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Steve Wilkens and Alan G. Padgett, CHRISTIANITY AND WESTERN THOUGHT. VOLUME II: FAITH AND REASON IN THE 19TH CENTURY

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obsession with the power of language gives rise in an elegant memoir.⁵ It strikes me as superstitious to hold that human linguistic behavior has power over the existence of theological realities. If such a magical view of the power of human language is a consequence of the doctrine of the ontological priority of the social, then we have what I take to be a conclusive reason to reject that doctrine.

In sum, this collection of papers provides a window on a conversation about theory and methods in religious studies. When I look through this window, I see some interesting lore about religion and religious studies, but I do not see much that would be valuable to philosophers of religion whose primary disciplinary affiliation is philosophy.

NOTES

1. Richard Rorty, "Religion in the Public Square: A Reconsideration," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 31.1 (2003), p. 142.

2. Charles Taylor, *Varieties of Religion Today* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 59.

3. *Ibid.*, p.60.

4. For details, see William P. Alston, *Perceiving God* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), especially Chapter 4, "A 'Doxastic Practice' Approach to Epistemology."

5. Alice Kaplan, *French Lessons* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

Christianity and Western Thought. Volume II: Faith and Reason in the 19th Century, by Steve Wilkens and Alan G. Padgett. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000. Pp. 436. \$30.00 (cloth).

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Of their accessible history of 19th century ideas Wilkens and Padgett say, "As an overview for students, our book is primarily a survey. Our purpose is to introduce the major figures in Western thought, primarily philosophers, from a Christian perspective" (p.9). Chapters 2 and 5 and the last two chapters (totalling about 150 of the 370 pages of text) are devoted to theologians and social scientists. A distinctive mark of this history is its preoccupation with Christianity. The authors are particularly interested in the religious views of the philosophers, poets, and social scientists they canvass, and seek to show how these interact with the authors' (other) central views. After the discussion of each author's ideas, they offer a brief critical assessment and / or estimation of the author's importance. Their assessments strike me as fair, and as not reflecting any very particular or sectarian theological viewpoint. Often they simply report the main criticisms that have been offered in the literature.

Another distinctive mark, as indicated in the title, is the theme of reason or rationality, the nature of which is a very live question at or just below

the surface of virtually every thinker discussed, though the thinkers do not always make the analysis of the concept an explicit theme, but instead, like the rest of us, simply employ the concept as though it is univocal, normative, and everyone knows what it is. While Wilkens and Padgett speak about authors' concepts of reason and signal some differences among them, it seems to me that they would have done well to intensify their analysis, in the interest of historical precision and accuracy.

The title of the first substantive chapter (Chapter 2) is "Expanding Rationality." It is about European Romanticism and American Transcendentalism as movements of rebellion against the Enlightenment's cold (emotion-excluding) and narrow (intuition-excluding) conception of reason as the road to knowledge and right practice. But the rebellion does not necessarily "expand rationality" conceptually; for example, Hamann is quoted as saying that "faith arises just as little from reason as tasting and seeing do" (26); the idea is that faith is *not* rational, but arises from "intuition." But if we think of reason as a set of procedures, rules, or habits of mind that are correct or normative, either epistemically or practically, and if we think of faith as getting us in touch with some reality, then we should really "expand rationality" by *including* "intuition" or the emotional side of our nature in it; and then faith becomes a way of being rational. Coleridge, unlike Hamann, really does expand *rationality* when he makes the primary imagination "the vital capacity of reason" (p.44). Through this epistemological move he can hold that "Christianity is the apex of rationality" (*ibid.*). By contrast Schleiermacher, the other main "Romantic" theologian treated in Chapter 3, is inclined to maintain a strict division between the rational and the experiential (affective, intuitive, subjective) (p.60). Religion belongs to the latter part of the mind, and what appears to be rational in religion (theology) is really the (non-cognitive?) *expression* of the affective (the feeling of absolute dependence).

Chapters 4 through 6 are about Hegelian idealism, its immediate predecessors, and its theological, as well as anti-theological, heirs. Like the Romantics and Transcendentalists, Hegel advocates a philosophy expansive enough to encompass religion; indeed, he regards himself as a Christian philosopher. He wishes to overcome the dichotomy between the divine and the human, between the thing-in-itself and our experience of it. But in doing so, he reaffirms the dichotomy of reason versus intuition. As Wilkens and Padgett comment, idealism "retained an allure for [professional] philosophy [that Romanticism lacked] by attempting to build on rationality *rather than intuition*" (p.63, italics added). Yet the kind of reason that Idealism sponsored did not, as in the earlier modern concept, avoid the subjective in the interest of objectivity; instead, it made the exploration of the subject of thinking, and in particular the evolution of this subject, the source and explanation of objectivity. The "subject" here is, however, no longer the individual human being, but a sort of anonymous, generalized spirit called "the Absolute." Hegel is a "dialectical" thinker, thus for him "each particular truth is only partial" (p.79). Each particular truth cannot be fully understood except in virtue of a "location" in a system of thought, and that location has an evolutionary temporality, that is, the truth belongs (having its meaning and truth) at a certain place in the process of dialectic.

Thus Hegelian idealism both adds to and subtracts from earlier concepts of reason. It adds to the systematicity that seems to be characteristic of virtually any concept of reason (which must, it seems, at least have a place for the grounding of some truths in other truths); it adds a historical or evolutionary dimension that is absent from the static conceptions of reason in earlier modern philosophy; it adds subjectivity, though it also revokes this by making it equivalent, after the dialectical evolution, with objectivity; and from a conception of reason like that of Coleridge it subtracts the individual thinker, with his emotional intuitions.

In the christology of his *Life of Jesus*, David Friedrich Strauss picks up especially on the dialectical and historical features of Hegel's concept of reason. In his view, the church faces a dilemma: we must acknowledge that the New Testament is fiction while affirming that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. The solution is to see that the representation of Jesus as the God-man is a mythological anticipatory proxy for the conceptual reconciliation of the divine and the human that is the necessary outcome of reason's evolution. Strauss's teacher Ferdinand Christian Baur applies the dialectical and evolutionary conception of reason to all history. "The historian can be equal to his task only in so far as he transposes himself into the objective reality of the subject matter itself, free from the bias of subjective views and interests, whatever they may be, so that instead of making history a reflection of his own subjectivity, he may be simply a mirror for the perception of historical phenomena in their true and real form" (p.104). And what he sees in history when so "transposed" by reason is, again, the absolute Idea, the objective unity of the divine and the human, the universal and the particular.

For Hegel as for the ancient philosophers, reason seeks unity and synthesis, and that unity is a divine quality; one might say that in the Hegelian dialectic, the divine dominates the human, spirit dominates matter. But in the next generation of Hegelians, represented by Feuerbach and Marx, the order of domination is reversed. Idealism becomes humanism and materialism. Feuerbach turns God into a human projection, a misconstrued image of the human species: "Every God is a *creature* of the imagination, an image, and specifically *an image of man*, but He is an image which man places outside himself and conceives of as an independent being" (p.118). To make something outside ourselves ultimate for ourselves is to slight ourselves as material beings: "Because we are not solely rational, but feeling and volitional beings, Idealism alienates us from ourselves" (p.122). The solution is a humanism in which humanity becomes our God (*not*: God becomes a man). But we might also have said that since feeling and volition are so important to us, taking them properly into consideration is our only rational course. Again, the conceptual scope of reason is negotiable.

In all the permutations of reason in the 18th and 19th centuries, rationality is intimately related to truth: reason is a way — sometimes the only way — of arriving at truth. So the rational and the real must be partially or wholly isometric, if not identical. In Karl Marx, the rational seems to leap out of the mind and into the material world, if somewhat hesitantly. The Hegelian dialectic is "inverted" (to use Wilkens' and Padgett's term), the conflicts and their resolutions being not between

ideas but between social classes as defined economically. Ideas no longer drive, but now merely reflect, material conditions, and religious ideas are no exception. Christianity is just a factor by which one economic class keeps another in its place.

Chapter 7, "Rebellion Against Rationality," presents Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche as dissenters from "the tide of optimism found in Romanticism and Idealism." "At the heart of their protest against a positive evaluation of human existence is a rejection of reason" (p.145). For Schopenhauer, the will to live is the essence of the human being, and this will is utterly distinct from the intellect. The human will is part of the blind will found throughout nature, which because of death is always doomed to frustration. Human reason applies only to the rather superficial world of phenomena, not the real world, which is essentially futile will. Padgett and Wilkens uncritically pass on the textbook tradition that Kierkegaard is "the father of...existentialism" (p.156) and an irrationalist who "revels in the irrationality of [Christianity's] doctrines" (p.165). Despite some of the items in their long bibliographical footnotes, they seem to be unaware of the work of Steve Evans and Merold Westphal on Kierkegaard's concept of rationality and of recent scholarship showing that Kierkegaard's thought is quite distant from — even diametrically opposed to — that of the paradigm existentialists of the 20th century. Since Wilkens and Padgett show awareness of the contestability of the concept of rationality, one might have expected them to give a more nuanced account of Kierkegaard's place in 19th century thought, especially considering that he is one of the few major thinkers of that century who was an orthodox Christian. Despite its brilliance, Nietzsche's thought is a bit chaotic, so one may wonder whether he has a consistent view about rationality. But one discernible theme is that since in all our actions, including our intellectual practices, we humans are seeking power, and since interpretation is an unavoidable fact of intellectual life (there being no such thing as facts which by their brutality compel assent), truth is a fiction and the world is just whatever the strong construe it to be in our imaginative quest for personal power. In history, for example, "events are created by those who successfully win the right through strength to tell the story in a way that is advantageous to them" (p.172). This does come pretty close to being an abandonment of theoretical reason, though a bit of practical reason remains: the will to power lends a certain "logic" to interpretation.

Concepts of rationality can also differ in scope of ascribed competency. Chapter 8 — "A Rational Society" — features chiefly Auguste Comte and John Stuart Mill. Like many 19th century thinkers (Hegel, Marx, Kierkegaard), Comte posits developmental stages, and the development he posits is toward greater rationality, by way of reducing what we expect from it. The three stages are the theological, the metaphysical, and the scientific. Like the more familiar positivists of the 20th century, Comte thinks that reason is not competent to answer metaphysical questions; the intellectually mature will trust only science for truth. The highest of the sciences is sociology (the name of which Comte invented), and Comte designs an entire society as directed by this science, complete with

its own scientific religion with nine sacraments! Mill, who was very interested in the philosophy of Comte and worked for its dissemination in England, disagrees with Comte in a number of particulars but largely shares his concept of rationality. He tries to stick to an anti-metaphysical, strictly empiricist epistemology in which even logical truths are empirical generalizations.

In Chapter 9 the scene shifts from Europe to America, except for a quick look at F. H. Bradley. The main characters are Charles Peirce and William James. Josiah Royce puts in a brief appearance; he and Bradley are treated with respect, but as the last gasps of Hegel's spirit. According to Peirce, the most rational way to fix beliefs is to test them fairly but rigorously and repeatedly in an intellectual community, with reference to their observable results, in a very broad sense of "observable." Peirce's "empiricism" differs from that of Comte and Mill in not excluding metaphysics; metaphysics too can have pragmatic value. One of Peirce's metaphysical positions is that the universe is becoming more law-abiding as time goes by, and he sees in this an indication that something like *agape* governs and is fundamental to the universe — indeed, that God exists. James, with his more direct and colorful style, brings out more clearly the broadmindedness of the pragmatist version of empiricism. To be rational is not to be narrowly "intellectual," but to consult the whole range of considerations that bear on belief-formation. "Pretend what we may, the whole man within us is at work when we form our philosophical opinions. Intellect, will, taste, and passion co-operate just as they do in practical affairs" (p.228). The case of the American pragmatists suggests that even a concept of rationality that contains a rule against going beyond the observable allows of variation in terms of what counts as observable.

In this review I have concentrated on just one aspect of Wilkens' and Padgett's book, though it is an important aspect that they themselves stress. In a very schematic way, I have brought out more clearly than they do the variety of concepts of rationality that are put forward in 19th century thought, though in doing so I have not gone beyond the data provided in their text. It seems to me that they could have improved their book, without sacrificing its accessibility and classroom usefulness, by doing a bit more philosophical analysis in this area. The ninth chapter is devoted to theological movements such as the Oxford Movement, the Mercersberg theology, the Princeton theology, and German liberalism. The last chapter is about Darwin and such thinkers as Herbert Spencer, Émile Durkheim, Max Weber, and Sigmund Freud. Another feature of the book that makes it attractive as a course text is the short biographical sketches that precede the accounts of authors' ideas. InterVarsity Press could have done a better job of editing; the book contains too many misspellings, typographical errors, awkward sentences, and misused words.