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Fear And Trembling (Penguin Great Ideas)



Synopsis

The perfect books for the true book lover, Penguin's Great Ideas series features twelve more groundbreaking works by some of history's most prodigious thinkers. Each volume is beautifully packaged with a unique type-driven design that highlights the bookmaker's art. Offering great literature in great packages at great prices, this series is ideal for those readers who want to explore and savor the Great Ideas that have shaped our world. Regarded as the father of Existentialism, Kierkegaard transformed philosophy with his conviction that we must all create our own nature; in this great work of religious anxiety, he argues that a true understanding of God can only be attained by making a personal "leap of faith."

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Customer Reviews

Faith, it goes without saying, is a personal thing. It is a private aspect of a person's life that may, if they wish, become public, though there is no real need for this to occur. Faith is something that cannot be explained - certainly not to the satisfaction of an atheist - rather, it is something that is believed. Faith, in short, is faith. The particularities of faith are among the causes of many great

schisms of the last thousand or so years of European history. Fear and Trembling, Kierkegaard's small, dense work on faith, tackles the problem of what it means to believe. In the 19th century, secular philosophy believed that religion was explicable, whereas the difficulties of Hegel were exceedingly great. 'I for my part have devoted a good deal of time to the understanding of the Hegelian philosophy, I believe also that I understand it tolerably well, but when in spite of the trouble I have taken there are certain passages I cannot understand, I am foolhardy enough to think that he himself has not been quite clear. All this I do easily and naturally, my head does not suffer from it. But on the other hand when I have to think of Abraham, I am as though annihilated.' Annihilated. Kierkegaard explores the biblical story of Abraham, who was commanded by God to sacrifice his only son, Isaac. Abraham sets out with the full intention of doing so, but is prevented at the last moment. A ram is provided as a sacrifice instead. Kierkegaard saw this as the supreme example of what it means to have faith, and how faith could never be properly understood through the lens of faith.

Atheists need to read this book. Empathy is a good thing and we need to understand the suffering of those who chose faith as a way of dealing with the world, however misguided they happen to be. Philosophers reflect the times in which they live. In the 19th century, technology and industry were progressing but so was large-scale warfare. As our lot improved, we gradually became aware of how bad things were. Through physics and engineering, man was conquering his world and so philosophers believed they too would soon understand everything. Kierkegaard correctly condemns the hubris of those philosophers who seek to "go beyond faith". His existentialism stands in stark contrast to the posturing of Hegel and the ramblings of Marx. Kierkegaard screams out man's pain and seeks refuge in Christian faith. But Kierkegaard is no mere fire and brimstone preacher. He is honest enough to see the core problem in Christianity and brave enough to attack it head on. In a word, faith is absurd. Abraham is the father of faith to the three monotheistic myths, and according to Kierkegaard faith was born at a precise moment in the biblical story of Abraham. Faith was born when Abraham accepted god's command to sacrifice his son Isaac on an altar with a knife. He accepted this command, knew he would plunge the knife into his son despite the unbearable suffering this would cause him, and knew as well that everything would work out. Kierkegaard is crystal clear on this point: Abraham knew he would kill his son and he knew things would work out. That is faith and that is absurd and Kierkegaard revels dumbfounded in this fact. He then justifies Abraham's act with his concept of a "teleological suspension of the ethical".

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