



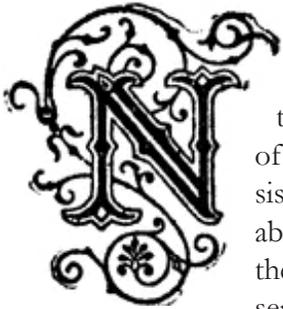
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JOHN HENRY NEWMAN: APOSTLE OF COMMON SENSE?

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NEWMAN HAS ALWAYS BEEN A PUZZLING CHARACTER, OFTEN DIVISIVE, OFTEN taken to be enigmatic; he has been adored and disliked, the object of boundless trust and the object of deep suspicion. He was the loved leader of a party in the Church of England, and this love persisted even after he left this Church for that of Rome; his fellow-workers in the Tractarian Movement, above all Pusey and Keble, felt wounded by his departure but not betrayed. He always remained in their correspondence “My dearest Newman”, and the younger generation of Tractarians, best represented by Dean Church, remained devoted to him and stayed his active friends. (One of the counts against Newman in the eyes of Manning was that when in his old age he visited London, he stayed with Church in the St. Paul’s Deanery.) When he became a Catholic he was thought to be a great prize by Cardinal Wiseman; but it soon became plain that at Westminster and in Rome the Catholic authorities hadn’t the slightest idea what to do with him. He had become a Catholic through his study of the Fathers and through the failure of his attempt to work out a distinctive Anglo-Catholic position within the Church of England, and his reasons, cogent or not, were set out in one of the great classics in the history of theology, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (1845), a book to be compared in its weight and its importance for the development of theology to the two *Summae* of Aquinas, to Calvin’s *Institutes* and, in the nineteenth century, to Mohler’s *Symbolism*, or, to choose something from the twentieth century, Pere de Lubac’s *Surnaturel*, or Karl Barth’s *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*. But the Essay was ill-received - in part because it was misunderstood - in Rome. Here, it seemed, was a man who explained what it was to be a Catholic and what were the rational inducements to faith; but they were not at all the reasons advanced by the school theologians and contained in the standard works of apologetics. Newman was devoted to the person of the Pope and even to the Roman officials and badly wanted to please, but few felt easy with him. Newman’s devotion flagged over the years, and he came in the end to care little what Rome thought about him, or so he seems to have believed. But when, with the end of Pius IX’s long pontificate, new men and new ideas came to Rome with Leo XIII, and Newman became a Cardinal, how much he had been crushed, throughout his Catholic life, by Roman suspicions comes through his remark:

“The cloud has been lifted from me for ever.”

To live in or under a cloud was not a new experience for Newman. Once the Tractarian movement was launched he was a hero to his followers - that he was the leader of the Movement, its animating spirit and the framer of its theological position admits of no doubt - but to his opponents, the alarmed representatives of English Protestantism, he seemed the most devious of men, cunning, subtle, logic-chopping, hair-splitting, uncandid, with a design

to de-Protestantize the English Church. His subtlety - what was often called his Jesuitry - was thought to be demonstrated for all to see with the publication of Tract 90, the last of the Tracts, which argued that subscription to the 39 Articles of the Church of England was compatible with the holding of Catholic beliefs. A part of Newman's argument was that the Articles were, under Elizabeth, deliberately framed as articles of peace and worded in such a way as to enable both Catholics who were not too strict in their view of the Papal supremacy and zealous Calvinists to assent to them. This would now be taken as a commonplace by historians; but in the year of publication, 1841, the reasoning seemed perverse, for it seemed to challenge the common sense of the matter: that the Church of England was a Protestant Church, that distinctively Catholic beliefs about the sacraments and the priesthood had been sent packing in the sixteenth century, along with candles, vestments, confessionals, relics, altars of stone, and all the other impedimenta of a ritualistic religion. What could Newman have in mind, it was whispered, and then shouted, but the subversion of Anglicanism for the benefit of the corrupt Roman Church, the enemy of (what was thought to be) Britain's moral purity and of her material prosperity? With Newman's conversion to Catholicism this ungenerous view of his Anglican role continued to be held by many. It was finally dissipated for most Englishmen who cared about the matter when in response to Kingsley's attack upon his good faith and integrity he wrote his *Apologia pro Vita Sua* (1864), a passionate account of his own inward-

ness from childhood on and the story of his role in the Tractarian movement and in the University of Oxford in which the drama was played out. This made him a great national figure. He continued to be thought a man of doubtful loyalty and orthodoxy by the most influential persons among English Catholics - Manning and Ward and Talbot (Manning's Roman agent) - but he was a hero to many of the Catholic clergy and laity and to the nation in general. That he had as an Anglican been a secret Roman Catholic was now believed only by gloomy fanatics; that he was, to use Monsignor Talbot's phrase, "the most

dangerous man in England" was believed only by Manning's entourage and by influential members of the Curia. That he was indeed dangerous to the Ultramontanes became plain when he sided with the Inopportunist in the great debate, before the first Vatican Council, over Papal Infallibility. But this opens up a range of topics that would divert me from my main theme if I were to follow it.

A difficulty in bringing Newman's character into focus was early felt by many observers, both the committed and the uncommitted. The most penetrating of the brief characterizations is I believe that of James Stephen. "He has established an alliance between the two apparently antagonistic principles of quietism and shrewd common sense - a sort of Benjamin Franklin graft upon a Fenelon stem." This picture of the engrafting of the qualities

of practicality and industry, even worldliness of a sort, on a root of personal fastidiousness and pre-occupation with a hidden pursuit of holiness, seems to me to hit upon something in Newman that properly puzzles us, that provokes us into using paradoxical expressions about him, that accounts for different and sometimes opposed perceptions of his role and character. He often strikes us as the apostle of common sense; but then we feel compelled to add a note of interrogation, as when we read in *the Apologia*: "I used to wish the Arabian tales were true; my imagination ran on unknown influences, on magical powers, and talismans. . . . I thought life might be a dream, or I an Angel, and all this world a deception, my fellow

angels by a playful device concealing themselves from me, and deceiving me with the semblance of a material world." And to this we must add what he says about his experience of conversion at the age of fifteen: "that it (the conversion) had some influence on my opinions, in the direction of those childish imaginations which I have already mentioned, viz. in isolating me from the objects which surrounded me, in confirming me in my distrust of the reality of material phenomena, and making me rest in the thought of two and two only absolute and luminously self-evident beings, myself and my Creator..."²³



Cardinal Newman

This is the Fenelon side of Newman. The practical, energetic, almost political side of Newman showed itself on his return from his travels in Italy in 1833, when he and Hurrell Froude “had fierce thoughts against the Liberals” and, perhaps with the vanity of young men, chose as their motto “the words in which Achilles, on returning to battle, says, ‘You shall know the difference, now that I am back again.’”⁴

Perhaps the best description of the political Newman, or the best description of that in him which spoke to his followers of his political capacity, is to be found in James Anthony Froude’s essay “The Oxford Counter-Reformation.” J. A. Froude was Hurrell Froude’s brother and was on hand through the period of gestation of Tractarianism. He was first a follower of Newman, then broke with Tractarianism and became fiercely Protestant. But he always admired Newman, finding him, despite his propagation of what Froude came to think in many respects a false religion, a man of genius, devoted to truth as he saw it, morally sensitive, magnanimous, perhaps - I think this doesn’t strain Froude’s text - the best man Froude has known. Here is that characterization of Newman which illustrates what I want to say:

When I entered at Oxford, John Henry Newman was beginning to be famous ... His appearance was striking. He was above the middle height, slight and spare. His head was large, his face remarkably like that of Julius Caesar. The forehead, the shape of the ears, and nose, were almost the same. The lines of the mouth were very peculiar, and I should say exactly the same. I have often thought of the resemblance, and I believe that it extended to the temperament. In both there was an original force of character which refused to be moulded by circumstances, which was to make its own way, and become a power in the world; a clearness of intellectual perception, a disdain for conventionalities, a temper imperious and wilful, but along with it a most attaching gentleness, sweetness, singleness of heart and purpose. Both were formed by nature to command others, both had the faculty of attracting to themselves the passionate devotion of friends and followers, and in both cases, too, perhaps the devotion was rather due to the personal ascendancy of the leader than to the cause he represented. It was Caesar, not the principle of the empire, which overthrew Pompey and the constitution. *Credo in Newmannum* was a common phrase at Oxford ...

I had then never seen so impressive a person. I met him now and then in private; I attended his church and heard him preach Sunday after Sunday; he is supposed to have been insidious, to have led his disciples on to conclusions to which he designed to bring them, while his purpose was carefully veiled. He was, on the contrary, the most transparent of men. He told us what he believed to be true. He did not know where it would carry him. No one who has ever risen to any great height in this world refuses to move till he knows where he is going. He is impelled in each step which he takes by a force within himself. He satisfies himself only that the step is a right one, and he leaves the rest to Providence. Newman’s mind was world-wide. He was interested in everything which was going on in science, in politics, in literature. Nothing was too large for him, nothing too trivial, if it threw light upon the central question, what man really was, and what was his destiny. He was careless about his personal prospects. He had no ambition to make a career, or to rise to rank or power... He could admire enthusiastically any greatness of action and character, however remote the sphere of it from his own. Gurwood’s “*Dispatches of the Duke of Wellington*” came out just then. Newman had been reading the book, and a friend asked him what he thought of it. “Think?” he said, “it makes one burn to have been a soldier.”⁶



Thus the testimony of one who, no doubt with a heavy heart and many qualifications, in the end thought that what Newman had identified himself with and consecrated his life to, Catholic Christianity, was for the most part a delusion. Of course, this makes the testimony more weighty and more valuable.

Two things I pick out from Froude’s account as important for my present purpose: those elements in the portrait that show us a man with the physical and mental attributes of an energetic and attractive leader of men - Newman was a “charismatic leader”, to use Max Weber’s formulation, a formulation that has unfortunately been degraded by common use in trivial contexts - and the inwardness of the man, as evidenced by the badges of

“gentleness, sweetness, singleness of heart and purpose.” I believe this combination is to be found throughout his career, though it isn’t necessary to emphasize that his gifts of leadership were - perhaps providentially - always frustrated. This is plainly true of his Anglican career; it is true of the Irish Catholic University affair, something one might almost call a black comedy; it is true in a measure of his career as founder and leader of the Oratory in England; and it is true of what one might regard as Newman’s attempt, along with Acton and Dollinger, Montalembert and Lacordaire, to help the Church to come to terms with the problems thrown up by the natural and historical sciences in the nineteenth century, though this attempt had not much effect in his own day. Of course, he knew that this coming to terms could happen only over time and through a shift in the location of power within the Church. He wrote in 1871 to Emily Bowles that “the Latin race will not always have a monopoly of the magisterium of Catholicism. We must be patient ... when the hour strikes, the reform will begin.”⁷ He was fortunate in the protection his cardinalate gave him and in the moment of his death. He was certainly suspected, with only a trace of justice, of being a father of Modernism during the pontificate of St. Pius X, and it is interesting to note how such an admirer of his work as Wilfrid Ward agonizes over how to make his account of Newman’s thought both accurate and at the same time not too offensive to those then in places of power in the Church. There was, of course, no question of a formal condemnation, so there was no need later for a rehabilitation such as had in justice to be rendered to Rosmini. What is certainly the most complete vindication of Newman’s work, and evidence of an intellectual power that continued, through his work, long after his death, is the way in which there is virtual unanimity in attributing the theological developments represented by the documents of Vatican II in part to Newman. What he had always picked out as being both the puzzle and the glory of Christianity, historical development, offers the greatest intellectual challenge to the educated believer, professional theologian or not, today; and Newman saw this and seems to have anticipated the anti historical line adopted by the Modernists and by their most rancorous opponents - there is no appeal to history against the contemporary religious consciousness (Loisy): the appeal to history against the present judgments of the Roman congregations concerned with discipline and censorship is heretical (the Ultramontanes) - and to have seen how to meet it.

I must return to my topic: the duality of Newman.

I move now to a different field of inquiry, that of philosophy. Here, too, we shall find the Fenelon-Benjamin Franklin duality reflected in the field of epistemology.

Epistemology is a very strange subject and is often thought by non-philosophers to be the philosophical discipline. What can we know and how do we know it? What do we mean when we assert there are chairs in untenanted rooms? How do we really know that John or Mary is a human being like ourselves and not a programmed android from outer space? Are objects really coloured or is the perception of colour something that occurs in us and doesn’t belong to the world “out there”? Since we sometimes misremember things, how can we ever be sure that we have really remembered something? And so on and so on.

Now Newman, in part because of his philosophical formation, was always fascinated by such problems and even came to think he had a duty - this was why he wrote the *Grammar of Assent* - to help people who had intellectual difficulties over the application of such concepts as knowledge and belief. I have already shown - perhaps “shown” sounds a bit strong, though no one has denied my conclusions, though many have disregarded them - that Newman’s thought is rooted in the empiricism that dominated British philosophy from the seventeenth century, with Locke, down to the nineteenth century, and that it is not too much to say that in matters philosophical he was a disciple of Locke and Hume, and often came close to Berkeley’s position.⁸ The evidence for this is scattered all over his work and is given its most pointed expression in *The Philosophical Notebook*, writings not intended for publication and only printed in our day. (There are of course other influences: Plato, the Alexandrian Fathers, perhaps Coleridge.) He was also influenced by John Stuart Mill, whose *System of Logic* he evidently studied carefully, and who seems to be the philosopher referred to when he writes in the *Apologia*, concerning a topic I will turn to presently - the existence of matter - that “there is a rising school of philosophy now which considers phenomena to constitute the whole of our knowledge of physics.”⁹ (One has to remember that this was a period when seminary textbooks were written in the jargon of scholasticism but the works of St. Thomas were not much studied, and were not much regarded in Rome.)

Empiricism as a philosophical doctrine seems both hardheaded and fanciful, to emphasize immediate

experience and yet construct vast imaginative pictures; and in having this dual character it seems almost tailored to fit Newman. What can we be certain about? What we see, touch, smell, hear, that we see colours, feel roughnesses and smoothness, smell the rose and the dungheap, hear voices and thunder. This seems very commonsensical and as a view is often associated with a belief in the natural sciences' power to explain how the world goes and in the power of the methods of the sciences to investigate the nature of human beings and human society. Indeed, the programme of the greatest of the empiricists, and the one from whom Newman seems to have learned most, David Hume, was to argue that the science of man is the only solid foundation for the other sciences, so, the only solid foundation we can give to this science itself must be laid on experience and observation." (There is something strange about this argument. If we look at it in its context we see that Hume is arguing from the successes of the natural sciences to the advisability of using its methods in establishing "the science of man"; but he also argues that the natural sciences stand in need of a solid foundation to be provided by the yet-to-be attained science of man.)

If, however, we attend to the way in which the empiricists analyse experience, our seeing, touching, and so on, we find ourselves within an intellectual scheme that seems very far removed from that taken for granted outside the philosophical classroom. When Doctor Johnson was told by Boswell that "Bishop Berkeley's ingenious sophistry to prove the nonexistence of matter" was both false and impossible to refute, "Johnson answered, striking his foot with mighty force against a large stone, till he rebounded from it, 'I refute it thus'."¹¹ This is not an adequate refutation of Berkeley, but it does evince the way in which Berkeley was commonly understood - as substituting for solid, familiar, kickable, resistant matter the thin stuff of ideas. The maxim *esse est percipi*, to be is to be perceived, was thus understood by both Boswell and Johnson. How could such a belief arise and even seem, as Boswell supposed, irrefutable?

The argument may, without doing serious injustice to it, be compressed as follows. When we say we see an object - say, an apple - we see what we take to be evidence for the object's existence, not the object itself. What we have are certain visual, tactual, olfactory and gustatory sensations. Put together, these are signs in normal situations of the existence "out there", in space and time, of a persisting object having certain properties, geo-

metrical, dynamic, and other, and this is what we mean by "the apple"; but what we know are sensations situated in ourselves (this isn't a spatial "in"), sensations that are momentary and can be had, as in cases of hallucination or other mistaken perceptions, in the absence of the object to which they ordinarily correspond. So the immediate objects of our acquaintance are our own sensations; and our knowledge of the world and other people, and any other sort of knowledge we may have, rests in the last resort upon inferences made from the character, number, regularities, similarities, dissimilarities, and so on, of our sensations. Plainly, since we can have the sensations without the objects usually corresponding to them, and since we suppose that the world persists through time, whereas our sensations don't, or don't in the same way, then we seem driven to say that our general knowledge of things isn't really knowledge, in the way that "I am having a red sensation now" is plausibly held to be a case of knowledge. The conjunction of "I am having sensations of roundness, red-and-white, fragrance, acidity" - the apple sensation - and "There is no apple there" is not selfcontradictory. I can't be mistaken about "I am having such-and-such sensations" but I can be mistaken in affirming the existence of something that I ordinarily take these sensations to be signs of. Our judgments of our immediate sensations are true without qualification; our judgments of existence don't go beyond a high probability.

Is there anything else we can be certain about? Yes; we can be certain of the truth of the conclusions of *demonstrative* arguments, where the conclusions may be said to be entailed by the premises, the starting-points, of the argument, as in Euclid, or as in those conclusions that follow from our understanding of the meaning of the words we use, as in "All bachelors are unmarried men." But conclusions that rest upon induction, upon the collection of examples, upon measurement and observation, can never reach beyond a practical certainty, which is no certainty at all if our standard of certainty is set by those subjects which admit of formal demonstration. So that all generalizations that rest upon observation and experience, such as "All men are mortal" and "No horse speaks French," are in this special sense uncertain.

Now, these are indeed the philosophical views Newman took for granted, and much of his writing is given over to using these views to overcome, polemically, his opponents, or to propound puzzles that seem important for Catholics to solve, and to try to solve them;

this latter enterprise is what lies behind so much of the *Grammar of Assent*. I am not concerned with the validity or otherwise of the arguments used to support the empiricist position. I think it is mistaken, and grossly mistaken, though I see how seductive it is, and why. And although I think its tendency, philosophically, has been to tempt inquirers into a maze of sophistry and illusion, I suspect that in the case of Newman its consequences are somewhat different. Empiricism seemed to chime in with tendencies of his mind and character that were native to him, or at least very early established, and to startle him into fresh thoughts about old questions, above all in the *Grammar*.

I won't spend much time in documenting Newman's philosophical views. I have already done this, as I have explained, and no one has seriously challenged my interpretation. Perhaps I should simply give a few examples from the *Notebook*. (It is true, he writes concerning these papers: "What I write, I do not state dogmatically, but categorically, this is, in investigation, nor have I confidence enough in what I have advanced to warrant publication." But it seems to be plain enough from what he did publish, from *The Arians* to the *Grammar*, that he drew his working philosophy, his habitual ways of looking at questions, from the school of Locke and Hume.)

I have a sensation of colours and forms - this is one thing. I have a persuasion that these colours and forms convey to me the presence &c. of external objects - this is a second thing. I have said that the sensation is not an object of faith, but of consciousness - but the second is an object of faith.¹²

This is the position I have already sketched: certainty belongs to the sensation, judgments about the existence of objects are matters of belief. The following is an even stronger statement to the effect that we do not perceive bodies:

What is internal to the mind is an object of consciousness, which external things are not.¹³

Here is how he begins a sketch of a work in the philosophy of religion, a work that was of course never written, though the *Grammar* is a partial realization of this long-nourished project:

In most departments of writing, to speak of the self is egotistical - not so in metaphysics. In it the writer cannot propose to do more than record his own opinions, the phenomena to which he ap-

peals and the principles which he assumes being within his own breast.... His hermit spirit dwells in his own sphere.¹⁴

This last sentence could serve as an epigraph to any essay on Newman's characteristic mentality. It is not so much a thesis in philosophy, though this is what it professes to be here, as a summary account of how Newman takes his own inwardness.

Finally, to illustrate Newman's sense of the limitations of philosophical or rational inquiry in religious matters, there is a passage written two years before his death:

To attempt to go beyond (Faith) by our Reason is like a schoolboy going "out of bounds"; it is going into a wild deserted, hopeless region, "*ad terram tenebrosam, et ad terram miseriae, ubi umbra est mortis, et nullus ordo, sed sempiternus horror inhabitat.*"¹⁵

This is Job 10:21, 22, in the Vulgate. A rough translation would be "a land of darkness and misery and of the shadow of death, a land of chaos and everlasting horror." The point, I take it, is that Newman, for all his great abilities in analysis and interpretation, was in the end struck by the perils of too facile a confidence in human reason not in the service of Revelation. But this sense of the darkness and danger of original philosophical inquiry is itself a consequence of what we might call the great myth of empiricism. Here we are within the worlds of our own individual consciousnesses. That there is a common world, with regularities and persistences through time, that is in part a home for mankind, in part a place of danger, all this cannot in practice be doubted; but that it is doubtable is a haunting thought that will never leave us once we have been through the destructive criticism of the empiricists, a criticism that takes away our simple confidence in the soundness of our common assumptions and judgments. We may say, too, that - and this is something that leaps at us from Newman's pages very often - the myth of empiricism enormously heightens the drama of our existence, reinforces our intermittent feeling that the world and people are much stranger than we commonly suppose. This is similar to what we may call the MOOREFFOC effect. There is a story told by Chesterton about how he is in a London eating place and he suddenly sees on the glass door this word in an unknown language, as though this were the Baghdad of the Arabian tales. Even when we come to see that MOOREFFOC is merely COFFEE-

ROOM seen in reverse, the reverberations of the experience remain.

Then there is the other aspect of empiricism about which I have said little so far: its association with hardheadedness and with scientific and historical inquiries. Here all propositions and hypotheses are brought to the test of experience, experience being by definition the only reliable thing we have. This, too, is a mark of Newman's mentality and accounts for what we have been calling his Benjamin Franklin side.

There is one astonishing instance of this in *The Philosophical Notebook*. It is a passage about Darwin and the theory of evolution. This is a note written in December 1863. We have to remember that *The Origin of Species* was published in 1859 and that it was at the 1860 meeting of the British Association that Bishop Wilberforce (commonly known as "soapy Sam") had made a conspicuous ass of himself by his foolish sneers at Darwin's theory. 16 But here is Newman, at a time when to be against Darwin was a badge of orthodoxy:

December 9, 1863.1. There is as much want of simplicity in the idea of the creation of distinct species as in that of the creation (of) trees in full growth (whose seed is in themselves), or of rocks with fossils in them. I mean that it is as strange that monkeys should be so like men, with no historical connection between them as that there should be the notion that there was no history... of facts by which fossil bones got into rocks...I will either go whole hog with Darwin or, dispensing with time and history altogether, hold, not only the theory of distinct species but that also of the creation of the fossil-bearing rocks.¹⁷

The thought in this passage was never known except to occasional correspondents, and I don't think the passage had even been read by anyone outside the Birmingham Oratory, until Dwight Culler came across it when he was preparing his masterly work *The Imperial Intellect* (1955). There is in the passage a combination of common sense with imagination: first, the obvious point that monkeys resemble men (perhaps this is the ground of that curious mixture of fascination and disgust that overcomes some of us in contemplating the monkey house at the zoo); then the leap of imagination, that places monkeys and men in the very long processes of history exemplified by the existence of the rocks with their fossils. It enabled Newman to pass by what was for

so many Christians a painful crisis of faith without any discomfort. This is all the more remarkable in that not many years before he wrote some things that would incline us to think of him as being what would today be called a fundamentalist. For instance, in the Dublin discourses on university education, he writes that "in the science of history, the preservation of our race in Noah's ark is an historical fact, which history never would arrive at without Revelation ..."18 Here we certainly hear the matter-of-fact Newman, not the romantic Newman, speaking, for there is no trace of irony in this comment.

All his life Newman was preoccupied with a question that seems philosophical in the extreme: the question of the existence of matter. It is sometimes hard to understand what is meant by a denial of, or a skepticism about, the existence of matter. A modern philosopher argued that philosophers who have denied the existence of matter have not wished to deny that under our trousers we wear underpants. But if they have not wanted to deny this, what is it they are denying? (Similarly, philosophers who have denied the existence of time have not, I take it, wished to deny that before my breakfast I shaved and that after my breakfast I took a walk.) At any rate, we can see that Newman's doctrine that we are acquainted only with the contents of our consciousness and that the existence of that of which the contents of our consciousness are signs is a matter of inference from that with which we are acquainted. An early expression of this view is to be found in his first major work, *The Arians of the Fourth Century*. He writes:

What are the phenomena of the external world, but a divine mode of conveying to the mind the realities of existence, individuality, and the influence of being on being, the best possible, though beguiling the imagination of most men with a harmless but unfounded belief in matter as distinct from the impressions of their senses?



Almost thirty years later, in discussing the doctrine of transubstantiation, he defends it on the ground that after all we have no idea what matter is:

What do I know of substance or matter? Just as much as the greatest philosophers, and that is nothing at all; and so much is this the case that there is a rising school of philosophy now which considers phenomena to constitute the whole of our knowledge in physics. The Catholic doctrine (i.e., on transubstantiation) ... deals with what no one on earth knows anything about, the material substances themselves.¹⁹

This seems a sad and broken-backed argument. If we have no way of saying what matter is, it seems difficult to suppose that we have the right to say that it is, to affirm its existence. Plainly, life would have been much simpler for Newman if he could have left this matter alone. But he couldn't. He took his original analysis of thinking and perceiving as so obviously true, that he couldn't abandon what seems such a straightforward implication of this analysis: that matter lies behind what we are acquainted with and as such can't be a matter of direct knowledge. It seemed, too, to be in a way congruent with one of the most distinctive Tractarian beliefs, one shared above all by Newman and Keble: that the world is sacramental through and through; that sensible phenomena constitute a Divine language, a system of signs to be read by us in proportion to our holiness. There is an obvious affinity here with the Wordsworth of the *Prelude* and *Tintern Abbey*. Newman's own literary tastes went with his Benjamin Franklin side: he liked Dryden, Crabbe, Thackeray; but when the pressure of emotion increases and when he attempts stammeringly to say something of the mysteries of Revelation, he turns out to be a romantic after all?

A determination to speak out in the defense of common sense presides over the writing of the *Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (1870), though, as we shall see, the necessity to defend common sense springs from the supposed strength of the empiricist account of knowledge. (These will be my last illustrations. Had I wished to illustrate the commonsensical side of Newman in the field of quasi-political leadership, I should have examined his *Letter to the Duke of Norfolk* (1875) in which he defends the doctrine which had been so commanding in his own life, the supremacy of conscience, in the last analysis, over all political and ecclesiastical authorities. I should have argued that here we find heroic common sense).

Earlier I said that, according to the empiricist

account, truth belongs to the immediate judgment of sensation of the "I see a red patch" or "I feel a sharp pain" variety. And that truth in the conclusions of arguments can be guaranteed only by strict demonstration, in which the conclusions are entailed by the premises, as in Euclid or as in those conclusions whose truth is guaranteed by the meaning of the words used ("all bachelors are unmarried men"). This is, roughly, to say that certainty attaches only to the conclusion of arguments in the fields of formal logic and mathematics. About other matters - that is, all the matters that concern us as social, active, curious, feeling beings, all that is important in our lives - there can't be certainty that is more than a practical certainty, something we take as certain because without it we can't get on with the business of living. This is why Hume is able in the end to overcome the melancholy into which skepticism tends to plunge him: "Nature" doesn't allow us to stay skeptical; the melancholy is soon cured by playing cards or backgammon or conversing comfortably with a friend.

This had always been one of Newman's persuasions - I say "persuasions," for it isn't an argument. Hume wrote of the skeptic that "he must assent to the principle concerning the existence of body, tho' he cannot pretend by any argument of philosophy to maintain its veracity. Nature has not left this to his choice, and has doubtless esteemed it an affair of too great importance to be trusted to our uncertain reasonings and speculations."²¹

Newman echoes this in Tract 85: "Nature certainly does give sentence against scepticism, against doubt . . . against a critical, cold, investigating temper, the temper of what are called shrewd, clear-headed, hard-headed men"²² and in the Grammar he returns to the same theme, quoting from an early work, "The Tamworth Reading Room" (1841), originally a set of letters published in *The Times*, such passionate statements as the following: "... science has ... little of a religious tendency; deductions have no power of persuasion. The heart is commonly reached, not through the reason, but through the imagination, by means of direct impressions, by the testimony of facts and events, by history, by description. Persons influence us, voices melt us, looks subdue us, deeds inflame us. Many a man will live and die upon a dogma; no man will be a martyr for a conclusion."²³ Again: "Logic makes but a sorry rhetoric with the multitude; first shoot round corners, and you may not despair of converting by a syllogism. .. man is not a reasoning animal; he is a seeing, feeling, contemplating, acting animal."²⁴ These are

fighting words, designed to cheer us up, as of course they do. What they say is that in practice the conclusions of demonstrative arguments do not interest us very much, do not move us; whereas considerations that, reduced to propositional form, fall short of demonstrative force, may nevertheless, put forward by persons we admire or in tones of voice that excite us, lead us to do and sometimes to die. Indeed, he goes on to say: "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."²⁵

We may allow that Newman is describing how in fact men come to be converted or confirmed in their allegiance to this set of principles or that. But we are not by this argument convinced that what we do and become in our encounter with influential persons, melting voices, subduing looks and inflaming deeds is necessarily what we ought to do or to be. We have in our time come across too many demonic persons who exactly fit the description given by Newman but whom to follow was - is - quite certainly to fall to evil. By itself, this argument simply shows the unpersuasiveness of purely formal arguments. A demonstrative Christianity would be a cold affair.

In the *Grammar* Newman wants to vindicate the reasonableness of belief both for the Christian and for the ordinary men living in the world, who may be a Christian or may be not. His difficulty arises from his starting point: that certainty seems to belong to demonstrative argument only; that what we might broadly call factual beliefs always fall short of the standard set by the conclusions of formal arguments. He rightly says that "There are many truths in concrete matters, which no one can demonstrate, yet everyone unconditionally accepts."²⁶ He instances:

We are sure beyond all hazard of mistake, that our own self is not the only being existing; that there is an external world; that it is a system with parts and a whole, a universe carried on by laws; and that the future is affected by the past ... that the earth, considered as a phenomenon, is a globe ... that there are really existing cities on definite sites, which go by the names of London, Paris, Florence, and Madrid.²⁷

Our assent to these propositions is no less absolute than our assent to Pythagoras' theorem. This everyone, including the skeptical philosopher, will accept. We couldn't carry on our lives without confidence in such

matters. Such is the verdict of common sense. But if it is conceivable - that is, an account may be offered that is not self-contradictory - that the opposite is true in a given case, do we have a right to give an absolute assent? Isn't it rather that we give our assent to the facts of common sense because it is, practically speaking, too difficult to do anything else? But is this good enough? After all, it seemed at one time a matter of common sense that the earth was unmoving and that the sun moved round it.

Newman never quite saw his way through this tangle of difficulties. We are inclined simply to say that he is in the tradition of Augustine and Anselm. *Credo ut intelligam* is the pervading maxim of his thought and to love the truth, and thus to believe or to move towards belief, is to be filled with the Divine love. Again, we may see in him an anticipation of the Kierkegaardian doctrine of the leap of faith, a leap which presupposes a cognitive gap, as it were, between what we know and what we are called upon to believe. There is something in this, too. In a sermon on the immortality of the soul he said:

So great a thing is it to understand that we have souls, that the knowing it, taken in connection with the results, is all one with being serious, i.e., truly religious. To discern our immortality is necessarily connected with fear and trembling and repentance, in the case of every Christian.²⁸

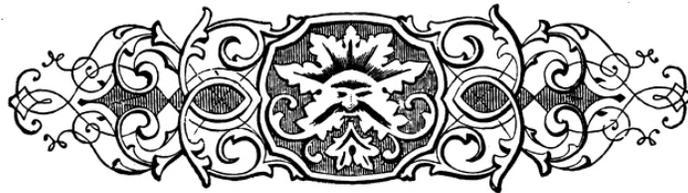
Philosophically, however, Newman's merit lies in his tending, in the *Grammar*, not towards a solution of the problem he propounds, but towards the area within which will be found a way of avoiding those presuppositions which constitute the problem of the connections between knowledge and belief as we receive them from the empiricist tradition.

It seems absurd to say that it is only a matter of high probability that Britain is an island or that men die when their heads are chopped off or that on the tiny stage of the solar system moving bodies "obey" Newtonian laws. That is, he sees that there are many certainly true empirical statements and that they have a logically crucial role in our discourse about the world. He sees that the way out of the difficulties of skepticism is to reconsider the role in discourse of empirical propositions. (Of course, this is one aspect of what Kant did.) "... the questions that we raise and our *doubts* depend on the fact that some propositions are exempt from doubt, and are as it were like hinges on which those turn."²⁹ Thus Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein's argument, to advance

a rude sketch of it, is that for there to be discourse about the world at all there must be some propositions about which it makes no sense to ask for a justification. "I cannot say that I have good grounds for the opinion that cats do not grow on trees or that I have a father and a mother."³⁰ Since, therefore, doubts are expressed in discourse, and since the concept of doubt can exist only where there are propositions about which no doubt can exist, the doubt about all empirical propositions which the empiricists suppose possible has in fact no sense.

What the empiricists did, and this was right, was to notice the logical distinction between two classes of propositions: those that can be reduced to tautologies and other propositions that are guaranteed in virtue of their form, and those that are factual (or synthetic). But to proceed from the (logical) remark that all synthetic propositions are doubttable in virtue of their form, that is, propositions negating them are not self-contradictory, to the (substantial) conclusion that all synthetic propo-

sitions are therefore doubtful, is to misunderstand the logic of the language. It is a refusal to play the game of language at all. It draws its seductiveness from our pushing round and round the board linguistic counters that seem to have their ordinary value. Newman was unique at that period - and here is superior to Mill (who was of course much more talented as philosopher) - in beginning to see where the problem was to be located. It was through his still being caught in the webs of empiricism that he thought the matter could best be put as one that concerned the characteristics of human faculties: how men in fact reason outside the classroom and where their real interests are in question. Newman had been wrestling with the problems discussed in the Grammar from very early in his intellectual life, perhaps from its uncertain beginning in childhood. He didn't solve these problems; he did better, though, than anyone else - he saw just where on the map of discourse the critical areas are. And in showing us where to look he was indeed an apostle of common sense.



NOTES

1David Newsome, *The Wilberforces and Henry Manning* (Cambridge: Mass. 1966), p. 186.

2*Apologia pro Vita Sua*, edited by Martin J. Svaglic (Oxford, 1967), p. 16.

3Ibid., p. 18.

4Ibid., 42.

5Here Froude may have in mind, as a parallel instance, a very different man, namely Cromwell, as portrayed by his friend Thomas Carlyle. 272-279.

6*Short Studies in Great Subjects*, Vol. IV (London, 1894), pp.

7*Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman*, vol. XXV, pp. 326, 327.

8See "Newman and Empiricism", in *The Night Battle* (London and Baltimore, 1962), and "Newman and the Empiricist Tradition", in *The Rediscovery of Newman*, edited by John Coulson and A. M. Allchin (London, 1967).

9*Apologia*, p. 158.

10*Treatise of Human Nature*, Introduction.

11James Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson* (Everyman Library, 1906), vol. 1, p. 292.

12*The Philosophical Notebooks of John Henry Newman*, edited by Edward Sillem and revised by A. J. Boekrad (Louvain, 1970), vol. II, p. 37.

13Ibid., p. 41.

14Ibid, p. 87.

15Ibid, p. 197. Newman's philosophical quality comes out in a later entry in which he begins to see that it isn't at all so clear that we know, always and infallibly, just what the object of consciousness is. He writes, "I may be puzzled what my present feeling is." He doesn't see how devastating this may be for his general position, but his noting the difficulty is enough (ibid., p. 79).

16Wishing to deny the derivation of man from the ape, he wondered aloud “if any one were willing to trace his descent through an ape as his grandfather, would he be willing to trace his descent similarly on the side of his grandmother?” Standish Meacham, Lord Bishop: *The Life of Samuel Wilberforce* (Cambridge: Mass., 1970), p. 216. It was this piece of facetiousness that caused Huxley to murmur, “the Lord hath delivered him into my hands” and to pronounce his celebrated rebuke.

17Notebook, p. 158.

18John Henry Newman, *Pie Idea of a University*, edited with introduction and notes by I. T. Ker (Oxford, 1976), p. 73.

19*Apologia*, p. 215.

20He was taxed by a correspondent with denying, in the *Apologia*, the existence of matter. He replied: “I have not meant...to deny the existence of matter. You are right in considering such denial would be inconsistent with our doctrine. But I am not therefore prepared to say that the phenomena which presents themselves to us are more than a particular mode in which the existence of matter is brought home to us, and as little to be identified with matter as the two cards of a stereoscope are identified with the actual image which they present to my eye at the point of sight...; all I mean to say is that to distinguish between phenomena, and matter, is not to deny the existence of matter,” letter of the 23 May, 1865 to James MacIvor, in *Letter and Diaries*, vol. XXI, p. 474.

21*A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. Selby-Biggs (Oxford, 1896), p. 187.

22*Tracts for the Times*, No. 85, “Lecture on the Scripture Proof of the Doctrines of the Church” (London, 1840), p. 72.

23*An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (London, 1906 [1870]), pp. 92, 93.

24*Ibid.*, p. 94.

25*Ibid.*, p. 95.

26*Grammar*, p. 160.

27*Ibid.*, p. 177.

28*Parochial Sermons*, fourth edition (London, 1843), vol. I, pp. 19, 20.

29Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, ed. Anscombe and von Wright, trans. by Denis Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford, 1969), p. 44.

30*Ibid.*, p.36e.