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Kugel, James L. *In the Valley of the Shadow: On the Foundations of Religious Belief*. New York: Free Press, 2011. 256 pp. \$26.00 cloth; \$15.00 pbk. (9781439130094; 9781439130100). Available as an e-book.

Based upon the subtitle, I thought this book by a noted biblical scholar would be a rational defense of religious belief. As it turns out, it is an exploration of why religious belief is so very common, not whether or not it ought to be. Dr. Kugel came to write this book as he reflected upon his battle with cancer (which he has won). It is thus a mixture of memoir and scholarly musing. The musing is informed by his scholarship concerning the nature of religion. In this book, he relies more on psychology, anthropology, and evolutionary biology than on theology. The memoir is quite moving. His sense of his own smallness that accompanied his illness was obviously very powerful. He also discusses the concomitant sense of what is beyond the self and thinks he has discovered in this, "the foundation on which the religious consciousness is built..." This book is both deeply felt and intellectual. In a way, this unusual book is even inspiring in an unsentimental way, but not everyone will connect with it, I think. Suitable for popular collections.

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