



The Pig That Wants to Be Eaten: 100 Experiments for the Armchair Philosopher

Julian Baggini

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Julian Baggini presents 100 thought experiments - short scenarios which pose a problem in a vivid and concrete way - and invites the reader to think about possible answers for him/herself. Experiments cover identity, religion, art, ethics, language, knowledge and many more. From Zeno's paradox to Groundhog Day (how do you make sense of a life of eternal recurrence?), via the pig that wants to be eaten (so should you eat him?), Plato's cave, Minority Report (is it right to punish people for what they are going to do, but haven't yet done?), and an American Werewolf in London (how can we tell whether we are awake or dreaming?), this book makes philosophy not only mind-stretching but also entertaining.

The Pig That Wants to Be Eaten: 100 Experiments for the Armchair Philosopher Details

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From Reader Review The Pig That Wants to Be Eaten: 100 Experiments for the Armchair Philosopher for online ebook

Sumit Singla says

This one barely made it to my philosophy list. Barely.

I confess, I've been guilty of judging the book by its cover. I picked it up because I couldn't resist the lure of bacon that's practically begging to be eaten. For a meat-lover turned vegetarian due to issues of animal cruelty, a pig that wants to be eaten would be a blessing, right?

Not really, as it turns out. For, I found much of this book unpalatable and the rest indigestible. Ok, enough with the bad puns and onwards to the review. I think this book is enough to tickle your brain cells a bit, but surely not enough to work them into an energetic workout. Many of the so-called thought experiments are repetitive in nature and just not elaborate enough. If you are the kind of armchair philosopher who wants simplistic, catchy things to think about, maybe you should read this.

But, if you enjoy deep philosophy or have had any exposure to it, I'd suggest saving your money and your time. After all, there are more important things out there than to think about pigs that want to be eaten. Hence, this book could be used as a bit of a primer to let's say, get a high schooler interested in philosophy.

Personally, I prefer deeper conundrums.

Michael says

A delightful piece of cerebral confectionary; thought experiments from many of the great philosophical sources: ranging from Plato's Republic through Descartes' Meditations to Douglas Adams' Restaurant at the End of the Universe; here presented in short pithy accessible form.

There is nothing startlingly new here, although some might be presented in slightly different ways than which the contemporary thinking person may have been accustomed.

One wonders whether there should have been a 101th self-referential thought experiment - on the value of thought experiments themselves.

David says

I thought this deserved 3.5 stars, but I'm perfectly happy to round up to 4 on the grounds that it was entertaining, thought-provoking, unpretentious and well-executed. Other reviewers have faulted it for lacking philosophical depth, but really - what could they have been expecting? The author makes no pretences, and the format of the book couldn't be clearer. It is what it sets out to be - 100 brief "philosophy" puzzles, each following a strict 3-page format, in which the puzzle/paradox/point of contention is described in the first page, then discussed (or resolved in those cases where resolution is possible) in the remaining two pages.

So, yeah, that format doesn't afford much scope for teasing out an issue in great depth. But it works better than you might think. Different vignettes can be used to approach a given theme from different angles and Baggini revisits his more interesting themes several times throughout the book (each chapter cross-references others that are loosely related). I don't necessarily fault an author for having a gimmick - sometimes it's an unhelpful distraction, but sometimes it can provide a kind of structure that turns out to be entirely beneficial. This book was an illustration of how a constraint can be useful - the 3-page limit helped keep things focused.

How well the book turns out is, of course, critically dependent on two factors:

1. How smart and interesting are the scenarios chosen for inclusion?
2. How good is the author at exposition? (which has a whole number of subdimensions - is his style academic? dull? accessible? sloppy? clear? irritating? credible? condescending? humorous?)

Baggini acquits himself well on both counts. Though he doesn't quite manage to pull off the folksy humor to which he aspires, his style is brisk, without condescension and free of annoying tics. More importantly, he is effective at hitting a decent balance in tone between the academic and the popular.

The selection of thought experiments was better than I had anticipated. Obviously, they're not all going to be winners - for instance, I personally no longer find anything even remotely interesting in Zeno's paradox, Buridan's ass, other people's famous inability to grasp the fact that coins and roulette wheels don't have a memory, the notion that living forever would suck all the joy out of life, or the inability to know how another person perceives color. But I do have a definite weakness for questions pertaining to ethical and moral choice, so those vignettes kept me entertained for hours. In general, the author covers the major bases - consciousness, perception, reality, pain, empathy, morality and ethics. For me, the most interesting scenarios were those which explored the nuances of moral responsibility in various hypothetical (but very concrete) settings.

What sealed the fourth star were the chapters that nudged me out of my comfort zone. For example, the scenarios which addressed our stewardship of the environment and the ethical treatment of animals captured and held my attention. The book's format favors concrete, crisply formulated, scenarios - the kind that you find yourself thinking about days later. Many don't have an obvious 'right' answer, in these cases Biaggini is smart enough not to try to provide one - he just wants to get you thinking about this stuff. At his most effective, he's almost demonically successful - for the last two days I've been trying (unsuccessfully) to come up with a convincing argument to dispel the notion that I'm suspended in a pod of amniotic fluid with a computer feeding me all the necessary stimuli needed to make me think my virtual reality is 'actual' reality.

Whimper...

There are limits, however. Despite the cogency of the arguments presented as ethical justification for eating our deceased family pets, Boris and Natasha need have no fear*. The crockpot and the Foreman grill have no role in their future.

*: Sadly, I understand all too well that this is the kind of sentimental foolishness to which we humans are susceptible. I have no illusions about the kitties' behavior should I drop dead and leave them unfended for. The transition from living food provider to dead food source would, I imagine, be rapid.

But I digress. The bottom line is that I enjoyed this book quite a bit more than I had expected to -- the author's particular gimmick actually worked out pretty well.

Mostafa Samir says

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Victoria says

This book was a Christmas gift from an old friend who clearly knows me well. Despite having studied philosophy reasonably intensively in the past, this little book of thought experiments was both entertaining and engaging. One of the things that I love about philosophy is that it can be read and understood at many different levels and this book is no exception. Baggini has taken 100 famous philosophical conundrums, re-written them in his own words and then added a brief discussion of the topic at hand. These can be used at face value, as short sharp ideas that you may not have thought about before or as a starting block for more serious thought and contemplation. In this way, the book will suit all levels of philosophical ability, from beginners to the more advanced.

This book has been widely criticised for lacking in philosophical depth and in some ways, this could be seen to be true. Debates that have gone on for centuries are summed up in just a few pages. However, it very clearly is not meant to be a deep philosophical work but rather, an accessible overview of some of the most famous, most potent and longest-running problems in philosophical history. They are not meant to be deep evaluation in themselves but rather, a springboard for great discussion – they are the thought experiments, the results and consequences of which are found within the reader rather than in what is being read: which brings me back to the issue of philosophical depth. The depth depends on what is put into it from a reader's point of view and the experiments are not intended to be read passively. Surely the depth is derived from the reader (or thinker if you will) rather than from the issues in themselves – you get out of it what you put in to it. I believe that Baggini intended to hold up a mirror, that he is the messenger and is showing these problems for the reader to work on themselves.

One thing that Baggini does do particularly well is to make old and often stuffy philosophical ideas more relevant to modern society and more easily accessible than other long, stodgy works of philosophy. He does this by re-working the concepts into relevant tales, referencing characters from television, books and films as well as modern technology such as televisions, automatic weaponry and virtual reality computers. A good example of this re-hashing is when he turns the old adage “if a tree falls in a forest and no-one is around to hear it, does it make a noise?” into a tale of aliens, movies and unusual sensory experiences.

Overall, this book is an excellent starting point for a budding philosopher that leaves out all the usual stodge and gives a wide-ranging view of many different schools of thought and ideas. The book is also a lovely little trip down memory lane if you are a more advanced philosopher, taking a fresh look at all those old conundrums that got you interested in philosophy in the first place. On top of this, it is just plain entertaining.

Well recommended.

Thomas Schneider says

(Personal Response)

I think that this book has a very interesting point of view on some unique subjects such as religion, philosophy, and paradoxes. This book is one with a new view for me since most of the books I read are typically about a main character while this one is composed of 100 three page chapters. The style that this was proposed in was something that myself as a reader found interesting enough to read for a while and I actually finished it. I thought I would never manage to finish this book mostly just do to the fact that this is so long to read out because it does not stay in the same place the whole time so I get lost every now and then but overall an okay book.

(Plot)

The plot of the story is really hard to talk about mostly due to the factor that there is no plot just hundreds of cut up little stories everywhere. I think that the most interesting one of this little stories is when Hitler sent a missionary to try and persuade the British to turn their heads at the actions they cause. The stories all showed interesting little ideas on how some people struggle with ideas and then they get explained as best as they can to show what the right thing be to do during this problem.

(Characterization)

The name Adolf Hitler is mentioned in the book for trying to get the prime minister of Britain to make him not try and fight to find a way of saying I have taken this land and we don't need to fight and lose the life of thousands of people. The Indians are in the book and are shown with some interesting knowledge on spiritual levels. The name God had appearances and was shown with many flaws of his power.

(Recommended Audience)

I think that people who would get a nice evening out of reading a book about ideas that are not the most easily comprehended. I would say that the time spent reading this could be worth it if you really wanted to learn how to read a book about comprehensive ideas. I would say people from the ages of early teens to mid aged people could probably read it if they wanted to.

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Thomas says

Here's a question for vegetarians: if a pig were raised in a comfortable and humane slaughterhouse, would you eat it? What if that pig were also genetically modified to want to be eaten - if being eaten was indeed its life's ambition? How about a genetically modified chicken that had lost its sense of self, environment, pain, pleasure etc.? It'd be like plucking a potato from the ground.

Another one, for everyone: let's say you're a doctor, and you have a patient who falls unconscious while on life-support. Beforehand she asked over and over again to be taken off the machine, but to your chagrin, an ethics committee forbids you from doing so. One day a random passerby - a janitor, perhaps - accidentally knocks out the plug and disconnects the patient from the machine. You let it go and the patient fades away: after all, you took no measure in shortening the her life, you just failed to prolong it. Are you justified?

In his book *The Pig That Wants to be Eaten*, Julian Baggini delves into various thought bombs that will leave your mind blown. In each of its 100 chapters, he spends one page detailing a thought experiment and then two pages afterward discussing its philosophical implications. He writes with conciseness and clarity, including all of the necessary information without falling into pretension. Each chapter raises questions and dilemmas with no easy answers. The topics range from the necessity of torture, to supererogatory behavior, to the authenticity of godless morality, and much more.

The best part about this book is that Baggini does not force any of his own beliefs, whatever they may be, into his writing. He leaves the thought experiments open-ended so that they are ripe for analysis, and even when the subjects touch on hefty issues like abortion and atheism, he never takes a definitive stance or pulls you a certain way. You have to think for yourself.

This book makes me wish that I could major in philosophy and never have a care in the world about employment or the economy. I would highly recommend this to anyone who wants to a full-on brain workout; if thinking about deep issues leaves a bad taste in your mouth, you should skip this one (actually, don't do that, challenge yourself and you won't regret it!) But I'll end this review by saying this: the chapter on Newcomb's Paradox made me want to scream in intellectually stimulated delight while ripping my hair out because my brain hurt too much. Actually, I guess I was like that for a lot of this book. Read it.

*review cross-posted on my blog, the quiet voice.

Jason says

Amusing at times, but completely pointless at other times. Baggini's thought experiments seemed to repeat. He goes too far into "what if" land. Throughout the book he takes ideas from philosophers like Descartes and Plato and writers like Douglas Adams (hence the title) and Ray Bradbury and changes the philosopher's original scenario or vignette into his own version. I found this approach useless; I would have rather had the original at my fingertips.

Teagan says

Personal response:

The book *The Pig That Wants To Be Eaten: 100 Experiments For The Armchair Philosopher* by Julian Baggini was the best book that I have read so far this year. One reason why this book stood out to me was the way it was written. The author had to do a lot of research to write this book because there were a lot of sources included in the reading. This book was written with no continuous plot, and no constant characters. Every three pages there was a completely new story, which kept the reader excited and intrigued in each individual story.

Plot:

In this book there really wasn't a constant plot, and every story had new characters. In each story, it started out with a situation that a person was put in, which seemed relatively simple. Then, the story would look at every angle and opinion that could be taken, which could make the reader question their own opinions. The author looked at things from ways that most people generally do not, and looked at the physiological side of things. For instance, one of the stories was about four kids who had all promised their mother that they would write letters to her while they were on a round-the-world trip. The problem was that, Hew wrote letters, but then gave them to someone else to send, but they never did. Drew wrote letters as well, but didn't attach the right amount of stamps so they never reached her mother either. Lou wrote as well, but the postal system failed. Sue also wrote letters, and even called her mom to see if they had arrived, and they never did. The physiological side of this would be, did any of them really do what they said they would? Technically all three did, but none of them did what was intended.

Characterization:

Just as the plot hadn't had one specific plot throughout the entire story, there also wasn't constant characters. In the example story used in the plot, the characters showed different character traits in one singular story compared to the next. One of the kids seemed careless because he never even made sure that the letters were being sent to his mother. Another child was also showing that they didn't care very much by not making sure that the correct amount of stamps was attached to the package. So did any of them really care about their mother receiving the letters? Lou showed that she wanted to be sure that the letters were sent, which showed caring and determination. But, the final child was the only one who actually knew that their letter actually sent. So as the story progressed the reader could have seen how the kids got more involved in the letters being sent.

Recommendation:

I recommend this story to mature adolescents, or adults because while this was the best book I've read, it was the most difficult to read as well. The vocabulary that was used was very mature, and large compared to stories that most young adults read in general. This was a book that has to be read to understand, and not just to skim through. The reader might even find them self having to read over entire stories multiple times to understand the concept that the author was presenting them with.

Yasmine Alfouzan says

This book delivers what it promises: engaging 100 thought experiments that are a wonderful introduction to the most basic philosophical puzzles. It is a great read for anyone new to philosophy and those who feel overwhelmed by the history of philosophy and keep asking themselves, "Well, where do I start?" I, being someone who knew about half of the things discussed in this book, did not feel that it's boring or stale since the author cleverly wrote out different hypothetical scenarios as an introduction to each concept, and they were almost always humorous and witty (I mean, come on, the title IS a reference from a Hitchhiker's Guide book). Easily one of the best "popular philosophy" books.

It should be pointed out, however, that this is not a reference book; and that is why it doesn't leave you satisfied since it covers ideas VERY briefly and not in depth at all. Nevertheless, the author mentions the source of most experiments so you may easily expand on a particular subject (which is why I am at the

moment waiting to get my copy of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra!*) Also, it cannot be read in one sitting: you read so little, and you think so much. Which makes this book a great one for those who are easily bored by reading walls of text, but don't mind spending too much time with it.

Overall, I recommend it. It's a nice addition to any library.

Charles says

Interesting collection of moral dilemmas, as well as other paradoxical debates and situations.

This book can help us in changing our perception hats with more flexibility, and always find new ways to challenge ideas or tackle a problem, to finally come up with balanced solutions.

Berrett says

This book is like being forced to hang out with a high school philosophy teacher who tries to get the cool kids to like him by demonstrating how "crazy" philosophy can be.

Well, maybe it wasn't that bad.

But it wasn't that good either.

Arimo says

You have to admit it: the title and tagline of the book instantly rise your curiosity. Fortunately, the intriguing and entertaining presentation continue in the content, too. Big and small philosophical questions are presented in light, easily digestible form.

While the book could be examined every now and then and read only occasionally, I ended up finishing it very quickly. The "experiments"/examples and their analyses are very short, so reading "just one more piece" became very addicting.

Tanima says

What a wonderfully thought-provoking book about some of the most interesting philosophical questions posed in our modern world!

Julian Baggini is a masterful thinker who poses captivating arguments from various perspectives. I'm particularly intrigued by this book because he specifically likes to delve into topics about artificial intelligence/supercomputers/virtual reality, the mind/subconscious/identity, and some of the most basic moral dilemmas of our time.

If you're interested in thinking about various topics in politics, literature, and religion in new ways, then I highly recommend giving this one a try!
