

Reflections

Dougall A. S. Smith

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Working thoughtfully toward a theory of human unity that stands to enrich many religious paths, this book is eloquent and convincing.

Dougall A. S. Smith presents a posthumous collection of elegant essays on epistemology, aesthetics, and religion penned by an unnamed friend. Though brief, *Reflections* stands to provoke and inspire on multiple fronts, raising questions of how meaning may be made at any moment of our ever-unfolding human story.

Smith prefaces his work with a few nods to the author, who, he reveals, remained a devout Anglican to the end, though he chose to deviate from official doctrinal positions at times. The writer's sense of awe for Christian teachings is apparent throughout, though he also proves well-versed in Eastern traditions, particularly Buddhism, and maintains respect for alternate ways of thinking.

The text is gracefully written and erudite. A host of footnotes betray engagement with a wide range of philosophical and theological texts, discussions of which add to the richness of *Reflections*'s own passages. The central encouragement is that seekers center themselves, pursue meaning via quiet, and dare to question preconceived notions of truth and being. These are common enough recommendations, particularly in discussions of spirituality, though their presentations here are uncommonly persuasive.

"The essence of prayer or meditation is not petition but relationship," the author writes, "being one with [God or] the whole or simply attending to what is encountered in stillness." Another passage rethinks truth itself: "what makes [truth] is ... elegance, of which coherence is part but not the only part. Truth, too, is a kind of beauty, and more than one interpretation can be true."

Reflections works thoughtfully toward a theory of human unity that stands to enrich many paths. Conversations around evolution are provocative, presenting all human ideas as part of an unending journey, so "truth" as it is known now is given its proper gravity, without a sense of immovability, within the greater scope of universal development.

Controversy may swirl around the author's rejection of concepts of eternal punishment and reward, though *Reflections* makes strong arguments for their disposal. The author remains thoughtful and interreligiously conversant throughout, with the jarring exception of a peripheral conversation of "Israelite" tradition. Engagement with such notions will find both sympathetic and hostile audiences, but all should find much worth discussing in these presentations.

Brief appendixes flesh out internal concepts, though almost superfluously, given the elegance of the body of the text. A chapter that puts the concepts in *Reflections* in the hands of a fictional believer proves piquing.

Reflections is a lovely and intelligent text that engages religious and philosophical concepts in compelling ways. A sure pleasure for seekers of many stripes.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (July 17, 2015)

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