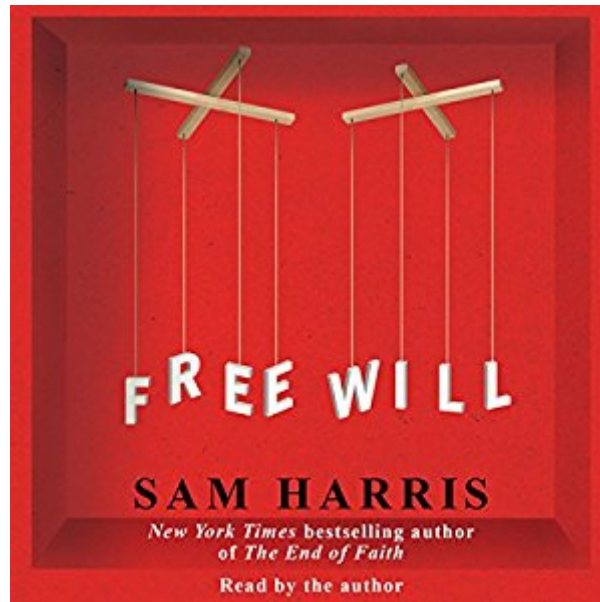




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# Free Will



## Synopsis

A belief in free will touches nearly everything that human beings value. It is difficult to think about law, politics, religion, public policy, intimate relationships, morality-as well as feelings of remorse or personal achievement-without first imagining that every person is the true source of his or her thoughts and actions. And yet the facts tell us that free will is an illusion. In this enlightening book, Sam Harris argues that this truth about the human mind does not undermine morality or diminish the importance of social and political freedom, but it can and should change the way we think about some of the most important questions in life.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I probably didn't need this book to tell me that what we perceive as "free will" is illusory, but whatever. I chose to read it, and it doesn't bother me that I can't fully understand why. However, this has allowed me to look at choice from a different perspective. Perhaps others will find value in it as well. For what it's worth, it wouldn't hurt.

If I understand his thesis correctly, he is saying that the genesis of our conscious thoughts (and subsequent actions) are largely unknown. These thoughts arise somewhere in the brain rather mysteriously and sort of rise to the surface. They are based on previous experiences, interpretations, heredity, pathology, and who knows what else. The idea that we have "free will" is totally an illusion. It is not exactly the determinism of BF Skinner with conditioned response and so

forth, that we all learned years ago in college, that the writer is talking about but it is close. I hope I've interpreted his ideas correctly. At any rate, I enjoyed reading his essay, and it doesn't take too long to read. I basically agree with what he said. I hope my interpretation is accurate.

Good introduction to the subject, quite convincing. Philosophers appear to have trouble explaining how we can be responsible if we don't have freewill in a deterministic universe. Harris doesn't take the reader very far into the swamp. Of course his credentials as an atheist shine through, but don't get in the way. I found the book helpful when defining related terms such as compatibilism.

"Free Will" by Sam Harris summarizes in his words recent developments into research about a pressing question: Do we have free will that is not in any way controlled by the imperatives of biology, chemistry, physics, et al that govern our bodies? Does this ghost in the machine really exist just because we feel that it does? Or do our decisions spring from our flesh, our DNA, our genes, and our influential experiences -- so that when we "decide" to do something, we in fact could not have "decided" any other way than the way we did? Most people cling to the first possibility despite mounting scientific evidence that it simply is not true because the thought that we are "meat puppets" is simply too disturbing. Well, it is, but if this is in fact the truth, we must learn how to come to terms with it and make it work in favor of humanity's better angels. Harris' brief book points out ways that this can be possible, so that we can get on with living as well as we can and cease lamenting old, no longer tenable fantasies.

Harris' take on free will is very intriguing. While the book itself is quite short, its concepts will lead to hours of thought and debate. It's well worth the read.

Well written and argued, but if you really want to go deeper into this topic I suggest to get the book "Essay on the Freedom of the Will" by Schopenhauer. Sure you will not find information or data from the fields evolutionary psychology or neuroscience, but the depth and scope of Schopenhauer's writing will open your mind in ways which you can't even imagine.

I was a philosophy major in college all those years ago, so I know something of the topic. Also, I'm awfully fond of Sam Harris, especially his "Letter to a Christian Nation." I cannot completely agree with his thesis, that Free Will is nothing but an illusion, and in fact our decisions are all made by the influences around us in complex ways science is only now beginning to unravel. But he does make

the point that civilization requires we all act as if our decisions are the product of free will, so I suppose the fact that I continue to believe that my decisions really are my own responsibility (unless you count my addictions to caffeine and backgammon), is not really a problem. Frankly, even if free will is just a convenient fiction, it is that: ethical decisions do indeed make a difference.

Sam continues to challenge our presuppositions about matters we thought were settled, at least it was for me. But now I am not so sure. He provides a great argument against free will. So that I must now go further in this subject. I recommend this book to anyone interested in this kind of reading. (Religion, psychology, and even physics)

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