

Book Reviews

Brian Besong and Jonathan Fuqua, eds. *Faith and Reason: Philosophers Explain their Turn to Catholicism*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2019. Foreword by Francis Beckwith, Introduction by Brian Besong.

The book reviewed here consists of autobiographical accounts from a dozen philosophers: Edward Feser (Pasadena City College, Pasadena), J. Budziszewski (University of Texas, Austin), Brian Cutter (University of Notre Dame), Neal Judisch (University of Oklahoma), Peter Kreeft (Boston College), Logan Paul Gage (Franciscan University of Steubenville), Robert C. Koons (University of Texas, Austin), W. Scott Cleveland (University of Mary, N. Dakota) Lindsay K. Cleveland (University of Mary, N. Dakota), Bryan R. Cross (Mound Mercy University), Candace Vogler (University of Chicago) and Francis J. Beckwith (Baylor University). These all have several things in common, two of which should be immediately highlighted: firstly, they are well-trained and competent philosophers, and secondly, they have changed their minds about matters of faith and become Catholics. In very different but also very profound ways, they all seek to tell us about how and why they came to embrace Catholicism as an overarching source of wisdom. In his introductory Foreword, which carries the subtitle “Taking Faith Seriously,” Beckwith stresses that

[i]n the professoriate, conventional wisdom is that beliefs arising from faith are by their very nature contrary to the deliverances of reason. But for those Catholic academics, like the contributors to this volume, who have both a deep faith and a sophisticated mastery of philosophy, that’s not at all how they understand the relationship between faith and reason. They see them as

✉ Józef Bremer, Jesuit University Ignatianum in Cracow, ul. Kopernika 26, 31-501 Kraków, Poland

✉ jozef.bremer@ignatianum.edu.pl

© 0000-0001-9664-8896

© **F** FORUM PHILOSOPHICUM 23 (2018) no. 2, 339–341
ISSN 1426-1898 E-ISSN 2353-7043

SUBM. 26 August 2019 Acc. 3 September 2019
Doi:10.35765/forphil.2018.2302.18

complementary, that we can know some things by both faith and reason (e.g. that God exists ...), some things only by reason (e.g. that water is H₂O ...), and some things only by faith (e.g. that God is a Trinity) (13).

The motive of complementarity between faith and reason (see the title of the book) reappears at various junctures in the book. Budziszewski, for example, seeks to relate it to John Paul II's famous statement that faith and reason are like the two wings of a bird: it needs both to fly (59). Scott and Cleveland, meanwhile, in their article *A Marriage of Faith and Reason: One Couple's Journey to the Catholic Church*, show in an austere way how poor and uncertain our faith would be without common-sense rationality and philosophical reason, and without tradition and the teachings of the Church. Gage, in *A Pastor's Kids Find the Catholic Church*, compares his own faith to a "precious family inheritance"—one which emerges in the context of everyday life and is supported by ordinary studies of philosophy and theology (151–74). Koons, in *A Lutheran's Path to Catholicism*, asks amongst other things whether the Lutheran doctrine of justification can be found in the Fathers (178–79). The authors not only reflect here on the relationship between Christian faith and reason, but also speak about and demonstrate their involvement in the Catholic form of life and its practices (see, e.g., 148–50, 172, 202), as well as their evolution towards an acceptance that the Church has the authority to teach doctrine (74).

Each of the stories proffered is unmistakably distinct, yet each presents us with descriptive data showing the different tangible ways in which God has brought these individuals to Himself and to the Catholic Church. In each and every case, reason played an essential role. But where these particular narratives are concerned, we hardly need to make presumptions or enter into speculations about which of the many and various perceptible means of attaining the grace of God may have put before them in reality, in order to facilitate their decision. In every case described, reason played the primary role, and this is what should be stressed: that reason which is, moreover, our most distinctive ability, and which lends itself to an openness towards precisely the sort of questions that transcend our own earthly reality. Needless to say, this is a reason that never forces faith upon a person. On the one hand, it was the plausibility of the Catholic form of life and the Catholic faith—contrasted primarily with other proposals as regards supernatural revelation—that captured the attention of these authors, illuminating their social and personal needs and fostering the conditions under which the inspiration to move towards supernatural faith could flourish and be nurtured. On the other hand, it surely had to be so, given that to make such a

decision—i.e. to declare oneself a Catholic philosopher—is certainly by no means an agreeable task when the declared majority of one’s colleagues either hold religious faith to be irrational or—somewhat less hard—are convinced that questions of faith are necessarily always confined to the private realm of the individual.

At the same time, *Faith and Reason* contains a discussion of universal scope about the relationship between philosophical and autobiographical approaches to understanding philosophical writing. It presents us with the question of how far we should take into consideration the biographical data of a philosopher in our analysis of his or her philosophical theories. Answers to this can take one or other of two possible forms. Most philosophical writing is impersonal and argumentative: for example, at the beginning of his lectures about Aristotle, Heidegger wrote laconically: “Aristotle was born, he worked and died.”¹ On the other hand, as a counterexample, many important philosophers have in fact written accounts of their own lives. Here it will suffice to mention Augustine’s writing, in which philosophical theses are often interwoven with biographical data as elements or aspects of a greater unity, or a certain broader kind of interpretative approach to Wittgenstein’s philosophy, where we are encouraged to see at least some aspects of its development as being closely interwoven with autobiographical situations.² Paraphrasing the title of Hilary Putnam’s book entitled *Jewish Philosophy as a Guide to Life: Rosenzweig, Buber, Levinas, Wittgenstein*, we could talk here about “Christian Teaching as a Guide to Philosophical Life.”³

Faith and Reason definitely belongs to this second thread. In place of the usual impersonal and argumentative forms of religio-philosophical discussion surrounding Christianity and Catholicism, these autobiographical texts are profoundly personal, and largely narrative or explanatory. The contributors to the book reflect upon the philosophical significance of their own autobiographies, and whether or not there are broadly philosophical tasks for which this sort of writing is particularly suited—thus certainly filling a gap in today’s market, at least where texts focusing on autobiography as a part of Christian philosophy are concerned.

JÓZEF BREMER

1. Quoted from Werner Schüssler, „Geborgen in der Ungeborgenheit“: *Einführung in Leben und Werk des Philosophen Peter Wust (1884–1940)* (Münster: LIT VERLAG, 2008), 9.

2. See, e.g., Thomas Mathien and D.G. Wright, eds., *Autobiography as Philosophy: The Philosophical Uses of Self-Presentation* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

3. See H. Putnam, *Jewish Philosophy as a Guide to Life: Rosenzweig, Buber, Levinas, Wittgenstein* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008).