



Free Will: A Philosophical Reappraisal

Nicholas Rescher

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This volume is a reassessment of free will and, as such, seeks to answer the question: Do humans ever act under the guidance of the will? To determine if humans have free will, Rescher first examines what exactly free will is and how it should function. While the literature on the subject of free will is vast, a good deal still remains to be done to avert obscurity and confusion. Rescher leads the reader through a conceptual web of distinctions that, taken together, provide a satisfying contribution to philosophical thought on free will in general.

Rescher sharpens his highly conceptual assessment by making distinctions--between productive (or metaphysical) and moral (or motivational) freedom, free decision and free action, motivational and causal determination of choices, durational events and the instantaneous eventuations that mark their commencements and completions, and between pre-determination and precedence determination. In doing so, he also examines the role of nature, nurture, and free choice. Each of these distinctions defines the characteristics of free will and averts a group of problems and difficulties traditionally ascribed to the doctrine. With these in place, it becomes possible to validate the compatibility between freedom of the will and a certain special mode of determinism.

Rescher's conceptual perspective in this age-old debate opens up the prospect of naturalizing free volition through its natural emergence via the same process of evoking development that has seen the emergence of intelligence on the world's stage. That is, only after the conceptual issues are settled, can the question of how things actually stand be answered. This work will be an important reassessment of free will not just because of the author's final conclusion, but because of the issue-illuminating path he takes to get there.

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