

Knowledge and Normality: Bl. John Henry Newman's Grammar of Assent and Contemporary Skepticism

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WESTERN THOUGHT in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is marked by an increasing skepticism with regard to the very possibility of knowledge. This skepticism is exemplified in the form of endless epistemological debates in analytical philosophy as well as in the form of the relativistic pluralism of postmodern mythologies, metaphors, and rhetorical strategies. Even natural science, given its continuing paradigm shifts, seems to afford not certainty but—at most—its practical applicability, technology. We feel more certain about how things work than about what they are. As a consequence, not only will theology lack a point of reference in natural reason for its assertions of certainty and faith, but the very life of ordinary people is left without orientation, when it comes to ethical rather than technical matters.

John Henry Newman's *Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*¹ may have been written in response to similar scenarios.² The nineteenth century

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¹ J. H. Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992). Henceforth quoted by page number in parentheses within the text.

² In a manuscript from 1860, Newman senses the coming of an age of skepticism, where the onus probandi is on the believer in unprecedented ways; Jay Newman, *The Mental Philosophy of John Henry Newman* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1986), 13f.; William Fey, *Faith and Doubt: The Unfolding of Newman's Thought on Certainty* (Shepherdstown, WV: Patmos Press, 1976), 55.

showed greater confidence in scientific assertions; nonetheless, scientific modes of thought, including linguistic and algebraic forms of logic, seemed to fail of certitude and to remain in the realm of hypothetical inferences, whereas technology (industrialization) was developing rapidly. For Newman, too, practical application seemed to be a point of reference for assertiveness. Yet not so much in the form of technology (of which the thought remains hypothetical: *if you want A, do B*), but in the form of a personal application of knowledge in life, that is, in the responsible use of an individual mind, first and foremost under the guidance of personal conscience and its categorical pronouncements (*you ought to want—and do—A!*).

In what follows we will explore Newman's thought as a possible contemporary resource by explicating a number of assertions that seem to flow from the *Grammar of Assent*.

I

It appears that the quest for certitude is modern. It might be part of a need for security that the increasingly atomized individual has lost. It may have had its beginning in an individualized Protestant assurance of salvation. A little later, Descartes's quest for methodologically controlled knowledge responds to older forms of nominalist skepticism, which now are countered by the certainties of mathematical science. Hobbes's logic of fear aims at political security, which is yet another form of certainty. But the remote ancestor of a desire for certainty might be the certainty of *faith* that stems from the witness of the First Truth Himself, Who offers a participation in His very own knowledge of Himself. Nothing of this kind can be found before Christianity. When later a situation arises in which God is hidden, the age secular, and the personal encounter with Christ remote, this sense of certainty will be searching for surrogates. The modern quest for certainty would never have arisen, had the certainty of faith never been experienced. Without this experience, modern man would not despair over the apparent inability of natural reason to find certainty.

This is not the diagnosis of J. H. Newman, but it might provide the proper context for his explorations of the problem of certainty. His response is not a simple and fideistic return to the certainty of faith, but the analysis and restoration of the normal workings of natural reason. Natural reason has its own certitude, but it is different from the certainty at which modern thought aims.

Modern thought aims at science and at forms of investigation that are communal, that is, intersubjectively verifiable in a scientific community. The logic at which it aims is by its very nature impersonal, that is, inde-

pendent of the person employing it. That is why it operates with the medium of intersubjective communication: language—and especially language in its most fixed and precise form, the form that can abstract even from the personal speaker and his location in space and time: writing. The impersonality of this medium also seems to promise an abstraction from the authority and prejudice of the speaker and make it a neutral medium for joint investigation.³ Here Newman anticipates in a very interesting way the motivations of the linguistic turn of the twentieth century, at least in its Anglo-Saxon variation. Newman also anticipates the move towards the mathematicization of logic (Frege): in its ideal form logic would use algebraic symbols, which are helpful for precision. But logic also entails an abstraction from any reference to the real world, which creates a formalistic universe wrapped up in itself.⁴ Even where it uses words rather than variables, these words are universal and abstract terms, “notions” as Newman calls them. Thus, logic not only abstracts from the individual person employing it, it also abstracts from the individuality of its subject matter—for the “real” (as opposed to the notional) is individual. This abstraction, too, helps logic’s precision (212); but the abstraction drains the ordinary terms of the “depth and breadth of associations” and of “their poetry and rhetoric and historical life,” it has “starved each term down till it has become the ghost of itself” and has made the river of words into a canal (214f.). It also emphasizes “inference” over “assent,” or, to put it in a more Aristotelian way: syllogism over propositions. Propositions are about truth and reality; syllogisms are about their own relations of validity, independently of reality. They would be anchored in reality only by propositions that employ, not merely notional

³ (210f.); Newman does appreciate these linguistic procedures as a subsequent test of validity, made possible by communication with others (281). It will allow us to register where the differences lie, whether they are relevant or not, and whether the argument is worth pursuing further (283). He does remind us, however, that language is secondary: language is just one of the mind’s works, and therefore the mind is more powerful and deeper than language (ibid.). It might seem curious that, on the other hand, the word “grammar” appears in the title of his book. My sense is that grammar is used here in opposition to “logic,” i.e. as a descriptive rather than normative science.

⁴ In response, Newman’s thought might also share in Husserl’s attempt to go back to the things themselves, to give meaning to and “cash in” the algebraic formulae of language and to find fulfillment in the evidence of the real. Cf. also R. Michael Olson, “Real Apprehension in Newman’s ‘An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent’,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 45 (2005): 499–516, e.g. 502, 516, and John Hick, *Faith and Knowledge*, 2nd ed. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1966), 74.

terms, but singular or “real” terms that refer to individuals.⁵ But neither Aristotelian syllogisms, nor the logic that Newman envisions, employ individual terms (popular examples about Socrates notwithstanding).⁶

The strength of certainty that comes with this procedure is also its weakness: its conclusions cannot reach the world of facts anymore (222).⁷ It creates a gap between universal and individual that can be crossed only by a leap. There is no algorithm for the *application* of laws. Science and logic have to leave it to the prudence and judgment of the engineer to cross this gap.

In this dichotomy between universal and particular, Newman—not unlike his near contemporary Kierkegaard—staunchly takes the side of the individuals (or “units” as he likes to call them): “Let units come first, and (so-

⁵ Price thinks, and others repeat, that “real” does not mean existence (i.e., as opposed to “unreal”) but implies a “thingish” quality in the sense of *realitas*; one might also think of Kant’s notion of a “real predicate,” as precisely opposed to existence; Henry Habberley Price, *Belief* (London: Allen & Unwin/New York: Humanities Press, 1969), 317. I don’t think this is quite correct. While it is true that Newman speaks of “images” (which are not necessarily real), these are images that can only be derived from something that is real in the sense of existent. A. Dulles points out that Newman takes “real” in opposition to “product of the mind” (i.e., unlike notions or abstraction); cf. Avery Dulles, “From Image to Truth: Newman on Revelation and Faith,” *Theological Studies* 51 (1990): 252–67, at 254. L. Tuninetti connects “real” to “sincere” and “realistic”; Luca Tuninetti, “‘Assenso realistico’ e ‘assenso nozionistico’ nella ‘Grammatica dell’assenso’ di John Henry Newman,” in *Verità nel tempo: Platonismo, Cristianesimo e contemporaneità: Studi in onore di Luca Obertello*, ed. Angelo Campodonico (Genoa: Il Melangolo, 2004), 192–207, at 195f.

⁶ Theologically, this implies that the contingent facts of revelation are outside of syllogistic demonstration: “The reason for this is that the newness of the world does not follow from what the world is. For the principle of demonstration is the essence of a thing. Now everything according to its species is abstracted from “here” and “now”; whence it is said that universals are everywhere and always.” *Summa theologiae* I, q. 46, a. 2 corp. In contrast, F. M. Willam understands Newman to be developing Aristotle’s rudimentary inductive syllogism; unlike Newman, however, he thinks (following Cicero) that even an inductive syllogism can be cast in the form of a symbolic notation, namely one that uses arrows; Franz Michel Willam, *Die Erkenntnislehre Kardinal Neumanns* (Bergen-Enkheim: Gerhard Kaffke, 1969), 14 and 19.

⁷ If there is a theory of truth for this kind of logical science, it could only be a coherence theory of truth, and indeed, as John Hick claims, reality cannot be reached; cf. Fey, *Faith and Doubt*, 96. Newman seems to anticipate this difficulty, noticing that mere coherence is insufficient for reality; *Faith and Doubt*, 111f. In an application to contemporary thought one might say that analytical and post-modern mind games fail to connect with reality and can be sustained only in separation from it.

called) universals second; let universals minister to units, not units be sacrificed to universals" (223). In the name of the existing individual he protests against the abstract essences, especially when it comes to the incommunicability of the human person,⁸ which he defends against an abstract essence of "stereotyped humanity." There are always circumstances and examples to the contrary and "each thing has its own nature and its own history" (224f.). The individual creature is just as incomprehensible as God himself (226).

What Newman seems to see is what the modern scientific method of the Enlightenment systematically excludes: everything that is unique, everything that cannot be repeated in an experiment and thereby intersubjectively verified. We might think of miracles, of my personal death, the experience of love for a particular person, the particularities of religions (the uniqueness of a contingent revelation being declared a superstition),⁹ my choice of profession or of a vocation or a spouse, and any personal existential experience: all this must seem to become by its nature illogical and irrational; human beings can enter into the purview of science only as "species beings."¹⁰

This entails, however, that this scientific method is useless for our real life and its existential decisions about particular matters. Here it arrives, at best, at probabilities (51f.).¹¹ Nor do the shadows of its "notional" abstractions have any motivating force to make these decisions and assents (52). Only the "real" and its image¹² in our mind can move us.¹³ This is therefore also a gap between theory and practice. Even within the realm of theory, this scientific method produces a gap between *mere* theory and actual belief. Neither education (87ff.) nor argument will fill this gap—

⁸ Persons have individuality, whereas animals have only specific differences (84).

⁹ It is Newman's intent to defend the pious peasant against the accusation of irrational "enthusiasm" and show him to be more human than the humanism of the Enlightenment. Cf. also Edward A. Sillem, "Cardinal Newman's Grammar of Assent on Conscience as a Way to God," *Heythrop Journal* 5 (1964): 377–401, at 377–84.

¹⁰ Newman also defends the individual against statistical laws, which are just the combination of independent individuals and their activities, not their cause (83–85).

¹¹ "I am suspicious then of scientific demonstrations in a question of concrete fact, in a discussion between fallible men" (319).

¹² The appeal to *imagination* rather than sensation, though initially surprising, is important because, by way of the imagination, the real can affect us even in its absence. Imagination in this context is not the *creative*, but the *conserving* faculty. Cf. Tuninetti, "Assenso realistico," 201f.

¹³ One might wonder, though, whether some people might not get excited about differential calculus or the idea of human equality; Ian T. Ker, "Recent Critics of Newman's *A Grammar of Assent*," *Religious Studies: An International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* 13 (1977): 63–71, at 70; similarly Price, *Belief*, 335f.

as a few quotes might illustrate: "To most men argument makes the point in hand only more doubtful, and considerably less impressive. After all, man is *not* a reasoning animal; he is a seeing, feeling, contemplating, acting animal. He is influenced by what is direct and precise"; "Life is not long enough for a religion of inferences" (90); "Life is for action. If we insist on proofs for everything, we shall never come to action: to act you must assume, and that assumption is faith" (91); "Moses was instructed not to reason from the creation, but to work miracles" (92); "no man will be a martyr for a conclusion" (89). Trying to achieve belief by looking at an inference is like trying to be refreshed by reading a thermometer (151).

This gap underlies a number of dichotomies in Newman: the notional vs. the real, inference vs. assent, the conditional vs. the unconditional, language vs. the living individual mind, common thought vs. individual persuasion (283), theory vs. practice, intellect vs. will, theology vs. religion, concept vs. image,¹⁴ the passive vs. the active, the broad and shallow vs. the narrow and deep, the progressive vs. the conservative (47), and yes, even the contrast between the Church of England and Roman Catholicism (notional and literary vs. real assent) (62f.).

For an Aristotelian, however, it is important to realize that this gap is aggravated in Newman by the fact that he stands in the tradition of British empiricism.¹⁵ In other words: he is a nominalist,¹⁶ and therefore universals *cannot* connect with individual reality; they do not constitute the nature of things as their respective substantial forms and therefore cannot make reality intelligible. Abstract notions are "ghosts," that is, something like the "faded copies" of D. Hume (40, 43, 44f.). Our concepts are our constructions or "creations:"

All things in the exterior world are unit and individual, and are nothing else; but the mind not only contemplates those unit realities, as they exist,

¹⁴ A distinction that Locke and the empiricists do not make; Frederick J. Crosson, "Semantics of the Grammar," *Faith and Philosophy* 7 (1990): 218–28, at 225; Newman became suspicious of John Stuart Mill (whom he read after 1857) for failing to make this distinction; Fey, *Faith and Doubt*, 93.

¹⁵ Jay Newman considers it a "love-hate relationship"; Jay Newman, "Cardinal Newman's Attack on Philosophers," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 50 (1976): 196–207, at 197.

¹⁶ E.g. (223). He also repeatedly makes the nominalist claim that the faculties of the mind are nothing but abstractions from individual acts. On the other hand, Dr. Zeno can be worried that Newman might multiply faculties potentially *ad infinitum* with his illative sense; Dr. Zeno, O.F.M. Cap, *John Henry Newman, Our Way to Certitude: An Introduction to Newman's Psychological Discovery: The Illative Sense, and His Grammar of Assent* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1957), 30f.; and J. Hick finds the talk of faculties outdated altogether; J. Hick, *Faith and Knowledge*, 76.

but has the gift, by an act of creation, of bringing before it abstractions and generalizations, which have no existence, no counterpart, out of it (29).

The thing behind these notions is a mere “x,” not an intelligible substance, but the *je ne sais quoi* of J. Locke or perhaps the “x” in the F(x) of modern logic, an individual under a description.¹⁷

II

A universal Aristotelian nature of things on the other hand is also a normative principle: it constitutes what something *ought* to be, it defines the thing’s “normality,” and it is the normative principle of the working of the thing characterized by this universal nature.

For a nominalist like Newman, such things do not exist. But there is one crucial exception in Newman’s thought, and that is the human mind.¹⁸ Much as he defies definitions of human nature as empty and unreal generalizations, he constantly appeals to the nature of our mind as a normative principle. It is precisely this appeal which allows him to cross the gap between the universal and the particular in assent and belief:¹⁹ our beliefs and our assent to propositions are justified, when our mind is working “normally”; our certitudes are reliable where they fulfill the

¹⁷ E.g. (29); this might be the reason why Newman thinks that the apprehension of propositions lies primarily in the apprehension of the *predicate*; a mere “x” is not intelligible or apprehensible except by virtue of the predicate; D. Pailin is critical of this, and perhaps rightly so; David A. Pailin, *The Way to Faith: An Examination of Newman’s ‘Grammar of Assent’ as a Response to the Search for Certainty in Faith* (London: Epworth Press, 1969), 105–8. Without essences there is also no real basis for per se predication and nothing that could serve as “first principles” (which indeed become mere personal habits of thought for Newman).

¹⁸ Although he can use the nature of the *elements* (fire, water etc.) in the object world as a parallel case for the nature of the subject that knows them (272f.)—something that sounds rather Aristotelian. Newman can also defend the distinction between essences and accidents against John Stuart Mill; Zeno, *John Henry Newman*, 67. While Boekraad and Walgrave see Newman only as an *apparent* nominalist, Pailin takes Newman seriously as a nominalist and sees how this must lead to some inconsistencies with his claims for objective morality, “connatural” ideas of the mind, and the “laws of my nature,” but he thinks that Newman was probably unaware of this; Pailin, *The Way*, 120–22. Fey rather takes him to be a moderate realist; Fey, *Faith and Doubt*, 78f.

¹⁹ He disagrees with rationalism about a priori certainties and universalities, and agrees with empiricism against innate ideas, yet he wants to appeal to the “common voice of mankind,” i.e., the universal features of our mind (270). I. Williams curiously points out that this is a kind of “naturalism” and that some elements of this could be found in D. Hume as well; Ieuan Williams, “Faith and Scepticism: Newman and the Naturalist Tradition,” *Philosophical Investigations* 15

nature of our mind: our mind is made for truth and its teleology is fulfilled in certitude. We are therefore epistemologically justified and do what we ought to do, when we use our faculties according to their nature:

... errors of the individual belong to the individual, not to his nature, and cannot avail to forfeit for him his natural right, under proper circumstances, to doubt, or to infer, or to assent. We do but fulfill our nature in doubting, inferring, and assenting; and our duty is, not to abstain from the exercise of any function of our nature, but to do what is in itself right rightly (28).

Normality is normative²⁰ and corresponds to the universality of our nature. For once, the individual as individual is wrong (“errors of the individual belong to the individual”). Errors are the exception to the norm and do not, by their existence, abolish the norm (we do not “forfeit our natural right”). “No instances then whatever of mistaken certitude are sufficient to constitute a proof, that certitude itself is a perversion or extravagance of his nature” (189).²¹ Newman affirms the principle *Usum non tollit abusus* (the proper use is not abolished by a misuse); otherwise, “mind has no laws whatever and no normal constitution” (189).²²

The underlying argument seems to be that what happens universally or for the most part (*ut in pluribus*) is natural; and what is natural cannot be misleading: *natura facit nihil frustra* (nature does nothing in vain). Human beings must be right for the most part, and there is an intrinsic authority to what has been said “always, everywhere and by everyone” (*semper ubique*

(1992): 51–66, at 54f.; the tensions in this psychological approach would be overcome only in Wittgenstein, who, Williams says, bases this approach not on epistemology or an ontology of faculties but on forms of action at the bottom of our language games; *ibid.*, 58–63. In fact, Newman, like Kant, responds to empiricism with some appeal to practical reason as well.

²⁰ “It is enough for the proof of the value and authority of any function which I possess, to be able to pronounce that it is natural” (273). The frequent reproach that Newman confuses psychological and epistemological certitude, or phenomenology and epistemology (e.g., Jay Newman, *The Mental Philosophy*, 27; D. Pailin, *The Way*, 177ff.) misses the whole point of Newman’s book.

²¹ This sentence might be misleading, because for Newman there is no such thing as a mistaken certitude.

²² “We do not dispense with clocks, because from time to time they go wrong, and tell untruly. A clock, organically considered, may be perfect, yet it may require regulating” (*ibid.*). On this also Zeno, *John Henry Newman*, 206f. Jay Newman asks critically how the clock is to be adjusted (Jay Newman, “Cardinal Newman on the Indefectibility of Certitude,” *Laval Théologique et Philosophique* 34 (1978): 15–20, at 18f.); Cardinal Newman’s answer would be: with nothing but the clock itself, i.e., in our case, our minds.

et ab omnibus) (e.g. 192f., 270). Our minds cannot be wrong for the most part, because this wrongness would then constitute our nature; that is, nature would be unnatural in the sense of dysfunctional, counteracting its own *telos*; it would be a self-contradictory monstrosity.

Such arguments might not initially sound convincing to the modern mind. Why would it be so impossible that everything is a self-contradictory monstrosity? In response there is no need to appeal to metaphysical or theological underpinnings; the theory of evolution will suffice: such monstrosities simply would not survive. They might exist as individuals, but they would not continue in existence for the most part, that is, not as a species. Therefore, a species can trust its typical equipment to function properly.²³ We might, for example, have the hallucination of an oasis when we are mad with thirst in the desert; it is mere wishful thinking. And so in individual cases our natural faculties might fail us. But the fact *that we have thirst* is normal and constitutive of our nature; and this cannot fail to indicate that there are potables in the world.²⁴ Our fundamental desires are indicative of realities.²⁵

Newman repeatedly appeals to notions of “instinct” for the operation of our mind, and he likes to use analogies from the animal realm to illustrate its workings. Reason has its natural workings just as animal natures do; hence Newman can speak of “intellectual instincts” (194).

Even inferences (formal or informal) occur as if by instinct: *uno actu*, spontaneously, without mediation and unanalyzably. His famous “illative sense” proceeds in the same way (260–63). We can only take it or leave it as a whole. And so, since we have nothing else to work with, we trust them as we trust natural instincts (209/260).²⁶

²³ “Every being is in a true sense sufficient for itself, so as to be able to fulfil its particular needs. It is a general law that, whatever is found as a function or an attribute of any class of beings, or is natural to it, is in its substance suitable to it, and subserves its existence, and cannot be rightly regarded as a fault or enormity. No being could endure, of which the constituent parts were at war with each other” (273).

²⁴ This example is taken from Robert Spaemann, *Schritte über uns hinaus I* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2010), 373. This might then also distinguish our sense of God from wishful thinking; being *capax Dei* might be indicative of a reality, if it is constitutive of our nature. Newman would certainly affirm this for our sense of conscience, as we will see.

²⁵ “That is to be accounted a normal operation of our nature, which men in general do actually instance. That is a law of our minds, which is exemplified in action on a large scale, whether *a priori* it ought to be a law or no. Our hoping is a proof that hope, as such, is not an extravagance; and our possession of certitude is a proof that it is not a weakness or an absurdity to be certain” (270).

²⁶ A similar view is taken by Zeno, *John Henry Newman*, 207.

These instincts also trump the skepticism of modern thought. For example, Descartes's skepticism about the external world is answered by an appeal to instinctual evidence rooted in nature and its teleology, for this is something that we share with animals as well (63). In response to Berkeley's and Hume's skepticism with regard to substances that would underlie our various kinds of sense data, Newman points to the instinctual ability of animals to discriminate between individuals, especially their mothers, right after birth. They do not have an intellect to show them substances, nor do their senses reveal more than loose sense data. Our own sense for the reality of substances must be instinctual and natural and therefore trustworthy as well (96, 102f.).²⁷ The same can be said for trusting our reasoning and memory, or our belief in causality and in the order of the universe and some basic "connatural" concepts (66–75). While initially our nature has these latter concepts only notionally, they become real by application and experience (78ff.).²⁸

Another important quasi-instinct is our conscience. This voice of conscience is, after all, already perceived by children. In fact, it is perceived even better by children, before their nature is corrupted by temptations and misdeeds. It is therefore indicative of a natural "instinct" (104f.). It is with us as one of the first principles of our nature, perhaps similar to thirst.

It is constitutive of our nature, and in this like the first principles of our mind, which Aristotle and Aquinas describe as natural habits.²⁹ They are not chosen, because every choice, including our choice to doubt them, presupposes them. For even our choice to doubt our minds can have no other reasons to appeal to than the reasons that *our mind* gives us. And the most fundamental reasons that our mind has, are constitutive of our nature. Hence, there can be no *reason* to be a skeptic about reasons. On the other hand, we have *all* reason to be skeptical about skepticism. Absolute skepticism is strictly unnatural; in fact, it is dysfunctional and a form of insanity. Newman quotes Pascal: "He who doubts, but seeks not to have his doubts removed, is at once the most criminal and the most unhappy of mortals. If, together with this, he is tranquil and self-satisfied, if he be vain of his tranquillity, or makes his state a topic of mirth and

²⁷ Perhaps an Aristotelian would first appeal to a *sensus communis*.

²⁸ There is therefore an initially *notional* assent to *real* propositions; this upsets John Hick (*Faith and Knowledge*, 73), because it moves from logic to psychology. But Newman never claimed to write a treatise on logic, but rather on the limitations of logic.

²⁹ ST I–II, q. 51, a. 1. As part of our nature the *habitus principiorum primorum* cannot be lost: *In II Sent.* dist. 24, qq. 2 and 3. It is a matter of wisdom to consider these matters; *In I Met.*, lect. 1, n. 34 and lect. 2, n. 1.

self-gratulation, I have not words to describe so insane a creature" (246). Montaigne might have been able to live as a skeptic, because he was rich and carefree, but a poor girl working in a factory needs the assurance of an ultimate meaning of her life, or she goes insane indeed (247).

In other words: rational inquiry and knowledge cannot begin with a hermeneutics of suspicion. If we do not give our natural equipment the benefit of the doubt, we will never get off the ground. Children will not learn if they do not trust their parents and teachers. They will not even learn the ability to question critically what they have learned, if they do not learn in trust first. We have to learn a mother tongue before we can start to ask questions in it (61).³⁰ In that sense, as Newman writes to W. Froude (6), "skeptical caution" is *not* the parent of discovery.³¹ Newman would agree with Gadamer that one has to begin with a hermeneutical principle of charity³² and that one may use one's own pre-understanding as a hermeneutical key.³³ He would also agree with Wittgenstein that one cannot begin with doubt.³⁴ He would agree with R. Swinburne's "principle of credulity," that we can trust our senses until there is evidence or

³⁰ Our primary education is based in *credence*, which gives us the necessary "furniture of the mind;" it "diversifies" our naked nature with rich clothing. While we give it only an "implicit notional assent," this furniture is not something we ever think of doubting; we believe it without effort. It comes to us from our senses, books, friends, conversations, and newspapers; we learn it as we do our mother tongue; it is cultural and national rather than personal, a "gentleman's knowledge . . . neither worthless nor despicable" (60f.). While personal and real assent is the goal, this is the necessary starting point.

³¹ As quoted in the introduction by Nicholas Lash.

³² ". . . he keeps to the principle, implicit but present to his mind, with which he took up the book that the book is more likely to be right than he is; and this mere preponderance of probability is sufficient to make him faithful to his belief in its correctness, till its incorrectness is actually proved" (151).

³³ Leo Scheffczyk, "Die Bedeutung der Kirchenväter für die Theologie Newmans," in *John Henry Newman, Vortragsreihe an der Universität Eichstätt*, ed. Alfred Gläßer (Eichstätt-Vienna: Franz Sales Verlag, 1991), 17–31, at 26; similarly, Fred Lawrence, "Lonergan's Retrieval of Thomas Aquinas's Conception of the 'Imago Dei': The Trinitarian Analogy of Intelligible Emanations in God," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 83 (2009): 363–68, at 378f. The permissibility of using one's own pre-understanding as a hermeneutical key is also behind Newman's argument against William Paley's evidentialism: "Why am I to begin with taking up a position not my own, and unclenching my mind of that large outfit of existing thoughts, principles, likings, desires, and hopes, which make me what I am?" (330). Our very nature itself creates a pre-understanding, for which Christianity is the only perfect fit (328, 333, 359, 375), as it also is the key for the previous salvation history (342–45).

³⁴ E.g., Wittgenstein, *On Certainty* §150; or: "283. For how can a child immediately doubt what it is taught? That could mean only that he was incapable of learning certain language games"; "317. This doubt isn't one of the doubts in our game.

reason to the contrary; otherwise we will not have any beliefs at all: for what counts as evidence to the contrary is again another perception or reason.³⁵

Newman therefore makes the point that we simply have no choice: our mind is all that we have to work with.

I cannot think, reflect, or judge about my being, without starting from the very point which I aim at concluding. (272)

I cannot avoid being sufficient for myself, for I cannot make myself anything else, and to change me is to destroy me. If I do not use myself, I have no other self to use. . . . My first elementary lesson of duty is that of resignation to the laws of my nature, whatever they are; my first disobedience is to be impatient at what I am, and to indulge an ambitious aspiration after what I cannot be, to cherish a distrust of my powers, and to desire to change laws which are identical with myself. (273)

We cannot even critique our mind without using (and therefore trusting) it.³⁶ It is legitimate to investigate occurring errors *ex parte post*; but this can never lead to a fundamental skepticism or *universal* doubt, because even the *noticing* of the errors—which raised the question in the first place—presupposes that our minds are functioning well enough to notice errors.³⁷

(But not as if we chose this game!); “329. ‘If he calls that in doubt—whatever “doubt” means here—he will never learn this game’”; “458. One doubts on specific grounds. The question is this: how is doubt introduced into the language-game?” Of course, unlike Newman, Wittgenstein is also something of a relativist with regard to language games. I. Williams, “Faith and Scepticism,” 58–63. According to W. Kienzler, Wittgenstein not only read Newman, but between 1946 and 1951 the *Grammar of Assent* was probably “the single most important external stimulus for Wittgenstein’s thought,” perhaps even more than G. E. Moore, whom he quotes more often. This is true especially for first principles, for which inferences are, so to speak, the wrong “grammar”; Wolfgang Kienzler, “Wittgenstein and John Henry Newman on Certainty,” in *Deepening Our Understanding of Wittgenstein*, ed. Michael Kober (New York: Rodopi, 2006), 117–38 (= *Grazer Philosophische Studien* 71 [2006]: 117, 133). One might speculate whether Wittgenstein was also curious about a title talking about a *grammar* of assent.

³⁵ R. Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), 303–10.

³⁶ According to Newman it is the other way around: we do not *trust* our faculties, we *use* them (272). Or, as he says about conscience: “I use it because I must use myself” (303f).

³⁷ “. . . there is no ultimate test of truth besides the testimony born to truth by the mind itself” (275). W. Wainwright thinks that the *pragmatic* irrationality of questioning our faculties does not make this questioning *epistemically* irrational. But I think that this formulation understates Newman’s implied point, which is that this distinction cannot be made. It still tries to take the perspective that we

III

All of this implies that we cannot start as skeptics, we cannot start with doubt. This is therefore the opposite of Descartes's starting point or of typical discussions of modern epistemology that demand "to know how we know." Already Hegel had pointed out that this leads to an infinite regress: epistemology is just another science, another type of knowledge—and how do we know *that* science? It is an impossible attempt to objectify our knowing by stepping outside of knowing, yet wanting this to be an act of knowledge.³⁸ Trying to begin with doubt is like trying to learn how to swim before, and without, going into the water.³⁹

Yet the impossible modern quest for certainty might indeed be a hidden "fear of knowledge" as Hegel suggests.⁴⁰ It is just the correlate of Descartes' universal doubt. Descartes himself had tried to overcome his doubt by an appeal to God. He, like Newman had indeed claimed that our faculties cannot go wrong for the most part.⁴¹ But for Descartes, this required a further metaphysical and theological argument: namely that God exists, that He created our faculties, and that He is not a deceiver. Since A. Arnauld, however, critics have pointed out that Descartes's argument is circular, because in order to prove God's existence, he needs to presuppose the working of our mind, by which we make this proof. But this in turn already assumes the existence of God as the guarantor of our "clear and distinct ideas," about which he does not deceive us.

Now this should lead us to ask: Is Newman's trust in the nature of our mind therefore also just a theological presupposition? Can modern skepticism really only be answered by a "radical orthodoxy" or a fideism of some sort?

cannot take, especially since that very distinction is being made with the very minds that it pretends to be about. Cf. William J. Wainwright, *Reason and the Heart: A Prolegomenon to a Critique of Passional Reason* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), 76f., footnote 40.

³⁸ G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1986), *Einleitung*, 69f. Newman did not read Hegel: Johannes Artz, "Newman as Philosopher," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 16 (1976): 263–87, at 285. His knowledge of Kant and German Idealism was probably only through Chalybäus' history of philosophy; Artz, 270.

³⁹ G. W. F. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der Philosophischen Wissenschaften 1830* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1969), 43 (§10). Wittgenstein might agree: *On Certainty* "471. It is so difficult to find the beginning. Or, better: it is difficult to begin at the beginning. And not try to go further back"; "354. Doubting and non-doubting behavior. There is the first only if there is the second."

⁴⁰ "... so ist nicht abzusehen, warum nicht umgekehrt ein Mißtrauen in dies Mißtrauen gesetzt und besorgt werden soll, daß diese Furcht zu irren schon der Irrtum selbst ist." G. W. F. Hegel, *Einleitung*, 69f.

⁴¹ Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Meditation VI.

In response we should note that the argument we have made above with the help of Newman did not appeal to any sort of theology and perhaps not even to metaphysics.⁴² It was a reflection on the very nature of our knowing. Nor was there any need to appeal to “clear and distinct ideas.” On the other hand, it is frequently overlooked that it is the universal doubt of Descartes—and not the trust in the nature of our mind—which is a theological presupposition. For it is frequently overlooked, that (before all other proofs) Descartes cannot even set up his doubt without the appeal to a *genius malignus*, an evil demon.⁴³ Only a god can have the power to make our mind go wrong systematically, to misconstrue our nature and make us into a self-contradictory monster, so to speak. This presupposes the freely deciding God of Christianity, but as turned into the voluntaristic and hidden God of the thought experiments of nominalism: God’s freedom and power are limited only by the principle of non-contradiction, and by a miracle he could do things like systematically deceiving us. Modern epistemology replaces this infinite power of God by our hypothetically infinite power of technology: its thought experiments usually appeal to science fiction. Yet modern epistemology still lives from theological premises that would not have entered the mind of an Aristotle or Plato. And the result is the same as in the earlier nominalist approach: the undermining of our natural and normative intuitions about the world and ourselves.

Newman does agree with Descartes that we have to begin with our own mind.⁴⁴ But he rejects the idea that this implies beginning with universal doubt (294). Doubt cannot be universal, because universality is correlated with normality and the natural trustworthy functioning of our mind. Doubt itself is just one *particular* functioning of this mind, because

⁴² Newman reflects at one point on God’s providence in the working of our minds, but as *subsequent* to these considerations: “Of course I do not stop here. As the structure of the universe speaks to us of Him who made it, so the laws of the mind are the expression, not of mere constituted order, but of His will. I should be bound by them even were they not His laws; but since one of their very functions is to tell me of Him, they throw a reflex light upon themselves, and, for resignation to my destiny, I substitute a cheerful concurrence in an overruling Providence” (275f.). There is, however, an occasional appeal also to necessary “special illuminations” in order to discover the “hidden God”; the reason for our darkness, however, is not the failure of our faculties, but rather originates in our own *moral* failure (275f., 309).

⁴³ Descartes, Meditation I. This point has frequently been made by Robert Spaemann, e.g., in *Das unsterbliche Gerücht* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2007), 45–47.

⁴⁴ Rather than modern, this might be a more Augustinian element in Newman’s thought. Certainty, however, is indeed located not so much in the nature of things or objects of the mind, but in the mind itself. He occasionally sounds like Kant with regard to his postulates: not “it is certain,” but “I am certain.”

it is either *nothing* (i.e., the absence of an inference or an assent), or it is itself “an assent to a proposition at variance with the thesis” and therefore something positive and a particular act, but not universal (28).⁴⁵ As such, doubt has its own particular assumptions; it is even the “*greatest assumption*” (294), and in effect, one might say, a “prejudice against prejudice” (Gadamer). Rather than beginning with universal doubt, we need to begin with trust in the universal features of our nature.⁴⁶

Nor is it proper to begin with asking for certainty, which is just the flip side of universal doubt: “we never say we are sure and certain without implying that we doubt. To say that a thing *must* be, is to admit that it *may not* be” (89).⁴⁷ In other words, beginning with certainty elicits an infinite regress: “you must prove your proofs” (91) or you must infallibly know that you are infallible (184). Indeed, having to “prove your proofs” might lead to something akin to Lewis Carroll’s Paradox (1895);⁴⁸ you would never begin to know anything.

Certainty is rather a reflex act, a reflection on the knowing that is always already going on. In Newman’s terminology, it is a “complex

⁴⁵ Newman might have learned this from R. Whately, who pointed out that doubt is its own form of credulity: someone who doubts the existence of Egypt must be “believing this most incredible proposition; that ‘it is possible for many thousands of persons, unconnected with each other, to have agreed, for successive ages, in bearing witness to the existence of a fictitious country, without being detected, contradicted or suspected.’” Whately uses this also to defend the historicity of the Gospels; W. Kienzler, “Wittgenstein and John Henry Newman,” 125.

⁴⁶ “Of the two, I would rather have to maintain that we ought to begin with believing everything that is offered to our acceptance, than that it is our duty to doubt of everything” (294). I think Newman has a better argument here than C. S. Peirce, who has similar reservations about Descartes: “Let us not pretend to doubt in philosophy what we do not doubt in our hearts.” Cf. Jay Newman, “Cardinal Newman on the Indefectibility,” 16.

⁴⁷ (Quoting himself from a text from 1841.) Newman: “You are wrong in beginning with certitude—certitude is only a kind of assent—you should begin with contrasting assent and inference” (quoted in Lash’s introduction [7]).

⁴⁸ If the rules of inference have to become themselves one of the premises of an inference, then their integration into the premises requires another rule, and an infinite regress ensues; therefore, a set of rules cannot contain a rule for validly following the rules, because an infinite regress of meta-rules results. The need to avoid this scenario might make Newman’s approach more plausible: “How it comes about that we can be certain is not my business to determine; for me it is sufficient that certitude is felt. This is what the schoolmen, I believe, call treating a subject *in facto esse*, in contrast with *in fieri*. Had I attempted the latter, I should have been falling into metaphysics; but my aim is of a practical character . . .” (270). According to F. Lawrence, Newman shares this view with Gadamer and Lonergan; F. Lawrence, “Lonergan’s Retrieval,” 378f.

assent,” and it is always only *notional*. These are assents to assents—something that is involved in acts of *conviction* or in the act of *continuing* to believe (157–59); “reflex acts may be repeated in a series” *ad infinitum*, like images in a double mirror (162). This implies that to begin with certainty is to begin with an *intentio obliqua* that has never been preceded by an *intentio recta*—an empty flight of mirrors.

Again, our normal, ordinary and therefore natural contact with reality is a direct contact;⁴⁹ our knowledge and its principles are *that by which* we know, before they become *that which* we know—objectified perhaps in linguistic form and impersonal notations. Doubt and reflection come later; they split our more primordial contact and communion with reality. Our primal beliefs are not reflexive: belief is not the intention never to change one’s mind, but the absence of the thought of changing; this thought is unimaginable and therefore no possible object of an assent to the contrary (160).

In this way we know many things that are necessary to us, yet they could not be made certain by reflective logical proof:

If our nature has any constitution, any laws, one of them is this absolute reception of propositions as true, which lie outside the narrow range of conclusions to which logic, formal or virtual, is tethered; nor has any philosophical theory the power to force on us a rule which will not work for a day. (150)

IV

Newman’s theory of assent bridges the gap between the universal and the particular that we had discussed in the beginning. It allows for a kind of “certitude” that is at once personal (unlike the “certainty” of the impersonal outlook of modern science, logic and linguistics) and universal (like the normal and natural working of our minds, which deserves the benefit of the doubt).

As such, our personal certitudes are not a leap of faith in the sense of Kierkegaard,⁵⁰ nor are they a form of subjectivism (raising the suspicion

⁴⁹ And the opposite is therefore insane: “I am sitting with a philosopher in the garden; he says again and again ‘I know that that’s a tree’, pointing to a tree that is near us. Someone else arrives and hears this, and I tell him: ‘This fellow isn’t insane. We are only doing philosophy.’” Wittgenstein, *On Certainty* §467.

⁵⁰ A very interesting comparison of Newman and Kierkegaard is made in M. Jamie Ferreira, “Leaps and Circles: Kierkegaard and Newman on Faith and Reason,” *Religious Studies* 30 (1994): 379–97. John Coulson suggested that both make a leap (Kierkegaard prospectively, and Newman retrospectively). Yet, Newman works with probabilities and reason, and emphasizes the continuity between faith

of “modernism”), but they have their own forms of rationality. Newman speaks of the *illative sense*, which also follows human nature and does not abandon logic, but incorporates it.⁵¹ It is itself a universal feature of our nature, though it needs to unfold personally: A human individual is “a being of progress.” Our nature is not “readymade”; rather we are self-made by nature. This is not a form of existentialism, but a “sacred duty” according to Newman. The most perfect fulfillment of this sacred duty is the employment of the *illative sense* (274), which is not an irrational leap.

To be sure, to move from logical inference to real assent does involve some kind of leap, and, not unlike the act of faith, making a judgment is not merely an act of the intellect but seems to involve the will as well.⁵² Separating assent from inference allows Newman to affirm volition as independent of the intellect (against Locke, Leibniz, and much of the

and reason (ibid., 379f.). Interestingly, both use the image of Newton’s circle and polygon: but for Kierkegaard it serves to illustrate the *non*-coincidence: the polygon is the rational petrification of the intuitive circle (ibid.; 388f.); whereas for Newman it is the imaginative rather than logical extension of reason towards the circle as its mathematical “limit” (ibid., 382). Both hold the extremes together non-logically, in either passion (Kierkegaard) or the imagination (Newman) (ibid., 391f.). This might reflect also their different starting point in Hegelian dialectic and empiricism respectively. One may wonder also whether Newman’s use of “imagination” does not reflect some influence of idealism, albeit indirect, in which the imagination tends to mediate between subject and object. Another possible influence for the role of the imagination are the lectures of the painter Sir Joshua Reynolds; Willam, *Die Erkenntnislehre*, 64–66, 69.

⁵¹ “. . . it does not supersede the logical form of inference, but is one and the same with it; only it is no longer an abstraction, but carried out into the realities of life” (232). The comparison with the aesthetic sense is not that it is sensual, but precisely that it is a *judgment*. Cf. T. Ker, “Recent Critics,” 63f.. The *illative sense* is not a *sensual* sense: in an 1860 manuscript, Newman distinguishes between “phenomena” (sensations) and “sensation” (as non-sensual sense of, e.g., good and evil); Jay Newman, *The Mental Philosophy*, 25.

⁵² Here he might agree with Descartes’ theory of judgment: “My errors, that is, depend on both (a) my intellect and (b) my will. . . . The intellect doesn’t affirm or deny anything; its role is only to present me with ideas regarding which I can make judgments” (Descartes, *Meditations*, Meditation IV). Only the will provides the sufficient condition for a judgment; Eric Steinberg, “Newman’s Distinction between Inference and Assent,” *Religious Studies* 23 (1987): 351–66, at 353. The question is, whether the *illative sense* is non-volitional like an aspect shift (as M. Jamie Ferreira says in “Leaps and Circles,” 389) and therefore needs to be distinguished from a subsequent volitional assent—which seems to be what Newman says. Accordingly he can speak of a “duty to be certain”; a true proposition *calls for* an absolute assent; yet the will cannot create certainty, it can only hinder our acceptance of it; cf. Fey, *Faith and Doubt*, 114–17.

modern age).⁵³ Assent is not just “a necessary shadow” following upon inference.⁵⁴ Reinstating this distinction also makes it possible to affirm assent as *absolute* rather than coming in degrees, each degree being determined by the premises of which it is the conclusion. Assent would otherwise remain ever conditional, just as its antecedents are (136f.).

To be sure, assent and volition cannot do without reasoning. Newman, just like Aquinas, would say that the reasoning that leads to the conclusion is a *necessary* condition (144). Yet, it is not a *sufficient* condition: the assent stands on its own feet, has its own act, and it is either absolutely a “yes,” or absolutely a “no.” (Importantly, this does not exclude saying absolutely yes or no *to* the degrees of probability of some conclusions; but in this case these probabilities enter the *object*, not the *act* of assent [147].)⁵⁵ If assent were to come in degrees of doubt or probability, as

⁵³ The conflation of volition with the intellect is something common to both rationalism and empiricism. Already Whately’s *Elements of Rhetoric*, which Newman co-authored, said that the identification of reason and assent would be like saying that the eyes could walk to the goal they see; cf. Willam, *Die Erkenntnislehre*, 79.

⁵⁴ Newman has a number of arguments for this; e.g., assent can *endure* without the inference; sometimes assent *fails*, while reasons are still in force, or it is never given; we do not even agree to mathematical conclusions automatically: national sentiment can sway us even in mathematics (the Newton/Leibniz controversy?), and generally the underlying cause for assent is *moral* (141–44). So, against Locke, assent and inference do not vary concomitantly. While one might object, that these arguments only describe *facts*, which as such cannot undermine Locke’s epistemic “ought,” *ought* also implies *can*, and Newman’s arguments might show that we *cannot*. Cf. Price, *Belief*, 136f. They do prove first of all the fact that assent and inference are not the same act, which is Newman’s point.

⁵⁵ Amazingly this is overlooked by many commentators, among them H. H. Price, who is led by this oversight to make a real caricature of Newman; Price, *Belief*, esp. 147–49. At least Gerard Casey notices this, in his *Natural Reason: A Study of the Notions of Inference, Assent, Intuition, and First Principles in the Philosophy of John Henry Cardinal Newman* (New York: P. Lang, 1984), 183f. On this also I. Ker, “Recent Critics,” 69. E. Steinberg (“Newman’s Distinction,” 361) fails to appreciate this distinction as well. Also, although the apprehension has degrees, the assent does not; the heathen historian assents to Christ’s existence with the same unconditionality as the believer (49f.). Price, *Belief*, 144–46, seems to suggest that the difference between assent and inference is merely a difference between two kinds of inferring: mere hypothetical “if . . . then” inferences (as mere *thinking about* inference) as compared to “because . . . therefore” inferences, which assent to the fact. E. Steinberg, on the other hand, sees Newman taking both as forms of assent, only in one case with a condition. Steinberg, “Newman’s Distinction,” 354f. Fey in turn warns against reducing assent to the “because . . . therefore” form, because that would make all assent hypothetical and therefore probable in Newman’s sense: Fey, *Faith and Doubt*, 147. According to M. Willam (following Lukasiewicz), Newman anticipated the reconstruction of Aristotle’s deductive syllogism as a conditional or

Locke would have it,⁵⁶ then it would not be assent at all. After all, the assent is true or false, and Truth and Falsehood obey the principle of the excluded middle. As the object of the act is indivisible, so is the act itself. Thus, half-assent would be like half-truth, and both are impossible (145–48). Hence no mental reservation is possible; we have to decide and we are responsible. Nor is this decision the result of mere intellectual education,⁵⁷ on the mechanistic inertial mode of the mind that can be found in the Enlightenment (323).⁵⁸ It is the activity of our mind, not the passive mechanism of an algorithm,⁵⁹ that leads to our assent.

Except in abstract cases, the assent follows in ways that are not logically traceable, because too many premises are involved, and they depend on the personal agency of the particular mind. When literary critics are arguing about questions of authenticity in Shakespeare, for instance, their personal experience of reading texts enters into the equation, plus their particular premises and principles for interpreting texts, as well as many data that could cumulatively never be represented as written on a sheet

hypothetical syllogism by modern formal logic; with that, it can indeed only be hypothetically true: Willam, *Die Erkenntnislehre*, 10–12, 57f.

⁵⁶ For J. Locke, cf. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* IV, ch. 15, sect. 2 and 5; IV, ch. 16 and 19, sect. 1. Price thinks that probability is enough, and that Newman merely sees the glass half-empty whereas Locke sees it half full; Price, *Belief*, 151–53. On my view this position misses Newman's *practical* point: when it comes to action, we either *do* or we do not. Action is absolute, regardless of the reasons for our decision. We imply an assent which is absolute.

⁵⁷ A similar view is maintained in *The Idea of a University*; cf. Jay Newman, "Cardinal Newman's Attack," 197–99; learning might even weaken faith; Jay Newman, *The Mental Philosophy*, 193.

⁵⁸ "His progress is a living growth, not a mechanism; and its instruments are mental acts, not the formulas and contrivances of language" (275). "It is the mind that reasons, and that controls its own reasonings, not any technical apparatus of words and propositions" (276). "I do not want to be converted by a smart syllogism" (330). This was the method he knew from his earlier affiliation with the Oriel Evidentialists of R. Whately, though; Fey, *Faith and Doubt*, 2.

⁵⁹ "Men are too well inclined to sit at home, instead of stirring themselves to inquire whether a revelation has been given; they expect its evidences to come to them without their trouble; they act, not as suppliants, but as judges. Modes of argument such as Paley's, encourage this state of mind; they allow men to forget that revelation is a boon, not a debt on the part of the Giver; they treat it as a mere historical phenomenon. . . . Like this is the conduct of those who resolve to treat the Almighty with dispassionateness, a judicial temper, clearheadedness, and candour. It is the way with some men, (surely not a good way,) to say, that without these lawyerlike qualifications conversion is immoral" (330–31). Similarly in *Sermons Preached On Various Occasions* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1908) V, 61–74.

of paper. All these premises require “rather to be photographed on the individual mind as by one impression,” and do not “admit of delineation for the satisfaction of the many in any known or possible language” (220). The assent requires a cumulative “mental comprehension of the whole case” in one “clear and rapid act of the intellect” (232), which, being one (239), is without medium between antecedent and consequent and proceeds by a kind of instinct (260). It can lead to an unconditional acceptance even where nothing can be demonstrated (e.g. in the case of “I will die”) (135). This kind of reasoning is not like an iron rod, but like a cable, in which the cumulative premises are intertwined, such that to ask for an iron rod might, in certain cases be irrational and unreasonable.⁶⁰ The problem is not that there is no evidence; if anything, there is too much evidence, and the problem is rather that it cannot be lined up in a syllogism. Reasoning based on this kind of evidence is therefore not a leap but an asymptotic approach of converging probabilities, like two converging straight lines, of which we anticipate the intersection, even though we do not see it (259).⁶¹ It is a kind of recognition, as we recognize family resemblances or emotions in a face, without being able to do so by logical inference (233).⁶²

⁶⁰ Quotation in Lash’s introduction (16). Cf. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* §67: “as in spinning a thread we twist fibre on fibre. And the strength of the thread does not reside in the fact that some one fibre runs through its whole length, but in the overlapping of many fibres.” J. Hick quotes another pertinent image by John Wisdom: the evidence functions “like the legs of a chair, not like the links of a chain.” J. Hick, *Faith and Knowledge*, 81. Willam (*Die Erkenntnislehre*, 20, 42) quotes Aristotle’s remark that many memories come together in one experience (*Eth. Nic.* VIII, 1142a16). According to Willam, a deductive syllogism yields a false result if just one premise is wrong, but this is not so in an “illative” conclusion; *Die Erkenntnislehre*, 21. However, this is not quite correct, as one can easily construct syllogisms with a true conclusion and false premises; I thank Prof. D. Marshall for bringing this to my awareness.

⁶¹ Newman’s favorite example is Newton’s regular polygon inscribed into a circle, the sides being continually diminished, asymptotically coinciding, even if in fact they do not (253f.). Another good example might be character recognition in reading; J. Hick, *Faith and Knowledge*, 82. In these matters, Newman is also influenced by Cicero; Willam, *Die Erkenntnislehre*, 57.

⁶² F. Aquino compares this with an externalist view of justification, which nevertheless allows for internalization, i.e., for a “cultivated” illative sense with an increased cognitive grasp of reasons, where fitting; Frederick D. Aquino, “Externalism and Internalism: A Newmanian Matter of Proper Fit,” *Heythrop Journal* 51 (2010): 1023–34. Natural, trustworthy and normal might be only those faculties that have been teleologically perfected by education. A trained capacity cannot be prone to error. Cf. Wainwright, *Reason and the Heart*, 65–68; 73; 79. Aquino also develops this maturation of the illative sense as a kind of communal virtue

Because the evidence and premises are cumulative only in one mind,⁶³ this inference has a *personal* character (277–80);⁶⁴ it produces certitude only *quoad nos* (289); it is mental and not linguistic, and not formalizable for common investigation (233).⁶⁵

But the fact that nothing more is available does not warrant the assertion that there is a deficiency. The very nature of the application of a universal to a particular does not allow for more: after all, as rules and formal inferences employ only abstract terms, they leave us with mere conjectures and presentiments with regard to the particular (51f.). Kant similarly attributes this application to the faculty of judgment (*Urteils-kraft*) and says that its operations cannot be brought under rules. Aristotle

epistemology at book length in *Communities of Informed Judgment: Newman's Illative Sense and Accounts of Rationality* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2004). But one may wonder whether this is really in the spirit of Newman, who rather stresses the individual mind and personal judgment.

⁶³ "... by the nature of the human mind we are assenting absolutely on reasons which taken separately are but probabilities"; quoted in Lash's introduction (11). Perhaps, some of the evidence can only be in our mind: our pain cannot be verified by others and is eminently personal.

⁶⁴ The personal character of knowing (as an art) can be found also in M. Polanyi's thought; Joseph Kroger, "Can Theology Be Tacit? A Review Essay on *Personal Catholicism, Tradition and Discovery: The Polanyi Society Periodical* 28 (2001): 23–27, at 23f., in which Kroger reviews Martin X. Moleski's book on Newman and Polanyi. Newman seems to think that even first principles are personal, if not arbitrary (321, 293); that is why syllogisms "hang loose at both ends:" not only in individual application, but also in their first premises. Elsewhere, though, he distinguishes between genuine first principles of (our) nature ("there must be those assumptions in the process which resolve themselves into the conditions of human nature") and those that are "traceable to the sentiments of the age, country, religion, social habits and ideas, of the particular inquirers or disputants, and passing current without detection, because admitted equally on all hands!" (217). Among those might be the basic methodological assumptions of various historians (284ff.). To impose the latter kind (but not the first) on others would be bigotry he says in 1851; cf. Casey, *Natural Reason*, 239; even among these latter, more conventional and culturally conditioned premises one can still discern true from false first principles by (1) the universality of their reception, (2) their age, (3) their utility, (4) the universality of the instinct that produced them, and (5) their recommendation via antecedent assumptions (ibid., 245).

⁶⁵ Even where inference is traceable, it is always the whole man who reasons (*actiones sunt suppositorum*); it is "the whole man that moves; paper logic is but the record of it." *Apologia*, quoted in Hick, *Faith and Knowledge*, 69. For similar reasons, John Crosby connects the illative sense with twentieth-century personalism; J. Crosby, *The Selfhood of the Human Person* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 73–75.

says something similar about *phronesis* (277f.), thereby distinguishing the peculiar form of reasoning in ethics from that of mathematics;⁶⁶ Wittgenstein claims comparable things for rule-following;⁶⁷ the Romantics talk about “divination” and “genius,” and so does Newman, ascribing it variously to weather-wise peasants, the diagnosis of a physician, the better instincts of women, Napoleon’s and Newton’s genius, as well as that of mathematical prodigies. Attempting to bring this genius under rules would rather destroy their gift (260; 262f.).

V

This lack of control might not satisfy some people’s quest for certainty, but the kind of insight provided by the assent Newman describes is the only thing available to us; we therefore have the right and even the duty to make use of it even for the most important transactions in life (258). Moreover, this mode of thought does provide instances of genuine certitude: they are not just cases of abstract logical principles that are self-evident or whose opposite would involve a logical contradiction, but particular and factual truths as, for example, “Great Britain is an island,” or the fact of our existence, or that we feel, think, and act, and the certainty that we are ignorant of many things, and that we are going to die (148f.).⁶⁸

Again: it is the *telos* of our mind to know the truth and to achieve certainty about it. The apprehension of the real makes theorizing itself real, and this contact with reality is the fulfillment of its intentionality.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Newman likes to quote *Eth. Nic.* I, 3 for this (322). One might also remember that for Aristotle, *akrasia* happens in the cracks between the universal and particular. For Heidegger and Gadamer *phronesis* and “care” (*Sorge*) as practical application are involved in the very act of *understanding* something; i.e., in the theoretical contexts that Newman is analyzing. Cf. also Lawrence, “Lonerger’s Retrieval,” 376.

⁶⁷ Some of Newman’s examples might have influenced Wittgenstein (who read Newman): how a curve can look concave to some and convex to others is related to Wittgenstein’s “duck-rabbit”; the recognition of family resemblance occurs as well (291f.).

⁶⁸ This seems to undercut Lessing’s “ditch,” and will therefore be important for religious certitude. Cf. also Fey, *Faith and Doubt*, 92. Also, Newman’s examples from historiography or studies of Shakespeare (284ff.; 217ff.) point to parallel attempts to discover a methodology for humanities, e.g. as “idiographic” rather than “nomothetic”—to use the distinction introduced by Windelband in his lecture “Geschichte und Naturwissenschaft” (1894).

⁶⁹ A somewhat Husserlian read of this can be found in Olson, “Real Apprehension,” e.g., 502, 516. The apprehension of the real has a temporal and teleological priority over skepticism (*ibid.*, 510).

If this were not possible, nature would be misconstrued. Something that is *by its nature* made to miss its proper goal is self-contradictory. Furthermore, the nature of our mind would become unintelligible for us, since things are defined from their fully actualized state. We find the definition of the oak tree by looking at the tree, not the acorn; we define the mind from its act of knowing, not from the state of doubt and confusion.

Newman is quite firm that certitude cannot be mistaken.⁷⁰ And since it is therefore necessarily correlated with truth, certitude, just like truth, cannot change (163f.); it is *indefectible* (181). It is at least a negative test of certitude,⁷¹ whether it did in fact change. In religion, for example, someone who is

⁷⁰ Where Newman speaks about “false certitudes” I think he is to be understood as having merely *apparent* certitudes in mind. In other cases he appears to merely consider an implicit objection or fallibility *in the abstract* (which for Newman is possible); M. Jamie Ferreira, *Doubt and Religious Commitment: The Role of the Will in Newman’s Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press/New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 107. I don’t think Pailin, *The Way*, 180–85, is right in attributing it to a lack of distinction between objective and subjective certainty, such that only the subjective side could be wrong and changeable; this would contradict the whole gist of Newman’s argument, and Pailin has accordingly problems making sense of his claims. In fact, in an earlier manuscript, Newman does distinguish (against Locke) objective and *subjective* certainty, and considers the subjective certainty unfailing! In 1853 this distinction becomes that between (conditional) inference and (unconditional) assent (Steinberg, “Newman’s Distinction,” 352f.). Other commentators have similar problems, apparently because they simply cannot believe that Newman is actually claiming this kind of certainty and indefectibility; e.g., Ian Ker, “Recent Critics,” 66f.; and Jay Newman, “The Illative Sense vs. Interpretation: D’Arcy’s Critique of Cardinal Newman’s Approach to Insight and Inference,” *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 73 (1999): 179–91, at 181. In the case of Jay Newman, there is also the influence of his intense dislike for his namesake’s anti-liberalism (*The Mental Philosophy*, 29–33 et passim). J. Ferreira has the same problem and therefore sees Newman apparently contradicting himself (she also confuses indefectibility and infallibility; Ferreira, *Doubt and Religious Commitment*, 107); she attempts to reduce Newman’s claim to a mere principle of subjective tenacity in the sense of I. Lakatos (one might say: as opposed to W. Froude’s Popperian fallibilism). For her, the only absolute tenacity would be the formal promise “to be true to the truth”; what that truth is might change, even if in an absolute, i.e., all-or-nothing fashion (ibid. 117–20, 125, 128). Newman says that one cannot on the one hand claim to be certain, while at the same time suggesting that one may change one’s mind tomorrow; but to my mind he does not mean to reduce this impossibility thereby to a *psychological* impossibility, as Ferreira takes it (ibid., 111f.).

⁷¹ Other conditions are: the certitude follows on investigation and proof (although it is not identical with it); it also provides a sense of intellectual satisfaction (207f.). The proof, however, could change (e.g., when doing apologetics), while the certitude remains; this is the case of “investigating” our faith (*fides quaerens intellectum*), whereas “inquiry” would imply having lost one’s faith, a lack of certitude (158f.).

certain about his faith and then loses it can never have been really certain; in a way, he never did have faith but perhaps a mere conviction (175, 200).⁷² If certitude and truth are the natural *telos* of our mind, then their achievement will bring a sense of *rest* in our goal.⁷³ There will be therefore no motivation for a change of mind.

Furthermore, one might wonder (although Newman does not), whether we could know what we are looking for in our search for knowledge and certitude, if we did not have anticipations of its attainment in at least some instances. Nor could we deny this possibility meaningfully without evoking and therefore claiming it.⁷⁴ Would we even have a meaningful notion of “mistake” if we did not have a positive notion of knowledge, of which it is the privation?

Mistakes can be detected and corrected only by an appeal to a new certitude. Whether avowing our fallibility in general or noting our mistakes in particular, we can easily be quite certain that we have made a mistake: “May I not at least be certain that I have been mistaken?” (188f.).

Mistakes, therefore, cannot cast doubt on the existence of certitude, or even on its normality, since they become recognizable only against the background of certitude. And therefore *absus non tollit usum*.⁷⁵

Newman provides a number of very concrete (even if not infallible) signs of *false* certitudes (hesitation when asked to swear on it in court, defensiveness etc.) (165–68). True certitude, on the other hand, can be (morally) patient of its opposite, even if not (intellectually) *tolerant* (165).

⁷² This might explain 1 Jn 2:19–20: “They went out from us, but they were not really of our number; if they had been, they would have remained with us. Their desertion shows that none of them was of our number. But you have the anointing that comes from the holy one, and you all have knowledge.”

⁷³ And it is rare (though not impossible) that something else than truth is free from circumstances and tokens that evoke suspicion. Prejudice might perhaps be indefectible, but not free from suspicion (207). Certitude is effortless and unwavering (163f.). “As there is a condition of mind which is characterized by invincible ignorance, so there is another which may be said to be possessed of invincible knowledge; . . . —I mean certitude” (174).

⁷⁴ We also could not argue for other truths without anything to base our arguments on—something that cannot be argued for and does not need to be argued for, because it is self-verifying. “Without first principles there can be no conclusions at all, and . . . thus probability does in some sense presuppose and require the existence of truths which are certain” (192f.). C. I. Lewis similarly pointed out that even knowledge of probabilities must at least rest on data which are certain; Fey, *Faith and Doubt*, 101. Even induction rests on certitude.

⁷⁵ Likewise, we can be quite *certain* that we have only *probable* knowledge, or also that one opinion is *more probable* than another. It would also be “against my nature” and against “duty” to withhold assent to duly established certitude, even by past generations on whose shoulders we stand. One can question individual cases of this tradition, but not its certitude in general (187).

The nature of knowledge itself would not be intelligible, if we could not understand it from its *telos*. In that sense, certitude is normative, natural, and therefore normal. In this sense it is not the claim to certitude which is fanaticism or religious insanity; rather, it is its *denial* which is not really normal (and which in fact claims a certitude of its own). “Certitude is a natural and normal state of mind, and not (as is sometimes objected) one of its extravagances or infirmities” (172).

What might be insane, however, would be a claim to *infallibility*. Infallibility is a property, not of particular acts, but of faculties and persons (183).⁷⁶ According to Newman, to make a claim of infallibility for a person or faculty would be to extend the normality of certitude too far, certitude being infallibility only *pro hac vice*—for the occasion (185).

Still, our ability to detect certitudes is a very personal ability. For example, we might have a gift in one area, but not necessarily in another; that both Newton and Napoleon were geniuses does not mean that they could exchange their particular roles.⁷⁷ Other certitudes arise only with experience and age: even the legitimate assumptions of “common credence” become a real assent of certitude only with the experience of people who have made decisions and commitments about them in their lives. This is why Aristotle says we should give heed not only to demonstrations but to experience and to the aged, because, as “having the eye of experience, they behold the principles of things” (268).⁷⁸ Hence evidence depends on the mode of the receiver: classics have more impact on older people, the Bible on the virtuous (78f.).⁷⁹ This feature might also make certitude harder to communicate (82f.): there is an element of personal experience, even of “feeling,” to certitude.

However, Newman is careful not to make this feature of experience constitutive of certitude. This experience might be part of the *telos* towards which we grow, but in itself it could not *prove* the certitude, which, in the case of a vivid imagination, could still be an illusion. Vividness does not *create*

⁷⁶ It might be worthy of note that, although papal infallibility is indeed a property ascribed to a *person*, in its precise definition it is rather what Newman describes as *certitude*: not everything a pope says is infallible, but only very specific and circumscribed acts of his are.

⁷⁷ In speaking of the illative sense, Newman does not seem to refer to a “faculty”—a fact that fits in well with his doubts about faculties (278–81). Indeed, Aristotle might have thought of the illative sense as a *habit* of the intellectual faculty rather than a distinct faculty; it could therefore also be specific and personal regarding applications (military, science, etc.).

⁷⁸ Cf. *Eth. Nic.* VI, 11.

⁷⁹ Job in this sense did not gain knowledge, but went from hearing to sight with regard to one and the same knowledge of God (80).

our assent; it merely *intensifies* it (80f.). Still, as the *telos* of knowing, Newman says, certitude provides a specific feeling of possession, attainment, finality, satisfaction, and self-congratulation “as its token and in a certain sense its form”; it is the theoretical parallel to the satisfaction we experience after performing a conscientious deed in the practical realm (168f.).⁸⁰

VI

With all of this, Newman manages to restore our intuitions about the certitudes that we assume in ordinary life, and he helps us to apply abstract rules to the concrete. Modern skepticism, for its part, can be sustained only in scientific abstraction.

Although Newman does not say so himself, we have also seen that the universal doubt modern skepticism employs has itself theological presuppositions. This is ironic, because these theological dimensions are what modern thought has been most skeptical about. For by reducing reason to generalizations over observational data, the skeptics have thought to consign ultimate metaphysical questions to the realm of the irrational.

Again, Newman’s response might be that this metaphysical skepticism goes against what the normal function of our mind tells us. And here he would refer us to the working of our *conscience*. Conscience is another one of those natural endowments of our mind and a kind of instinct. Yet it has a greater affinity with perception than with the inference of an illative sense.⁸¹ Within this perception, it is important to distinguish two aspects: (a) the perception of the distinction between right and wrong (“critical faculty”); (b) the perception of an ultimate responsibility, which we have

⁸⁰ The implication seems to be that a person committing the deed of an erroneous conscience (e.g., mercy-killing) would *not* experience something of this kind, or at least could not truly be certain about its goodness.

⁸¹ Jay Newman (“Cardinal Newman’s Attack,” 204) compares this with G. E. Moore’s intuition. Perhaps more plausibly, J. Gaffney compares the perception of Newman’s conscience with the theory of M. Scheler, who holds in *On the eternal in Man* that, just like sense perception, the voice of conscience implies (without inference) an external source of information, and that the soul starts to disintegrate if it tries to understand itself as its source; cf. James Gaffney, “Newman on the Common Roots of Morality and Religion,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 16 (1988): 143–59, at 157f. Gerard Casey, following J. Ferreira, holds that formal, informal, and natural inference form a continuum (albeit logically distinct from each other), where natural inference has as its limit case *intuition*. This limit case would apply to conscience as a form of intuition; *Natural Reason*, 57–71. Intuition in turn would be the same as simple assent (*ibid.*, 59), even though Newman initially would like to restrict intuition to internal experiences (*ibid.*, 66f., 129f.). I am not sure that Ferreira pays due regard to the volitional elements and the crucial discontinuities between inference and assent.

before someone,⁸² that is, the perception of the voice of an ultimate judge (“judicial faculty”).⁸³ It is only this latter aspect which enjoys the certitude of a natural instinct. It is indeed what we find endorsed *semper ubique et ab omnibus* (110) and for Newman it implies the very existence of God;⁸⁴ it is “our great internal teacher of religion” (304) and the root of all natural religion, especially in its universal institutions of atonement and

⁸² For Newman, aesthetical theories of the moral sense (Shaftesbury) or the “religion of civilization” and the intellect (apparently the Enlightenment as well as Greek mythology) miss this point; they are missing the element of divine command and promulgation and our corresponding obedience (307f.). I think one would also miss this aspect if one simply equates Newman’s distinction with Aquinas’s between *synderesis* and *conscientia*, as J. Splett is inclined to do; Jörg Splett, “Gewissen und Glaubensbegründung bei John Henry Newman,” in *John Henry Newman, Vortragsreihe an der Universität Eichstätt*, ed. Alfred Gläßer (Eichstätt: Franz-Sales-Verlag, 1991), 33–50, at 37f. (on aesthetical theories) and 35f. An additional obligatory force—beyond a mere “moral sense,” which is known from our own nature—might be a reflection of the fact that this very nature is contingent: natural law does not hold merely because of our nature’s metaphysical necessity and dignity; rather, our nature could have been otherwise; it is given to us by the creator. By choosing to create our nature as it is, the creator by that very act promulgates the law that he speaks in our conscience. With that, he is a “legis-creator” rather than a “legis-lator”; cf. also Sillem, “Cardinal Newman’s Grammar of Assent,” 399.

⁸³ It might be worth quoting his own famous words: “The rule and measure of duty is not utility, nor expedience, nor the happiness of the greatest number, nor State convenience, nor fitness, order, and the pulchrum. Conscience is not a long-sighted selfishness, nor a desire to be consistent with oneself; but it is a messenger from Him, who, both in nature and in grace, speaks to us behind a veil, and teaches and rules us by His representatives. Conscience is the aboriginal Vicar of Christ, a prophet in its informations, a monarch in its peremptoriness, a priest in its blessings and anathemas, and, even though the eternal priesthood throughout the Church could cease to be, in it the sacerdotal principle would remain and would have a sway.” “A Letter Addressed to the Duke of Norfolk on Occasion of Mr. Gladstone’s Recent Exposition,” in Newman, *Certain Difficulties*, ch.V, 248f.

⁸⁴ Here we would infer an *is* from an *ought*, namely the fact of God’s existence from finding ourselves under an obligation. It also tells us *what* God is (304); e.g., he is a *person*, because we experience shame only before a person, not before things or animals. John Hick thinks that Newman uses the illative sense to prove the existence of God and consequently he accuses Newman of a type fallacy in the application of the illative sense to non-observables (Hick, *Faith and Knowledge*, 90); but Hick completely omits the discussion of conscience in Newman, which is his true access to the existence of God. The implied proof for the existence of God, however, is not so much an argument or inference, but a perception; Casey, *Natural Reason*, 57–71. Similarly, Newman understands his own version of the *Cogito* (*sentio ergo sum*) as immediate; the *ergo* is no inference (*ibid.*, 95f.). This immediacy will also not allow cultural projections to interfere in conscience. It can be compared to a “basic

sacrifice (305f., 315f.).⁸⁵ Variations in ethical judgment belong to the “critical faculty” alone, and they are the result of a malformation of conscience. In children, on the other hand, the voice of conscience is most clear, even wordlessly, and it is closer to them than the voice of their parents (104f.).⁸⁶ Only later the normative and natural working of conscience becomes distorted by our wrong responses, bad friends, temptations, and neglects (98–110).⁸⁷

belief” in the sense of Plantinga; Casey, *Natural Reason*, 132–42. One finds the same parallel in Mark Wynn, who does, however deny the immediacy of this “perception”; Wynn, “The Relationship of Religion and Ethics: A Comparison of Newman and Contemporary Philosophy of Religion,” *Heythrop Journal* 46 (2005): 435–49, at 436f. One might need to distinguish the hearing of the voice of conscience from the sight of perception. Neither conscience nor illative sense are supernatural and extraordinary, but normal; in this, Newman’s appeal to inner experience would be different from that of Jonathan Edwards; cf. Wainwright, *Reason and the Heart*, 82.

⁸⁵ Equally universal are: prayer, especially the intercessory prayer of particular holy individuals; the notion of miracles and providence; and the idea of revelation (312–17). Newman hints at “endemic traditions which have their first origin in a paradisiacal illumination” (317), and suggests that there was a subsequent fall into polytheism (336). This appeal to an original historical “illumination” might not be so necessary if the universality is indeed rooted in conscience. This is a tension in Newman.

⁸⁶ Which would mean that conscience (and the idea of God) cannot be, as Mackie suggests, the result of educational conditioning or introjection; cf. J. L. Mackie: *The Miracle of Theism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 105f. There would be no obligation to invest matters of conscience with the dignity of something *unconditional* (as we do in conscience clauses and in respecting conscientious objection), if it is just the product of cultural *conditioning* (Splett, “Gewissen und Glaubensbegründung,” 46). Conscience is not a product; it is rather what we *begin* with. That is why a child can have a very clear view of his parents being ethically wrong. (An interesting corollary is that, *pace* Dawkins, it would be child abuse, *not* to nourish the voice of God in a child. It would be a malformation of its nature—maybe even more so than it would be to deprive it of its own mother.) Conscience is what we begin with, because it is a faculty that *evaluates* all external input and is its first judge; it is closer to us than any other faculty (“Conscience is nearer to me than any other means of knowledge” [304]), including the senses that give us the external input (and therefore the material for the illative sense!); presumably, this is also why God can ask us to disbelieve our senses (e.g., after the transubstantiation); it is also the reason why cosmological proofs or those from design presuppose trusting God’s voice in them; Fey, *Faith and Doubt*, 21.

⁸⁷ The “bell” of conscience will then ring wrongly (190f.). Obedience makes it ring more clearly (304). Newman would probably not want to accuse atheists like his friend W. Froude of immorality; but positively speaking, not numbing one’s conscience but following it will eventually lead to recognizing the voice of God; Sillem, “Cardinal Newman’s Grammar of Assent,” 395.

If this is the source of natural religion: the perception of God as judge, and a sense of our personal failure, as we face God's wrath,⁸⁸ then the one true revealed religion will respond to this experience of our conscience. Grace builds on nature (302f.) in such a way that it responds to our fallen nature by an act of vicarious atonement.⁸⁹ Thus Newman's advance towards God does not proceed by way of cosmological proofs for the existence of God. For him (not unlike Kierkegaard), these are too speculative, theoretical, and detached.⁹⁰ We do not come to know God unless we employ our desires, our interests, our practical reason and conscience, and indeed our very fear (331). Revelation itself is a response, not to a *desiderium naturale videndi deum*, but to our bad conscience.⁹¹ Contemporary popular attempts to explain the possibility of salvation for non-Christians (or for those who did not know Christ) frequently adduce the possibility that they, too, can perform good works—be it by anonymous grace or some other means. Newman's theory might allow for a much less Pelagian answer: pagans can rather be saved by their *bad* conscience, because it makes them aware of their need for a savior. Just like the patriarchs of the Old Testament, they can be saved by an act of hope and faith in such a savior. And perhaps it is not so much sin that gets in the way of salvation, but self-righteousness.

If conscience is the preparation for the Gospel, then not everything in pagan religion needs to be false. As a natural and normative faculty, its

⁸⁸ "... the aspect under which Almighty God is presented to us by Nature, is (to use a figure) of One who is angry with us, and threatens evil" (305). Fear is the first aspect of religion, and without it there is no genuine religion (311) and "... where conscience is, fear must be" (331).

⁸⁹ "Revelation begins where Natural Religion fails. The Religion of Nature is a mere inchoation, and needs a complement,—it can have but one complement, and that very complement is Christianity. Natural Religion is based upon the sense of sin; it recognizes the disease, but it cannot find, it does but look out for the remedy" (375). "It is the Image of Him who fulfils the one great need of human nature, the Healer of its wounds, the Physician of the soul, this Image it is which both creates faith, and then rewards it" (359).

⁹⁰ Nevertheless, he does indicate a possible proof for the existence of God from causality and the mathematical laws of nature. In spite of his empiricist background, his understanding of causality is deep, metaphysical, and Aristotelian: e.g., unlike Hume he understands that regularity implies final, not efficient causality (70–75). He also understands that Bacon abandoned final causes for the sake of efficient causes because he was interested in power and control (290).

⁹¹ Positively, it might be a desire for knowledge of an undistorted law, too: "... a thirst, an impatience, for the knowledge of that Unseen Lord, and Governor, and Judge, who as yet speaks to them only secretly, who whispers in their hearts, who tells them something, but not nearly so much as they wish and as they need." Newman, *Sermons Preached On Various Occasions*, V, 66f.

pronouncements *ut in pluribus* will provide a guide for truth and certitude.⁹² Hence *quod semper ubique et ab omnibus* is a criterion not only for the proper development of dogma⁹³ but even for interreligious dialogue; it creates an “intercommunion of religions” (201). Newman can concede that a Protestant or a Muslim might have genuine certitude and real assent with regard to those things that he shares in common with a Catholic.⁹⁴ A conversion does not imply renouncing this certitude, but deepening it and broadening it to other aspects (198).⁹⁵ Although this is its *telos*, certitude does not require that something be universally received *in fact* (i.e., everybody becoming Catholic); on the other hand, the reverse is true: that something is universally received does imply certitude (195f.).⁹⁶

⁹² “Nor is it a fair objection to this argument, to say that such prayers and rites as have obtained in various places and times, are in their character, object, and scope inconsistent with each other; because their contrarieties do not come into the idea of religion, as such, at all, and the very fact of their discordance destroys their right to be taken into account, so far as they are discordant; for what is not universal has no claim to be considered natural, right, or of divine origin” (313f.). Nor can it contradict our ethical judgment (324; 326); he exemplified this in a later novel “Callista.” Cf. Gaffney, “Newman on the Common Roots,” 151–55.

⁹³ “. . . we have a direct and conscious knowledge of our Maker, His attributes, His providences, acts, works, and will; and, beyond this knowledge lies the large domain of theology, metaphysics, and ethics, on which it is not allowed to us to advance beyond probabilities, or to attain to more than an opinion” (194). For the role of theology and the possibility of our real and notional assent to the mysteries of the Trinity, see 55–59.

⁹⁴ Interestingly, Newman acknowledges that beliefs are intricately related to a systematic whole, and can take on different “shades and tints” in different wholes; this would resonate with G. Lindbeck’s cultural-linguistic approach (196f.; 202); however, true to his principles, at the end assent is absolute, and not dependent on inferential relationships of the whole: “That systematized whole is the object of notional assent, and its propositions, one by one, are the objects of real” (i.e., assent) (119f.).

⁹⁵ “And thus it is conceivable that a man might travel in his religious profession all the way from heathenism to Catholicity, through Mahometanism, Judaism, Unitarianism, Protestantism, and Anglicanism, without any one certitude lost, but with a continual accumulation of truths, which claimed from him and elicited in his intellect fresh and fresh certitudes” (202). The final revelation is the hermeneutical key that triggers our illative sense, which finally understands the previous salvation history and Old Testament prophecy (342–45).

⁹⁶ “The Catholic Church then, though not universally acknowledged, may without inconsistency claim to teach the primary truths of religion, just as modern science, though but partially received, claims to teach the great principles and laws which are the foundation of secular knowledge, and that with a significance to which no other religious system can pretend, because it is its very profession to speak to all mankind, and its very badge to be ever making converts all over the

This certitude is the ruling principle of the life of a Christian, and without it Christianity would degenerate into sentimentalism (192f.). “Christian earnestness may be ruled by the world to be a perverseness or a delusion; but, as long as it exists, it will presuppose certitude as the very life which is to animate it” (193). Certitude is the natural and supernatural actualization of the *telos* of human nature,⁹⁷ not just in its knowing faculties, but also in practice: conscience is for the sake of practice, and it is fulfilled in sacrifice—which is “certitude under another name” (193).

VII

Both conscience and the illative sense provide us with certitudes; one with regard to the ultimate realities, the other with regard to more ordinary matters. How are they related? I would suggest that conscience is the more profound and moving force and stands behind the illative sense as well, for conscience has some of the features of the illative sense, and more explicitly. It opens the ultimate horizon under which the illative sense operates on concrete matters.⁹⁸ It is a first principle that is universal and personal at once. As a principle of practical decision it applies the universal to the particular; it provides something akin to a real assent, which does not follow from the premises in a simple logical algorithm. It implies activity and spontaneity of the mind, rather than the passive mechanical operations of logic. It operates with the vividness of an image, at least in children (105). It more poignantly articulates the teleology and normativity of our nature, as an explicit “ought” or duty.⁹⁹ It makes clear that we have the right and the duty to follow the epistemological implications of our natural faculties as well,

earth, whereas other religions are more or less variable in their teaching, tolerant of each other, and local, and professedly local, in their *habitat* and character” (196).

⁹⁷ Regarding the relationship between the natural and the supernatural actualization, Newman tries to avoid both rationalism and fideism; the illative sense also serves as a third way between mere degrees of assent in rationalistic Protestantism, and a faith without reason in the Protestantism of the “enthusiasts,” as Newman states the problem in 1848; *beginning* with the infallibility of the Church would also be circular. Jay Newman, *The Mental Philosophy*, 12.

⁹⁸ It is important to notice that the two are initially in a sense in conflict: apparently, Newman did *not* develop the illative sense for the sake of apologetics; rather, it developed in the context of his parallel study of modern mathematical and experimental physics and Stoic and Aristotelian logic and epistemology. Until the early 1820s he even considered leaving the Church, because of arising incompatibilities. Cf. Willam, *Die Erkenntnislehre*, 46ff., 61f.

⁹⁹ It might be worth pointing out that Locke, too, articulates his epistemology of assent along the lines of an “ethics of belief” (*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, IV, 15, 5). Bishop Butler, too, puts conscience at the top of all the faculties, including the cognitive ones.

and that here, too, *ought implies can*. For science does not provide the guidance that we need for decisions and commitments, yet *duty calls for* decisions here and now (*ars longa, vita brevis*). This lack of scientific guidance in our decisions, however, does not force us into a mere “will to believe” (W. James),¹⁰⁰ but allows us the responsible use of our illative sense.

Finally, conscience also places our epistemological endeavors in the context of a personal relationship, *cor ad cor*. Epistemology might not need theological presuppositions, but it is certainly confirmed by them: conscience is about our responsibility and response to the voice of the One who made us and gave us our nature; it will therefore put us under the *duty* to follow the nature of our mind. But it will also give us the *right* to trust in its workings, for again: *ought implies can*. Yet all of this is rooted in a personal relationship. In our knowledge of things we have communion with what we know. But our communion with things is affirmed and embraced in an even deeper communion with the One who made us.

Nobody begins a personal relationship with a hermeneutics of suspicion or universal doubt. Putting a friendship to the test is *ipso facto* the end of that friendship. But the same can be said for knowledge. For Newman, science is more open to doubt than a friendship, because science is about things. But where knowledge of persons and trust in friends is involved, rejecting doubts about a friend’s conduct becomes even an obligation. Still, there might be a point at which evidence can convince us that a friend has become guilty. In the case of God, however, who gives us our faculties, this is not possible. God is not fickle, and if we could find him guilty, he would not be God. Nor, without God, could there even be any notion of guilt or responsibility to begin with.¹⁰¹ This precondition of our knowledge becomes crucial when we consider our belief in revelation, for revelation exceeds the expectations of our natu-

¹⁰⁰ F. C. S. Schiller saw James’s pragmatism merely as a wider application of Newman. Jay Newman, *The Mental Philosophy*, 28. But W. James’s pragmatism might sound rather frivolous compared to Newman, who puts this in an ethical context; on the other hand, Newman might be less harsh or severe than Kierkegaard’s demand for a leap of faith. D. Burrell seems to read Newman as a pragmatist (identification of objects through religious practice); David Burrell, “Verification in Matters Religious,” in *Meaning, Truth, and God*, ed. Leroy Rouner (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), 39f., 48. M. Wynn connects Newman’s “passional” commitments with modern studies in emotions and how they function in focusing our attention between our wide range of sense data and our lack of intellectual knowledge; Wynn, “The Relationship,” 438–43.

¹⁰¹ For this reason I disagree with J. Ferreira’s attempt to equate what Newman says about finite friends with what he says about God. Ferreira, *Doubt and Religious Commitment*, 126, 144.

ral faculties.¹⁰² We cannot believe without a basic trust in God. This trust embraces all the particular truths at once, as revealed by God; they do therefore form one integral deposit of faith, which is held together by the witness of the one, simple, and indivisible God. This is why we cannot be “Cafeteria Catholics.” We cannot pick and choose among the particulars without losing the whole; we lose the basic trust and with this God’s supernatural gift of faith.¹⁰³

Furthermore, we cannot know and understand everything in our faith at once, that is, with the same simplicity with which God knows it. We have to *entrust* our faith to a larger whole than our own mind. The true subject of faith is the Church.¹⁰⁴ And since it is the Church that articulates and embodies this whole, the infallibility of the Church is for Newman “the

¹⁰² Although our natural conscience will also tell us that it is insufficient and darkened and in need of revelation, teaching, and external authority.

¹⁰³ “. . . for we are not left at liberty to pick and choose out of its contents according to our judgment, but must receive it all, as we find it, if we accept it at all. It is a religion in addition to the religion of nature; and as nature has an intrinsic claim upon us to be obeyed and used, so what is over and above nature, or supernatural, must also bring with it valid testimonials of its right to demand our homage” (302). That does not exclude that our faith is personal (“. . . in these provinces of inquiry egotism is true modesty. In religious inquiry each of us can speak only for himself, and for himself he has a right to speak. His own experiences are enough for himself, but he cannot speak for others . . .” [300]). Though this faith is therefore personal, it is still not our whim or choice; it is still a personal faith in something from which we cannot pick and choose; nor is its truth merely relative to us. And though personal, it is not a mere feeling or general trust, but it terminates at a propositional content—which does not seem to find the agreement of J. Hick (*Faith and Knowledge*, 90) and M. Moleski, S.J. (cf. Kroger, “Can Theology Be Tacit?” 25).

¹⁰⁴ Newman’s starting point from the “original impression,” or, as he says later, “idea” of God might set him up for modernist misunderstandings; but, as A. Dulles points out, this experience of God is *not* immediate and needs linguistic mediation; it rather provides the instinctive trust with which we embrace the true external revelation; A. Dulles, “From Image to Truth,” 255f., 260f. and 266f. Put in these terms, it sounds reminiscent of early Jesuit theories of a “discerniculum experimentale” as developed by A. Perez, S.J. at the Collegio Romano in the early seventeenth century; cf. T. Ramelow, *Gott, Freiheit, Weltenwahl* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997), 38–41. Newman seems to have been familiar with some of these older theories, since he quotes from Suarez and Lugo; A. Dulles, “From Image to Truth,” 264. The antecedent natural *motiva credibilitatis* could be understood as based on the illative sense, whereas the supernatural assent of faith would operate through Newman’s notion of conscience. This assent would also involve an act of the will and it includes the very fact of revelation in its material object, as J. Connolly points out against J. Ferreira; John Connolly, “Newman on Faith and Divine Faith: Clarifying Some Ambiguities,” *Horizons* 23 (1996): 261–80, at

fundamental dogma of the Catholic religion.” Accordingly, we give the assent of our “implicit” and inclusive faith not only to the Church’s present, but also to her future pronouncements (129–30).

Nothing could be more contrary to modern skepticism. Certitudes of this magnitude, including in relation to innerworldly agencies, will seem outrageous. But with Newman we might understand that *no* certainties can be had without trust—trust in our nature and trust in the One who made it. And this might just confirm that the modern quest for certainty and its inevitable corollary of skeptical despair still gets its clue from a certainty that can only be held by faith. The modern age has misplaced its quest; it is seeking certainty in the wrong way in the wrong place. N.V

267 and 277–80. Ferreira, on the other hand, tries to streamline natural and supernatural assent, so as to open them both to fallibility and revisability; Ferreira, *Doubt and Religious Commitment*, 135–41.