

The Power and the Glory: The Key Ideas and Crusading Lives of Eight Debaters of Reason vs. Faith

Burgess Laughlin

CreateSpace (Jun 10, 2010)

\$20.00 (278pp)

978-1-4392-6658-8

"The debate about reason and faith is a philosophical one, which means any normally intelligent person can participate if he is willing to think and discuss issues as a way of gathering insights," Burgess Laughlin writes. "...Specialized knowledge of history is not a requirement for philosophical thinking and discussion." In *The Power and the Glory*, Burgess Laughlin, author of *The Aristotle Adventure: A Guide to the Greek, Arabic, and Latin Scholars Who Transmitted Aristotle's Logic to the Renaissance*, demonstrates his depth of historical knowledge and succinctly summarizes contributions to understanding the relationship between reason and faith.

The book's title is derived from Laughlin's view of power as "the ability to change one's world despite opposition" and glory as the "state of mind that arises from taking a personal form of action for philosophic values." He begins with an introduction that explains the basic structure of philosophy and defines the scope of the book. He traces the lives and development of eight thinkers and debaters in the long history of philosophy: Celsus, Origen, Porphyry, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, John Locke, Immanuel Kant, and Ayn Rand. The book also includes an appendix and an index, plus extensive notes and references.

Laughlin uses biography and history to present a survey of the debate concerning the value of reason versus faith. In each section about history's great thinkers, Laughlin introduces enough personal biography, political background, and information about their scholastic developments to understand the philosophic positions they took, their motivations for entering the philosophic debate, and the social context of the times. For instance, in the section on Kant, Laughlin provides not only Kant's biography and philosophy, but also information on Kant's critic, Johann Georg Hamann, and his upbringing in a "Pietist" home. Thus, we get a full picture of each philosopher and his opposition.

With intellectual honesty, Laughlin writes in a readable style, and easily captures the depth and subtlety of the various points about the possibility and means of knowledge. Regarding the development of John Locke's position, he writes:

This problem—What is the proper source of knowledge?—was the root of the social and political conflicts of Locke's time. Puritans said conscience should be the source of knowledge of right and wrong actions ... Catholics resorted to infallibility of the pope... Locke tried to find a way to solve political and ethical problems in the same manner that men of science in his time were solving scientific problems...

The Power and the Glory is Laughlin's attempt to show the value of reason over faith. In the seven-page appendix he writes, "Anyone working for a better world in which to live will inevitably be in a position to occasionally advocate for reason and reject all forms of mysticism." Whether one agrees with his position or not, this text is an excellent summary of the debate over the nature and source of knowledge. Here is an immensely useful, clear, and direct look at ideas, their sources, and how to evaluate them. Anyone interested in clarifying their understanding of philosophy, theology, ethics, and metaphysics will do well to read this twice.

DAVID GEORGE (September 4, 2010)

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