

COR AD COR LOQUITUR:
THE PHILOSOPHICAL PERSONALISM OF JOHN HENRY NEWMAN

by

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John Henry Newman has been called the “pioneer of a new philosophy of the individual person and the personal life.”¹ This statement captures Newman’s propensity towards principles usually associated with 20th century philosophical personalism: a firm commitment to the person and to the idea that personal experience should be the central starting point of any philosophical system. This study analyzes Newman’s personalism in relation to the personalism of Max Scheler, Dietrich Von Hildebrand, and Karol Wojtyła under five primary aspects: 1) the irreducibility of the person, (2) the importance of the affective sphere of the person, (3) the viability of the conscience as a guide to truth, (4) the importance of informal inference and (5) the importance of personal relationships and intersubjectivity. In explicating these ideas, it will become apparent that Newman has a deep respect for the interior, affective life of the person, and he believes that these interior sentiments and decisions proceeding from them can be justified without exterior or explicit proof. This leaves Newman open to the charge of subjectivism, which has been leveled at him by Jay Newman (of no relation). The second portion of this study will engage Jay Newman as an interlocutor, showing that his charge of subjectivism is untenable upon a careful examination of Newman’s thought. Newman will be further

¹ *Philosophical Notebook of John Henry Newman* (Louvain: Nauwelaerts Publishing House, 1961), I: 250.

freed from the charge of subjectivism when his thought is contrasted with the thought of William James, who can be rightly understood as a subjectivist.

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PREFACE

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Abbreviations

All John Henry Newman's work will be cited from the uniform Longmans, Green, and Co.'s 1909 edition, using the abbreviations that follow. All works can be found at www.newmanreader.org, a free online depository of Newman's collected works sponsored by the National Institute for Newman Studies in Pittsburgh.

Add. – *Addresses to Cardinal Newman and His Replies*

Apol. – *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*

DAMC – *Discourses Addressed to Mixed Congregations*

DD – *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*

GA – *An Essay in Aid of A Grammar of Assent*

HS – *Historical Sketches*

Idea – *The Idea of a University*

MD – *Meditations and Devotions*

OUS – *Oxford University Sermons*

PPS – *Parochial and Plain Sermons*

SVO – *Sermons Preached on Various Occasions*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Between 1826 and 1843, John Henry Newman, (d. 1890) delivered what he regarded as his “best and most valuable thoughts”² to the University of Oxford’s parish church. This series of 15 “discourses,” as Newman called them, later known collectively as the *Oxford University Sermons*, focused on the relationship between faith and reason, and are perhaps the “most ingenious and philosophically fertile of all of Newman’s sermons, perhaps even of all his writings.”³ Yet Newman’s own reflections indicate that he thought them the finest thing he had written not because of their rigorous analysis of abstract ideas, or “philosophical fertility,” but because they “bear immediately upon the most *intimate* and practical religious questions.”⁴ Newman’s attribution of the remarkable success of a series of discourses to their ability to speak to something intimate—personal, familiar, experiential—is reflective of his wider outlook. Throughout all his works, Newman aims to speak to the heart of the reader (or listener, in some cases) to that which is personal, and not just appeal to the intellect. Referencing Paley’s

² Wilfred Ward, *The Life of John Henry Cardinal Newman*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1912), 59.

³ Mary Katherine Tillman, introduction to *Fifteen Sermons Preached Before the University of Oxford between 1826 and 1843*, by John Henry Newman (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), ix.

⁴ To Mrs. J. Mozley in *Letters and Correspondence of John Henry Newman During His Life in the English Church*, 2 vols., vol. 1, Anne Mozley (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1903). Italics mine.

teleological argument for the existence of God, Newman writes, “I say plainly I do not want to be converted by a smart syllogism; if I am asked to convert others by it, I say plainly I do not care to overcome their reason *without touching their hearts*.”⁵

This desire for the touching of hearts guides all of Newman’s work, even his most technical piece, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*. The most mature expression of Newman’s epistemology, the *Grammar* is the product of decades of refinement of the ideas in the *Oxford University Sermons*. Between these two works (as well as a few others), Newman defends the viability of religious belief against the rationalists, those who want to make religion into a series of tidy syllogisms, and want to neglect the importance of affective experience, persuading only the intellectual faculties of persons. Newman conceives faith as personal and intimate, as more than just an abstract recognition of some series of propositions. Faith is a relationship of trust and a process seated within the depths of the human person, as aided by the conscience. Man encounters the personhood of God, who “sets up His throne within us, and enables us to obey Him...and to know the voice of God.”⁶ In Newman, there is a deep respect for the interior life of the person, in both its cognitive and emotional aspects. Newman wants to maintain that the beliefs that arise from the interior life, including the affective life, can be epistemically justified, even without direct or explicit evidence.

This led late 20th century analytic philosopher Jay Newman⁷ to characterize John Henry Newman’s *Grammar of Assent* as a text that defends religious subjectivism.⁸ For Jay Newman,

⁵ *GA*, 425. Italics mine.

⁶ *PPS*, IV: 312.

⁷ Jay Newman has no direct relation to John Henry Newman.

⁸ *The Mental Philosophy of John Henry Newman* (Waterloo, Ontario, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1986).

John Henry Newman is not an *anti*-rationalist, but an *ir*-rationalist. He neglects the importance of the intellect and appeals only to the heart, thus falling into subjectivism. But, as I will argue, this characterization is a mistake. Jay Newman fails to understand John Henry Newman’s work in a comprehensive way. In reality, John Henry Newman is a far cry from being a religious subjectivist, instead demanding an unwavering objectivity in matters of religion. Newman’s philosophy is based on an epistemological realism, and has what Crosby calls a “theocentric character”⁹—it accounts for objective realities about God outside oneself. This focus on a stern objectivity in religious matters—as well as moral matters—shows that rather than being a religious subjectivist or an irrationalist, John Henry Newman shows a proclivity towards principles usually associated with philosophical personalism.

Although personalism developed during the nineteenth century and especially the twentieth, it has direct roots perhaps as far back as Kant’s practical formulation of the Categorical Imperative in the *Groundwork*.¹⁰ However, personalism has become a widely divergent series of traditions. As such, it is difficult to make many meaningful statements that apply to all philosophies identifying as ‘personalist.’ This paper will focus more narrowly on the strand of philosophical personalism typified in the thought of Max Scheler (d. 1928), Dietrich von Hildebrand (d. 1977), and Karol Wojtyła (d. 2005). This paper will draw on principles from

⁹ John F. Crosby has extensively developed an understanding of Newman’s philosophy as “theocentric” in his John F. Crosby, *The Personalism of John Henry Newman* (Catholic University of America Press, 2014). I am indebted to him for this scholarship.

¹⁰ In *Love and Responsibility*, Wojtyła cites Kant as a source for his development of the personalistic norm, though it is modified: “Whenever a person is the object of your activity, remember that you may not treat that person only as the means to an end, as an instrument, but must allow for the fact that he or she, too, has, or at least should have, distinct personal ends.” Trans. William Collins Son & Co. Ltd. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press. 1981) 27-28.

these three philosophers to illustrate the fundamental contentions of a personalist tradition that focuses on the human person and the person's experience as the central organizing principle of philosophical systemization. For the personalists, modern philosophical systems that reduce the human person to a mechanistic or determined object violate the dignity of the human person. Rather than existing only as a mechanistic or determined object, the person exists as a free, unrepeatable subject. They draw attention to the sensations of the 'heart' of the person and the relevance of lived experiences. The personalists believe that human affectivity has been treated like a "proverbial stepson"¹¹ in the history of philosophy, being understood as simply irrational passions or near-useless sentimentality. Personalism restores human affectivity as a substantial part of a philosophical anthropology, recognizing that any complete philosophy of the human person demands affectivity be treated as more than just irrational passions. These subjective elements of personalism are not the entirety of a sound philosophical system however—there is still a serious demand on the human person to recognize objective truths. As Crosby notes, "This zeal for truth, and this abhorrence of the relativistic dissolution of truth are absolutely fundamental."¹² This paper will attempt to justify such a statement, by capturing John Henry Newman's distinctly *personalist*, not subjectivist, philosophy, thus refuting Jay Newman's analysis of John Henry Newman's philosophy as subjectivist.

Chapter Two will put Newman's thought in contact with the personalist tradition, focusing on five main elements of Newman's personalism: (1) the irreducibility of the person, (2) the importance of the affective sphere of the person, (3) the viability of the conscience as a guide to truth, (4) the importance of informal inference and, (5) the importance of personal

¹¹ Dietrich Von Hildebrand. *The Heart: An Analysis of Human and Divine Affectivity*. (St. Augustine's Press, 2007.)

¹² *Personalism of John Henry Newman*, 2.

relationships and intersubjectivity. This chapter forms the philosophical core of the paper, and is an attempt to capture the distinctly personalist spirit of Newman's philosophy.

Chapter Three addresses concerns that might arise after studying Newman's personalism, namely, does it fall into a dangerous kind of religious subjectivism? Chapter Three will primarily engage Jay Newman as an interlocutor, using his extended critique of the *Grammar of Assent*. In response, I refute Jay Newman's critique of John Henry's epistemology by showing the stern objectivity that Newman manifests in the *Grammar* and his other works. Chapter Three attempts to further exonerate Newman from the charge of subjectivism by way of contrast with William James. James, a father of American Pragmatism, attempted to address some of the same questions as Newman. It might appear, *prima facie*, as though James and Newman have a great deal in common: an emphasis on persons acting and not just thinking, a resistance to skepticism, a respect for the importance of human affectivity, and a resistance to the common, but misguided, emphasis on the rational faculties of persons. Chapter Three shows that James and Newman were much more different than a first reading might suggest. Unlike Newman, James *did* fall into a radical subjectivism, of roughly the variety that Jay Newman interprets Newman as holding. By drawing out the subjectivism of James, Newman will be further insulated from the charge of subjectivism.

My hope in this paper is twofold: I hope to contribute to Newman Studies by capturing the harmony between Newman and a few of the 20th century personalists. I also hope to show that Newman's esteem for the personal, the intimate, and the experiential does not make him a subjectivist, but positions him to speak keenly on issues present in contemporary philosophy, and the culture at large, today.

2.0 NEWMAN AND “THE WORLDVIEW OF PERSONALISM”¹³

Edward Sillem, in his philosophical analysis of John Henry Newman’s thought, claims that Newman stands “at the threshold of the new age...the pioneer of a new philosophy of the individual person and Personal Life.”¹⁴ My aim in this chapter is to explore Sillem’s claim by giving a broad overview of personalist philosophy, and bringing these themes of the “individual person and Personal Life” into the world of Newman’s thought, which is readily able to receive them. While I hope to elucidate Newman’s personalist thought, I do not intend to show here that we can find a parallel in Newman’s thought to every major personalist theme, or vice-versa. To this end, I also hope to avoid over-simplifying Newman’s thought: I do not intend to simply label Newman a “Personalist” and ignore the further subtlety of his thought. Rather, I hope to capture here what I think can be fairly called Newman’s “personalist spirit”—a spirit that permeates his thoughts in his sermons, essays, and his very character and behavior.

Personalist philosophy can be found in works of 20th century thinkers like Martin Buber (d. 1965), Edith Stein (d. 1942), Emmanuel Mounier (d. 1950), Romano Guardini (d. 1969), and the founders of so-called American Personalism, Borden Bowne (d. 1910), and George Holmes

¹³ This chapter draws its title from Bengtsson’s, *The Worldview of Personalism: Origins and Early Development*, Oxford Theological Monographs (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

¹⁴ Edward Sillem, *Philosophical Notebook of John Henry Newman* (Louvain: Nauwelaerts Publishing House, 1961), I: 250.

Howison (d. 1916). Augustine, Kierkegaard, Kant all had their own “personalist spirit” that was later developed explicitly by these thinkers. Personalism also is indebted to the personalist spirit of Leibniz, who saw each person as an entire universe in miniature. However, Personalism as a philosophical movement became so varied and diverse that in 1947 Jacques Maritain wrote, “at times, [personalist doctrines] have nothing more in common than the word ‘person.’”¹⁵ Therefore, I do not intend to account for all the philosophical movements that consider themselves to be “personalist,” which span across various religious, cultural, and philosophical commitments, but intend to focus my work here on one cohesive school of philosophical personalism that stretched over the twentieth century, and is best embodied by Max Scheler (d. 1928), Dietrich Von Hildebrand (d. 1977), and Karol Wojtyła (d. 2005). Scheler deeply influenced both Von Hildebrand and Wojtyła, and was a philosopher of the first rate. In fact, just after Scheler’s death, Martin Heidegger said that Scheler was “the strongest philosophical force in modern Germany, nay, in contemporary Europe and even in contemporary philosophy as such,” and later stated, “there is no one among today’s serious philosophers who is not essentially indebted to him.”¹⁶ Scheler and Von Hildebrand were good friends, and Scheler held Von Hildebrand in high esteem from the time Von Hildebrand began his university studies in 1906.¹⁷ Scheler so deeply influenced Von Hildebrand that Von Hildebrand’s conversion to Catholicism was greatly motivated by Scheler. Karol Wojtyła, who, besides being a bishop and a

¹⁵ Thomas Williams and Jan Bengtsson, "Personalism," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward Zalta (2013).

¹⁶ Martin Heidegger, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, trans. Michael Hein (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1984), 50-51.

¹⁷ John Henry Crosby, "Biography of Dietrich Von Hildebrand," *Quaestiones Disputatae* 3, no. 2 (2013).

pope, was a serious philosopher who wrote a number of strictly philosophical works and has, in fact, been called “perhaps the greatest twentieth-century personalist,” and was also deeply influenced by Scheler.¹⁸ In fact, his habilitation thesis was entitled, “Reevaluation of the Possibility of Founding a Catholic Ethic on the Ethical System of Max Scheler,” and Wojtyła so valued Scheler’s work that he translated Scheler’s *Formalism in Ethics* into his native Polish. These three philosophers, while they do not agree on every philosophical point, do form a cohesive strand of personalism. By studying their thought, we can come to understand a certain personalist worldview and see how Newman can be viewed through a personalist lens.

For Scheler, Von Hildebrand, and Wojtyła, personalist philosophy is one that takes the human person, and the person’s conscious experience, to be the center of philosophical investigation. Personalism emerged in response to various modern philosophies that were seen as misunderstanding the human person—these impersonalist philosophies, such as Enlightenment rationalism, pantheism, Hegelian absolute idealism, individualism, collectivism, and determinism were viewed as wrong and dangerous. Against such philosophies, personalism attempts to strike a balance between communitarianism and individualism, emphasizing the distinctiveness and subjectivity of each human person while also recognizing their need to discover themselves through community. Personalism also reasserts the dignity of the human person against materialism and other reductionist philosophies.

In the following five sections, I will attempt to develop these ideas in order to give a more complete understanding of the personalism embraced by Scheler, Von Hildebrand, and Wojtyła, and to show how Newman’s thought relates to each. Section one will cover the nature

¹⁸ Jan Olof Bengtsson, *The Worldview of Personalism: Origins and Early Development*, Oxford Theological Monographs (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 281.

of the human person as free and unique, and possessing an irreducible subjectivity, drawing primarily on Wojtyła's important essay "Subjectivity and the Irreducible in Man."¹⁹ Section two will explore the importance of affectivity, with special attention toward Dietrich Von Hildebrand's *The Heart*²⁰ and Newman's distinctions between notional and real apprehension and assent. Newman's personalism stands dynamically opposed to rationalism—in which the affective sphere is neglected in favor of the intellectual sphere. This opposition colors all of the personalist themes in Newman, and is essential to understanding Newman properly. Section three will address Newman's understanding of the conscience and its connections to personalist philosophy, especially as an alternative to the "rationalist" proofs for the existence of God. Section four covers the role of implicit reason in Newman's epistemology and the importance of justified beliefs that do not have formal explicit proofs. The final section will focus on Newman's "Personal Influence, the Means of Propagating the Truth," and the personalist importance of personal relationships and intersubjectivity. Each section will draw on one of the fundamental principles of personalist thought: the reality and experience of the *person*, as the unique, irreducible, social being that the person is, should be the center of philosophical investigation.

¹⁹ Karol Wojtyła, "Subjectivity and the Irreducible in Man," in *The Human Being in Action: The Irreducible Element in Man, Part 2: Investigations at the Intersection of Philosophy and Psychiatry, Analecta Husserliana: The Yearbook of Phenomenological Research* (Boston: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1978).

²⁰ Dietrich Von Hildebrand, *The Heart: An Analysis of Human and Divine Affectivity* (St. Augustine's Press, 2007).

2.1 THE PERSON AS AN IRREDUCIBLE SUBJECT

We live in a universe with a diameter of about 91 billion light years (a figure which is rapidly increasing)²¹ containing over 100 billion galaxies²² and about a billion billion stars.²³ We seem to be a small, meaningless speck in the inconceivably large mass of the cosmos. Stephen Hawking drearily states that we are “just a chemical scum on a moderate-sized planet, orbiting round a very average star in the outer suburb of one among a hundred billion galaxies.”²⁴ Bertrand Russell regarded Earth as “the petty planet on which our bodies impotently crawl,” later stating:

Blind to good and evil, reckless of destruction, omnipotent matter rolls on its relentless way; for Man, condemned to-day to lose his dearest, to-morrow himself to pass through the gate of darkness...²⁵

When we understand the human person in relation to the size of cosmos, like Russell or Hawking, the human person can seem “utterly insignificant.”²⁶ While this particular way of conceiving of the person is not uncommon, the personalists resist it, because this kind of understanding fails to capture the distinctive, irreducible nature of the human person.

²¹ Itzhak Bars and John Terning, *Extra Dimension in Space and Time* (New York: Springer, 2010), 27.

²² Glen Mackie, "To See the Universe in a Grain of Taranaki Sand," Swinburne University of Technology.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ 1995 interview with Ken Campbell on “Reality on the Rocks: Beyond our Ken.”

²⁵ Bertrand Russell, "A Free Man's Worship," (1903).

²⁶ Guy Kahane, "Our Cosmic Insignificance," *Noûs* 48, no. 4 (2014): 745.

2.1.1 Wojtyła on the Irreducible in the Human Being

It is upon this “irreducibility” in man that Karol Wojtyła focuses his essay, “Subjectivity and the Irreducible in Man.” Here, Wojtyła profiles two distinct ways of understanding the person. A *cosmological* understanding of man carries with it “the conviction of the reducibility of man to the level of the world.”²⁷ In this kind of understanding, man is understood as being *in the world*, at the level of the world, and made of the same “stuff” as the world. This cosmological understanding has its place, especially in the sciences, because it is aimed at understanding man in terms of the natural world. However, if we reduce man such that we have only this cosmological understanding of him, we might be tempted to think something like Stephen Hawking: we are “just a chemical scum on a moderate-sized planet.” In the cosmological understanding, persons are understood simply as objects that can be entirely understood by the methods of science.

But, for Wojtyła, this understanding is incomplete. Rather than reduce man to the cosmological understanding, we must complement the cosmological understanding with a second type of understanding: a *personalistic* type.²⁸ Wojtyła argues, “it is necessary to stop in the process of reduction which leads us in the direction of understanding man within the world (the cosmological type of understanding), *to be able to understand man in himself.*”²⁹ Understanding man in himself (the personalistic type of understanding) does not reduce man to the level of the world, but rather, recognizes that which is essentially human—that which *is irreducible to the level of the world*. This personalistic type of understanding “brings forth the

²⁷ Wojtyła, "Subjectivity and the Irreducible in Man," 108.

²⁸ Ibid., 111.

²⁹ Ibid. Italics are Wojtyła's.

incomparable and distinct character of man present in his innerness.”³⁰ It focuses on the subjectivity of man, which is a synonym of all that is irreducible in man.³¹ We can think here of man’s inner experience, his interior struggles and triumphs, and his understanding of himself as a self-determined actor, as well as many other interior experiences, that constitute his subjectivity. Because this sort of interiority is “invisible,” it cannot be understood by reducing man to the level of the world. It can only be “manifested and revealed,” not through philosophical abstraction, but by dwelling upon our “experience lived through.”³² This personalistic understanding makes it impossible to reduce man to “chemical scum,” and helps us to better appreciate his subjectivity. We each realize that we are individual actors—we discover our own “I” as the one who possesses and dominates ourselves.

2.1.2 Newman and the “Infinite Abyss of Existence”

Up to this point, I have emphasized Wojtyła’s resistance to understanding man only through a cosmological picture. He affirms the unique subjectivity of each human person, and the importance of recognizing the interior life of persons as distinctly irreducible. Just as Wojtyła resists the cosmological-only understanding of man, so too does Newman, even though he does not use that language. In “The Individuality of the Soul,” Newman focuses on the “distinct existence” of every man’s soul,³³ affirming that each person is a “whole and independent being,

³⁰ Peter Emmanuel Mara, "Understanding Man as a Subject and a Person: A Wojtyła Personalistic Interpretation of the Human Being," *KRITIKĒ* 1, no. 1 (2007): 87.

³¹ Wojtyła, "Subjectivity and the Irreducible in Man," 109.

³² *Ibid.*, 113.

³³ *PPS*, IV: 80.

as if there were no else in the world but he.”³⁴ Newman is focusing here on the subject—the distinct existence of each person. Like Wojtyła, Newman does not believe that this subjective experience can be understood by reducing the interior life of the person to the level of the world. While imagining surveying a busy town, Newman provides the following vivid imagery to emphasize this subjective experience of the individual:

... every being in that great concourse is his own centre and all things about him are but shades, but a "vain shadow," in which he "walketh and disquieteth himself in vain." He has his own hopes and fears, desires, judgments, and aims; he is everything to himself, and no one else is really any thing. No one outside of him can really touch him, can touch his soul, his immortality; he must live with himself for ever. He has a depth within him unfathomable, an infinite abyss of existence; and the scene in which he bears part for the moment is but like a gleam of sunshine upon its surface.³⁵

Newman’s sentiment that “no one outside of him can really touch him” shows a great reverence for the interior life of the person. Nobody can reduce the person from the outside without remainder—the person has a subtle interior subjectivity that escapes understanding in “worldly terms.” Newman perceives this interior subjectivity as creating “an infinite abyss of existence” within each person. This is how we avoid being paralyzed by the realization of our smallness in relationships to the cosmos; as subjects, we exist on a different sort of plane than the rest of the universe. We have an irreducible quality (the “infinite” cannot be reduced) to us that the universe, even in all of its 100 billion galaxies, in all its physical immensity, cannot swallow up.

2.1.3 Newman and the Relationship of the Sciences

We can also capture Newman’s perspective on the irreducibility of the human person when we consider his view on the relationship between the sciences. Man *does* become

³⁴ Ibid., 81.

³⁵ Ibid., 82-83.

swallowed up in the cosmos when he is only considered in his exterior aspects or through a purely physical analysis. But Newman is uniquely positioned to resist this interpretation because of his ideal of knowledge.

In *The Idea of a University*, Newman defends the importance of a liberal education, in which students study many disciplines. This kind of education helps them to obtain a more global picture of reality, as each individual science only provides only one aspect of reality. When the human person is the subject of study, she cannot be captured by just one science—say physics. We should not understand the person *only* as Newtonian mechanics might—as “matter in motion.” Although the human person is indeed “matter in motion” the person is not *only* that, and to give preference to physics (or any other natural science) in our pursuit of understanding the person would be a mistake:

...the Sciences, into which our knowledge may be said to be cast, have multiplied bearings one on another, and an internal sympathy, and admit, or rather demand, comparison and adjustment. They complete, correct, balance each other. This consideration, if well-founded, must be taken into account, not only as regards the attainment of truth, which is their common end, but as regards the influence which they exercise upon those whose education consists in the study of them. I have said already, that to give undue prominence to one is to be unjust to another; to neglect or supersede these is to divert those from their proper object. It is to unsettle the boundary lines between science and science, to disturb their action, to destroy the harmony which binds them together. Such a proceeding will have a corresponding effect when introduced into a place of education. There is no science but tells a different tale, when viewed as a portion of a whole, from what it is likely to suggest when taken by itself, without the safeguard, as I may call it, of others.³⁶

We see here then, an irreducibility of all of reality, including the person. Our world and the person is too complex and multifaceted for one science to understand all of it. It is only through the complete integration of the sciences—literature, poetry, theology, philosophy, and the natural

³⁶ *Idea*, 99-100. We can see a certain affinity for the personalism of Leibniz here in Leibniz’s idea of the *harmonia rerum*, wherein “perfection is the harmony of things.”

sciences—that we can obtain a more complete picture of man. In the cosmological understanding, there is a propensity to understand the person only in the context of the natural sciences.

Recall the line from Hawking: man is just a “chemical scum.” Such an understanding would arise if the physical sciences were the only sciences. But for Newman, other learned men “zealous for their own sciences, and rivals of each other” come together, adjusting their claims based on the contributions of the other sciences.³⁷ Philosophy and the other humane disciplines help to resist the reductionist picture of the person, and create a more holistic picture—which is *more accurate*. This multi-disciplinary approach helps to provide a “master of view of things,” instead of a merely physical view of things.³⁸ All significant aspects of a thing have to be taken seriously in our thinking about the thing (in this case the human person), and Newman captures this with his conception of the relationship between the sciences.

We see then two distinct areas in which Newman shows an appreciation for the “irreducible in man.” His perspective on that infinite abyss of existence and his refusal to allow any one intellectual approach to fully capture reality both indicate this. We can imagine the “hopes and fears, desires, judgments, and aims” that Newman describes as part of the infinite abyss of existence the very sort of things that Wojtyła describes as “absolutely interior.”³⁹ Newman discusses these sorts of interior sentiments often, and in the section that follows, I will develop Newman’s appreciation for the affective, and put it in contact with personalist philosophy, especially that of Von Hildebrand.

³⁷ *Idea*, 101.

³⁸ *Idea*, 109.

³⁹ Wojtyła, “Subjectivity and the Irreducible in Man,” 111.

2.2 REHABILITATING AFFECTIVITY

The philosophical personalists attempt to rehabilitate the philosophical status of human affectivity. Blaise Pascal, who always drew attention to the experience of the human person, focuses upon the heart in his *Pensées*: “The heart has its reasons, which reason does not know. We feel it in a thousand things.”⁴⁰ Similarly, Dietrich Von Hildebrand, building on the work of Scheler, provides a particularly keen rehabilitation in *The Heart*, which is a concise yet robust analysis of the affective qualities of both persons and God. Von Hildebrand believes that affectivity has been treated like a “proverbial stepson” in the history of philosophy.⁴¹ This section will first use Von Hildebrand’s thought to show why the philosophical neglect of human affectivity is so problematic. I will then attempt to show how, like Von Hildebrand, Newman understands the importance of affectivity, an understanding that manifests especially clearly in relation to notional and real apprehension and assent, which will draw us closer to understanding Newman’s personalist spirit.

2.2.1 Von Hildebrand and The Heart

In the opening chapter of *The Heart*, Von Hildebrand states clearly the overarching theme of his work:

It is high time we lifted the ban on the affective sphere and discovered its spiritual role. We must acknowledge the place which the heart holds in the human person—a place equal in rank to that of the will and the intellect.⁴²

⁴⁰ Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1958), 78.

⁴¹ Von Hildebrand, *The Heart: An Analysis of Human and Divine Affectivity*, 3.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 16.

To elevate the importance of “the heart” (which Von Hildebrand understands as both the root and center of a person’s affectivity⁴³) might seem like an error, as affective sensations can come and go independent of our free will. Von Hildebrand is very much aware of this, and even attempts to explain why most philosophers have relegated the importance of the heart and human affectivity to a state of contempt.⁴⁴

Von Hildebrand recognizes that most philosophers have dealt with personal affectivity only under the heading of “the passions.”⁴⁵ Dealing with affectivity under this heading allowed philosophers to focus on the “irrational and nonspiritual character” of affectivity, and thus not take it seriously as an essential part in understanding the rational human person. Von Hildebrand traces the neglect of the affective sphere, in part, to the unguineness of certain affective experiences. There is no parallel unguineness in the intellectual or volitional spheres of the person.⁴⁶ This unguineness can be rhetorical, in which a person inflates their affectivity—a sort of “affective boasting.” By exaggerating the affective response, focus moves from the object stimulating his response towards his exhibitionism.⁴⁷ As the occasion for his or her affective response fades into the background, he or she begins to look quite unreasonable: “Why is that person acting that way?” Additionally, philosophers can mischaracterize the affective sphere of

⁴³ Ibid., 20.

⁴⁴ It is worth noting that some modern thinkers have “elevated” the status of the heart for quite misguided reasons (I think here of Hume). As will become clear, Von Hildebrand views this sort of elevation as a mistake as well, and tries rather to find the appropriate balance between the rational and affective faculties.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 4.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 9.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 8-9.

the person as irrational when they witness an exaggerated sentimentality on the part of the actor—perverting the affective response into a mere emotionally stimulating state.⁴⁸

After detailing these and other reasons why philosophers have been driven to view the affectivity of the person as senseless passion, Von Hildebrand argues persuasively that this is unfair:

If it is understandable that the affective sphere is looked at with some suspicion because there are many forms of unguineness to be found within that sphere, it is not difficult to see that this suspicion gives rise to a typical prejudice, but while prejudices are often understandable psychologically, they are no less justifiable...From a philosophical point of view, there is no excuse for discrediting the affective sphere and the heart merely because these are exposed to so many perversions and deviations...should we look at the intellect with suspicion and mistrust because of the innumerable absurdities it has thought up, and because non-intellectual people who have never been touched by these absurdities have remained healthier than those who have been influenced by them?⁴⁹

For Von Hildebrand, we need to move beyond caricaturing human affectivity as merely the “feeling” associated with irrational passions, and come to recognize a certain hierarchy of affective responses. Bodily sensations, such as the pleasurable feeling arising from taking a warm bath, form the lowest level of human affectivity. Above these bodily sensations are psychic feelings (which might occur in relation to a bodily feeling), and which are *caused* rather than *motivated*, such as an alcohol induced euphoria. The highest feelings are spiritual feelings, which are the most powerful, and respond to objects only in which appropriate emotional responses are due.⁵⁰ These are distinctly intentional feelings. While bodily states can cause lower-level affective states, bodily states cannot cause spiritual feeling (although a spiritual feeling, like loving or hating, can certainly have bodily repercussions). Rather, there is a value-

⁴⁸ Ibid., 10.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 16.

⁵⁰ Robert Wood, "Dietrich Von Hildebrand on the Heart," *Quaestiones Disputatae* 3, no. 2 (2013): 111.

response to an object that is deserving of it, and valuing is always intentional.⁵¹ We might consider here love or hate—they have definite objects that they are responding to.

There is a certain mode of vision that comes with these spiritual experiences in which we recognize the value of the object, something that can only occur when we have a deep and noble heart.⁵² We need to have a properly ordered and functioning affective sphere in order for the “splendor and glory of the cosmos, its mysteries as well as its tragic features, its character as a valley of tears” to move us from simply an intellectual recognition of these things to “responses of joy, enthusiasm and love.”⁵³ As Wood comments on this spiritual seeing: “such seeing involves the whole person and not simply an abstractive intellect. Such seeing is the stuff of poetry. One could speak here of a vision.”⁵⁴

This sort of spiritual affectivity is part of the “irreducibility” we see in Wojtyła. When there is an “affective atrophy,” the person is deprived of what makes much of their life characteristically human. This atrophy can be seen when there is a hypertrophy of the intellect, in which an individual is “incapable of dropping the attitude of intellectual analysis, and thus cannot be affected by anything or give to anything an affective response of joy or sorrow, love or enthusiasm.”⁵⁵ Affective atrophy can also occur when there is a hypertrophy of “pragmatic

⁵¹ Von Hildebrand shows here a close affinity with Max Scheler, who develops the importance of value-response in his *Formalism*. See, in particular, 253-64. Max Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values*, trans. Manfred Frings and Roger Funk, Northwestern Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973).

⁵² Von Hildebrand, *The Heart: An Analysis of Human and Divine Affectivity* 15.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁵⁴ "Dietrich Von Hildebrand on the Heart," 111.

⁵⁵ Von Hildebrand, *The Heart: An Analysis of Human and Divine Affectivity* 55.

efficiency,” in which the person takes a utilitarian approach and he finds affective experience “superfluous and a waste of time.”⁵⁶ Finally, affective atrophy can occur when there is a hypertrophy of the will in which affective responses are looked at as compromising the goodness of the moral act (such as in Kant’s deontology), or in the case of a stoic who yearns to suppress affectivity.⁵⁷ In each case, the person misses much of the distinctly human experience. Von Hildebrand notes that, “in the affective sphere...the treasures of a man’s most individual life are stored. It is in the heart that the secret of a person is to be found; it is here that the most intimate word is spoken.”⁵⁸ To not be in touch with this is to live a sterile sort of life—one that misses much of the value of the distinctively human experience.

The involvement of “the whole person” that Von Hildebrand praises is essential to personalist thought, and we can see this emphasis quite clearly in Newman’s thought as well. Like Von Hildebrand, Newman resists the sterility of life when the affective sphere is seen as a non-essential part of the human experience. He was particularly troubled when this sort of sterility affected his Anglican Church, and Christianity was losing its influence over the people of England. He attempted to bring Christianity back to life by touching on the affective sphere of the person—to move “the whole person.”

2.2.2 Newman and the Importance of the Affective

We can see especially Newman’s emphasis on the “whole person” and the importance of affectivity when we examine Newman’s *Grammar of Assent*, and its distinction between real and

⁵⁶ Ibid., 56.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 57.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 58.

notional assent and apprehension. As a way of entering into this distinction, consider this thought from Newman:

I am far from denying the real force of the arguments in proof of a God, drawn from the general facts of human society and the course of history, but these do not warm me or enlighten me; they do not take away the winter of my desolation, or make the buds unfold and the leaves grow within me, and my moral being rejoice.⁵⁹

Newman does not doubt the form or content of these arguments in proof of a God, but he recognizes their inability to have a meaningful impact on the affective sphere of the human person. They do not move the whole person—the “moral being”—but only stimulate the intellect. A man does not die for an abstract notion, but rather for something he believes with the entirety of himself. In the *Grammar of Assent*, one of Newman’s most philosophically interesting points is the distinction between the notional and the real. Understanding this distinction will help us understand why arguments for the proof of a God do not take away Newman’s “winter of desolation.”

For Newman, we can apprehend a proposition either “notionally” or “really.” This distinction follows Newman’s taxonomy of propositions, which can be either “notional propositions” or “real propositions.” Notional propositions are those sorts where either one or both terms are common nouns, “as standing for what is abstract, general, and non-existing.”⁶⁰ These are propositions such as “man is an animal” or “to err is human, to forgive divine.” Real propositions are those propositions that are composed of singular nouns, and the terms are external to us. These are propositions such as “Philip was the father of Alexander,” and “the earth goes round the sun.”⁶¹ Corresponding to these two types of propositions are two modes of

⁵⁹ *Apol.* 247.

⁶⁰ *GA*, 29.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

apprehending propositions: notional, which might be called abstract, and real, which might be called concrete. Newman takes real apprehension to be a stronger mode of apprehending propositions, and is “more vivid and forcible...it *excites and stimulates the affections and passions*...Thus it indirectly brings about what the apprehension of large principles, of general laws, or moral obligations, never could effect.”⁶² Thus, in real apprehension, it is not just our intellect that is stimulated, but also our affective sphere. We experience a movement within our whole being, not just the mind, which is why Newman takes real apprehension to be “more vivid and forcible.”

Newman then applies this distinction between “notional” and “real” to assent. For Newman, assent is a mental assertion in which there is an absolute acceptance of a proposition without any conditions. As with apprehension, Newman takes real assent to be more powerful than notional assent. This is true in part because the objects of real assents are things, whereas the objects of notional assents are notions. The objects of real assent (“things”) are “confessedly more impressive and affective than notions...experiences and their images strike and occupy the mind, as abstractions and their combinations do not.”⁶³ While in either case, assent is total and impartial,⁶⁴ Newman takes real assent, which touches the affective sphere, and not merely the intellect, to be the more powerful kind of assent.

Real assent is characterized by a conviction of the entire human person of the truth of a proposition. It is concerned with things concrete, and thus it particularly motivates one to act in concrete ways. Newman describes real assent as having a deeply personal and affective character to it:

⁶² *GA*, 31. Italics mine.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* Newman, unlike Locke, says assent is not “admitted in degrees.”

“[Real assent] being concerned with things concrete, not abstract, which variously excite the mind from their moral and imaginative properties, has for its objects, not only directly what is true, but inclusively what is beautiful, useful, admirable, heroic; objects which kindle devotion, rouse the passions, and attach the affections; and thus it leads the way to actions of every kind, to the establishment of principles, and the formation of character, and is thus again intimately connected with what is individual and personal.”⁶⁵

Real assent has a certain freshness and force to it that does not exist in notional assent. It compels us to act and make decisions, and involves the entirety of the human person.⁶⁶ A few examples should help to clarify the distinction between the notional and real.

Take an eighteen-year-old boy in the early 1940’s. He may have heard from others that “war is horrible.” He may have seen pictures in a history book of the destruction of some buildings in central Europe during the first World War. He might have a notional apprehension of the idea that “war is horrible” because he apprehends it in terms of what is abstract and general. The apprehension occurs in his mind—he has registered information regarding the proposition. Then, he is drafted, and six months later finds himself in Guadalcanal with a rifle in his hand and an American flag patch on his sleeve. He is lying in a foxhole, while people who want to kill him lie just a few hundred yards away. He is soaked from head to toe, and he has not changed his clothes or showered in some time. He is seeing his comrades being mangled by enemy artillery, killed by painful diseases, and oppressed from sadness, loneliness and despair. His apprehension of “war is horrible” has passed from the notional to the real. His assent to the proposition “war is horrible” has moved from being general, abstract and intellectual, to concrete, tangible, and felt with his entire being. It affects his action: he is sometimes so anxious he cannot sleep. He begs God to protect him, when before he hardly prayed at all. He can now have a real assent to the proposition, “war is horrible.”

⁶⁵ Ibid., 87.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 88-89.

Or perhaps imagine that you have learned about dementia in science classes, or watched a few specials from the evening news on aging and dementia. You notionally apprehend the qualities of it—memory loss, mood swings, confusion, and anger. You can discuss the qualities in the abstract; perhaps you can even answer test questions about them in medical school. But then your mother develops severe dementia and you experience her leaving the car keys in the freezer, yelling at your young child, or not remembering your name. Your apprehension of dementia has moved from notional to real. You experience it in your entire being, not merely as an abstract and general proposition.

These examples contrast notional and real apprehension and assent, which is a fundamental distinction that lies at the heart of the *Grammar of Assent*. Newman argues for the importance of real apprehension and assent through the *Grammar*, and resists the sterility—or, to use Von Hildebrand’s language, the “affective atrophy”—that comes from over-valuing notional assent. Understanding the notional-real distinction, we are now in a position to understand why the proofs for the existence of God fail to warm the winter of Newman’s desolation: such proofs rely only upon notional apprehension and notional assent. They provide knowledge, but they do not move the entire being; they have a sterile character. In an effort to be watertight, they become detached, abstract, and universal, such that we can only gain a notional understanding of them. Newman is searching for reasons that touch his entire being—including his affectivity. He does not believe knowledge alone can warm the winter of his desolation or cause his moral being to rejoice:

I say, then, that the happiness of the soul consists in the exercise of the affections; not in sensual pleasures, not in activity, not in excitement, not in self esteem, not in the consciousness of power, not in knowledge; in none of these things lies our happiness, but in our affections being elicited, employed, supplied.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ *PPS IV*: 315-316.

This is precisely the rehabilitation of affectivity that von Hildebrand and the other personalists hope for: Newman recognizes that the affective sphere is where the “treasure of a man” lies. It is here that man can be moved in the strongest and most meaningful way. The importance of a real, not merely notional, route to God is clearly present in Newman, and is very important to understanding Newman. Up to this point, it might seem as though Newman is neglecting the importance of notional assent, but Newman does not. He resists the trends of religious rationalism, but he is not an irrationalist. We will return to Newman’s appreciation for notional assent, and his respect for objectivity in Chapter Three. For now, let us examine Newman’s distinctly *personalist* path to God.

2.3 NEWMAN AND CONSCIENCE

Crosby points out that, like Kant, part of Newman’s understanding of the irreducible element in the person relies upon man having a certain “moral existence.”⁶⁸ We can turn to Newman’s own words here for confirmation:

There is something in moral truth and goodness, in faith, in firmness, in heavenly-mindedness, in meekness, in courage, in loving-kindness, to which this world’s circumstances are quite unequal, for which the longest life is insufficient, which makes the highest opportunities of this world disappointing, which must burst the prison of this world to have its appropriate range.⁶⁹

For Newman, moral truth in our lives transcends the circumstances of this world, and elevates us above the level of the world. A fundamental aspect of our irreducibility comes from our moral

⁶⁸ *The Personalism of John Henry Newman*, 181-86.

⁶⁹ *PPS IV*: 212.

natures. But what is it about the human person that lends itself to the development of this moral nature? For Newman, like the other personalists, it is the existence of the conscience. This section will explain Newman's understanding of the conscience as an essential part of man, that leads us to God and it will bring that understanding into contact with the thought of Max Scheler, which will further show the kinship between Newman and the personalists.

Newman carries the deeply personalist real/notional distinction into Christian language in distinguishing between the "religious imagination" and the "theological intellect," with the former corresponding to real assent and the latter corresponding to notional assent. Newman takes these two faculties of the mind to be present in all persons: "every religious man is to some extent a theologian, and no theology can start or thrive without the initiative and abiding presence of religion."⁷⁰ However, these faculties are not equally developed across all persons, and Newman has a great distaste for those who place emphasis on the theological intellect at the expense of the religious imagination. This sort of hyper-rational "liberalism"—as Newman often refers to it—is dangerous to religious faith. It sterilizes faith, and removes the affective and emotional component of religious experience. Moreover, it restricts "reasonable" religious belief to a certain class of people—those who have the necessary habits of mind to be able to trace out distinctions, follow arguments, and weigh evidences and claims against one another. But throughout his work, especially in the *Grammar of Assent*, Newman is interested in defending the faith of the English factory girl and the poor, uneducated peasant, both of whom might not have particular gifts with respect to intellectual reasoning. Yet Newman wants to argue that these people can have reasonable belief. By focusing in on the conscience, Newman is able to account for a reason that even the English factory girl or poor peasant can be led to a reasonable belief in

⁷⁰ *GA*, 93.

God. In his defense of the conscience, Newman allows everyone, regardless of intellectual stature, to have an equal ability to experience God.

Newman assumes the existence of a conscience as a first principle.⁷¹ He understands the conscience in two distinct senses: In the first sense, conscience supplies us with a sense of right and wrong, which Newman calls the conscience's critical office. In the second sense, the conscience is the "dictate of an authoritative monitor bearing upon the details of conduct as they come before," which Newman calls the juridical office.⁷² It is in this latter sense of "conscience" that the person experiences certain phenomena that Newman believes ultimately leads an individual to the belief in one God.

These affective phenomena are things we experience in our everyday lives, both the bad phenomena: "self-reproach, poignant shame, haunting remorse, chill dismay at the prospect of the future," and the good: "self-approval, inward peace, lightness of heart."⁷³ Newman believes that the arousing of these affective sentiments is proper only to other *persons*—*things* cannot give rise to such sentiments. However, sometimes it seems as though these phenomena arise without an apparent earthly object to elicit them; Newman thinks here of a line from Proverbs: "the wicked flee, when no one pursueth." In this situation, Newman thinks that the conscience leads us to search for the one who gives rise to these feelings, and this process directs us to God. Elsewhere, Newman describes the process by which the conscience leads us to God rather eloquently:

⁷¹ *GA*, 97. Newman writes, "I assume and shall not attempt to prove, is that which I should use as a foundation...that we have by nature a conscience."

⁷² *Ibid.*, 99.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 101.

It [the conscience] is more than a man's own self. The man himself has not power over it, or only with extreme difficulty; he did not make it, he cannot destroy it. He may silence it in particular cases or directions, he may distort its enunciations, but he cannot, or it is quite the exception if he can, he cannot emancipate himself from it. He can disobey it, he may refuse to use it; but it remains.

This is Conscience; and, from the nature of the case, its very existence carries on our minds to a Being exterior to ourselves; for else whence did it come? and to a Being superior to ourselves; else whence its strange, troublesome peremptoriness? I say, without going on to the question what it says, and whether its particular dictates are always as clear and consistent as they might be, its very existence throws us out of ourselves, and beyond ourselves, to go and seek for Him in the height and depth, whose Voice it is...They believe in His existence, not because others say it, not in the word of man merely, but with a personal apprehension of its truth.⁷⁴

This guidance of the conscience towards God makes it possible for us to have a personal apprehension of the existence of “what Theists mean when they speak of God.”⁷⁵ We might turn here to Scheler, where we see a similar idea. Says Scheler:

Behind the stirrings of the conscience, its warnings, its counsel, its condemnations, the spiritual eye of Faith is ever aware of the outline of an invisible, everlasting Judge. These stirrings seem to form a wordless natural discourse from God to the soul, prompting the course of its salvation and the world's.⁷⁶

In both cases, there is an appreciation for the affective feelings that arise from the conscience. It imposes upon feelings of anxiety or guilt, and we search for a way to cleanse ourselves from these sorts of feelings. This causes us to search for God. For both Scheler and Newman, this search eventually led to repentance, which “is a form of self-healing the soul, is in fact its only way of regaining its lost powers and in religion it is something yet more: it is the natural function with which God endowed the soul, in order that the soul might return to him whenever it strayed from him.”⁷⁷

⁷⁴ *SVO*, 64.

⁷⁵ *GA*, 95.

⁷⁶ Max Scheler, *On the Eternal in Man* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 2010), 36.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 39.

Newman's conception of the conscience ties together some of the other personalists themes discussed up unto this point. We see here a picture of a deeply *personal* route to God, beginning from the interiority of the person, and directing us towards God. We do not find this in a cosmological route to God, where one might try to reason to God from observing the external world—these are the proofs of a God that do not warm Newman's winter of desolation.⁷⁸

In his discussion of the conscience in the *Grammar*, Newman writes, "I have already said I am not proposing here to prove the Being of a God; yet I have found it impossible to avoid saying where I look for the proof of it. For I am looking for that proof in the same quarter as that from which I would commence a proof of His attributes and character,—by the same means as those by which I show how we apprehend Him, not merely as a notion, but as a reality."⁷⁹ This "proof" also depends on the affective sphere of the person, for it is here that we detect the movements of the conscience. While the conscience is interior, it also points us towards the influence of community, for our conscience is formed in part through the influence of others, an idea that will be discussed in Section 2.5. For now, we will turn to another aspect of Newman's personalism: his distinction between formal and informal inference.

2.4 NEWMAN ON INFORMAL INFERENCE

In the *Grammar*, Newman distinguishes between formal and informal inference, and attempts to situate each of them properly within their place in the realm of reason. Formal inference is the process of forming judgments explicitly and systematically. Newman refers to it as

⁷⁸ Crosby, *The Personalism of John Henry Newman*, 189.

⁷⁹ *GA*, 104.

“ratiocination” and “verbal reasoning, of whatever kind, as opposed to mental.”⁸⁰ The “regulating principle” of this is logic. In this kind of reasoning, one weighs evidence, defends propositions, and forms arguments regarding those propositions. This is the kind of reasoning that is, or at least could easily be, “written out.” When done well, it is clear and systematic. Mathematical proofs are certainly done formally. The steps are clearly articulated, the terms defined, and one mind can easily check the work of another mind.

Conversely, informal inference occurs quickly and casually. Informal inference occurs regularly throughout our day, and is the sort of reasoning that is generally useful within our lives. The mind is not consciously interested in tracing out a precise line of argument. Rather, this sort of inference occurs somewhat casually, “beneath the surface” of the mind. It is not a methodical investigation, but rather a spontaneous process, which Newman wants to argue is nonetheless reasonable. We might turn here to Newman’s earlier *Oxford University Sermons*, where he distinguishes between “implicit reason” and “explicit reason”, two concepts that generally correspond to informal inference and formal inference in the *Grammar*. Newman describes in a vivid way the process of implicit reason:

The mind ranges to and fro, and spreads out, and advances forward with a quickness which has become a proverb, and a subtlety and versatility which baffle investigation. It passes on from point to point, gaining one by some indication; another on a probability; then availing itself of an association; then falling back on some received law; next seizing on testimony; then committing itself to some popular impression, or some inward instinct, or some obscure memory; and thus it makes progress not unlike a clamberer on a steep cliff, who, by quick eye, prompt hand, and firm foot, ascends how he knows not himself; by personal endowments and by practice, rather than by rule, leaving no track behind him, and unable to teach another...And such mainly is the way in which all men, gifted or not gifted, commonly reason,—not by rule, but by an inward faculty.⁸¹

⁸⁰ *GA*, 212.

⁸¹ *OUS*, 257.

This sort of instinctual reasoning is essential to be able to live effectively. It allows us to make every day decisions in an efficient way.

To illustrate the processes of formal and informal inference, take the following example. John, a logician, is driving through the city, and arrives at some particular intersection. The stoplight is red, so John waits accordingly. The light turns green, and John, almost immediately, moves his foot from the brake to the accelerator and proceeds through the intersection. John reacted to the light changing and acted intuitively. He created no systematic argument ending with “Therefore, I ought to proceed through the intersection”—he acted instead on implicit reason. John *could* have reasoned explicitly, formalizing and symbolizing his argument, ensuring valid logical form, justifying each premise, and so forth, but we would not normally say he *must* do this to be acting reasonably. The situation does not *normally* call for such analysis.⁸² His exercise in propositional logic did not improve his exercise in reason generally, nor did it ensure that his conclusion was protected from error. The integrity of the implicit reasoning process could be maintained without it needing to be explicitly argued; the explicit reasoning process is serving primarily to decipher and formalize the unreflective process of implicit reason, which has already occurred.⁸³

Newman thinks this kind of formal inference is very limited, both in scope, and in usefulness. Newman thinks that because of the complexities of the person’s mental life, the person’s thought is often far too subtle to be captured by formal reasoning. As a result, formal reasoning consists not in making useful arguments, “to ascertain facts in the concrete, but to find

⁸² We might imagine a time in which such an analysis would be reasonably asked or offered, perhaps to acquiesce a backseat driver, respond to traffic ticket charges in a court, and so forth.

⁸³ Frederick Aquino, “Externalism and Internalism: A Newmanian Matter of Proper Fit.” *The Heythrop Journal*. (LI, 2010, 1023).

and dress up the middle terms.” The logician is interested in creating clear and rigorous arguments that are accessible to other minds, which necessarily limits it in terms of the scope that it can work within. Formal reasoning is forced to have these conclusions be abstract because in order to make the reasoning accessible to many minds, it must focus on general notions—on universals. Formal reasoning thus creates conclusions that are just too abstract to be able to deal with the concrete reality of our lives. Formal inference certainly has its place, especially in the natural sciences, mathematics or other academic disciplines, as these disciplines can proceed from concrete and real premises, but formal inference is generally too limited to be decisive in everyday concrete subject matters.

So in what sense does Newman’s personalism shine through in his distinction between formal and informal inference? Newman shows here an appreciation for the way the person *actually* reasons—their experiential reality. In informal inference, there is a sort of intuitive aspect. He pays particular attention to the concrete and the personal, and tries to ensure that this sort of reasoning remains justified. Newman resists here the rationalist movement, which wants explicit and articulate proofs, and which views conclusions *not* having that proof very skeptically. In his anti-rationalism (which is not an irrationalism), he does not want “reason” to be understood only as abstract and disinterested proofs, but rather, Newman wants to understand reason in its relationship to the experiential reality of the human person. Newman creates then a more holistic understanding of reason that better reflects the lived reality of the human person, and which powerfully resists the attraction of rationalism. Recall also the previous section on the conscience. The person, guided by his or her conscience, finds God by way of mostly informal inference. The person does not follow the conscience through detached and abstract formal reasoning, but rather through something more personal.

2.5 INTERSUBJECTIVITY AND PERSONAL INFLUENCE

I have shown that there is a deep kinship between Newman and the personalists on the matter of human affectivity and how that affectivity is important to finding God. One of the clearest examples of Newman's appreciation for the affective sphere of the person lies in his treatment of real assent, in which there is a movement from the general and abstract to the concrete. For Newman, one of the most powerful ways this movement occurred is through the contact between one subject and another—the personal influence between each person. This section will show the importance of intersubjectivity and community in Newman and the other personalists. The personalists saw one kind of philosophy as overemphasizing the communal nature of persons, such as Marxism. In an attempt to distance himself from Ludwig Feuerbach's philosophy of the human person, Marx writes that human nature is simply “the ensemble of the social relations,” and is not anything present in any single individual.⁸⁵ In this form of ultimate collectivism, one person becomes interchangeable with the next—the unique individual is lost. An opposite problem occurs in radical individualism and ethical egoism in which the role of the single individual is overemphasized, and the importance of community, intersubjectivity, and interdependence is lost.

While each person forms his or her own beliefs and lives his or her own unique path in life, it is important for persons to connect with others who share a similar outlook on life, and to have solidarity growing out of that similar perspective, as well as the personhood common to all.

⁸⁵ Karl Marx, “Theses on Feuerbach,” Thesis 6, 1845.

For Newman, like the other personalists, there is an importance in understanding the independence and distinct existence of each person, and their own freedom to choose beliefs and actions, while also recognizing the communal aspect to personhood. Newman's perspective on the conscience, which I have already shown to be deeply personal, involves an undeniably social element. Our conscience is formed through the influence and inspiration of others. This section begins by tracing out some of the personalist understanding of intersubjectivity, community, and exemplarity, and then moves to Newman's own views.

2.5.1 Newman and Wojtyła on The Birth of the Intersubjective Relationship

In his study of philosophical anthropology, Nicholas Rescher argues that mutual recognition of other persons, as persons, is one of seven essential features of personhood:

One must be disposed to acknowledge other duly qualified agents as persons and be prepared to value them as such. With persons there must be not only feeling, but fellow-feeling; persons must function in a context of community.⁸⁶

Personhood thus has an inextricably social dimension. The conception of a (full-fledged) person is subject to a principle of reciprocity-expectation. For to qualify as a person oneself involves acknowledging and accepting as such the other creatures who seem plausibly qualified as being persons. And it involves the expectation that they will reciprocate.⁸⁷

This demand for a reciprocal recognition of the personhood of the other is found throughout the personalists. It is in the recognition of others as persons—as unique irreducible subjects—that we experience the fullness of our own personhood.

⁸⁶ Nicholas Rescher, *Human Interests: Reflections on a Philosophical Anthropology*, Stanford Series in Philosophy (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 7.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

As discussed earlier, Wojtyła believes that dwelling upon our experience “lived through,” reveals to us our own *I*, as ones who possess and dominate ourselves. It is in this self-possession and self-domination that man realizes that he is a subject and that he is a person—that he has an irreducible dignity.⁸⁸ But this picture is incomplete—there is a necessarily social dimension to this recognition. We must also recognize that the other is also an *I*, and in doing so, we realize more fully our own *I* as one who can experience self-possession and self-domination.⁸⁹ If we fail to recognize the subjectivity of the other, we feel as though we are “alone in a world of objects and cannot realize the “I” of [our] own person.”⁹⁰ For Wojtyła, it is only through a gift of self that we can come to possess our *own* selves. As rational animals, it is only the human person who can make a gift of him or herself.⁹¹

In Newman, we can find a similar theme, though it is perhaps a little more difficult to draw out. At first glance, it might seem as though Newman’s respect for the individuality of the person places the person at a great distance from others. Wojtyła argues that alienation “devastates the I-other relationship, weakens the ability to experience another human being as

⁸⁸ Wojtyła, "Subjectivity and the Irreducible in Man," 112.

⁸⁹ Wojtyła develops this idea more fully in Chapter 7, “Intersubjectivity by Participation,” in *The Acting Person* (Boston: D. Reidel Publishing Company 1979), 267-70.

⁹⁰ James Hannik, "The Personalism of Karol Wojtyła," in *Philosophical and Religious Conceptions of the Person and Their Implications for Ethical, Political, and Social Thought*, ed. James McLachlan (Lewistown, NY: E. Mellen Press, 2002), 268. See also Von Hildebrand on the possibility of an I-thou relationship requiring reciprocity: Paola Premoli De Marchi, "The Birth of Love as an I-Thou Relation," *Quaestiones Disputatae* 3, no. 2 (2013): 152-53.

⁹¹ See especially Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, trans. H. T. Willets (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 96.

another *I*, and inhibits the possibility of friendship and the spontaneous powers of community.”⁹² Yet it seems as though Newman’s philosophy of radical individuality provides us with the totally alienated picture of the human person. Recall this passage from Newman: “He has his own hopes and fears, desires, judgments, and aims; *he is everything to himself, and no one else is really any thing*. No one outside of him can really touch him, can touch his soul, his immortality; he must live with himself for ever. He has a depth within him unfathomable, an infinite abyss of existence...”⁹³ This seems to be devastatingly alienating. The structure of the individual’s inner life, his inability to be touched, puts him at a great distance from the other as each becomes aware of their own personhood. But Crosby offers an alternative interpretation:

There is also a *turning toward others* on the basis of personal incommunicability. I can experience not only myself as if the only one but also another person existing as if the only one. With this I apprehend the other preeminently as person, taking him or her out of all the crowds and other encompassing totalities in which people disappear; and I establish the only possible basis on which I can enter into interpersonal communion with the other.⁹⁴

On this reading, recognizing the “infinite abyss of experience” within ourselves brings with it not only the recognition of ourselves as subjects and persons, but also also puts us in a position to recognize *the other* as subjects and persons, to recognize the “I” of the other—the irreducible subjectivity. For we have to be gathered into ourselves, and to live out of our interiority, in order to establish that spiritual “distance” to the other that lets the other present himself not as an

⁹² "Participation or Alienation?," in *Person and Community: Selected Essays, Catholic Thought from Lublin* (New York: Peter Lang, 1978), 206.

⁹³ *PPS* IV: 82-83. Italics mine.

⁹⁴ John F. Crosby, "The Personalism of John Henry Newman," in *Philosophical and Religious Conceptions of the Person and Their Implications for Ethical, Political and Social Thought*, ed. James McLachlan (Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen Press, 2002).

object but as a personal subject living out of his own personal center. Far from alienating us, this recognition actually brings us together and creates the possibility of meaningful intersubjectivity.

In both Wojtyła and Newman, the recognition of a certain irreducible quality (either the “I” or the “infinite abyss”) within ourselves and the other communicates to us the personhood of both ourselves and of the other. This recognition gives birth to the possibility of a meaningful relationship between two subjects, which Newman took to be extremely important and powerful. The next section will show how, for Newman, this is the most important way in which we can transmit the truth we have understood.

2.5.2 Personal Influence, the Means of Propagating the Truth

We have seen how Newman considered real assent to be more powerful than notional assent, and, separately, how his philosophy allows for deep and meaningful relationships with others. But these two ideas are actually intimately connected, for it is *through meaningful relationships* that we can profoundly experience real assent. Throughout both the *Grammar of Assent* and the *Oxford University Sermons*, Newman constantly warns us against “expecting too much from proof, or demonstration, or formal inference.”⁹⁵ In fact, the motto of the *Grammar* is taken from Ambrose of Milan (d. 397): “*Non in dialectica complacuit Deo salvum populum suum.*”⁹⁶ (It has not pleased God to save His people by dialectal reasoning.) Newman did not think that any sort of dialectal reasoning could satisfy the heart of man—could warm the winter of their desolation. Rather, he thought it was through the encounter of another person that man could come to know God and the truth:

⁹⁵ Ibid., 313.

⁹⁶ *GA*, title page.

Men persuade themselves, with little difficulty, to scoff at principles, to ridicule books, to make sport of the names of good men; but they cannot bear their presence: it is holiness embodied in personal form, which they cannot steadily confront and bear down: so that the silent conduct of a conscientious man secures for him from beholders a feeling different in kind from any which is created by the mere versatile and garrulous Reason.⁹⁷

It is not through formal logic that Newman thinks one becomes satisfied with the evidence for some given proposition, because formal logic can only stimulate the intellect. Conversely, the presence of a person can stimulate the entire being. It can move the heart to joy, anger, sorrow or empathy, none of which are stimulated by formal logic. An encounter with a *person* can motivate us strongly towards real assent and a deep conviction of some truth, be it religious or otherwise.

Newman developed his conviction that the truth is spread most effectively through a personal encounter at a very young age. Reflecting on his childhood, Newman writes, “I was instructed in religious knowledge by kind and pious friends, who told me who my Maker was, what great things he had done for me, how much I owed to Him, and how I was to serve Him. All this I learned from them, and I rejoice that they taught it to me.”⁹⁸ It was through his kind and pious *friends*—through his encounter with other persons—that he was most influenced, not by arguments or philosophical dialectic. This allowed him to have a real apprehension and assent to the truth, to acquire “an intimate token” inside himself, such that “were all the world, even were his teachers, to tell him that religion was a dream, still he would have a good reason for believing it true.”⁹⁹

⁹⁷ *OUS*, 92.

⁹⁸ *PPS* VII: 110.

⁹⁹ *PPS* VII: 112.

This trend continued throughout Newman’s life, with persons influencing him much more profoundly than any arguments.¹⁰⁰ Newman himself was quite aware of this fact (even a cursory look at the *Apologia*, or reflection upon his motto as a Cardinal (*cor ad cor loquitur*) demonstrates as much), which is perhaps why he decided he ought to use his personal influence to impact others, just as he had been impacted. As a teacher, writer, and pastor, Newman leveraged his personal influence to bring others to his understanding and truth. Newman writes vividly and personally, providing personal anecdotes and examples throughout all of his writings, even in the *Grammar*—the most technical of all his pieces.

Newman had a particular appreciation for the importance of personal influence in education. The founder of a university, Newman thought that effective teachers are those who are able to move from the universal to the concrete, from the abstract to the *personal*. This appreciation for the personal is what gives life to the university, what allows the students to really apprehend, and really assent to teachings. In discussing the “prodigious powers” of the printing press, Newman discusses the benefit of the *litera scriptura* (written word) that is widely available in the form of “periodicals, tracts, pamphlets, works in series, and light literature.”¹⁰¹ This broad body of written literature was becoming more widely available in Newman’s time, and made all kinds of information cheaply and readily accessible. Newman understands the apparent wonder of this new technology:

What can we want more, you will say, for the intellectual education of the whole man, and for every man, than so exuberant and diversified and persistent a promulgation of all kinds of knowledge? Why, you will ask, need we go up to knowledge, when knowledge comes down to us? ... We have sermons in stones, and books in the running brooks; works larger and more comprehensive than those which have gained for ancients an

¹⁰⁰ Zeno’s study of Newman’s interior life is perhaps the most complete demonstration of this fact. Zeno, *John Henry Newman: His Inner Life* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987).

¹⁰¹ *HS* III: 7.

immortality, issue forth every morning, and are projected onwards to the ends of the earth at the rate of hundreds of miles a day. Our seats are strewed, our pavements are powdered, with swarms of little tracts; and the very bricks of our city walls preach wisdom, by informing us by their placards where we can at once cheaply purchase it. I allow all this, and much more; such certainly is our popular education, and its effects are remarkable.¹⁰²

Yet Newman finds this unsatisfactory. He continues:

[When men] aim at something precise, something refined, something really luminous, something really large, something choice, they go to another market; they avail themselves, in some shape or other, of the rival method, the ancient method, of oral instruction, of *present communication between man and man*, of teachers instead of learning, *of the personal influence of a master...*¹⁰³

Newman recognizes the meaningful impact that a *person* can have on another. The depth of their personality, their existence as an affective subject, fills in a gap that the *litera scripta* cannot fill. Perhaps we can imagine this dichotomy between the *litera scripta* and the personal encounter with a teacher even more vividly today as we experience the Internet. The Internet puts a vast amount of information at our fingertips cheaply, easily and accessibly. Yet students still seek out the sorts of education where they can encounter professors—persons—on a regular and intimate basis. These interactions give life to the university; it is persons, not books, that are essential to the university.¹⁰⁴ As Newman understands it, “no book can convey the special spirit and delicate peculiarities of its subject with that rapidity and certainty which attend on the sympathy of mind with mind, through the eyes, the look, the accent, and the manner, in casual expressions thrown off at the moment, and the unstudied turns of familiar conversations.”¹⁰⁵ It is only through the person—through the intersubjective relationship between teacher and student—that the best kind

¹⁰² Ibid., 7.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 8. Italics mine.

¹⁰⁴ Newman even goes so far as to say that books are not necessary at all for a good education. See *HS III*: 40.

¹⁰⁵ *HS III*: 8-9.

of learning can occur. It is in this interaction that the student can move from abstract and universal apprehension to a more vivid, lively apprehension.

This chapter has helped to show the deeply personalist spirit of Newman through his work on the human person. We see in Newman a deep appreciation for that which is interior, affective, and invisible. But this sort of language leaves Newman open to some critiques of apparent religious subjectivism and moral relativism. The following chapter will elucidate, and respond to, this critique.

3.0 NEWMAN THE SUBJECTIVIST?

We have seen in Newman a deep respect for the interior life of the person.¹⁰⁶ He is interested in moving ideas from the notional to the real, from the abstract and universal to the personal and the concrete, which arouses the affective sphere of the person. Yet, for some, there might be some fundamental problems with this sort of philosophical anthropology. In focusing on the subjectivity of the person, we might appear to give permission to a religious, moral, and epistemological subjectivism, deprived of *objective* facts, norms, or values. In the philosophy of William James, we see this sort of problem pollute a philosophical anthropology. James takes the truth to be whatever gives us psychological satisfaction. Take for example, the way James describes Newman's conversion to "Romanism." For James, Newman converted because it gave him a certain kind of psychological satisfaction:

As a rule we disbelieve all facts and theories for which we have no use...Huxley belabors the bishops because there is no use for sacerdotalism in his life. Newman on the contrary, goes over to Romanism, and finds all sorts of reasons good for staying there, because a priestly system is for him an organic need and delight.¹⁰⁷

For James, Newman's need for some sort of sacerdotal hierarchy led to his conversion, not the truth of Catholicism, and in fulfilling his need for that system, he made it true. In the words of

¹⁰⁶ In this chapter, I am often referencing Jay Newman and John Henry Newman. As a matter of convention, I will continue to refer John Henry Newman as "Newman" and I will refer to Jay Newman always as "Jay Newman."

¹⁰⁷ James, "The Will to Believe," 228.

James: “faith in a fact can help create the fact.”¹⁰⁸ One can easily imagine Newman’s abhorrence of the sentiment that he converted to Catholicism for “delight,” or that his conversion was justified on such grounds. We might look here to Newman’s “Prayer for the Light of Truth,” in which Newman begs God to grant him the grace from making a decision based on “self-deceit” but rather on what “reason approves”:

O MY God, I confess that Thou canst enlighten my darkness. I confess that Thou alone canst. I wish my darkness to be enlightened. I do not know whether Thou wilt: but that Thou canst and that I wish, are sufficient reasons for me to ask, what Thou at least hast not forbidden my asking. I hereby promise that by Thy grace which I am asking, I will embrace whatever I at length feel certain is the truth, if ever I come to be certain. And by Thy grace I will guard against all self-deceit which may lead me to take what nature would have, rather than what reason approves.¹⁰⁹

James clearly misunderstands Newman’s conversion, because he mistakes it for being one of psychological satisfaction, rather than it being one of what “reason approves.”

Yet, at times, Newman’s philosophy and attention to the affective might seem to leave him quite open to the charge of subjectivism. It might seem quite reasonable to think that Newman’s conversion *was* completed to fulfill a psychological need. It is precisely this sort of worry that motivated Jay Newman to write an extended critique of the *Grammar of Assent*. In his 1986 work, *The Mental Philosophy of John Henry Newman*, Jay Newman traces Newman’s argument carefully, and while he recognizes the “importance and originality of the project” that the *Grammar of Assent* embodies, he does not “count himself among John Henry Newman’s many admirers”—a fact that he often makes little effort to hide.¹¹⁰ He often sees Newman’s epistemology as supporting irrationalism or subjectivism, and frequently being too inconsistent

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 234.

¹⁰⁹ *MD*, 288.

¹¹⁰ Newman, *The Mental Philosophy of John Henry Newman*, 2.

and vague. Jay Newman views Newman's epistemology as following into the same types of issues that, in reality, arise in James (though he does not directly make this comparison.)

Throughout his book, Jay Newman makes numerous small critiques of Newman's philosophy, but I view most of these as surface level disagreements, and those are not the focus here. The real core of his critique can be divided into three main parts: First, Jay argues Newman shows a mistaken appreciation for the real over the notional. Second, Jay argues Newman inappropriately defends informal inference. Third, Jay argues Newman's defense of the conscience as a legitimate means to finding truth necessarily leads to relativism.

Jay Newman should be lauded for his attentiveness to the problems of subjectivism. Jay Newman rightly resists any kind of subjectivism as dangerous to philosophical inquiry. While Jay Newman does rightly pick up on some ambiguity in Newman's writings, they are insufficient to provide a reason to reject Newman's philosophy. Jay Newman misses some important aspects of Newman's writing, which I hope to show through the course of this chapter. To this end, Section 3.1 attempts to understand and interpret Jay Newman's critique of Newman's epistemology. Section 3.2 will respond to Jay Newman's critique by leveraging the personalist scholarship developed above. The final section of this chapter will attempt to exonerate Newman from the charge of subjectivism by way of contrast with William James.

3.1 JAY NEWMAN'S CRITIQUE OF THE *GRAMMAR OF ASSENT*

Jay Newman's primary critique of Newman's epistemology is that it falls into subjectivism. Jay Newman does not explicitly assert a formal definition of subjectivism or relativism (which he seems to use nearly interchangeably). However, here I think it is fair to understand a subjectivist

epistemology to be one that allows truth to be understood as only in relation to an individual, and does not provide for an external, objective truth with which we need to concern ourselves. Anything that is true is true *relative* to some given person or system.¹¹¹

If Newman is *actually* a subjectivist, like Jay Newman argues, the consequences would be serious. Truth would be “true” only by virtue of a person’s emotional or affective state, or his cultural situation, or his upbringing, and so forth. There would be no meaningful way in which we could tell him he was *simply wrong* about his beliefs, no matter how morally or intellectually repugnant they were.

If we were to ask some given man why he believes what he believes, and he were allowed to say, “my reasons are too personal to describe,” or, “my thought is too subtle to be captured by any sort of formal, spoken argument,” or “the guiding light of my conscience told me to believe it,” we would rightly find this quite frustrating. So too, does Jay Newman. There is a legitimate fear that all kinds of foolish, nonsensical and morally dubious views can be justified on account of one’s “personal reasons,” and it closes the door on any meaningful way to discuss the issues, because the one holding them is not forced to give a rational account that we can take issue with. These sorts of fears are legitimate. But does Newman’s epistemology fall into them? I think not. Jay Newman, however, is quite convinced that they do, but for misguided reasons.

Jay Newman also takes issue with the “constant disparaging” of notional apprehension and assent that he believes to be present in Newman’s epistemology. While Newman views notional assent as impersonal, Jay Newman believes that the notional can also be powerful and

¹¹¹ In section 3.2, I provide a more nuanced understanding of relativism, but this definition suffices for understanding Jay Newman’s argument.

motivate us to action. Recall that Newman believes that real assent is more vivid and concrete, thus allowing it to have more influence on the way we live our lives. It is altogether more powerful, and thus takes the place of precedence.¹¹² But for Jay Newman, this disparaging of the importance of the notional leaves us open to subjectivism because it does not allow for serious intellectual engagement with issues of any kind.

According to Jay Newman, if Newman can succeed in his philosophical project, “he will have shown the irrelevance of the cold, impersonal, rational arguments of the skeptics, liberals, and atheists.”¹¹³ In other words, if he can show that the notional can—or should—be set aside in favor of the real, he will be able to justify whatever kind of religious belief he wants. But this kind of cold, rational analysis is what does not allow religion to fall into unjustified nonsense, superstition and bigotry. Yet if Newman neglects the value of the notional, his religious belief is sure to end up there. Jay Newman believes the issues brought forth in Newman’s real/notional distinction also appear in Newman’s defense of informal inference.

For Jay Newman, Newman allows informal inference to have too high of an epistemic position. He believes that Newman’s defense of informal inference allows too much leeway in what sorts of positions need to be defended and what sorts do not. He correctly appreciates the centrality of Newman’s theory of informal inference to his philosophical project, but vigorously argues against many of its fundamental claims.¹¹⁴ In fact, Jay Newman isn’t even sure he can call Newman’s discussion on informal inference a theory:

It may be an overstatement to say that Newman has a "theory" of informal inference. After all, how much can be said about a form of inference or ratiocination that is non-verbal, cannot be analyzed in terms of rules, and varies with the nature and circumstances

¹¹² *GA*, 47.

¹¹³ *Mental Philosophy*, 63.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 145.

of the particular case? Whatever objective features characterize formal inference are clearly absent here.¹¹⁵

This characterizes a great deal of Jay Newman's critique of informal inference; it seems to be completely subjectivist. It is not characterized by "common measure, a standard, a set of rules, or anything objective."¹¹⁶ Jay Newman believes that informal inference's lack of standards, rules, method, and most importantly, its lack of ability to be articulated to others leads it to subjectivism and relativism. If you have some given belief, but you are not forced to explain it, or defend it, or articulate any reason for holding it, how can anybody critique your position? For Jay Newman, this leads to a "you have your truths, and I have mine, and there is no meaningful way to decide who is right" perspective, which Jay Newman would be right to deem problematic.

For Newman, informal reasoning has its own sorts of premises, method and conclusions. But Jay Newman believes that Newman provides no more than a descriptive phenomenological picture of why some people believe certain things—not an epistemology that justifies the process. Instead of thinking that Newman provides a defense of this kind of reason, he simply depicts how this kind of reason might occur, moving from an "undifferentiated mass of data" to an informal conclusion.¹¹⁷ Jay Newman does not believe that this sort of process can be in any way considered as justified as the process of formal inference is; in the case of formal inference assumptions and methods are clearly expressed and are left open to judgment from other minds. This enables rational discourse and an objective treatment of an argument.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 146.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 146.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 148.

Jay Newman believes that Newman's position that "personal judgment" should be understood as epistemically justified is extremely unsatisfying. As he points out, if my friend holds some position that we view as mistaken, such that I ask him to explain it, and he only responds that it is "too personal" for me to understand, I will be very dissatisfied.¹¹⁸ I could rightly demand reasons justifying his position. Otherwise, he could hold any sort of position he wanted, and there is nothing I, or anybody else, could do to refute his position. This leads to an inevitable subjectivism and relativism.

As shown above, Newman's regard for the conscience as a justified means to belief in God relies on respect for the interiority of the person, and the affective responses that arise because of the conscience. Newman believes that our moral sense will lead us towards belief in God; he even goes so far as to say it can provide with knowledge about God. But Jay Newman believes that just like his defense of informal and formal inference, Newman's defense of the authority of the conscience inevitably leads to subjectivism and relativism.

For Jay Newman, any epistemological position that emphasizes the role of the conscience as a tool that can direct the mind to truth must be able to account for the "unreliability of the conscience."¹¹⁹ For if "all people everywhere did associate intimations of conscience with the 'voice of God,' it would seem that God is saying different things to different people."¹²⁰ The Muslim, the Buddhist, and the Hindu might all claim to "follow their conscience" in matters of religion, and thus, they might practice the rituals, hold the doctrines, and participate in the cultures of their respective religions. The atheist or agnostic too might claim to "follow his conscience" in matters of religion. In each case, the individual's religious practice is being

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 159-160.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 79.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

justified by their conscience, yet they are all behaving very differently. They cannot all be correct, as many of their doctrines and practices are mutually exclusive. Jay Newman asks of such a situation, “how can any particular faith be known to be more rational than any other?”¹²¹

As Jay Newman himself points out, Newman is aware of this difficulty, and thus introduces virtue as the safeguard of faith.¹²² Newman’s idea here is that a right state of heart and virtuous disposition will prevent the conscience from leading one into credulity, superstition or fanaticism. But this is not satisfying to Jay Newman, because once again there is no readily apparent reason that one ought to think that Christians are the most virtuous—many pious Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists would all claim to have proper virtue, and there is nothing within the *Grammar* that explain this away.

¹²¹ Ibid., 81.

¹²² Jay Newman refers here to Newman’s “Love the Safeguard of Faith Against Superstition” in the *Oxford University Sermons*. While Newman uses the term “love” to describe that which is the safeguard of faith against superstition, he indicates that he does not mean “love precisely” but rather a virtuous state of being. Speaking of faith, Newman writes: “And it becomes superstition or credulity, enthusiasm or fanaticism, or bigotry, in proportion as it emancipates itself from this spirit of wisdom and understanding, of counsel and ghostly strength, of knowledge and true godliness, and holy fear...it takes its character from the moral state of the agent.” (*OUS*, 249-250) But Jay Newman points out that “viewed positively, these traits” (such as spirit of wisdom and understanding, of counsel and holy fear, etc.) are praiseworthy dispositions, *virtues*. *Mental Philosophy*, 84. Newman means here that a proper moral disposition will help to guide one to proper religious belief.

3.2 A RESPONSE TO JAY NEWMAN

Although Jay Newman provides an extensive reconstruction of Newman's thought, he misses some fundamental aspects of Newman's thought that make a critique of subjectivism rather untenable. This section responds to the subjectivism critique, ultimately showing that while Newman's personalism affirms the importance of the affective sphere, and the distinctly personal experience of religion, he desires a properly balanced picture of religious belief, in which the affective sphere does not become overbearing, but rather joins with the intellect in a more comprehensive view of the person.

3.2.1 Two Kinds of Relativism

Throughout his critique of Newman's epistemology, Jay Newman seems to conflate two different kinds of relativism, which we might call objective *fact* relativism and *personal judgment* relativism.¹²³ Separating these two positions from each other will help to show why Jay Newman is mistaken in his understanding of Newman.

Objective fact relativism is one in which we believe that reality is not independent of linguistic, religious or cultural frameworks, or personal or psychological histories. On this view, there is nothing that is true without regard to a given context or framework. If we embrace this first kind of relativism, it becomes reasonable to say that all truth is only true relative to a given person or system. The second type of relativism, *personal judgment* relativism says that one person might have good reasons for believing that *x* is true, but these reasons are not good for

¹²³ I take these two terms from Joseph Milburn, who was particularly helpful with the development of the ideas contained in this section.

another person to believe that x is true. On this view, one's justification for believing something can be a good justification based on their past personal experiences, cultural habits or another contextual factor, but if we were to share this reason with somebody who did not have these past personal experiences or cultural habits, it might not be a good reason for them to believe them.

Jay Newman seems to think that holding to this second, weaker kind of relativism, personal judgment relativism, commits us to also hold to the first kind of relativism, objective fact relativism. But there is no good reason to think this is true. One can coherently hold to a conception of objective truth, without being committed to believing that everybody's reasons for holding objective truth all have to be the same. Jay Newman seems to assume that if we hold to "personal reasons" as being good justifiers for our beliefs, this necessarily leads us to a conviction in objective fact relativism, but Newman's philosophy resists this.

There is certainly a sense in which Newman holds to personal judgment relativism, but he is not committed to objective fact relativism (which is the sort of relativism that would be concerning). Consider this thought from Newman: "Every one who reasons, is his own centre; and no expedient for attaining a common measure of minds can reverse this truth."¹²⁴ We see here Newman highlighting the importance of personal judgment, but this does not commit him to objective fact relativism, which will be made clear in the following sections.

3.2.2 The Importance of "The Dogmatical Principle"

In this section, I hope to make it clear that if Newman's personalist philosophy leads to objective fact relativism, this is against his professed intentions. While he is committed to a

¹²⁴ *GA*, 271.

reverence for personal judgment, he most certainly rejects the objective fact relativism that Jay Newman accuses him of. Since the age of fifteen, Newman thought religion as “mere sentiment” is “a dream and a mockery.”¹²⁵ Since that time, Newman viewed himself as being under a “certain definite religious teaching,” with dogma being the fundamental principle of his religion.¹²⁶ One could hardly think of a clearer expression of Newman’s personal abhorrence for only subjective religious experience. Newman referred to this principle as the “dogmatical principle,” a principle which he never abandoned in all his years. In his *Development of Doctrine*, we see this idea developed and articulated more robustly:

That there is a truth then; *that there is one truth*; that religious error is in itself of an immoral nature; that its maintainers, unless involuntarily such, are guilty in maintaining it; that it is to be dreaded; that the search for truth is not the gratification of curiosity; that its attainment has nothing of the excitement of a discovery; that the mind is below truth, not above it, and is bound, not to descant upon it, but to venerate it; that truth and falsehood are set before us for the trial of our hearts...—this is the dogmatical principle, which has strength.¹²⁷

Newman thinks there is “one truth”—hardly the language we would expect from a subjectivist. Rather than the language of subjectivism, we see a stern objectivity in Newman. He continues by way of contrast:

That truth and falsehood in religion are but matter of opinion; that one doctrine is as good as another; that the Governor of the world does not intend that we should gain the truth; that there is no truth; that we are not more acceptable to God by believing this than by believing that; that no one is answerable for his opinions; that they are a matter of necessity or accident; that it is enough if we sincerely hold what we profess; that our merit lies in seeking, not in possessing; that it is a duty to follow what seems to us true, without a fear lest it should not be true; that it may be a gain to succeed, and can be no harm to fail; that we may take up and lay down opinions at pleasure...—this is the principle of philosophies and heresies, which is very weakness.

¹²⁵ *Apol.*, 49. It is worth noting that Newman held this view fifty years before writing the *Grammar*.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ *DD*, 357. Italics mine.

Elsewhere, Newman describes and rejects what he takes to be the world's common philosophy of religion. It is attractive because it provides an "easy, cheerful, and tranquil mind:"

Each man is like himself and no one else; each man has his own opinions, his own rule of faith and conduct, his own worship; if a number join together in a religious form, this is an accident, for the sake of convenience; for each is complete in himself; religion is simply a personal concern; there is no such thing really as a common or joint religion, that is, one in which a number of men, strictly speaking, partake; it is all matter of private judgment. Hence, as they sometimes proceed even to avow, there is no such thing as a true religion or a false; that is true to each, which each sincerely believes to be true; and what is true to one, is not true to his neighbour.¹²⁸

But as attractive as this sort of thought might be, it is wrong. Newman calls this sort of ideology, in which religion is a matter of personal opinion and sentiment, "liberalism."¹²⁹ Nine years after publishing the *Grammar of Assent*, Newman said, "For thirty, forty, fifty years I have resisted to the best of my powers the spirit of Liberalism in religion."¹³⁰ Newman resisted Liberalism precisely because it "made men of religious seriousness *shrink into themselves*" and such an attitude introduced to Newman's beloved Oxford a perverse "liberality of sentiment."¹³¹ Throughout his time at Oxford, Newman resisted boldly and aggressively this spirit of liberalism. Doctrine, for this ideology, is merely an "opinion which happens to be held by bodies of men."¹³² He thought this deprived religion of its necessary character of objectivity. It allowed mere sentiment, mere opinion, to dominate, turning religion into a purely human endeavor.

¹²⁸ *DAMC*, 147.

¹²⁹ In the *Apologia* (Note A, 491), Newman explains the development of his use of the term "liberalism" which he traces back to the "liberal party" during his time at Oxford. This group held to a "false liberty of thought," thus, for Newman, embracing a spirit of religious "liberalism."

¹³⁰ *Add.*, 64.

¹³¹ *Apol.*, 494. Italics mine.

¹³² *Apol.*, 499.

It is clear that there is significant evidence that Newman abhorred subjectivism especially as manifested in “liberalism.” But might there be a fundamental disunity in Newman’s thought? Is what we have seen about the “dogmatic principle” able to be reconciled with Newman’s epistemology? Even a broad survey of Newman’s writings provides an emphatic “yes” in response to the latter question.

3.2.3 The Need for Notional Apprehension and Assent

Much of Jay Newman’s critique relies on his claim that Newman neglects the importance of Notional Assent; for Jay Newman, it seems that the notional can prevent us from falling into subjectivism because it allows us to engage serious intellectual issues in an abstract and rigorous way. We can perhaps understand his critique more fully when we understand that Jay Newman, like many of the skeptics that Newman takes issue with, seems more concerned with avoiding error than achieving a possession of the Truth. This places Jay Newman within an epistemological tradition that is populated by some great thinkers. But Newman has no desire to have a place in this tradition. He is much more concerned with finding truth than he is with avoiding error:

Next let it be considered, that the following law seems to hold in our attainment of knowledge, that according to its desirableness, whether in point of excellence, or range, or intricacy, so is the subtlety of the evidence on which it is received. We are so constituted, that if we insist upon being as sure as is conceivable, in every step of our course, we must be content to creep along the ground, and can never soar. *If we are intended for great ends, we are called to great hazards;* and, whereas we are given absolute certainty in nothing, we must in all things choose between doubt and inactivity, and the conviction that we are under the eye of One who, for whatever reason, exercises us with the less evidence when He might give us the greater.¹³³

¹³³ *OUS*, 215. Italics mine.

Nevertheless, Newman's recognition of the need for the notional and the formal is explicitly found in the *Grammar*, especially as a way to avoid error, and it is this recognition that I wish to draw out here. There is both a recognized need for the notional, and an understanding that the real actually relies upon the notional. For Newman, each the real and the notional "has its own excellence and serviceableness, and each has its own imperfection."¹³⁴ There is a certain kind of *excellence* proper only to notional appreciation, and recognizing this appreciation is essential in order to defend him against the charge of subjectivism.

One such excellence proper to notional is the breadth associated with it. Recall that Newman believes that "there is one truth." Newman believes this one truth to be unified, and to have immense breadth:

All that exists, as contemplated by the human mind, forms one large system or complex fact, and this of course resolves itself into an indefinite number of particular facts, which, as being portions of a whole, have countless relations of every kind, one towards another. Knowledge is the apprehension of these facts, whether in themselves, or in their mutual positions and bearings.¹³⁵

Yet, this apprehension that is necessary for Knowledge, must be notional, because only notional apprehension has the ability to understand things in such a broad way. We cannot understand all of knowledge at once, but must understand it in its constituent parts. Yet, for Newman, knowledge is one whole, so we can "separate off portion from portion" only through *mental abstraction*—an abstraction that is proper to the notional alone.¹³⁶ Notional assent's ability to engage in mental abstraction yields a broad understanding of knowledge. As Newman tells us: "On only few subjects have any of us the opportunity of realizing in our minds what we speak

¹³⁴ *GA*, 32.

¹³⁵ *Idea*, 45.

¹³⁶ *Idea*, 50.

and hear about.”¹³⁷ Think of all that we can only have notional understanding of: events in history, accounts of scientific experiments, events happening in distance places of the world. If we only had real apprehension, without notional apprehension, we would not be able to have any apprehension at all of such things. Yet, these are important things to know. This “quest of comprehensiveness” is recognized by Newman as an “integral part of the human constitution.”¹³⁸ He argues that in acquiring such comprehensiveness, “we are satisfying a direct need of our nature.”¹³⁹ We want to—we *need to*—apprehend things that we can only apprehend notionally, even if only due to practical considerations.

Newman also places a great emphasis on the importance of knowing things in their “mutual positions and bearings.”¹⁴⁰ For Newman, philosophy is “the knowledge not merely of things in general, but of things in their relations to one another. It is the power of referring everything to its place in the universal system.”¹⁴¹ This understanding of knowledge as knowing not just facts, but also the relationships between those facts, can only be accomplished by notional apprehension. There is a certain sort of “tensile unity” to knowledge, as knowledge of the particulars often seems to conflict.¹⁴² It is for this reason that Newman writes that the philosophical mind is one of “breadth and spaciousness of thought, in which lines, seemingly

¹³⁷ *GA*, 33.

¹³⁸ Terrence Merrigan, *Clear Heads and Holy Hearts: The Religious and Theological Ideal of John Henry Newman*, Louvain Theological & Pastoral Monographs (Louvain: Peeters Publishers, 1991), 112.

¹³⁹ *Idea*, 104.

¹⁴⁰ *Idea*, 45.

¹⁴¹ *OUS*, 290-291.

¹⁴² Merrigan, *Clear Heads and Holy Hearts: The Religious and Theological Ideal of John Henry Newman*, 113.

parallel may converge at leisure and principles, recognized as incommensurable, may be safely antagonistic.”¹⁴³ The excellence of notional apprehension is that it is able to handle the complexities, breadth and relations of knowledge.

Yet, despite its advantages in breadth, there is also a serious appreciation for the precision that comes only with notional apprehension. Recall that Newman believes the conscience leads to God—to search for “the unseen teacher.” Yet, the conscience, and the affective responses to it, cannot lead us to understand, whether, for example, the voice of God in the conscience is one god or if it is compatible with many gods.¹⁴⁴ An answer to such a question is provided by notional apprehension and formal reasoning. An investigation into whether the voice of God in the conscience is one or many, or other investigations of a similar sort, need to be completed by a certain tightness of reasoning that is proper to notional apprehension and formal reasoning.

Moreover, this precision can be applied in the sciences and mathematics. For Newman, the sciences consist in processes of mental abstraction, so they have far more to do with “the relations of things than with the things themselves.”¹⁴⁵ Recall that this understanding “the relations” of things occurs through use of notional apprehension. So here once again, we see Newman’s appreciation for the unique excellence associated with the notional. For Newman, it is only through the notional that science can progress. Merrigan describes how on Newman’s account, the sciences “thrive in their divorce from the real.”¹⁴⁶ They have a great degree of “simplicity and exactness” and can deal in universals, not in particulars, which are complicated

¹⁴³ *Idea*, 460.

¹⁴⁴ Crosby, *The Personalism of John Henry Newman*, 55.

¹⁴⁵ Merrigan, *Clear Heads and Holy Hearts: The Religious and Theological Ideal of John Henry Newman*, 124.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

and messy. It is through the notional that this complication can be sorted out. In not having to deal with the concrete, the sciences create a partial and abstract, but scientifically useful, view of reality.

It is also here in the world of science that formal inference is so important. We must use formal inference in matters of scientific discovery. The scientific method desires clearly and neatly defined terms, and tidy syllogisms, to which the process of formal inference lends itself perfectly. Newman does not neglect the importance of formal inference, and it is a mistake to view him as taking informal inference to be always as useful as formal inference. We can also think here of the fields of mathematics, medicine and engineering, and even the social sciences and humanities. Newman is far from thinking that formal inference in such matters is useless, or even inferior to informal inference. We can imagine that if somebody just cited their “personal reasons” as justification for believing that pharmaceutical *x* was more effective than pharmaceutical *y* at treating high blood pressure, we would not find that very satisfying at all. Neither would Newman. In describing the difference between one man’s conclusion and another Newman writes:

In consequence it becomes a necessity, if it be possible, to analyze the process of reasoning, and to invent a method which may act as a common measure between mind and mind, as a means of joint investigation, and as a recognized intellectual standard,—a standard such as to secure us against hopeless mistakes...¹⁴⁸

Formal inference is standardizing and allows us to find errors in reasoning in a clear way. Newman recognizes this. He also recognizes the extreme limits this kind of reasoning has in the way we live our lives.

Jay Newman’s view that Newman neglects the importance of the notional is misguided. As I have shown, Newman appreciates the breadth and precision of the notional. We need

¹⁴⁸ *GA*, 262.

notional apprehension in order to advance the scientific method, and in order to apprehend the wide range of things that we desire to apprehend. We see then that Newman does not just disparage the intellectual faculty of the person in favor of the real and the affective, but rather views the intellectual faculty (and thus notional apprehension) as having its proper place within the human person. But what of the conscience? Jay Newman makes great efforts to show that Newman's view of the conscience leads to religious subjectivism. For Muslims, Buddhist, atheists, and so forth can all claim to have properly functioning consciences. How then does this not lead to total subjectivism?

3.2.4 The Reliability of the Conscience

Recall that Newman understands the conscience in two distinct senses: In the first sense, conscience supplies us with a sense of right and wrong, which Newman calls the conscience's critical office. In the second sense, the conscience is the "dictate of an authoritative monitor bearing upon the details of conduct as they come before us," which Newman calls the juridical office.¹⁵⁰ As Crosby points out, it is quite possible for everyone to experience conscience in the first sense, be they an atheist, Buddhist or Hindu. But it is in the second sense that Newman believes that the conscience can lead us to proper religious belief.¹⁵¹ This second sense can be dulled even while the first sense of conscience is very much functioning. If one takes a view of the conscience as merely a reflection of societal standards, or as some sort of psychological phenomenon, or the byproduct of an evolutionary process, or some other reductionist approach, they are unlikely to experience the same authoritative voice of the conscience, as manifested in

¹⁵⁰ *GA*, 99.

¹⁵¹ *The Personalism of John Henry Newman*, 200-01.

its juridical office. When the second sense of conscience is viewed in one of these reductionist ways, it is quite understandable that one would not experience the divine mystery associated with it.

Moreover, Newman does not argue that conscience must be the *sole* guide to understanding and pursuing right conduct. The conscience can be interpreted in light of the moral law that we can apprehend notionally or reason through via formal inference. There are moral truths available to our intellects, and we can utilize these truths along with our conscience for moral reasoning. If our understanding of the moral law is totally misguided, we surely can have a malformed conscience, and perhaps culpably so. But, to some degree, formal inference on the moral law should prevent us from seriously perverting our consciences. Newman's defense of the conscience does not exclude right reason or an appreciation of others' judgment from contributing, or even driving, discussions of the moral law. There are times when formal reasoning might help us to consider the moral status of some actions, especially in those circumstances where our experience is severely limited or distorted. We must not rely *solely* on an unaided conscience in pursuit of the moral law, and Newman does not argue such a position. Newman does not exclude other sources of moral knowledge, and in some cases, it may be wise to consider these sources seriously.

Jay Newman is concerned that other followers of other religions may all purport to follow their consciences in the road of religious belief, yet they all end up in different places. Jay Newman raises a good point here, and Newman is aware of this fact. As Hughes points out, such a difference in religious practice, or any malfunction of the conscience, might arise because one is "factually ill-informed, emotionally immature, emotionally involved in a way that would cloud

their judgment, or simply lacking in experience of life.”¹⁵² All of these factors can explain why the conscience can lead to such disparate forms of religious beliefs, and further stress the importance of the notional assent and formal inference in moral reasoning.

Let us suppose Sam is a follower of some religion *x*, has been since birth, and claims to be following her conscience in her religious pursuits. Her family and friends all follow religion *x*, and she is heavily emotionally invested in it. Yet, at some point, for some intellectual reason—a formal inference—she begins to be dissuaded from the truth of religion *x*. It might be that she finds that religion *x*'s founder was only pursuing money, or that the sacred canon of religion *x* is incoherent or inconsistent, or one of any other number of reasons. As Sam becomes disenchanted with religion *x*, her conscience may prompt her to move away from that religion and to another. This is a situation where formal reasoning and notional assent might help to guide the person to objective truth.

Newman is convinced that if one sincerely does follow his or her conscience, they will be led to the truth (namely, for Newman, Christianity.) We can consider here Newman's own conversion to Catholicism. In the *Apologia*, Newman defends himself against charges that he was a “secret Catholic,” hiding in the Anglican Church. Newman chronicles how at no point, until 1845, could he have become Catholic, because his conscience did not prompt him to do so. Yet he eventually had an intellectual attraction to the supposed truths of Catholicism, and it was *only then* that his conscience prompted him to convert. Newman is clearly aware of the divergence in religious belief; he just does not view it as decreasing the viability of the conscience as a route to truth because he does not neglect the importance of other faculties.

¹⁵² Gerard J Hughes, "Conscience," in *The Cambridge Companion to John Henry Newman*, ed. Ian Ker and Terrence Merrigan, *The Cambridge Companions to Religion* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 204.

It becomes clear, then, that a subjectivist reading of Newman is rather untenable, once one studies Newman's thought comprehensively. Newman shows a stern objectivity, and a deep reverence for the one, whole, and transcendental truth. Concerns of subjectivism begin to dissolve upon a closer reading of Newman. Newman's personalism is not a kind of subjectivism, but is instead very much opposed to it.

3.3 WILLIAM JAMES: A TRUE SUBJECTIVIST

Jay Newman's characterization of John Henry Newman's epistemology as subjectivist is mistaken, as I have shown. However, I wish to show this further by exploring the thought of one of the fathers of the American Pragmatist movement, William James. James engaged some of the same puzzling epistemological questions that Newman covers in the *Grammar of Assent*. At first it might seem as though James and Newman have a great deal in common: an emphasis on persons acting and not just thinking, a resistance to skepticism, a respect for the importance of human affectivity, a resistance to "intellectual hypertrophy,"¹⁵³ and an awareness of the role of the heart and the will in the formation of our deepest convictions. Many lines from James could be seen as coming from Newman, and vice versa. In many ways, James and Newman both resist that "intellectual hypertrophy" that the Enlightenment brought. Yet, important distinctions and contrasts must be drawn between these two thinkers. Unlike Newman, James *did* fall into a

¹⁵³ Recall here Von Hildebrand's understanding: intellectual hypertrophy occurs when one is "incapable of dropping the attitude of intellectual analysis, and thus cannot be affected by anything or give to anything an affective response of joy or sorrow, love or enthusiasm." See *The Heart*, 55.

radical subjectivism, of roughly the variety that Jay Newman interprets Newman as holding. By engaging the thought of James, Newman will hopefully be further exonerated from the charge of subjectivism by way of contrast.

James points out that in surveying the history of philosophy, “no concrete test of what is really true has ever been agreed upon.”¹⁵⁴ All attempts at providing a universally accepted definition of truth have failed. Instead of trying to develop a new “concrete test” of what is true, James offers that no such test can be developed because there is no objective truth:

*Purely objective truth, truth in whose establishment the function of giving human satisfaction in marrying previous parts of experience with newer parts played no role whatever, is nowhere to be found.*¹⁵⁵

For James, rather than hopelessly pursue some exterior, objective truth, we are better off proceeding from ourselves in pursuit of the ultimate reality. This might seem to be a Newmanian sounding truth, for Newman has little interest in pursuing merely notional propositions, but for Newman objective truth still exists. Yet for James, “truth is made...in the course of experience.”¹⁵⁶ There is nothing fixed about truth for James; rather, we make it in order to fulfill our own needs and desires: “Ideas become true just insofar as they help us to get into satisfactory relation with other parts of our experience.”¹⁵⁷ James turns the pursuit of objective truth into a

¹⁵⁴ William James, "The Will to Believe," in *Human Knowledge: Classical and Contemporary Approaches*, ed. Paul K. Moser and Arnold Vander Nat (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 230.

¹⁵⁵ *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* (New York: Longman Green Co, 1907), 25. Italics mine.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 84

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 23.

matter of “affective and subjective satisfaction.”¹⁵⁸ It is from this context—one in which we should believe in those things that give us personal satisfaction—that James delivers his famous lecture to Harvard students on religious belief, “The Will to Believe.” James proclaims boldly the purpose of his talk:

I have brought with me today something like a sermon on justification by faith to read to you,—I mean an essay in justification *of* faith, a defence [sic.] of our right to adopt a believing attitude in religious matters, in spite of the fact that our merely logical intellect may not have been coerced. “The Will to Believe,” accordingly, is the title of my paper.¹⁵⁹

Newman would agree that we might reasonably believe even if our “our merely logical intellect” has not been coerced. But James then defends our “right to believe” in that which gives us certain psychological satisfactions, which I do not think Newman would take to. For James, in absence of propositions that can be judged on purely intellectual grounds (such as scientific fact), we can decide based on our own subjective experience, and we are justified in doing so. We can believe something because it gives us a certain kind of pleasure and satisfaction, such as he construes Newman as doing in his conversion to Catholicism.

As shown earlier, we see in Newman a deep regard for the dogmatic principle, in which there is “one truth,” and that our duty lies in possessing that truth. Yet, as one commentator of James puts it: “James, it seems to me, is best interpreted as concerned to attack the spirit of

¹⁵⁸ Nicholas Rescher, *Realistic Pragmatism: An Introduction to Pragmatic Philosophy* ed. George R. Lucas, Suny Series in Philosophy (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 18.

¹⁵⁹ James, “The Will to Believe,” 225.

dogmatism—the conviction of certainty that closes the mind to new experiences.”¹⁶⁰ While Newman clearly held onto his “dogmatic principle”, he was also able to incorporate new information into his thought process. When led by his conscience and his intellect, Newman readily adapted to new ideas, and, in doing so, made major contributions to history, theology, education and philosophy. One can think here of his famous *Development of Doctrine* (which would have been resisted by some Scholastic philosophers), or his revolutionary view on the role of the laity. It was not as though Newman’s dogma interfered with his ability to think and to change, but rather formed the framework within which he worked.

There is clearly a radical subjectivism associated with the thought of William James, one that is devastating to any sort of pursuit of a transcendental, objective truth. This is the sort of philosophy that Jay Newman should be criticizing, not Newman’s. In Newman we see a deep respect for objectivity and an integrated view of the human person, in which the affective, intellectual, and volitional faculties of man all have their proper place. In James, we see a gross inflation of the affective faculty, to the point that religious truth is simply that which effects the best possible integration of a person’s affectivity. It is clear that James and Newman, despite all their kinship of spirit, are radically opposed—and they are so opposed because Newman is not a subjectivist.

¹⁶⁰ Israel Scheffler, *Four Pragmatists: A Critical Introduction to Peirce, James, Mead, and Dewey*, ed. Ted Honderich, International Library of Philosophy and Scientific Books (London-New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), 113.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The introduction set out two goals for this paper. First was to capture the harmony between Newman and a few of the 20th century personalists, namely Max Scheler, Dietrich Von Hildebrand, and Karol Wojtyła. The second was to show that Newman's esteem for the personal, the intimate, and the experiential does not make him a subjectivist, but positions him to speak keenly on issues present in contemporary philosophy and the culture at large, today.

These two goals are intimately related; it is *because* of Newman's personalism (especially as found in his philosophical anthropology and epistemology) that he is able to be relevant to contemporary discussions. His particular interest in "touching the heart" and speaking to the person's "hopes and fears, desires, judgments, and aims" enables him to have a profound effect on those who read him—a characteristic that is missing from many modern philosophers and thinkers. In an era in which the university and the broader culture have become obsessed with the natural sciences, technology, and engineering, I think it is important for philosophers to focus on those thinkers who can speak to the concerns and desires of *persons*. In order for the humanities to continue their relevance, they need to offer something that the technical fields cannot—an ability to engage the deepest questions of the personal life and the human experience.

Study of the humanities and the study of Newman, will give us the very tools we need to examine the quality of life itself—an examination that has become generally, and noticeably,

absent, following the widespread depersonalization of the world in which we live. Even our day-to-day experiences have been stripped of the personal interactions once characteristic: casual chats with a cashier at the grocery store were once commonplace, but now “self-checkout” allows us to pay for our goods without ever speaking to another persons. Bank tellers have been replaced by ATMs, receptionists have been by replaced computers and automated phone trees, and catching up with family on the telephone has turned into texting and Facebook.

Newman, and more importantly, his thought, is uniquely positioned to break through the impersonal, and “touch hearts”—to engage the whole person in the issues of great importance. I hope that this study provides an occasion for people to engage with Newman in his role as “the pioneer of a new philosophy of the individual person and Personal Life.”¹⁶¹

¹⁶¹ Sillem, *Philosophical Notebook of John Henry Newman*, I: 250.

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