.

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