

# What does it mean to be you? essay sample



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In Julian Baggini's "Is There a Real You?", he discusses what our preconceived notion of what we think we are. He challenges the typical idea of what the word "you" really means and how it defines us. For the longest time, we have always thought that we needed to actually go out and discover who we are as a person. We feel that without this, we are limiting our understanding of who we are and what we can become. It is this idea that people have this core, this central definition of who they are, that Baggini wants to challenge. That we are instead not just a person, but are all of the things that we have experienced and done. This kind of mindset is very much a philosophical outlook on what it means to experience being a human. If we are no longer just people but instead everything that we have done, seen, enjoyed, etc., then we are in fact much more.

Baggini starts off by bringing up the human fascination of categorizing and labeling ourselves. In today's world, there is always a magazine, newspaper, website, article, etc., that has some kind of test that aims at telling you what kind of person you are or what kind of personality you have. Regardless of whether it is the Myers-Briggs test or a hundred or-so question test in Readers' Digest, these tests do have some merit in giving you an idea about what you are like as a person. The problem, however, is that these tests have too much assumed credibility. People take them as these permanent truths that define them to their core that remains the same throughout life. This topic is important because it is the basis for Baggini's argument. This topic helps blanket his challenge for the way people try and discover who they are and this common sense attitude we have that we are defined by what we are perceived as. A good point that Baggini brings up, is that most

of the things that we have in our life are not just one thing. They are indeed one thing but they are more complex in nature. Just about everything is comprised of much smaller things that in the end make up whatever object it is.

A watch, for example, isn't just a watch made up of hands, a face, gears, and a battery. On the contrary, it is actually the hands, face, gears, and battery that make the watch what it is. Without these few components, the watch would in fact not even exist. This analogy that he uses works very well due to it giving a measure of insight. Most people just think of a watch as a watch at first glance. They never truly think at the same time that it has all of those components which makes it what it is. It is the same way in which we look at people. We do not just look at and think about all of the things a person has been through and then determine what kind of person they are. We normally just define that person by the way they look, or by the aura that they give off. This kind of attitude is the reason why most people tend to judge others incorrectly or without morality.

Baggini brings up a point that Paul Broks, a clinical neuropsychologist, made when he said that " We have this deep intuition that there is a core, an essence there, and it's hard to shake off, probably impossible to shake off, I suspect. But it's true that neuroscience shows that there is no center in the brain where things do all come together." This understanding of the brain is interesting because it shows how the brain isn't being controlled by a central unit that tells us who we are and that we exist, but by different sections that all work together in order to form this sense of self. It is a scary thought because it gives off this sense of illusion, that we are in fact not real.

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Baggini goes on to say that this kind of idea is not one that is particularly helpful and uses the Iguazu falls as a rough metaphor to help give us a better understanding of what we are. We can understand and appreciate that there is nothing permanent with the falls, it is always changing and the water itself is never the same. This doesn't mean that it is an illusion though. The fact that the water is able to flow in different ways means that the falls are able to change and develop; defining what it is more and more. That sense of freedom is something that it is quite liberating when it comes to us. This kind of idea allows Baggini to strengthen his argument when it comes to challenging the idea that we have this permanent meaning and that we are trapped in definition that we give for ourselves.

Baggini begins to finish by quoting Buddha, " Well-makers lead the water (wherever they like); fletchers bend the arrow; carpenters bend a log of wood; wise people fashion themselves. Dhammapada (verse 80)". With this quote, Baggini completes his argument about what it means to be " you" with the idea that the definition of ones' true-self isn't just something that you need to go out and search for, but is instead, part something you discover, and part something that you create. Baggini's argument is a very strong one, that he frequently strengthens with philosophical ideas and metaphors. He manages to challenge the ideas of others, without stating that those people were necessarily wrong, and still solidify his argument using their findings. His argument is one that some may perceive as silly but is one that can still strongly defend itself.

#### Work Cited

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