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*Reason, Revelation, and Devotion: Inference and Argument in Religion* by William J. Wainwright (review)

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WAINWRIGHT, William J. *Reason, Revelation, and Devotion: Inference and Argument in Religion*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016. xi + 203 pp. Cloth, \$84.99; paper, \$27.99—In this book, William Wainwright brings together mostly previously published material on a number of perplexing questions concerning what constitutes a rational belief, the role of emotion and passion (as well as tradition) in our appraisal of an argument, and, an issue that has often vexed philosophers and perhaps given our discipline a bad name, why intelligent people can examine exactly the same evidence and arguments and yet come to very different conclusions. One of Wainwright's aims is to make a space for a role for passion and tradition in the evaluation of arguments, while at the same time trying to avoid the subjectivism and relativism that seem to accompany such a position. He is particularly interested in this book in the nature and proper role of inference and argument in religion, though his general analysis applies to most areas of inquiry.

A work in the analytic tradition of philosophy of religion, the book consists of seven short chapters of carefully developed arguments, accompanied by some textually based analysis of the work of important thinkers along the way, as Wainwright strives to develop a consistent view on this difficult subject. Overall the book reads a little disjointed and struggles to carry a sustained argument throughout, and indeed it can sometimes be difficult to identify Wainwright's own position. He often skirts issues rather than confronting them directly, which is a pity because the questions he raises are interesting and of some concern for philosophers. Wainwright may be situated within the tradition of Reformed epistemology, which places an emphasis on the view that belief in God can be properly basic (and so does not require any further evidence). In epistemology more generally, he seems more concerned with the question of what one is entitled to believe, and the relationship between this notion of entitlement and evidence and justification. Thus, Wainwright allows for a more subjective (or person-relative) dimension to knowledge, including and perhaps especially in the area of religious belief, than other traditions, such as the Catholic tradition, might.

Chapter 1 introduces several examples of historical religious reasoning, including Samuel Clarke's version of the cosmological argument for the existence of God, and the quarrel between Pelagius and Augustine over the roles played by freedom and grace in human life. The main purpose of the chapter is to provide examples of important instances of reasoning in religion; the discussion of Clarke is revealing, and reminds us again that he was a formidable philosophical mind. The subjective (and perhaps relativistic) tendency in Reformed epistemology is evident also in George Mavrodes notion that proof is person-relative, an idea Wainwright takes up in chapter 2, where he explores the uses to which religious arguments can be put; in particular, he discusses the bearing that the purposes underlying the construction of religious arguments should have on our overall assessment of their success and failure.

Chapter 3 explores further the matter of person-relativity by means of engagement with the interesting work in comparative religions of Paul J.

Griffiths and Francis X. Clooney. These thinkers have argued that central texts play a crucial role in classical Buddhism, Christianity, and Vaishnavism in the sense that one must be thoroughly absorbed and have existentially appropriated these texts in such a way that they become part of one's being. Moreover, the textual tradition affects what their participants regard as good reasons, and so we run into a difficult problem of person-relativity. Chapter 4 extends the argument further by questioning the strict separation of reason and emotion that we find in Western philosophy. Wainwright argues that various traditions, including that of Christianity and classical philosophy, and even Chinese Neoconfucianism, claim that proper reasoning is as much a function of the state of one's heart as it is of one's intellect.

Wainwright's discussion so far prompts him to turn in chapter 5 to rethink the relationship between philosophy and rhetoric, and to push back against the prevalent and influential view in Western philosophy that rhetoric is a danger to philosophy. He argues that "a properly chastened" rhetoric can and should play an essential role in philosophical reasoning about religion. Chapter 6 argues for reexamination of the relationship of revelation to reason in the Vedanta and Christian accounts, as well as that of the Cambridge Platonists (who are usually interpreted as exalting reason over revelation) and the Anglo-American Puritans (who held the opposite view). He argues that these various positions are not as starkly opposed as usually thought, and that the Christian tradition in particular had a more nuanced, balanced view of reason and revelation. The final chapter examines the view of Dionysius the Areopagite and of John Chrysostom that reason breaks down when confronted with the overwhelming mystery of God, a view also found in various existentialist writers such as Martin Buber and Gabriel Marcel (whom Wainwright does not mention). He believes that this sense of mystery is not a denial or rejection of reason; mystery chastens reason but does not appropriate it (indeed, one may profitably follow Marcel's insight that reason can lead us to mystery).

Central to much of Wainwright's discussion is the claim that in some nontrivial sense arguments and proofs are relative in some way to the person appraising them. He notes that our assessment of arguments such as those of Samuel Clarke are often based in part on our "temperament, needs, desires, and concerns, our hopes and fears, our passions, and our deepest intuitions," what William James called our "willing" or "passional nature." These considerations of the will, and of temperament and emotion, come into play particularly when arguments are suggestive but not decisive. Although the arguments must still be good ones, with reasonable premises and conclusions, and supported by good evidence, our passional nature plays a role in our appraisal in cases where the details are open to dispute, which is the case with many arguments concerning large philosophical and religious topics. It is hard to deny that there is some truth to this, and it would be one explanation for why equally intelligent philosophers can look at the same arguments and come to

different conclusions. The crucial question is whether the part played by this “passional nature” commits us to some kind of relativism in philosophy, to the view that the reason one finds a particular argument convincing is because of considerations having to do with one’s situation and temperament.

The crucial chapter in the book, therefore, is chapter 4, where Wainwright discusses the person-relativity of arguments. Here he refers to the work of Jonathan Edwards, John Henry Newman, William James, and Wang Yangming, a Neoconfucian thinker. According to Wainwright, all argue for a version of the view that there is an objective account of the correct passions that human beings should exhibit and develop, that these passions are reflections of reality, presumably as part of human nature. These passional elements seem to involve spiritual and perhaps moral qualities, and are part of the structure of human beings. This is why beliefs that are based in part on our passional nature are so successful in life, according to James. Where these passions come from is of course crucial; some will give a theistic explanation, others a naturalistic one.

Wainwright does raise the issue of possible circularity here—these thinkers appeal in many cases to various assumptions that have not themselves been decisively established. For example, James’s overall view rests on his psychology and his pragmatism (and does he accept these positions in part because of his passional nature?). Wainwright replies that this conclusion seems inescapable for any view one is arguing for, theistic or not, but the problem with this position is that it appears to commit us to relativism, or at least he does not explain how we can avoid relativism. He adds that for many philosophical issues, including those in religion, our assessment of specific arguments is often based on our overall worldview, which itself often depends on a cumulative case type of argument. Whether our acceptance of a cumulative case argument is itself person-relative is an issue Wainwright does not address adequately. In terms of studying and learning from other traditions not our own but that we think are false overall, Clooney has put the point well: “The crucial question is . . . just where to draw the line between a sincere openness to another religious perspective and a compromise of one’s core convictions.” Answering this question seems to require an objective account of reason and argument, something with which Wainwright’s study never really comes to terms. This is why some will find his discussion, careful and interesting though it is, ultimately unsatisfactory.—Brendan Sweetman, *Rockhurst University*

WISEMAN, Harris. *The Myth of the Moral Brain: The Limits of Moral Enhancement*. Basic Bioethics. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2016. ix + 340 pp. Cloth, \$38.00—*The Myth of the Moral Brain* is a critical