



Is God Happy?: Selected Essays

By Leszek Kolakowski

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The late Leszek Kolakowski was one of the most influential philosophers of the twentieth century. A prominent anticommunist writer, Kolakowski was also a deeply humanistic thinker, and his meditations on society, religion, morality, and culture stand alongside his political writings as commentaries on intellectual and everyday life in the twentieth century.

Kolakowski's extraordinary empathy, humor, and erudition are on full display in "Is God Happy?," the first collection of his work to be published since his death in 2009. Accessible and wide ranging, these essays—many of them translated into English for the first time—testify to the remarkable scope of Kolakowski's work. From a provocative and deeply felt critique of Marxist ideology to the witty and self-effacing "In Praise of Unpunctuality" to a rigorous analysis of Erasmus's model of Christianity and the future of religion, these essays distill Kolakowski's lifelong engagement with the eternal problems of philosophy and some of the most vital questions of our age.

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Editorial Review

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The late Kolakowski was a philosopher of many gifts. Chief among them was his ability to imbue his philosophical reflections with his life experiences, making his work not only accessible but also exciting to read, especially by nonacademics and those untrained in the Western philosophical tradition. Born in Poland, in 1927, he lived through the German occupation of WWII and much of the Communist totalitarian state that followed, witnessing firsthand some of the greatest evil of the twentieth century. The essays selected for inclusion here demonstrate his vast range. The collection's title is taken from the title of an essay in which Kolakowski offers his unique analysis of the age-old problem of reconciling human suffering with a compassionate god. The same freshness and originality are found in the other essays, which address such topics as natural law, totalitarianism, truth, history, and reason, along with selections from his withering critiques of Marxism. This is philosophy at its best; namely, engaging, thoughtful, timely, challenging, and eminently readable. --Christopher McConnell

Review

"Kirkus Reviews"

"Stimulating and provocative."

"Publishers Weekly"

"The word 'mordant' may have been invented to describe a writer such as the late Kolakowski, public intellectual, brilliant stylist, and prolific author.... Kolakowski knew history and the history of his chosen discipline, philosophy, and it informed his arguments with God and everybody else, conducted in bitingly ironic fashion. He deserves greater appreciation for the inimitable way he articulated the great moral questions that haunted European intellectuals after midcentury and before postmodernism disengaged the intelligentsia."

"The Wall Street Journal"

"[Kolakowski] was an intellectual in the best sense of that word: a scholar of vast learning, a writer with a gift for the clear and felicitous expression of complex ideas, and a man who didn't overestimate his own importance.... ['Is God Happy?'] is an excellent introduction to Kolakowski's writing. It is a treasure for Kolakowski's admirers, too.... The essays on communism and the left brim with arresting insights."

"The Nation"

"A valuable introduction to Kolakowski's extraordinary intellectual versatility."

"The American Spectator"

"A splendid collection.... Many of the essays in 'Is God Happy?' are heroic efforts by Kolakowski to rescue crucial features of the Christian worldview.... [Kolakowski] was a beacon of light in a dark time, and even his earliest essays retain their ability to instruct and inspire."

"First Things"

"The eminent Polish philosopher Leszek Kolakowski is best known in the English-speaking world for his critique of Marxism. Yet his work is not a museum piece. 'Is God Happy?,' which compiles half a century of his essays (many published in English for the first time), reveals the continued relevance of his thought... Even Kolakowski's humor and irony, then, perform a serious purpose: They attempt to capture some essential aspect of the truth without emptying it of all sense of mystery."

"The Polish American Journal"

"A remarkable book.... All the essays are thought provoking....The late Kolakowski was one of the most renowned twentieth century intellectuals and philosophers. He had written essays and books for over fifty years, some of which were banned by the Communist party. Today we now have the pleasure of reading them in English, with an excellent translation by his daughter."

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About the Author

Leszek Kolakowski (1927-2009) was professor of the history of modern philosophy at the University of Warsaw until 1968, when he was fired by the government for political reasons and prevented from teaching and publishing. That same year he took up a visiting professorship at McGill University in Montreal, then at UC Berkeley, and in 1970 settled in Oxford at All Souls College, where he was Senior Research Fellow. Kolakowski was also professor at the Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago; the author

of numerous books, including his masterwork, "Main Currents of Marxism"; and the recipient of many awards, including the Prix Tocqueville and the John W. Kluge Prize.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Terra Runyan:

Nowadays reading books become more and more than want or need but also be a life style. This reading addiction give you lot of advantages. The benefits you got of course the knowledge the particular information inside the book that will improve your knowledge and information. The knowledge you get based on what kind of publication you read, if you want get more knowledge just go with schooling books but if you want really feel happy read one using theme for entertaining for example comic or novel. The actual Is God Happy?: Selected Essays is kind of guide which is giving the reader unforeseen experience.

Alexandra Robbins:

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Richard Russell:

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