



## The Promise of Passional Reason

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### Abstract

In some contexts, philosophical debate can be rancorous even when the volume is kept low. In other contexts, certain stripes of “evangelical apologetics” can be equally adversarial and inimical in tone. In the name of preserving a professional, if not an irenic spirit, some unspoken ground rules have been adopted for interreligious dialogue. First is the demand to avoid all appearance of circular reasoning, which is to say avoid making any rhetorical moves that depend upon metaphysical presuppositions about the reality of God. Second, it is understood that (supposedly) unimportant theologically-laden details are to be left off until the (supposedly) prior task of establishing God’s reality is achieved. Such ground rules put philosophical theologians at a distinct disadvantage in interreligious dialogue as they sideline the very voices that have the highest stake in the conversation. William Wainwright offers the concept of “passional reason” as a way to counter the ground rules. Wainwright has shown that charges of circularity and subjectivism fail in the cases of such thinkers as Jonathan Edwards, John Henry Newman, and William James. Read in one way, Wainwright’s work may be taken as a strategic defense that prevents antagonists from excluding religious voices from philosophical conversation. I argue that there is an even more fruitful way to read Wainwright. Simply put, Wainwright’s recapture and rehabilitation of “passional reason” for philosophy of religion simultaneously opens the door for more constructive approaches to interreligious dialogue than an agonistic-styled philosophical debate can allow.

Research Article



### Key Words:

passional reason, evangelicalism, apologetics, Wainwright, Wittgenstein, interreligious dialogue.

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## Introduction

A number of years ago, as a newly minted Ph.D., I gave a paper at the Society for Philosophy of Religion (<http://www.societyphilosophyreligion.org>). William Wainwright was the key responder. He was everything that a novice philosopher could wish for in a respondent. He was obviously insightful but also gracious, kind, and generous. Instead of displaying to the world how big his brain was (which, incidentally, was very big), his goal was to help me be a better philosopher. All of his comments were pedagogical in import, aimed at nurturing my scholarship rather than winning a debate. He spoke with me afterward. I was so very grateful. I wanted to emulate what I saw in him: Wainwright understood philosophy as a *team* sport. I sheepishly confess that I haven't always appreciated Wainwright's example. In fact, I had to be converted out of "combat apologetics." In what follows I want to tell the story of the challenges that face a young philosophical theologian (me) whose conceptual roots were in a certain strand of Christianity in the USA, and how Wainwright can provide assistance with these challenges.<sup>1</sup>

The college and university system in the USA tries to flourish at the nexus of market forces and the ideology of individual freedom. Data clearly show that a possessor of a college degree begins adulthood with an advantage in salary and job security. Of course, degrees from professional schools, especially in STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics), *promise* youngsters a much greater degree of financial prosperity. Correlatively, it stands to reason that those who today enter the humanities must do it for sheer "love of the game," since jobs are scarce and pay is low compared to their technical and professional peers. Among the humanities fields (i.e., history, philosophy, theology/religion, literature), those whose love of the game drives them to earn a Ph.D. in the special field called "philosophical theology" most likely will be those who have a particularly compelling personal stake in religion. Not only do we philosophical theologians love the discipline, we are also devoted to the religion we think so hard about. This fact gives me, as a philosophical theologian, a quite different stance than many of my peers in philosophy, even than philosophers of religion. As a philosophical theologian, I do not expend much energy on the question of whether God is real. Rather, I do my scholarship with divine reality as my starting point.

The seeds of my current religious convictions were planted in me long

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before I reached the age of formal reasoning. Unfortunately, the religious community that nurtured my belief loaded me with conceptual baggage from which I needed to be freed. Let me expand just a little further.

The religious demographics of my childhood (I was raised in Minnesota, USA) were distributed evenly between Lutherans (40%) and Roman Catholic Christians (40%). By the time I graduated college, sociologists increasingly used a noninstitutional term for delineating a portion of the religious landscape: “evangelical.” Today the term “evangelical” primarily functions as a label for a brand of extreme political conservatism in the USA. However, in the 1970s the term was more closely related to its etymology in the biblical term *euangelion*, a reference to “the Gospel” or “Good News” (of Jesus). Thus, “evangelical” labeled those Christian believers who were marked by a zeal to spread the story of Jesus and a love for Christian Scriptures (Dayton & Johnston, 1991). When I became a teenager, something close to one-third of USA citizens self-identified as “evangelicals” in this early sense. Given the size of this demographic, those of us who ended up in the graduate study of theology could count on meeting many others whose upbringing resembled mine. In fact, since only those who “love the game” undertake graduate school, the percentage of evangelicals in graduate programs in theology very likely *exceeded* the frequency of evangelicals in the general population. Unfortunately, because we shared a similar religious identity, we were also weighed down with the same sort of unwieldy baggage. One particularly burdensome piece of luggage was a trenchant set of expectations about what kind of speech-acts constituted dialogue with religious “Others.” I was taught that the “Other” might be anyone, from a convinced atheist to a practicing Hindu to a mystical Jew to a Wiccan. I was instructed first to *share* the Gospel and then, if necessary, to *defend* the Gospel. It was the imperative “defend the Gospel” that got me conceptually tangled. While still in my teenage years, I was coached in Christian “apologetics,” a term derived from the ancient Greek *apologia*, connoting a speech of defense, say, in a court of law. Granted, I was taught to defend the evangelical faith with a smile if at all possible, but defend it to the point of martyrdom if necessary. Serious business indeed!

The assumption behind the training I received was that “to defend” was a preeminently *rational* activity. At the time, I instinctively understood “rational” to mean cognitivist in scope, evidentialist with respect to data, foundationalist in epistemological structure, and propositionalist in terms of genre. In contrast to so-called apologetics of the early Christian era who drew attention to the exemplary way Christians *lived* (for example, see (Aristides, 1965, esp. pp. 276-278), contemporary apologetics was about marshaling evidence to win verbal arguments. I treasured copies of *Evidence that*

*Demands a Verdict* and the sequel, *More Evidence that Demands a Verdict*. I memorized tidbits from these books to use in evangelizing conversations and kept them at the ready should the opportunity arise to “speak up for truth” in the university classrooms.

Knowing what I thought I knew, and not knowing what I did not know, yet brimming with religious zeal, after university I enrolled in a school of theology that felt comfortable—which is to say, as narrow as I was—with the aim of gaining metaphorical ammunition for my apologetics guns. As a first-year graduate student, I worked for a professor widely popular in evangelical circles for his no-nonsense, hard-hitting apologetics. I learned from another teacher at this school that John Locke’s *The Reasonableness of Christianity* was supposedly synonymous with Christian epistemology. One professor, knowing my interest in philosophical theology, took pains to warn me off from topics (such as philosophy of mind) that were bound to lead me away from the *sine qua non* of the faith; among these truths, he counted body-soul dualism as preeminent.

As God’s mercy would have it, I escaped that comfortable, familiar but constricting trajectory because of an administrative technicality: the school was not academically accredited! Had I stayed in that program, I could not have pursued doctoral studies without repeating the M.A. degree! To avoid further financial debt, I transferred schools.

It is blatantly unfair for me to generalize from my experience to an entire demographic. However, I tell my tale because I do not think my story is particularly unusual among other nascent philosophical theologians hailing from the USA. The sort of training that had been my lot left me carrying burdensome luggage into my next school. All but two of my evangelical peers who remained at the former school concluded that I had left the faith! Due to an unusual promise given to me when I transferred schools, I was reluctantly permitted to teach as an adjunct one class at the former school (on a provisional basis, of course). During this class, a senior professor attended many class sessions in order to sniff out any heresy! The decision at the end of the term was not in my favor. Since they couldn’t figure out whether or not I was in the fold, the invitation to teach as an adjunct was never repeated.

In addition to the emotional cost of rejection by my former peers, I had to extinguish some long-term conceptual habits. First, persons with backgrounds like mine tended to view interreligious dialogue with suspicion if not disdain. Interreligious dialogue was associated with softminded liberalism (where “liberals” were taken to be those who had jettisoned many of the so-called “fundamentals” of the faith (Marsden, 1991)). We were taught that: “Too many theological concessions would have to be made before common ground could

be found. And to seek common ground would put one in danger of heresy or syncretism. Just look at the Worldwide Council of Churches” (said with sneering disgust for its “liberalism”). Or so I had been taught in my youth. Second, agonistic “apologetics” rather than dialogue was assumed to be the proper strategic stance when approaching the religious “Other.” As far as I was taught, this stance did not distinguish the religious Other from the atheistic Other. Both were “not us.” In other words, evidentialist apologetics in the USA typically adopted an aggressive attitude of “I’m right, therefore you must be wrong” toward any other religious faith as well as toward the most belligerent of atheists. Third, a corollary of this apologetic stance was a kind of minimalism in practice. For example, the only kind of evidence likely to be conceded by an atheistic audience could only be that which was public and perceivable by all persons regardless of their religious views. Consequently, particular religious voices, beliefs, practices, and sources were held in abeyance until the debate is over (i.e., until our side “won”). Fourth, this apologetic strategy was also reductionist in the sense that it sidelines all the riches of human culture that would have been counted as reason at work by the ancients. Among my former set, a well-reasoned defense was restricted to a propositional argument of the sort that can be read aloud at an academic conference. But the work of ancient philosophers and premodern philosophical theologians was understood to be an entire way of life (Hadot, 1995; Kallenberg, 2004).

Enter Wainwright. To my mind, Wainwright’s work (with that of like-minded others such as George Mavrodes, William Alston, Nicholas Wolterstorff) contributed to a change in the tenor of philosophy of religion and thus to the emergence of a more constructive genre of interreligious dialogue. Wainwright’s specific contribution was a recapturing of what he termed “passional reason.”

The term “passional reason” comes from Wainwright’s 1995 book, *Reason and the Heart: A Prolegomenon to a Critique of Passional Reason*. (Note that in his 2020 article, he substitutes the term “informal reasoning.”) The term connotes at least two things. At first blush, it connotes reasoning with respect to human wants, needs, and desires. From Aristotle’s *praxis* and practical wisdom (*phronēsis*) to Aquinas’s *prudētia*, human reason had been conceived in much broader terms than the assessment of propositions. Nor could practical reasoning be dismissed as mere means-to-ends strategizing. The highest operation of reason is engaged in converse and deliberation over the ends themselves (Wiggins, 1980). Such deliberation necessarily involved broad acquaintance with human experience, wants, needs, desires, loves, as well as failings, perversions, and limits.



In addition to reasoning over things we care about (such as: “What is human life *for*?”), a second implication in Wainwright’s choice of “passional reasoning” has to do with the *manner* of the species of reasoning involved. In other words, not only the *object* of reasoning is broadened, *how* one goes about it is also different than the assessment of propositions for their veracity. For example, forms of *analogizing* associated with narrative, art, poetry, etc. as well as *anagogy* associated with deliberate behavioral paths taken for transforming the thinker are both included in the broad field of “passional reason” (Burrell, 1973; Gavrilyuk & Coakley, 2012).

Wainwright takes his cues from three thinkers of earlier eras: Jonathan Edwards, John Henry Newman, and William James. Wainwright’s basic argument is that philosophy ought not to exclude voices such as these (I mean, exclude them from philosophy, philosophical theology, or from interreligious dialogue). Particularly damning objections of subjectivity and circularity against these three not only fail, they also miss the point. The point of interreligious dialogue is not to win, it is to understand and to be understood.

### **Jonathan Edwards**

Jonathan Edwards was the first and to some the foremost American philosopher. In Edwards Wainwright finds a spokesperson with a highly particularist commitment to religion. Wainwright states that for Edwards “Christianity is paradigmatic.” (Wainwright, 1995, p. 14 fn 10) Edwards shows “almost uncritical confidence in reason’s power and scope ... . But Edwards was a Calvinist, who shared the Reformed tradition’s distrust of humanity’s natural capacities and its skepticism about natural theology [also known as philosophy of religion].” (Wainwright, 1995, p. 7)

Edwards’s commitment to Christianity does not mean that he thinks Christians *automatically* reason well. Edwards’s explicitly says that reasoning can be improved by “instruction”:

[K]nowledge bears an exact proportion to instruction. Why [else] does the learned and well-educated reason better than the mere citizen? ... There is no fallacy more gross than to imagine reason, utterly untaught and undisciplined, capable of the same attainments in knowledge as reason well refined and instructed. (Cited in (Wainwright, 1995, p. 13))

However, for Edwards, instruction also involves (ongoing) repair of the heart, the opening of poetic eyes that are otherwise myopic if not entirely blind. This latter dimension of instruction can only be initiated by God.

In ordinary articles of knowledge, our sense and experience furnish

reason with ideas and principles to work on... . But in respect to God, it can have no right idea nor axiom to set out with, till [God] is pleased to reveal it.

That the ancient philosophers and wiser heathen had so good notions of God as they had seems to be much more owing to tradition, which originated from divine revelation, than from their own invention.

And again,

[T]he first principles of religion, being of a high and spiritual nature, are harder to be found out than those of any other science ... the minds of men are gross and earthly, used to objects of sense; and all their depraved appetites and corrupt dispositions, which are by nature opposite to true religion, help to increase the natural weakness of their reason. (Cited in (Wainwright, 1995, p. 14))

Edwards calls the repaired faculty “spiritual sense,” “true benevolence,” and “true virtue.” As Edwards puts it, true virtue—the habitual disposition that enables one to achieve the human end—“true virtue must chiefly consist in love to God” (Cited in (Wainwright, 1995, p. 14). And where the love of God is absent, philosophy cannot but be faulty. Again Edwards:

Hence it appears that those schemes of religion or moral philosophy, which—however well in some respects they may treat of benevolence to mankind and other virtues depending on it, yet—have not a supreme regard to God, and love to him laid as the foundation, and all other virtues handled in a connection with this, and in subordination to it, are not true schemes of philosophy but are *fundamentally and essentially defective*. (Edwards, 1960, p. 26)

Wainwright holds out Edwards as an exemplar of passional reasoning. Edwards clearly reasons about that which he cares deeply for (i.e., theology). Moreover, the *manner* of his reasoning is neither dispassionately objective nor strictly propositional (See (Edwards, 1843).

Edwards’s writing has a circular feel to it. Wainwright takes this charge head-on. Edwards’s arguments are not circular in the strict sense of offering premises that restate the conclusions. But Wainwright concedes that this circularity enters in a different way. Wainwright summarizes:

In examining the question of circularity, it will be helpful to distinguish three things: (1) the conclusion of true benevolence and other holy dispositions are needed to use one’s epistemic faculties rightly, (2) an implication of this conclusion, namely that sincere theists are in a superior position with respect to rational arguments about “divine

things,” and (3) the theist’s reliance on his or her assessments of the evidence’s force. (Wainwright, 1995, p. 116)

As to (1), Wainwright states that the conclusion itself is not presupposed by Edwards’s theology, although Edwards does think that there is a scale of proportion between one’s knowledge and one’s instruction. Is this much different than that which all educators hold? Let me hazard a simplistic illustration. All educators champion the value of giving instruction. But we also are able to spot the difference between those students who grind through rote exercises and those who in addition, “catch fire.” These latter are the students who are forming proper dispositions toward the discipline. They may even be coming to love it. Those who “catch fire” often prove to be better able to “go on” in ways that the “grind-it-out” student cannot. What is this “something more” to be called? Edwards calls it “holy disposition” (where “holy” means “that which is set apart”) and “true benevolence.” Judaic scholars might call attention to the difference between “intention” (*keva*) and “routine” (*kavanah*) (Heschel, 1976). A Catholic philosopher might call it the recognition of “goods internal to the practice” (MacIntyre, 1984, p. 187). However it is labeled, it seems reasonable to think that the “something more” gives the possessor an advantage over the mechanical learner whose attention may be elsewhere.

If (1) is unobjectionable, then (2) clearly follows: the student in possession of the “something more” is indeed in a superior epistemic position relative to those who lack it. Edwards holds that this maxim applies to theology. Or does he? It is likely that Edwards himself would *object* to my analogy on the grounds that it evacuates his explanation of the very divine influence he thinks is needed for one to gain the proper dispositions that constitute repair of their epistemic faculties. In Wainwright’s words, “Edwards’s theistic metaphysics entails his epistemic theory or makes it probable” (Wainwright, 1995, p. 117). And does this not presume circularity? Wainwright thinks not. For at issue is not that Edwards’s epistemic *theory* supports the conclusion that God exists. Rather, the other way around: Edwards’s metaphysical premise that God exists supports or makes probable (perhaps even entails) Edwards’s epistemic theory. Wainwright observes:

What is at issue are the premises themselves, the theistic metaphysics in which the controversial epistemic theory is embedded. The theists’ critics doubt or deny that the evidence for the metaphysics is sufficient to support it. Theists such as Edwards believe it is. (Wainwright, 1995, p. 117)

Taken together, (1) and (2) do not constitute circularity in Edwards’s



reasoning, but together exemplify contrasting positions taken by theists or nontheists on the value of evidence. This stalemate over evidence brings us to the putative objection of (3), namely that “the theist’s reliance on his or her own assessment of the evidence’s force.” Wainwright counters that 3 is toothless because it is ubiquitous: “The kind of circularity that infects positions like Edwards’s affects all areas in which there are deep disagreements about the overall force of complicated bodies of evidence.” And again, “The type of circularity we have uncovered infects history, archeology, paleontology, philosophy, literary and artistic criticism, and every other discipline in which apparently competent inquirers disagree” (Wainwright, 1995, pp. 116, 118).

In short, practitioners of all disciplines—not just philosophers of religion and philosophical theologians—must rely on their own best judgment about data, evidence, coherence, explanatory power, and so on. Granted, sometimes a “subtle type of circularity occurs when principles of reasoning are supported by arguments that employ them.” However, scholars of all stripes are willing to tolerate such instances to the extent that the circularity is “not vicious.” In fact, some instances of circularity can have explanatory power that contributes to the overall persuasiveness of the system, model, or paradigm being envisioned. Extending this line of thinking,

Although [circular] arguments of this [non-vicious] kind cannot provide ‘original justification’, they can make principles of reason and epistemic attitudes more reasonable than they would otherwise be; for the existence of plausible explanations of an alleged fact can add to its probability. (Wainwright, 1995, p. 118)

Arguing in exemplary analytic style Wainwright shows that, strictly speaking, objections raised against Edwards do not hold. Consequently, theists in Edwards’s train cannot be excluded from interreligious dialogue as if their religious particularity contravenes the canons of philosophical argument.

### **John Henry Newman**

The second exemplar of “passional reason” whom Wainwright considers is John Henry Newman. Above we saw Edwards’s view that “spiritual sense” is not possessed by all people. The capacity may be universal (for Edwards, God “desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth”; 1 Timothy 2:4), but “spiritual sense is only realized in the “redeemed,” those in whom God has acted to reveal Godself. In contrast, Newman’s “Illative Sense” is endemic to human nature *in se*. In terms of virtue, Illative Sense falls on a continuum. Some develop it well and some poorly. Or rather, some will

develop Illative Sense in one area (e.g., strategy in warcraft) and another will develop Illative Sense in another area (e.g., fine arts). Illative Sense names a family resemblance between all instances of practical wisdom (there are “many kinds of *phronēsis*” (Newman, 1870, p. 279)). But as a basic human faculty, each human being possesses a degree of Illative Sense, the development of which falls to individual responsibility. If the notion of Illative Sense is plausible, then Newman provides additional warrant for religious believers to constructively participate in interreligious dialogue without first having to check their religious particularity at the door.

Writing in 1870, Newman is well aware that “There are those, who, arguing *à priori*, maintain, that, since experience leads by syllogism only to probabilities, certitude is ever a mistake” (Newman, 1870, p. 271). Yet the common testimony of humankind is that human agents do, in fact, act with *certitude*. In contrast to *certainty*, which refers to an epistemic status of some propositions, “certitude is a mental state” (Newman, 1870, p. 271). Therefore, the relevant question is, for the one lacking certainty is there any warrant for their certitude? Newman answers in the affirmative: certitude can be warranted by the development of one faculty in particular, that is, by the perfection or “virtue” of the human faculty he calls the “Illative Sense.”

Newman deliberately associates the Illative Sense with the twin Aristotelian notions of “virtue” and “*phronēsis*.” In the first instance, virtue is understood as a skilled reflex (either of character, intellect, or body) learned by training inside a cooperative practice under the guidance of an experienced mentor (See (MacIntyre, 1984)).

The reference to virtue means that Newman speaks existentially, acknowledging the timefulness and inescapable subjectivity of human agents. Each human individual is born “a being of progress with relation to [his or her] perfection and characteristic good” (Newman, 1870, p. 274). The extent to which one achieves or fails to achieve the good is a function of his or her practical rationality. This progress is not automatic: “progress is a living growth, not a mechanism; and its instruments are mental acts” (Newman, 1870, p. 275). Such progress (or lack of progress) is the direct result of what one does with one’s freedom: “each of us has the prerogative of completing his inchoate and rudimental nature, and of developing his own perfection out of the living elements with which his mind began to be” (Newman, 1870, p. 274).

A person of good sense makes good progress. And one’s good progress is warrant for deeming as “good” their faculty of the Illative Sense (Newman, 1870, p. 275). According to Newman, “though man cannot change what he is born with, he is a being of progress with relation to his perfection and

characteristic good” (Newman, 1870, p. 274). And “this law of progress is carried out by means of the acquisition of knowledge, of which inference and assent are the immediate instruments” (Newman, 1870, p. 274).

We must keep in mind that for Newman the *telos* toward which a human person advances and the *means* by which progress is made are internally related: the Illative Sense is the very means by which is achieved excellence in practical reasoning, which is to say, excellence in the exercise of Illative Sense, or the becoming of a person of good sense. The excellence, perfection, or virtue of the Illative Sense Newman explains as something akin to Aristotle’s *phronēsis* (Newman, 1870, p. 279).

With this last statement, Newman is delving into what today is considered “moral psychology,” a topic not frequently arising inside philosophy of religion. Granted, there has been some interest in *epistemic* virtues, and virtue epistemologists take a central good of human life to be the cultivation of intellectual skills (Zagzebski, 1996). However, for Newman, “good sense” cannot be isolated from all other dimensions of practical living, especially the development of one’s moral and religious qualities. When Newman says we ought to be “looking out for modes of thought proper to our nature,” he is envisioning a consonance between the structure of human rationality and the structure of the universe. Both the laws of the universe and of the operation of the human mind are the two-sided expression of God’s single will. Consequently, “one of their functions [i.e., of these laws] is to tell me of Him [i.e., God]” (Newman, 1870, p. 275).

It is He who teaches us all knowledge; and the way by which we acquire it is His way. He varies that way according to the subject matter; but whether He has set before us in our particular pursuit the way of observation or of experiment, of speculation or of research, of demonstration or of probability, whether we are inquiring into the system of the universe, or into the elements of matter and of life, or into the history of human society and past times, if we take the way proper to our subject-matter, we have His blessing upon us, and shall find, besides abundant matter for mere opinion, the materials in due measure of proof and assent. (Newman, 1870, pp. 275-276).

Moral and religious praxis are constitutive elements of the divine way. Thus are these also crucial for the maturation of one’s Illative Sense. In other words, Illative Sense cannot but be entangled with the bodily behavior of the thinker.

The contrast between the Illative sense and propositional logic is well known. No one can dispute the power of the deductive syllogism concerning Socrates’ mortality. It matters not whether Socrates is tall or short, straight or bandy-legged, bald or hairy, given he is human, he is necessarily mortal. This

is known with certainty. So closely related to mathematics is deductive logic that philosophers are wont to convert propositions into strings of symbols and manipulate them accordingly. It is this translation into symbols, or further into ones and zeroes, that enable mathematical logic to be performed by computers. But for Newman, the Illative Sense requires a *living human mind*: “it is the mind that reasons, and that controls its own reasonings, not any technical apparatus” (Newman, 1870, p. 276). In other words, no machine can reason well about practical matters. Nor are practical matters—such as issues of duty, social intercourse, taste in art, etc.—of such a nature as can be prescribed fully in advance. So one cannot appeal to “the dead letter of a treatise or a code” (much less to an Internet search) to settle a practical matter wisely (Newman, 1870, p. 276). Rather, the warrant for one’s feeling of certitude about the wisdom of a practical decision they are making is not located in the arena of logic but something settled by the faculty of “good sense.” This Illative Sense is the wise person’s chief authority: “A living, present authority, himself or another, is his immediate guide in matters of a personal, social, or political character.” (Newman, 1870, p. 279). This is not to say that a living person—the “Authority”—governs by issuing an imperative that overrules a code book, for the novice would have just as much trouble understanding the imperative of the “Authority” as a line in a code book (were one to exist). Granted, the imperative issued by the “Authority” would have the distinct advantage of taking into account the present contingencies of a local situation, something that the dead letter of a code could never do. Even so, the skilled judgment of the “Authority” that preceded his or her issuing of said imperative would itself have been an instance of “tacit understanding,” an exercise of Illative Sense, which is likely to be lost on the novice (Newman, 1870, p. 287).

Consider the kind of understanding it takes to ride a bicycle. The best that a parent can do in describing their own tacit understanding to a young child is to say: “You’ve got to get the ‘feel’ for it.” True enough. But this description doesn’t help the child! What may actually aid learning is the simple instruction: “Go faster!” While counterintuitive for the child, the advice is sound, since it is far easier to “get the feel” of balancing on two wheels when the gyroscopic forces are great; that is to say, when the wheels are turning quickly. Only the expert cyclist can balance on two wheels while motionless at a traffic light. Training heuristics (such as “Pedal faster!”) can guide the experience of the novice until he or she “gets the feel.” The state of having “gotten the feel” constitutes the child’s tacit “know-how,” which subsequently serves as the warrant for the child to be an authority unto themselves in this single practical matter of balancing on a bicycle.

Newman does not develop what is meant by the “tacit” dimension of the

Illative Sense. He is content to set up the Illative Sense as a plausible warrant for knowledge that is sensible, legitimate, and rational albeit not universally held. (Newman provides at least eleven different examples of practical reasoning arenas in which Illative Sense is shown to be local. Illative Sense in one domain does not imply possession of good sense in another arena (Newman, 1870, pp. 279-280).)

The human animal seems very skilled at talking, but not so skilled at reaching unanimity—except perhaps when talking about mathematics and logic. So Wainwright does not find it surprising that “the most intelligent, learned and irenic philosophical theologians” rarely reach consensus. Why not? Because, continues Wainwright, “many of their best and most interesting arguments are neither deductively valid nor inductively sound” (Wainwright, 2020, p. 8). But these arguments *are* sensible. In his last published essay, Wainwright used Newman, in particular, to explain how we can gauge the relevance of data, weigh the effect of context and experience, hold or discount some explanatory models over others, and discern an argument’s summative force (Wainwright, 2020, pp. 8-9).

Wainwright admits that deployment of our Illative Sense will “often lead to opposed conclusions,” but he hastens to explain that this mixed outcome does not indicate that Illative Sense is defective in some fatal way (Wainwright, 2020, p. 9). Trusting in Illative Sense is warranted, though not entailed, by widespread agreement within a population, conversion of differing minds into a position of agreement, and the explanatory power of the whole system within which Illative Sense is learned and used. Of course, the multitude may be wrong, smart people deceived, and future models are likely to displace whatever is the currently reigning explanation. But if these are not taken as “failings,” but as marks of the inescapably contingent and finite nature of human reasoning—what Stanley Cavell calls the “truth of skepticism” (Cavell, 1999, pp. 3-48)—then our well-intentioned trust in our Illative Sense cannot be faulted for failing to guarantee unanimity.

The more pertinent question to be asked of Newman is whether the Illative Sense is “epistemically *reliable*. Does it track the *truth*?” Wainwright imagines Newman’s reply:

It is, and does, if it is an “expression of His will.” For God is not a deceiver. How though, do I know that my illative capacities are a gift of providence? By deploying them! ... By properly deploying my illative faculties I learn of God’s providence and thus acquire reason for trusting them (Wainwright, 2020, p. 11).

Something seems fishy here: “My justification [of my Illative Sense]



employs the very capacities whose credentials are in question.” Yet once again, Wainwright is unconvinced that this kind of circularity is fatal.

Whether this consequence [i.e., the circularity] is disastrous, however, depends on whether it is reasonable to require universal agreement or non-question-begging defenses of basic epistemic practices (that is, practices which underlie all right-thinking but cannot themselves be further justified) (Wainwright, 2020, p. 11).

Wainwright concludes that the first requirement “sets a standard that can’t be met by most desirous intellectual endeavors.” Part of what makes an intellectual tradition alive is the presence of detractors. On this point Alasdair MacIntyre is helpful.

A tradition is an argument extended through time in which certain fundamental agreements are defined and redefined in terms of two kinds of conflict: those with critics and enemies external to the tradition who reject all or at least key parts of those fundamental agreements, and those internal, interpretive debates through which the meaning and rationale of the fundamental agreements come to be expressed and by whose progress a tradition is constituted. (MacIntyre, 1988, p. 12)

And Wainwright observes that “the second [requirement] is equally questionable since basic epistemic practices like memory or sense perception can’t be justified without circularity either.” (Wainwright, 2020, p. 11).

In short, objections raised against Newman’s Illative Sense do not hold water.

### William James

For Wainwright, William James exemplifies passionate thinking in his view that human beings reason about those things in which we have a personal stake.

Criticizing Spencer’s definition of truth as (“mere”) correspondence James asserts that a “correspondence” between the mind and reality is a “*right* mental action” and rightness is determined by “pure subjective interests...brought...upon the scene and corresponding to no relation already there.” (Wainwright, 1995, p. 84)

James holds that specific exercises of reason, such as doing philosophy or conducting scientific research, are “purely teleological weapons of the mind. The essence of a thing is that one of its properties which is *so important for my interests* that in comparison with it, I may neglect the rest” (cited in

(Wainwright, 1995, pp. 84-85)). Lest we think that James restricts this kind of reasoning to those task-oriented folk who want to get things done, Wainwright hastens to remind us that “[t]he influences of passion and need are not occasional or accidental. James clearly thinks that *every* worldview is partially determined by it and that *no* worldview seems compelling in its absence” (Wainwright, 1995, p. 86).

Our passional nature plays a decisive role in cases where persons face opportunities to believe when evidence is, shall we say, less than compelling. Recall that the ideal, according to James’s contemporary, W. K. Clifford, is that we act rationally when we proportion the strength of our believing to the evidence. Decisiveness in believing ought to be reserved for instances where the evidence is objective and self-evident. Failing these high standards, the rational person is justified in scaling back their commitment proportionally, even to simply walk away. James rejects Clifford’s scheme. In his classic essay, “The Will to Believe,” James asserts that a person is rationally justified in embracing beliefs more strongly than their evidence seems to warrant so long as the opportunity for belief is (1) “living,” that there is enough appeal to each alternative that one could conceivably opt for either one; (2) “momentous,” which is to say, “if the opportunity presented is unique, the stake is significant, and the decision is irreversible” (Wainwright, 1995, p. 86); and (3) “forced,” meaning one cannot escape choosing by simply walking away.

Notice that for James reasonability is not reserved for the small slice of life where (a) deductive logic dictates to us precisely what we are to conclude, or (b) empiricism presents us with overwhelming evidence beyond reasonable doubt. No. For James, reasonable belief is also operative in the broadest swaths of life where an issue “cannot by its nature be decided on intellectual grounds” (cited in (Wainwright, 1995, p. 87)). In the main, Wainwright sees James as holding that religious believing is just such an occasion, and one that involves two dimensions of human nature. On the intellectual side, there is *some* evidence for believing but the evidence is not coercive. On the passional side, religious believing is a thoroughly rational response, reflecting as it does “our temperament, needs, concerns, fears, hopes, passions, and emotions” (Wainwright, 1995, p. 88).

It is the blatant subjectivity that draws the ire of James’s philosophical nemeses today, among whom James’s “cognitive volition” is cast in pejorative light. Quoting from Louis Pojman, Wainwright summarizes the criticism:

Allowing one’s beliefs to be determined by passional factors is...a “sort of lying [to oneself] or cheating [oneself] in that it enjoins believing against what has the best guarantee of being the truth.” “Cognitive

voliting,” then, “decreases one’s own freedom and personhood.” “Since...it is wrong to lessen one’s autonomy or personhood, it is wrong to lessen the degree of [evidential] justification of one’s beliefs on important matters” (Cited in (Wainwright, 1995, p. 110).

Wainwright dissents. On the one hand, willing to believe does *not* involve lying to oneself. The agent sees that the evidence for believing some *p* is deductively insufficient. Does this insufficiency mean the agent *must* prescind from believing *p* is true? If so, then the agent would indeed have to deceive him- or herself in order to choose belief over and against the “entailed” nonbelief. But James denies this entailment (Wainwright, 1995, p. 110).

On the other hand, in the name of preserving the 18<sup>th</sup>-century Enlightenment notion of “autonomy,” a prior question must be answered, “What is this ‘self’ that is capable of being ‘a law unto itself’ (*auto + nomos*)?” Wainwright observes that the strictly analytical philosopher follows Kant in holding “reason is one’s real self.” In contrast, “Edwards, Newman, and James believe that [reason] is not [one’s real self]. In *their* view, our heart or passional nature is the deepest thing about us” (Wainwright, 1995, p. 111).

Wainwright goes on to say that our passional nature, passion being what it is, does not *necessarily* restrict human freedom. Granted, sometimes yes. Such cases make for the strongest argument against willing-to-believe.

Extensive experience has shown that need, desire, and other passional factors can adversely affect judgment. It has also shown that methodical efforts to reduce their influence can serve the cause of truth. Science is the most impressive example (Wainwright, 1995, pp. 113-114).

And sometimes no. “The fact remains that dispassion and disinterest are sometimes epistemically harmful” (Wainwright, 1995, p. 114 fn. 119). In the short run, dispassion and disinterest may hinder the development of the very skills of attention and attunement necessary for picking up small but relevant details. As an example, Wainwright reminds us of the close connection of rightly formed passion and the making of wise moral choices.

Aristotle argues that moral reasoning goes astray when it is not informed by a correct understanding of the good life. The latter, however, depends on properly cultivated dispositions as well as sound reasoning. If one’s emotional temper is defective or has been perverted by corrupt education, one cannot appreciate the good. As a result, one misconstrues the nature of the good life, and one’s practical deliberations miscarry (Wainwright, 1995, p. 114).

It is eminently plausible that subjectivity ought *not* be banned *tout court*

from the exercise of reasoning on the putative grounds that subjectivity makes us less free.

Objections to the presence of subjectivity (interests, needs, desires) in James's scheme fail to carry the day. What then is the real source of the loud objections to the "will to believe?" Wainwright has shown that James's critics themselves seem to "beg the question by implicitly assuming that theism is false or that subjective qualifications are not needed to know God" (Wainwright, 1995, p. 115). But this disagreement is neither one of deductively valid nor empirically sound. Rather it is a disagreement following from diametrically opposed presuppositions.

If objections raised by non-theists against Edwards, Newman, and James do not comport with the strictures of reason narrowly defined as propositional coherence and empirical soundness. Wainwright's explanation of passional reason is, in effect, a call for a supplementary approach. By showing that the critics fail to win at their own game, Wainwright has opened the door to other ways of approaching interreligious dialogue without dismissing interreligious conversations out of hand for being insufficiently rigorous.

## Conclusion

William Wainwright's work promises to be a "game-changer" for interreligious dialogue. I choose the term advisedly. To call interreligious dialogue a "game" is not meant to trivialize it. Moreover, to *change* the game does not necessarily imply that the activity is no longer a "game." As Wittgenstein famously showed, the concept "game" defies definition. Compare board games with Olympic Games, or party games with solitaire or tennis with children imagining a large cardboard box is a bear cave. Wittgenstein goes on to ask:

Are they all "amusing?" Compare chess with noughts and crosses. Or is there always winning and losing, or competition between players? Think of patience. In ball games there is winning and losing; but when a child throws his ball at the wall and catches it again, this feature has disappeared. (Wittgenstein, 1953, §66)

No single characteristic, indeed no single set of characteristics can encompass the indefinable term "game." Yet for all that, we use the word "game" naturally, effortlessly, consistently, and without confusion.

Wittgenstein goes on to argue that an analogous fecundity of variety marks our uses of language. Once again, there can be no universally applicable definition of "language-game." Nor can one set of rules be spelled out in advance that govern all language games. Think of the vast differences between

Giving orders, and obeying them...  
Making up a story and reading it...  
Guessing riddles...  
Making a joke; telling it...  
Solving a problem in practical arithmetic...  
Asking, thanking, cursing, greeting, praying. (Wittgenstein, 1953, §23)

Of course, any particular language game may submit to definition and thereby be answerable to specific criteria for “fair play.” The language game of conducting a scientific experiment has some strict rules. The lab notebook must be preserved *in toto*—no pages removed; no pages added—as it constitutes an accurate snapshot of the observer’s experience. But how does procedural faithfulness cover a different language game, say the language game for greeting a close friend after an absence of many months?

The “new game” whose evolution Wainwright seems to make possible differs from conservative religious apologetics I learned in my youth. Had the younger me read Wainwright, I would have cheered him on, assuming there was animosity between him and his audience (his nemeses, as I would have seen it) and credited him with a big win over his detractors by proving their charges failed to draw blood in this agonistic struggle. But playing the cognitive gladiator does not seem to the older me to be what Wainwright has been up to. Indeed, having met Wainwright at the very time my views had undergone fresh conversion away from “combat apologetics” meant that I was able to see ways in which Wainwright makes possible a response constituted by new *telos*, motivation, venue, and means.

To suggest the “new game” takes a *telos* other than that typically presumed by agonistic philosophizing is not to say that interreligious dialogue is uninterested in “truth.” Some language games, of course, aim directly at the truth. Think of the solving of a “who-dunnit?” murder mystery party game; a real-life police investigation; or a financial audit performed on a banking institution. These are all examples of language games that aim at finding the truth and uncovering what really happened. The problem is that the concept of “truth” is just as slippery as “game.”

There are many language games that do not take “truth” as the sole *telos*. This is not to say that truth is unimportant. Obviously, truth-telling (in contrast to lying, deception, prevarication, etc.) seems to be presupposed by all language use; deception is parasitic on our primordially human instinct to trust one another (Hertzberg, 1988). The truth may be presupposed as partially constitutive of the game’s preconditions, but a “static description of the way things are” may not necessarily be the only, or even the primary, *telos*.

Imagine two persons are set up by friends to meet as a “blind date.” How to



proceed? One asks questions. If time is limited, or as in the party game called “Twenty Questions,” the number of questions is limited, then which questions one asks is significant. One might inquire about something trivial, say the partner’s favorite dessert. Alternatively, one might ask a riskier question, say about a life-changing event. The latter question is more likely to help one get to know the new acquaintance. Even *how* the answer is delivered (e.g., flippantly vs. teary-eyed vs. stony silence) may be revelatory. Life goals, experiences, successes, ways one has suffered, these are topics that aim not so much at a static depiction of “truth” as aim at “personal knowing” (Lauer, 2014). The *telos* is not yet arrived at, for who can be known after a mere 20 questions? But one does end at a place to begin. The *telos* in this language game is to make progress, to begin a relationship, to initiate a friendship, to open lines of communication. Attainment of such a *telos* is always on the horizon, for we never finally succeed in knowing another completely. We might say that the *telos* in this case is a moving target: it is fruitfully to extend the conversation indefinitely. Such a *telos* cannot but be two-sided. I want to know them on their own terms *and* I want to be understood on my own terms. This is not so much an investigation into the facts of the matter, much less a combat for superiority, as the cultivation of friendship. *That* is the point. As a religious believer, I am inclined even to say, *love* is the long-term *telos*.

If love is the primary *telos* of this “new game,” then one does not need to settle which of the logically possible arrangements between partners (Inclusivism, Exclusivism, Pluralism, or Universalism) is “correct” before engaging in interreligious dialogue. Perhaps interreligious dialogue is a language game whose rules must be “read off the play of the game” (Wittgenstein, 1953, p. 54). Perhaps interreligious dialogue is in its infancy and promises to evolve in years to come. If so, of what sort is the language game of interreligious dialogue? Moreover, the new game allows players to enter the game with any number of distinct motivations. Most importantly, the new game allows the particularity of each conversation partner’s religious tradition to warrant their individual intentions. One religious believer may participate driven by the idea, “I must seek the welfare of the city in which I find myself” (Jeremiah 29:13). Another may be motivated by the conviction, “I am to be a witness to the good news wherever I am” (Acts 1:8). And so on.

It might be objected that I am guilty of my own kind of circularity. In order to encourage the flourishing of interreligious dialogue without reference to truth-seeking syllogisms, am I not surreptitiously importing reasons drawn from my own religious tradition? Of course! But isn’t that the nature of all human communication, of every language game? Is not passional reason ubiquitous, permeating every human communicative act, whether verbal or

nonverbal? What I, following Wainwright, refuse to do is champion a totalizing mode of philosophizing that dictates all the rules of the game in advance by deliberately sidelining passional references.

Granted, the new language game may not “fit” inside the academy any better than a rugby match fits inside a tennis court. Yet no one venue needs to be held up as the single correct way to proceed. Rather, creativity in the venue can abound.

For example, consider a recent movement begun in 2007, called the Scriptural Reasoning movement (together with the Society of Scriptural Reasoning, and their associated journal). In a 2007 interview, founder Peter Ochs of the University of Virginia explained:

Scriptural reasoning is a practice for inviting participants in Muslim, Jewish, and Christian scriptural traditions to study together. They are people who study among themselves, and we want them to study their sacred texts with one another at the same time....[I]t looks very simple. There’s a table. There’s a collection of readers from different traditions. There’s very small selections from each of their scriptures. And they sit and they together act as if they each were experts in the other’s tradition, and they interpret and they challenge each other. That’s the method. (Ochs, 12 October 2007).

This seems to me as one promising venue for taking interreligious dialogue forward. And of course, there may be many others.

If the new language game resembles a conversation more than a debate, then it is not surprising that the means for felicity cannot be reduced to propositions structured by logical necessity but something more prudential, perhaps what Anthony Kenny called the metric of “satisfactoriness” (Kenny, 1976). If “passional reason” has a place at the interreligious dialogue table, then as Wainwright observed, the criteria for felicity reduce neither to truth tables nor to algorithms (Wainwright, 1995, p. 128). Moreover, conditions for prospering the conversation are most likely to include participants with properly developed Illative Sense (to borrow Newman’s apt phrase). And who, pray tell, is to be the judge of “properly developed”? Once again, judgment is not to be restricted to that which is rendered by a so-called objective judge behind a veil of ignorance. Quite to the contrary, those who are most capable of carrying the conversation forward are those who are most deeply advanced in the virtues internal to their given religious tradition (MacIntyre, 1990).

In short, Wainwright leaves open the possibility that the very best participants for interreligious dialogue may be, if not saints, at least deeply devoted religious thinkers.

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