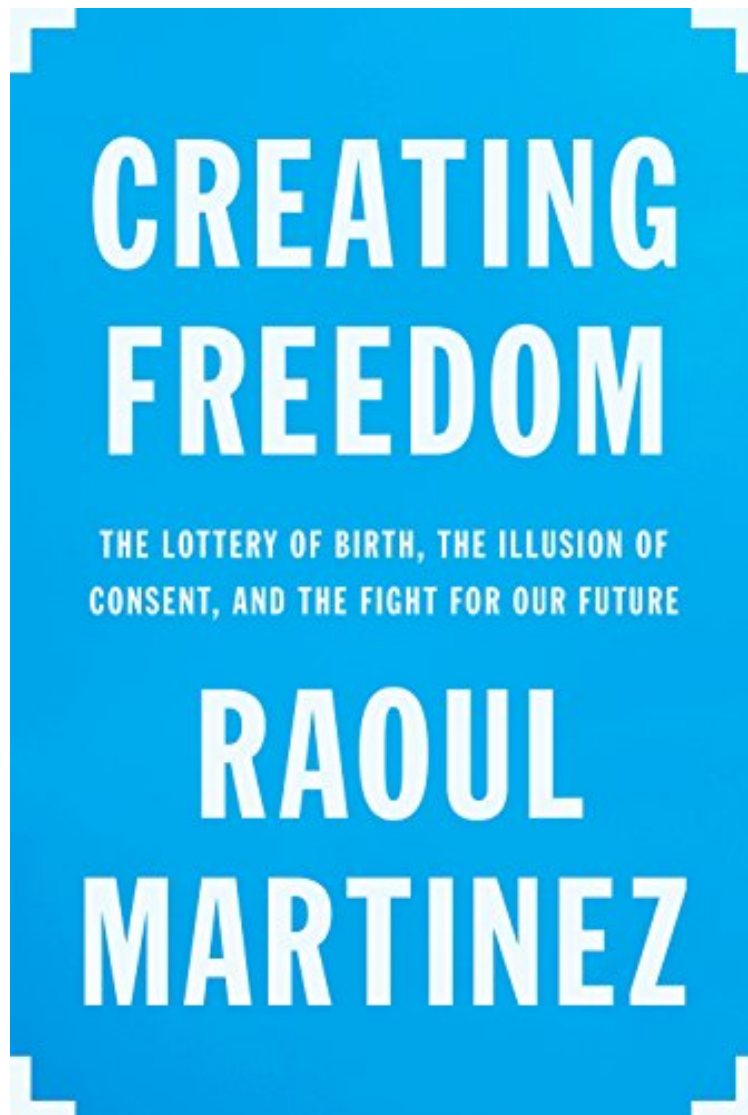


[Download free ebook] **Creating Freedom: The Lottery of Birth, the Illusion of Consent, and the Fight for Our Future**

Creating Freedom: The Lottery of Birth, the Illusion of Consent, and the Fight for Our Future

Raoul Martinez

*audiobook / *ebooks / Download PDF / ePub / DOC*



DOWNLOAD



+

READ ONLINE

#620443 in eBooks 2017-01-31 2017-01-31 File Name: B01A4AQWGQ | File size: 64.Mb

Raoul Martinez : Creating Freedom: The Lottery of Birth, the Illusion of Consent, and the Fight for Our Future before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised **Creating Freedom: The Lottery of Birth, the Illusion of Consent, and the Fight for Our Future**:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. His writing style is more like 'mansplaining' with broad assertions that he seems entirely confident ...By David B BerrianMr. Martinez has some interesting and provocative ideas;

however, he seems to have little interest in subtleties that might compromise his arguments. His writing style is more like 'mansplaining' with broad assertions that he seems entirely confident are totally correct. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Brilliant! By JDOT Insightful, profound, challenging to conventional thinking about wealth and fairness. Addresses what must be done for our survival and thrival on this planet. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. It is most timely and the needed Manifesto for our ... By Wilfredo E Cespedes It is most timely and the needed Manifesto for our Worldwide Crisis. How you will read it and take action. We Can Do This!

The ideal of freedom is at the heart of our political and economic system. It is foundational to our sense of justice, our way of life, our conception of what it is to be human. But are we free in the way that we think we are? In *Creating Freedom*, Raoul Martinez brings together a torrent of mind-expanding ideas, facts, and arguments to dismantle sacred myths central to our society—myths about free will, free markets, free media, and free elections. From the lottery of our birth to the consent-manufacturing influence of concentrated power, this far-reaching manifesto lifts the veil on the mechanisms of control that pervade our lives. It shows that the more we understand how the world shapes us, the more effectively we can shape the world. A highly original exploration of the most urgent questions of our time, *Creating Freedom* reveals that we are far less free than we like to think, but it also shows that freedom is something we can create together. In fact, our very survival may depend on our doing so.

"Exceptional . . . This year's essential text for thinking radicals" —The Guardian (UK) "A stunning treatise; the freedoms within our society are illusory or entirely antithetical to actual liberty.... The author, and the arguments within his book, have a tendency to leave a reader feeling enlivened, stirred and provoked." —Irish Times "In this stunning and lucid book, Raoul Martinez reassesses our past, re-examines our present, and re-imagines our future. It's such an exciting and compelling read that you almost don't notice at first how radical it is. *Creating Freedom* makes me think that we humans are on the cusp of our next big step—and it's this kind of thinking that will carry us over." —Brian Enold "I've been working my way through, highlighter in hand, at times thinking, 'Why bother! Just highlight the whole thing.'" —David Byrne "Provocative, powerful and important—*Creating Freedom* is a rigorous exploration of what's gone wrong with our society and how to make it right. A book for our time, this radical manifesto exposes the myths at the heart of our system and shows what the ideal of freedom truly demands from us, individually and collectively." —Susan Sarandon "Creating Freedom is quite magnificent in its intelligence, acuity, scope, human warmth and - most importantly - hope! My book of the year." —Stephen Fry "Martinez speaks for a generation living through a profound mismatch between their aspirations for freedom and creativity and the thudding conformity a society, driven by the market, demands" —Paul Mason "Everyone trying to puzzle through how to deal with the madness of the world - and the forces destroying it - should read this book" —Johann Hari "An impassioned social and political critique with glimmers of hope for change. British artist and documentarian Martinez makes his literary debut writing on a theme taken up recently by writers such as economists Thomas Piketty and Joseph Stiglitz, journalist Bob Herbert, and activist Ralph Nader: inequality, injustice, greed, and entrenched power have undermined democracy and threaten the common good and the future of our planet... An intelligent, rigorous manifesto." —Kirkus "If you believe you are free, think again. Strong arguments . . . epic in scope . . . [A] manifesto to enlighten citizens stuck in an illusion of democracy" —Financial Times "Thought-provoking . . . sound and persuasive . . . Eminently readable with a an elegance of style not often found in theoretical works. It is no less than a rallying cry to take back the substance rather than the illusions of our freedoms." —New Internationalist "Beautifully written, vigorously argued and remarkably researched . . . No one has examined the issues of freedom and moral responsibility in such an extensive and fascinating context, or done more to show that these issues are not ivory tower debates but absolutely life and death issues for individuals and quite possibly for our species" —Bruce Waller "This discussion of the impossibility of ultimate moral responsibility is extremely well written, aphoristic in places, and philosophically right on target." —Galen Strawson
About the Author Raoul Martinez is an artist, writer, and award-winning documentarian whose work has been exhibited in London's National Portrait Gallery. He lives in London. Steve West is an actor of international standing. He is known for his appearances on London's West End Stage in *Mamma Mia!*, contemporary plays, and Shakespearean classics. He has appeared in Hollywood movies and on television screens in the United States and the United Kingdom and performed for Queen Elizabeth II at Buckingham Palace. His work has also been screened at the Cannes International Film Festival. Excerpt. copy; Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. part one THE LOTTERY OF BIRTH 1 Luck We do not choose to exist. We do not choose the environment we will grow up in. We do not choose to be born Hindu, Christian or Muslim, into a war-zone or peaceful middle-class suburb, into starvation or luxury. We do not choose our parents, nor whether they'll be happy or miserable, knowledgeable or ignorant, healthy or sickly, attentive or neglectful. The knowledge we possess, the beliefs we hold, the tastes we develop, the traditions we adopt, the opportunities we enjoy, the work we do — the very lives we lead — depend entirely

on our biological inheritance and the environment to which we are exposed. This is the lottery of birth. We meet the world primed to adopt the way of life we encounter. The society that greets us takes our potential and shapes it. Ancient Greece, Confucian China, Renaissance Italy, Victorian England, Communist Russia — across millennia of human history there has been a spectacular multiplicity of cultures, each with the power to mould us in radically different ways. Early interactions, the treatment we receive and the behaviour we observe, begin the process of constructing an identity. Gradually, imperceptibly, we are inducted into a community. Cultural transmission is a powerful process, one that has produced both beautiful and ugly outcomes. A glance at history reveals that there is neither a belief too bizarre nor an action too appalling for humans to embrace, given the necessary cultural influences. As much as we condemn the injustices and prejudices of past societies, there is no reason to assume that, under those circumstances, we would not have embraced the same values and defended the same traditions. We might have developed loyalty to any group, nation, ideology or religion, learned any language, practised any social custom, partaken in any act of barbarism or altruism. Thinking about the lottery of birth draws our attention to a simple fact: we do not create ourselves. The very idea entails a logical contradiction. To create something, you have to exist, so to create yourself you would have to have existed before you had been created. Whether we're talking about flesh and blood people or immaterial souls, there is no way around this simple fact.¹ The implications are far-reaching: if we do not create ourselves, how can we be responsible for the way we are? And if we are not responsible for the way we are, how can we be responsible for what we do? The answer is: we cannot. The kind of freedom that would make us truly responsible for our actions — truly worthy of credit or blame — is a dangerous illusion, one that distorts our thinking on the most pressing economic, political and moral issues of our time. Yet it's an illusion central to our lives. As we will see, examining it exposes as false a number of assumptions at the heart of our culture — ideas about punishment, reward, blame and entitlement — and demands a revolution in the way we organise society and think about ourselves and each other. It can seem hard to reconcile the fact that we are not truly responsible for the lives we lead with the countless choices we make every day — what to eat, what to wear, whether to lie or tell the truth, whether to stand up for ourselves or suffer in silence. After all, I'm choosing to type these words and you're choosing to read them. However, the act of making a choice does little to confer responsibility. The reason for this is simple: we make choices with a brain we did not choose. No one creates their own brain. No one even really understands the workings of their brain, let alone anyone else's. Just as computers do not programme themselves, we do not wire the grey matter inside our skulls. This feat is accomplished through endless interactions between our genes and environment, neither of which we control. The upshot is that I did not choose to be me and you did not choose to be you, yet who we are determines the choices we make in any given situation. Intuitively, we understand this. We are good at predicting the behaviour of those we know well. If a child, partner or sibling shows a drastic change in behaviour, we look for some external cause — drugs, bullying, overwork. Take the real-life case of a middle-aged married man — let's call him John — who developed an overwhelming addiction to child pornography.² After several incidents of highly inappropriate sexual behaviour, as well as some time on a rehabilitation programme, John faced a stretch in prison. Suffering from increasingly painful headaches, John was hospitalised the night before he was due to be sentenced. A brain scan revealed a massive tumour in his orbitofrontal cortex. The surgeons operated, removed the tumour, and John's sexual appetite and behaviour returned to normal. After six months, however, the paedophilic tendencies returned. His wife took him back to the surgeon, who discovered that a portion of the tumour had regrown. After a second operation, John's behaviour returned to normal. With the discovery of the brain tumour, John seems more a victim than a moral deviant — someone worthy of compassion rather than punishment. We tell ourselves that the tumour is to blame for his troubling behaviour and, of course, no one chooses to have a tumour. But what if there had been no tumour? Would that have made John more responsible? Would you feel more justified in blaming John if, say, his addiction had been the product of childhood abuse rather than the abnormal growth of brain tissue? If so, why? We no more control our upbringing than we do cell growth in the brain, and formative experiences have a profound impact on the way we develop. In the 1950s, British psychiatrist John Bowlby showed that a child's relationship with its primary care-giver has a decisive impact on emotional and mental development. Today, it is widely accepted among child psychologists that if a child fails to form a secure attachment to a care-giver, the likelihood increases of developing a range of behavioural problems related to depleted self-worth, lack of trust in other people and an absence of empathy. The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study, one of the largest of its kind, looked at the long-term effects of childhood trauma on health and behaviour.³ Its findings confirm what many might expect: stressful or traumatic childhood experiences such as abuse, neglect, witnessing domestic violence, or growing up with alcohol or other substance abuse, mental illness, parental discord, or crime in the home . . . are a common pathway to social, emotional, and cognitive impairments that lead to increased risk . . . of violence or re-victimization, disease, disability and premature mortality.⁴ The prevalence of and risks associated with these problems are greater in people who have experienced more abuse. For instance, each traumatic event in a child's life makes them two to four times more likely to develop an addiction. Most brain development takes place after birth. This is a distinctive feature of human beings. Dr Gabor Mate, a physician specialising in the treatment of addiction, argues that physical and

emotional interactions determine much of our neurological growth and that addiction is largely a product of life-experience, particularly in early childhood: [E]ndorphins are released in the infant's brain when there are warm, non-stressed, calm interactions with the parenting figures. Endorphins, in turn, promote the growth of receptors and nerve cells, and the discharge of other important brain chemicals. The fewer endorphin-enhancing experiences in infancy and early childhood, the greater the need for external sources. Hence, a greater vulnerability to addictions.⁵ At any moment the state of our brain is a reflection of countless forces — genetic and environmental — over which we have little or no awareness. Advances in science and improvements in technology are gradually increasing our understanding of the brain. Today we can detect and identify brain tumours; two hundred years ago we could not. Back then, John would have been held completely responsible for his actions. No account would have been taken of the effect of the abnormal growth of tissue in his brain because no one would have known about it. The default assumption would have been that an adult is morally responsible for his or her actions. As modern scientific instruments have increased our perceptual reach, our knowledge of the brain has improved. Observation and experience have taught us that a tumour can have a dramatic effect on an individual's behaviour, radically changing their personality. We have learned to attribute responsibility for abnormal behaviour to the tumour instead of to the person who happens to suffer from it. The problem with this line of thinking is that our assessment of blameworthiness is constrained by our current level of scientific understanding. A hundred years from now, with better scientific instruments and a better understanding of the brain, we may be able to detect subtle changes in the brain's neurochemistry that give rise to all kinds of behaviour which today we attribute to the 'free agency' of the individual. Neuroscientist David Eagleman writes: 'The underlying cause [of a form of behaviour] could be a genetic mutation, a bit of brain damage caused by an undetectably small stroke or tumor, an imbalance in neurotransmitter levels, a hormonal imbalance — or any combination. Any or all of these problems may be undetectable with our current technologies. But they can cause differences in brain function that lead to abnormal behaviour.' In other words, if there is a measurable brain problem, that buys leniency for the defendant. But we do blame someone if we lack the technology to detect a biological problem.⁶ The more we understand the brain, the more we will be able to account for our behaviour by reference to its specific features, which will be attributable to genetic inheritance and life-experience. We may be able to show that the violence and aggression of an abusive father is rooted in a particular hormone imbalance, which itself could be rooted in childhood trauma. Scientific advances will help us to view a person's choices in a far wider context, one that includes the forces that created the brain making the choices we observe. The notion of 'individual responsibility' is just a fig leaf that covers the current gaps in our knowledge. Our understanding of the brain is still extremely limited. In one cubic millimetre of brain tissue there are a hundred million synaptic connections between neurons. Current imaging methods rely on blood-flow signals that cover tens of cubic millimetres of brain tissue.⁷ The upshot, as Eagleman vividly puts it, is that 'modern neuroimaging is like asking an astronaut in the space shuttle to look out the window and judge how America is doing';⁸ Though it may never be attained, a total understanding of the brain would eradicate the idea of individual responsibility entirely. But we do not have to wait for advances in science to understand that if someone behaves differently from us in a given situation, it is because they are different from us. We may lack the technology to identify the relevant way in which their neuro-circuitry differs from our own, but the evidence of the difference lies in the behaviour. If we had exactly the same brain state and encountered the same situation then, all else being equal, we would behave in exactly the same way. This principle holds whether we are using it to explain the exceptional intellectual gifts of Einstein (which, incidentally, led him to reject the myth of responsibility) or the extraordinary moral failings of Stalin.⁹ Simon Baron-Cohen, Professor of Developmental Psychopathology and a leading researcher in empathetic development, suggests that when it comes to varying degrees of empathy, 'perhaps we should see such behaviour not as a product of individual choice or responsibility, but as a product of the person's neurology'.¹⁰ We do not hold someone with schizophrenia responsible for having a hallucination, just as we do not hold someone with diabetes responsible for their increased thirst. In the case of the person with diabetes, we 'blame' the person's low levels of insulin, or the person's cells for not responding normally to insulin. That is, we recognize the biomedical causes of the behaviour. Equally, if someone's behaviour is the result of their low empathy, which itself stems from the underactivity of the brain's empathy circuit, and which ultimately is the result of their genetic make-up and/or their early experience, in what sense is the person responsible?¹¹ Perhaps the biggest obstacle to seeing things this way is the intuition that, although as children we are not responsible for our identity and actions, we can choose to change ourselves as we mature and, by doing so, become truly responsible — bad habits can be broken and patterns from childhood overcome. On the face of it, this seems a reasonable claim. People can change and often these changes can be brought about very consciously — that is not in doubt — but it cannot make us truly responsible for who we are. To see why, think of a new-born baby endowed with a genetic inheritance it did not ask for and exposed to a world it played no part in creating. At what point does it become a truly responsible being, worthy of credit and blame? The problem is that, by the time we have developed the intelligence necessary to contemplate our own identity, we are already very much in possession of one. How we think about ourselves and the world around us will already be framed by the conditioning we have received

up to that point. This conditioning informs any choices we make, even the choice to rebel against aspects of that conditioning. It is still possible for new influences, encountered by chance, to have a deep impact on what we think and do, but we're not responsible for what we encounter by chance — and the influences that we consciously seek out are sought because of who we already are. As the philosopher Galen Strawson put it: "Both the particular way in which one is moved to try to change oneself, and the degree of one's success in the attempt at change, will be determined by how one already is as a result of heredity and experience."¹² Most of what goes on in the brain is completely inaccessible to the conscious mind. Rather than its functioning being a product of consciousness, it makes more sense to say that consciousness is a product of the brain's functioning. Eagleman writes: "The first thing we learn from studying our own [brain] circuitry is a simple lesson: most of what we do and think and feel is not under our conscious control. The vast jungles of neurons operate their own programs. The conscious you — the I that flickers to life when you wake up in the morning — is the smallest bit of what's transpiring in your brain .??. Your consciousness is like a tiny stowaway on a transatlantic steamship, taking credit for the journey without acknowledging the massive engineering underfoot."