



The Faith of a Heretic

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The Faith of a Heretic Details

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From Reader Review The Faith of a Heretic for online ebook

Hugh Coverly says

Kaufmann presents his "quest for honesty" in religion, theology and philosophy. When I first read this book twenty years ago, I was still immersed in theological studies at seminary, and now I am a committed atheist. As an atheist, my latest reading of the book reconfirmed my absence of belief in God. In clear and precise language Kaufmann presents devastating critiques of God, religion, theology and philosophy. The book has a contemporary feel, even though it betrays its age by references clearly set in the late 1950s. The New Atheists might find the book antiquated because of its use of Old Testament and New Testament references, ancient and Enlightenment philosophers, existentialism, and modern theologians such as Paul Tillich and Rudolf Bultmann. Even if one is not prepared to follow Kaufmann through this territory, one can still learn much from and appreciate his more original and personal statements in the opening and closing chapters, especially those on The Quest for Honesty and Commitment, and later those on Organized Religion, Morality, and Death. In the end, Kaufmann is not an atheist--I believe he comes awfully close--but a self-identified heretic. As a heretic Kaufmann questions the unfounded foundational beliefs held by religion and propped up by theology, and the failure of contemporary philosophy to tackle the big questions in order to focus on the minutiae of language and other specialist topics. Atheists may find support in following Kaufmann's approach, even if they don't reach his conclusions.

Nick says

This graceful statement of Kaufmann's basic spiritual outlook and call for intellectual integrity could serve as a soul enema for anyone. Kaufmann's discussion of the moral superiority of Old Testament Judaism (real social-moral concern for others divorced from otherworldly reward) to Christianity ("blessed are the meek...for I shall pay them off!") will certainly stick with me, as will his analysis of the weak-sauce liberal Protestant theologians of the 20th century, who purport to offer everything we moderns want "and heaven too." Kaufmann returns again and again to Jesus's exhortations to honesty: don't put new wine into old wineskins; make your yes, yes, and your no, no. The religious thinkers he discusses fail to follow these maxims all too often.

But the most important part of the book for me was Kaufmann's discussion of virtues, namely his dismissal of hope (the child of fear and cowardice!) and championing of his invented "humbition" (humility + ambition). His virtues combine into a tragic outlook that recognizes that the world is a rough place and that we have limited time to accomplish what little we can. Hope denies or at least de-emphasizes these truths whereas humbition looks them square in the face. Also, Kaufmann's spiritual "paganism"--having multiple "ultimate concerns" instead of one--seems a lot more workable and in tune with human nature than the religious demand to focus one's life on one point. No, Soren: purity of heart is not to will one thing. Yes, Friedrich: from here on out everything unconditional belongs to pathology.

Christopher says

What the childish and puerile 'new atheists' tried to do in more recent times was once done with actual style and knowledge by Walter Kaufmann, someone who actually knew what they were talking about.

He is still buried deep within that world I once inhabited which I can no longer abide, the intellectual school

of liberalism (meant in the general rather than American political sense) but the fact that he can be so convincing even from such a vantage point is refreshing considering most of the drivel that has leaked out of that corner of the intellectual world for the past 50-odd years.

If you have a friend interested in exploring the ethics of atheism, agnosticism, etc and they have an above pop-polemic reading level recommend this over the more recent and popular works on the topic.

Frankie Della Torre says

Kaufmann made me strive to obtain, by God's grace, I pray, the faith of a heretic.

Emily says

I read this book years ago, but I still think about it from time to time. Some of it makes no sense (not to be confused with being hard to understand, mind you) and is arranged in a strange way. But, Kaufman has some fascinating ideas. My favorite was his chapter on God being either all-powerful OR all-merciful. You have to choose one or the other, Kaufman argues-- and he won't tell you which to choose. I also think what he has to say about death is amazing.

Jerry Wall says

Good morality discussion. `Biblical moral code doesn't work because based on fear of punishment or bribe with hope of reward. Decisions to be moral should be based on a thought process using reason to decide on appropriate aspects of such a code

Chris Bonds says

Don't have time to write a review just now, will say this is one of the best books I've read in a long time.

Paul O'Leary says

Kaufman's exploration of religion and the need to keep an open mind feels dated to me. His targets are names less remembered than they once were, such as Bultmann and Tillich. He argues persuasively that a religion denuded of troublesome facts until its essence is distilled is in essence on a par with any other religion worthy of the name. Covering this up has been the job of theologians since religious dogma separated one God from another. This position and it's attached consequences were once shocking to the public. Not so much now. Kaufman is a very good writer with complete mastery of his materials, yet the subject seems well, no, over canvassed already. This book was published in 1961 when religion was still something of a touchy subject. Also, an active topic of debate and focus for reform. Today, religion in America has moved out from the public sphere and into the private, that is, when it's able to afford its rent. The stakes simply aren't as high anymore. Kaufman's paean to always keep independent thought alive

requiring the "faith of a heretic" against all thought-stifling dogmatic theology doesn't have the impact it once did. Certainly not a bad book. Critical thinking, undoubtedly, needs its proponents still. But I must confess I found it something of a boring book. There are lessons that could be retold with profit, like Job's suffering and misery caused by a God from an authority which had nothing to do with godly morality, nor was it expected by Job himself. Kaufman's dictum that "honesty within limits" isn't honesty at all deserves proper attention, perhaps especially today. But once these basic lessons have been revisited the book starts to weigh heavier on one's time and lighter on one's mind. Kaufman's book on Nietzsche is a pathbreaking classic. This offering, sadly, is not.

Brian Reinhart says

The best book on atheism and non-religion that I've ever read, and I've read a lot of them. Kaufmann is smarter, nimbler, kinder, more understanding, and more insightful than Dawkins, Hitchens, Harris, etc.

Try to find the later paperback with the red cover that has a new preface. Not that this classic is available anywhere, when it should be everywhere.

Ramses says

This is one of those books I will buy my own copy of and keep on my shelf for years to come. It may need to be consulted occasionally.

Bruce says

I liked this a lot, despite some rambling and redundancies. It is a very intelligent critique of religion and philosophy (a sequel to his earlier *Critique of Religion and Philosophy*) which is often insightful and informative. Kaufmann gives a lot of himself in the book, and I came to wish he were still alive so I could discuss certain topics with him.

Robert Gourley says

Entertaining, witty, interesting, though often intellectually dishonest; first published in 1959, certainly one of the progenitors of the anti-authoritarian spirit of the baby-boomers to the faddish atheism of today.

DoubleM says

Walter Kaufmann's erudite tome was not what I expected; which was another religious zealot proclaiming that his faith was the one and only and that all should adopt it, adhere to it, and follow his thinking. Boy, was I surprised. Mr. Kaufmann cited the writings of the great, historical minds of the ages, comparing, contrasting, and analyzing their treatises on religion, philosophies, psychology, politics, and just plain common sense. His basic premise is that we each must learn and think for ourselves, no one else can do that

for us.

This is not a book to be read as a substitute when there are only re-runs on TV. It is a book to be read at one's own pace and absorbed so that new ideas may be formed and acted on in our individual lives. "The Faith of a Heretic" is a REFERENCE book which should be consulted, as needed, to live a successful life. I will return to it from time to time, if for no other reason than to delete the erroneous ideas which I have carried with me since childhood. HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

Paul Dinger says

I read this book in college and I can honestly say it has stayed with me. This is not a book you read in order to believe anything, but to doubt Everything. You will not come away knowing what Kauffmann knows but wondering if you know as much as you think you do. The target here is intellectual dishonesty and it is revealed and dragged thru the mud. I have been having a dialoge with this book since reading it and it's companion piece. Some books you read, my old philosophy teacher used to say, and some you experience. This is a book you experience.

Ryan Young says

Herr Kaufmann thinks clearly. I dearly wish everyone i ever knew would read this book and endeavor to understand its points. he has a gentle way of elucidating difficult concepts, as if he were richard dawkins without the rancor. he is well versed in ancient and contemporary philosophy, ancient and contemporary religion, and even psychology, such as it was in the 1950s.

honesty. he wants us to aspire to honesty. with ourselves. with our children. with our neighbor. not sincerity, but honesty. the kind of honesty that springs from courage, that kind of honesty that leads to love. A book for the nearest shelf, to be consulted.

read it and let's all talk about it!
