Newman and Wittgenstein after Foundationalism

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In this paper I intend to compare some of the ideas of Newman and Wittgenstein, and to use some of Wittgenstein's later remarks in an attempt to better understand Newman's philosophy. I will argue that they both move away from the typical foundationalist tradition of modern European philosophy towards a non-foundationalist account of knowledge and belief.

An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent[1] is Newman's most important work from a philosophical point of view. Newman has two main objectives in this work. The first is concerned with a discussion of the question of supernatural dogma and mystery as objects of religious belief. This was in opposition to the theological liberalism of his time, which considered superstitious anything in religious matters that could not be understood. The second objective is to analyse the more philosophical problem of the justification of religious and secular beliefs which lack absolute logical proof.[2] These two main objectives of Newman's study correspond to the two parts of which his work consists: in the first, he wants to show that you can believe what you cannot understand and in the second, that you can believe what you cannot absolutely prove.[3] Newman asserts that his interest is on assent, as a result and as a process.

In Newman's view, assent means "the absolute acceptance of a proposition without any condition"[4], which always comes with its apprehension. This in turn results from "the interpretation given to the terms of which the proposition is composed".[5] He distinguishes between notional assent and real assent: any given proposition may have a notional sense as used by one man, and a real as used by another. The difference lies in the commitment of the person to the content of the proposition. "While in notional assent the mind

[1] GA IV.3.1 means chapter IV, paragraph 3, section 1; English edition edited by Nicholas Lash, University of Notre Dame Press, 1979.

[2] See Bastable, J. D. "The Germination of Belief within Probability according to Newman", *Philosophical Studies*, Vol. XI (1961–62), p. 85, note 10.

[3] Dessain, S. "Cardinal Newman on the Theory and Practice of Knowledge. The Purpose of the *Grammar of Assent*", *The Downside Review*, 75, January 1957.

[4] GA II.1 p. 32 Without any condition does not mean without reserve.

[5] GA II.1 p. 32.

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contemplates its own creations instead of things, in real, it is directed towards things, represented by the impressions which they have left on the imagination."[6] Belief is another name for real assent, and is not grounded on understanding, because it is constituted by a series of acts not totally explicit; these acts, however, do not lack a reason. In the second part of the *Grammar* Newman deals with the relationship between assent and inference and how we can believe what cannot be demonstrated in an absolute way. While in the first part of his work Newman describes the result obtained with an assent, in the second he focuses on those conditions which make this process possible, giving a detailed phenomenology of different forms of assent and providing some conditions to recognise certitude. In doing so he has to deal with the meaning of certainty. For the purpose of this paper I will take from his rich analysis only what is close to Wittgenstein, avoiding the many aspects in which they diverge.

Newman claims that his remarks hold good in secular subjects as well as in religious ones. The purpose of the *Grammar* is not to form a theory which may account for the phenomena of the intellect but to ascertain what is the matter of fact as regards them: that is, those instances in which assent is given to the inferred propositions and under which circumstances. Thus, Newman proves that to be certain is one law of the human spirit, and not a condition of weakness or of absurdity. Certitude in Newman's view is a mental state: certainty is a quality of propositions.[7]

Are there criteria of accuracy for an inference, in the way that these criteria may be our warrant of the fact that certitude is rightly elicited in favour of a proposition; and this also since our warrant cannot be scientific? The final judgement on the validity of an inference in concrete matters is committed to the personal action of the ratiocinative faculty, whose perfection or virtue Newman defines as "Illative Sense"[8]. In other words, this concept identifies man's personal judgement while it also means that when referring to concrete matters all our being is involved.[9] The "supra-logical judgement, which is the warrant for man's certitude about concrete matters, is not merely common-sense but the true healthy action of our reasoning powers, an action more subtle and more comprehensive than the mere appreciation of a syllogistic argument."[10] Newman calls this judgement a *judicium prudentis viri* since these conclusions originate not from a scientific necessity, but from one's own individual perception of the

[6] Ker, I. Introduction to Newman, J. H. *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, Clarendon, Oxford, 2001, p. xiv.

[7] GA IX p. 271.

[8] GA IX p. 270.

[9] See Tillman, M. K. "The Personalist Epistemology of John Henry Newman", *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association*, vol. LX (1986), pp. 235–244.

[10] GA VIII.2.3 p. 251.

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very truth in question. He points out: "instead of devising, what can not be, some sufficient science of reasoning which may compel certitude in concrete conclusions, to confess that there is no ultimate test of truth besides the testimony born to truth by the mind itself, and that this phenomenon, perplexing as one may find it, is a normal and inevitable characteristic of the mental constitution of a being like man on a stage such as the world."[11]

Following John Keble and Joseph Butler, Newman develops the idea that the method by which we are enabled to become certain of that which is concrete is identified as the cumulation of probabilities and these are "independent of one another while they arise from the nature and circumstances of the particular case under review; probabilities too fine to be availed separately, too subtle and circuitous to be convertible into syllogisms, too numerous and various for such conversion, even were they convertible."[12] The method of reasoning in concrete matters does not supersede the logical form of inference, but it is carried out into the realities of life.[13] What can be a proof for one intellect is not so for another, for the certainty of a proposition does not properly consist in the certitude of the mind which contemplates it[14]; certitude is the result of those arguments which, considered theoretically and not in their full implicit sense, are nothing but probabilities. Yet in one's daily life the individual considers them highly credited. On the contrary, in fact, many of man's most obstinate and most rational certitudes depend on proofs which are informal and personal, which baffle one's power of analysis, and cannot be ruled by logic. However, man does not reject them because one law of the human mind is to recognise a connection between certitude and implicit proof.[15]

Newman and Wittgenstein

In Wittgenstein's work an entry on Newman's name can be found only once, in the first section of *On Certainty*: "If you don't know that *here is one hand*, we'll grant you all the rest. When one says that such and such a proposition can not be proved, of course that does not mean that it can not be derived from other propositions; any proposition can be derived from other ones. But they may be no more certain than it is itself. (On this a curious remark by H. Newman.)"[16] This remark appears to make a direct reference to the *Grammar of Assent*.

[11] GA IX.1 p. 275.
[12] GA VIII.1.2 p. 230.
[13] See Ferreira, M. J. "Newman on Belief-Confidence, Proportionality and Probability", *The Heythrop Journal*, Vol. XXVI (1985), pp. 164–176.
[14] GA VIII.1 p. 234.
[15] GA VIII.2.1 p. 239.
[16] OC 1.

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Yet we do not know exactly which of Newman's works Wittgenstein actually read. Drury wrote: "He told me that he had been reading Newman's *Apologia* and that he admired Newman's obvious sincerity. But when he came to read the last sermon Newman preached to his friends in Littlemore, he thought to himself, 'I wouldn't wish to speak to my friends like that'."[17] Norman Malcolm recalls that "He disliked the theological writings of Cardinal Newman, which he read with care during his last year at Cambridge"[18] and it is not possible to exclude the influence of Alfred Whitehead on this.[19] Yorick Smythies also remembers a critical appreciation of the *Grammar of the Assent*[20] but Elizabeth Anscombe once said that Wittgenstein did not read the *Grammar of Assent* but the *Apologia*.[21] Among Newman commentators and scholars it is not difficult to find attempts of comparative study between him and other philosophers of the twentieth century, including Wittgenstein.[22] By contrast, this kind of work is less common

[17] Rhees, R. (edit.) *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1984, p. 130.

[18] See Malcolm, N. *Ludwig Wittgenstein, A Memoir*, New York-Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1984, p. 59.

[19] Henry Whitehead, Alfred's brother, was a Fellow and lecturer in classics at Trinity College, Oxford, when Newman was an honorary Fellow. Alfred Whitehead met Newman probably only once in Edgbaston, in 1889 when he was considering joining the Catholic Church. "[Whitehead] never forgot his few minutes with Newman. And the man remained high in his esteem. In philosophical lectures at Harvard he recommended reading him, and sometimes went so far in praise of Newman's merit as a thinker to call him the most profound mind of the nineteenth century". Lowe, V. *Alfred North Whitehead The Man and his Work*, The John Hopkins University Press, 1985, p. 171.

[20] "Yorick Smythies, a former student of Wittgenstein's, told me that Wittgenstein had said of J. H. Newman's *Grammar of Assent*, that Newman thought the grammar was supporting the Christian faith whereas, in fact, the faith was supporting the grammar, as if it were suspended from a balloon. Thus assent to religious belief is an ascent or an elevation rather than the result of an upward climb. The driving force that impels this upward thrust is love of Christ and trust in his redemptive power." Barrett, C. *Wittgenstein on Ethics and Religious Belief*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1991, p. 181.

[21] "... Professor Anscombe informed me at the Conference that Wittgenstein did not read Newman's book [*Grammar of Assent*], although he had read in the *Apologia*." FitzPatrick, P. J. *Eine komische Bemerkung H. Newmans* in Leinfellner E. and others (edd.) *Wittgenstein and his impact on contemporary thought*, Wien, HPT, 1978, pp. 42–45. And also "I was informed by Professor Anscombe that Wittgenstein did not read the *Grammar of Assent*; but that, on hearing this theme in the book stated, he acknowledged the likeness to his own views. On what Malcolm had in mind, I can offer no information; but I record Professor Anscombe's recollection that Wittgenstein did not like Tract 90." FitzPatrick, P. J. *Newman's Grammar and the Church Today* in Nicholls D. and Kerr F. (edit.) *John Henry Newman Reason, Rhetoric and Romanticism*, Bristol, The Bristol Press, 1991, p. 128 note 1.

[22] See Grassi, O. (edit.) *L'idea di ragione*, Milan, Jaca Book, 1992; p. 73; Fey, W. R *Faith and Doubt*, Shepherdstown, Patmos Press, 1976, p. 158; Bearsley, P. J. "Aquinas and Wittgenstein on the Grounds of Certainty", *The Modern Schoolman*, Vol. LI (1974), pp. 301–334; McCarthy, G. "Newman and Wittgenstein: The Problem of Certainty", *Irish Theological Quarterly*, Vol. 49 (1982) n. 2, pp. 98–120; Holyer, R. "Religious Certainty and the Imagination: an Interpretation of J. H. Newman", *The Thomist*, n. 50 (1986), pp. 395–416; Ferreira, M. J. *Doubt and Religious Commitment*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1980; Ferreira, M. J. *Scepticism and Reasonable Doubt*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1986.

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among Wittgenstein's critics; nevertheless we do have some examples.[23]

According to the so called "later Wittgenstein", the full structure of language is no longer expressed by its formal features, but it consists of a variety of different aspects; in particular, these aspects are connected to the variable and boundless language use and to a consideration of the concrete situations of the use of language itself. Surveying these aspects and trying to see their mutual connections is what constitutes its analysis. In his later work, Wittgenstein deals with language in its more straightforward ordinary meaning, observing the everyday situations in which language works. "Don't think, look!"[24] he says. In this way, therefore, language is rescued from philosophical perplexities and placed in the effectiveness of its use and functioning.

While Newman's philosophical project emphasises the personal aspect conceived as the involvement of the human being in its whole nature in knowledge and belief, Wittgenstein insists on the practical and communitarian aspect. Nevertheless they both attempt a philosophical account of the phenomena they are concerned with, i.e. as it 'in fact is', as formed and given in ordinary experience.[25] They seek a full description through internal conceptual connections. Phillips attributes to Wittgenstein the method according to which "if the philosopher wants to give an account of religion, he must pay attention to what religious believers do and say".[26] Indeed, this method is exactly the one Newman puts into operation. In his dispute with Locke, for instance, Newman accuses him in his empiricist position of being unreal as a result of its normative characteristic. Newman is the true empiricist, we may say, because he attempts to describe the phenomena instead of judging them.[27] He doesn't look for an "a priori" but appeals to the common voice of mankind.[28] In fact,

[23] See Barrett, C. *Newman and Wittgenstein on the Rationality of Religious Belief*, in Ker, I. (edit.) *Newman and* Conversion, Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1997; Levvis, G. W. "The Wittgensteinian Consistency of Scepticism", *Philosophical Investigations*, n. 15 (1992), pp. 66–78; Gallacher, H. P. "Wittgenstein over kennis", *Kennis en metode*, n. 2 (1978), pp. 18–29.

[24] PU 66.

[25] "How it comes about that we can be certain is not my business to determine; for me it is sufficient that certitude is felt. This is what the schoolmen, I believe, call treating a subject in facto esse, in contrast with in fieri. Had I attempted the latter, I should have been falling into metaphysics; but my aim is of a practical character, such as that of Butler in his Analogy, with this difference, that he treats of probability, doubt, expedience, and duty, whereas in these pages, without excluding, far from it, the question of duty, I would confine myself to the truth of things, and to the mind's certitude of that truth." GA IX, p. 270.

[26] Phillips, D. Z. *The Concept of Prayer*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965, p. 1.

[27] See Naulty, R. A. "Newman's Dispute with Locke", *Journal of history of Philosophy*, n. 11 (1973), pp. 453–457; Newman, Jay "Newman on the Strength of Belief", *The Thomist*, n. 44 (1977), pp. 134–140; Bastable, J. D. "Cardinal Newman's Philosophy of Belief", *Philosophical Studies*, Vol. V (1955), pp. 52–55; Cameron, J. M. "Newman and Locke A Note on some Themes in An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent", *Newman Studien*, Vol. IX, pp. 197–205.

[28] See McCarthy, G. "Newman and Wittgenstein: The Problem of Certainty", *Irish Theological Quarterly*, Vol. 49 (1982) n. 2, p. 111.

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Newman insists that "we must take the constitution of the human mind as we find it, and not as we may judge it ought to be."[29] Likewise Wittgenstein renounces a normative theory which determines what makes sense from what does not make sense and devotes his philosophical effort to looking at how things manifest themselves.

If we define "foundationalism" as the idea that only what is sufficiently grounded has to be accepted, then Newman and Wittgenstein can both be considered anti-foundationalists.[30]

In the modern philosophical tradition most of thinkers have held that reasons for knowledge and belief must rest on a foundational structure; propositions that form this foundational structure derive none of their justification from other propositions. Different and also opposite accounts have being given to the nature of this foundational structure by philosophical schools, such as the Empiricists or the Rationalists, but they all agree that what does not satisfy the criteria required must be rejected as unjustified, irrational or dogmatic. Scepticism, on the other hand, holds that these criteria cannot be satisfied at all and knowledge is not possible. The need for justification leads to much more problematic questions when criteria are requested to give an account of religious belief. One of the most common problems is when or where the need for justification should consider whether the criteria have been satisfied.

Newman argues that, unless the series of arguments on which knowledge is based ends somewhere, there cannot be withdrawal into the infinite. A protest written in 1841 quoted in the *Grammar* reads: "Life is not long enough for a religion of inferences; we shall never have done beginning, if we determine to begin with proof. We shall ever be laying our foundations; we shall turn theology into evidence, and divine matters into textual concerns. We shall never get at our first principles. Resolve to believe nothing, and you must prove your proofs and analyse your elements, sinking farther and farther, and finding 'in the lowest depth a lower deep', till you come to the broad bosom of scepticism. [...] Life is for action. If we insist on proofs for every thing, we shall never come to action: to act you must assume, and that assumption is faith."[31] Two important aspects must be underlined: on the one hand Newman gives priority to action rather than to reflection, while on the other hand he wishes to reject the temptation of scepticism which would confine certainty to the realm of the irrational. His *Grammar* is precisely an attempt to avoid scepticism without being a rationalist.

[29] GA VII.1.1 p. 177.

[30] See Collins, P. M. "Newman, Foundationalism and Teaching Philosophy", *Metaphilosophy*, Vol. 22 (1991), n. 1 and 2, pp. 143–161 and Schenck, D. "Newman's Complex Assent and Foundationalism", *International Philosophical Quarterly*, n. 26 (1986), pp. 229–240.

[31] GA IV.3 pp. 90–91.

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Wittgenstein in a similar way denies the need for justification of particular practices rather than providing an alternative view of what constitutes a justification of those practices. He argues: "You must bear in mind that the language game is, so to speak, something unforeseeable. I mean: it is not based on grounds. Not reasonable (or unreasonable). It stands there – like our life."[32] And elsewhere he continues: "Giving ground, however, justifying the evidence, comes to an end; but the end is not a certain propositions striking us immediately as true, i.e., it is not a kind of seeing on our part; it is our acting which lies at the bottom of the language game."[33] The end of the foundation is not a conclusion or a point of view but an action, therefore, the typical philosophical question of the search for the foundation has its only answer in the acknowledgement of man's way of acting. Furthermore, the certainty of our assumptions is not based on our knowledge of the truth of these assumptions but is considered an essential feature of every human act. In other words, it is something specifically belonging to one's own life and relating to the way one acts and behaves. Given that what is fundamental cannot be proved, certainty cannot be considered as a question of knowledge of true propositions but a more primitive concept. Thus, certainty of the propositions of common sense is connected to the very same function of those propositions themselves and not with their truth.

In *On Certainty* Wittgenstein seems to rely on the fact that knowledge provides man with an idea of a safe condition, the final stage beyond which any form of investigation has no reason to be carried out. This condition of safeness resembles the behaviour of the believer. The religious man perceives his beliefs as absolutely certain not because their truth is well established but because they form the ground for what can be said, thought, and done within religious life.[34] In real terms, such behaviour, which would be considered dogmatic and superstitious by many modern philosophers, seems to occur in every human activity and manifests itself more evidently in those activities characterised by religious or ritualistic elements. It is possible to accept these assumptions not with an explicit acknowledgement but by acting in practical terms without questioning. Such behaviour is identified as "virtual acceptance" by Gullvåg[35], which is also the same definition used by Newman to explain the commitment of most believers to the truth of their assent.

[32] OC 559.
[33] OC 204.
[34] See Martin; D. "On Certainty and Religious Belief", *Religious Studies*, n. 20 (1984), p. 602.
[35] See Gullvåg, I. "Remarks on Wittgenstein's *Über Gewissheit* and a Norwegian Discussion", *Inquiry*, n. 31 (1988), p. 378.

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Most people pass through life without any doubt or certitude about the most important propositions which can occupy their minds. Newman refers to this condition as simple assent or virtual certitude. For example, if we were to question the majority of Christians about the truth of the objects of their assent we would obtain an act of faith that implicitly owns all required conditions for certitude. In addition, the argumentative process necessary to justify such an act will be valid and sufficient, if carried out seriously, and proportionately to their several capacities so that the very authenticity of the act itself cannot be denied. "And if the particular argument used in some instances needs strengthening, . . . , the keenness of the real apprehension with which the assent is made, though it cannot be the legitimate basis of the assent, may still legitimately act, and strongly act, in confirmation of this"[36]. When the occasion for reflection does not occur, "most genuine and thorough as is the assent, it can only be called virtual, material or interpretative certitude"[37].

The certainty that distinguishes Moore's common sense propositions, as Wittgenstein comments in his notes, is the same one that is present in the believer's assents. Moreover, it would be misleading in these instances to concentrate on the concept of knowledge because Wittgenstein thinks about a form of life of human beings which goes beyond what may be justified or unjustified. However, this is not because this is an un-reflected or superficial condition; he does so because such a condition is almost instinctive and very close to animal behaviour.[38] He points out that: "I want to regard man here as an animal; as a primitive being to which one grants instinct but not ratiocination. As a creature in a primitive state. Any logic good enough for a primitive means of communication needs no apology from us. Language did not emerge from some kind of ratiocination."[39] In the same way, Newman focuses on the question of instinct, developed in children from an early age and in beasts, as a force that rules acts of the mind and makes one accept the first principle.[40] Wittgenstein explains: "Instinct is the first thing, reasoning the second. Reasons exist only inside of a language game."[41]

The main thesis of *On Certainty* is that what man finds impossible to doubt is not what he *knows* for certain, but what he *takes* as certain or what he *treats* as certain, or what plays that particular role for him. Consequently, there is no reference to the question of knowing, rather to a certain logical status given to certain kinds of propositions. It looks as if a factual "a priori" is connected to this

[36] GA VI.2.2 p. 174.
[37] GA VII.1.1 p. 174.
[38] ÜG 357–359.
[39] ÜG 475.
[40] GA VII.1.1 p. 102.
[41] BPP II 689.

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logical condition because we cannot proceed without these defined and method-determined propositions; but what is important is that in their foundational role these are not a matter of knowledge.[42] Supposing the factual "a priori" is identified with the very act of faith that defines and determines how one believes, the above argument may well apply to the *Grammar of the Assent*.

Doubt, language and philosophy

Other common features can be found between Newman and Wittgenstein, especially in questions related to doubt. For instance, Newman considers investigation as compatible with assent but not inquiry. For, he says, to investigate is to consider the grounds to assent to propositions or doctrines, without retaining doubts about their truth. Moreover, it would be absurd to be at the same time believers and inquirers. For to inquire means that something has not yet been found and can still be in doubt as to where truth lies; this position cannot belong to the believer, he should have no doubts. And where the above situation takes place this is the consequence of the fact that he has already lost his faith; what then would be better than to inquire?[43] On the whole, Newman's theory circles around two main ideas: on the one hand he acknowledges that the believer should not doubt, while on the other hand he recognises that weakness, even in a man of faith, often symbolises the temptation of doubt. When such temptation appears Newman's theory itself seems unable to overcome the difficulties of its consequences.

This analysis may seem, to the common reader, a juxtaposition between a concrete fact and a dogmatic, rather unpractical duty. Newman himself is aware of the simplistic nature of his argument and repeatedly tries to overcome such difficulties by appealing to ordinary human behaviour. He is also conscious that when men attempt to unite any incompatible aspects, they expose themselves to dangerous objections given that for some to investigate may also signify to make an inquiry. Nevertheless, he admits that for educated minds "investigations into the argumentative proof of the things to which they have given their assent, is an obligation, or rather a necessity. Such a trial of their intellects is a law of their nature, like the growth of childhood into manhood."[44] It is generally accepted that moral principles as well as intellectual assents have to be tested,

[42] See Finch, H. L. R. "Wittgenstein's Last Word: Ordinary Certainty", *International Philosophical Quarterly*, n. 15 (1975), p. 384.

[43] On doubt in Newman see Ferreira, M. J. *Doubt and Religious Commitment*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1980; Powell, J. P. "Cardinal Newman on Faith and Doubt: the Role of Conscience", *The Downside Review*, n. 99–100 (1981), pp. 137–148; Holyer, R. "Newman on Doubt", *The Downside Review*, n. 107–108 (1989), pp. 117–126.

[44] GA VI, 2 p. 160.

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realised and developed by the exercise of our mature judgement, and indeed, if my opinions are true I have a right to think that they will bear up to examination.

In many sections of the *Grammar* Newman recognises that doubt carries an important value in the investigation and that it may even provide a source of pleasure. Yet here the analysis is focused not on the possibility to have doubts, rather it concentrates on the sense of doubt in some situations. Also, belief never implies the intention for change, though it implies the complete absence of thought, expectation and fear of changing. Newman in fact considers intentions to change as inconsistent with the very idea of believing, because the strength and the range of the act of assent itself excludes it. Then, could doubt be forbidden? Surely not, it would make no sense. Why therefore, is doubt incompatible with assent? Newman's opinion on the matter may appear dogmatic but Wittgenstein can help clarify it.

It is argued that the difference between investigation and inquiry lies in the different ways of approaching the truth. This does not concern the content of the propositions for every proposition can be investigated, rather it refers to the fact that what can be possible, does not actually happen. Thus, "what I need to show", Wittgenstein explains, "is that a doubt is not necessary even when it is possible. That the possibility of the language-game does not depend on everything being doubted that can be doubted."[45] Most modern philosophers since Descartes argue that it is their task to show the reasons why their particular world description is true, otherwise they would fall either into blind faith or into doubt. Wittgenstein affirms that the act of believing precedes doubt logically and psychologically. He points out that "the child learns by believing the adult. Doubt comes after belief."[46] In fact the child learns by trusting his parents and his teachers. By contrast, the pupil who continuously interrupts his teachers with questions and objections should be made to listen; in this way his teacher will highlight the senselessness of the child's doubt.[47] Also, doubts must have good reasons[48] and the pupil must learn to ask questions. It is recognised that a reasonable man shows doubt only in particular circumstances. For instance, it is not possible to doubt the meaning of the words by means of which perplexity is expressed; and this also proves that the cosmic perspective of scepticism is nonsense. In fact, Wittgenstein states that "doubts about existence only work in a language-game"[49]: it is the game one plays to settle one's own sense of doubt; and this means that one cannot withdraw from those grammatical paradigms which provide him with

[45] OC 392.
[46] OC 160.
[47] See OC 310.
[48] See OC 458.
[49] OC 24.

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the basis of communication.[50] At the grounds of our judgement lies something beyond question, otherwise it would not be possible to play the game.

From this perspective, the game of doubting requires certainty[51] as its starting point and doubt rests on what is out of doubt.[52] In this sense Wittgenstein renounces the idea that philosophy begins with the process of questioning and with the suspension of assent; hence, once he has sufficiently doubted, the task of the philosopher is to rebuild the way that leads to the truth of judgement. Both the dogmatic philosophy and the theory based on Cartesian doubt look for a language which may regulate and base itself on truth and therefore provide a secure shelter from chaos and nonsense. The dogmatic philosopher is convinced of his own truth; the sceptic, whose theory is based on doubt, recognises he lacks truth. This is the reason why he insists on the challenge of doubt; yet both search for infallible language and definitive interpretation, one claiming he possesses it, the other claiming it does not actually exist. Similarly, Newman underlines the fact that certain critics "seem to have gone far beyond any reasonable scepticism by laying down as a general proposition that we have no right in philosophy to make any assumption whatsoever and that philosophers ought to begin with a universal doubt."[53] This is the greatest of all presumptions. Doubt is a positive state, and implies a definite habit of the mind; therefore it necessarily involves an entire system of principles and doctrines of its own. Supposing nothing is to be assumed, what is our method of reasoning but an assumption? We ought to begin with believing everything that is offered to our acceptance, this seems to be the true way of learning. Only later do we discover and discard what is contradictory.

Morawetz has made an attempt to study some of Wittgenstein's ideas by highlighting two main kinds of propositions which, in *On Certainty*, are closely related to one another: they are the paradigmatic and the methodological ones.[54] The paradigmatic proposition plays a special role in the language game; and such a process is made possible not by the concept of an transcendental "a priori"; but because of the function they play in the particular conceptual system in which these are placed.[55] Furthermore, the falsity of the paradigmatic proposition would involve the entire language game by calling

[50] See Frank, G. "Fondazione della conoscenza e fondamenti dell'operare (Moore and Wittgenstein)", *Nuova Corrente*, n.72–73 (1977), p. 51.

[51] "If you tried to doubt everything you would not get as far as doubting anything. The game of doubting itself presupposes certainty." OC 115.

[52] OC 519.

[53] GA IX.3.2 p. 294.

[54] See Morawetz, T. *Wittgenstein & Knowledge The Importance of "On Certainty"*, Amherst, The University of Massachusetts Press, 1978.

[55] See Morawetz, T. *Wittgenstein & Knowledge The Importance of "On Certainty"*, Amherst, The University of Massachusetts Press, 1978, pp. 12–13.

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into question the very fact that it can be played.[56] To make a mistake with these judgements would mean making a mistake every time for, being a regular phenomenon, every language game is necessarily based on rules. Nevertheless, rules in the language game derive from the paradigmatic statements which, in turn, help put them in operation. Therefore, to eliminate these regulations means to abandon the language game itself. The paradigmatic characteristic of those propositions can be explained through the analysis of the connection between them and the meaning of the words used: that is "if I make certain false statements, it becomes uncertain whether I understand them."[57] If paradigmatic propositions are considered as statements within the linguistic game, methodological propositions state the possibility conditions of the given game.[58] The latter have the same grammatical form as the former; and while these are propositions they seem to be part of a given game, in reality they are not. Therefore a mistake in a methodological proposition cannot be made in the same way, as it is impossible to retain doubts. "There are cases where doubt is unreasonable, but others where it seems logically impossible. And there seems to be no clear boundary between them."[59]

If Morawetz's ideas are applied to the different theoretical aspects introduced by Newman[60], we can more easily understand why Newman considers only investigation and not inquiry legitimate in the experience of the believer. Considering the grounds for assent to a doctrine or proposition, without doubting its truth, one does not question what makes it possible and therefore investigation is compatible with the assent. For this reason it is a law of nature by educated minds, if not a necessity, the process of investigation into the proofs of things they have given their assent, as well as a growth into manhood. In addition, we could affirm for instance that many theological schools in the Christian tradition interpret elements of faith through different argumentative discourses, but these arguments do not dissent with one another on essential issues expressed by their common dogmatic feature.

A theology may begin with a fundamentalist reading and interpretation of the Scriptures, with the study of Greek philosophical categories; with a strong emphasis on either the more mystic aspects or the

[56] See OC 617.

[57] OC 81.

[58] "The notion of a methodological proposition is like the notion of a proposition known a priori, a proposition which invariably specifies a condition for the possibility of knowing." Morawetz, T. *Wittgenstein & Knowledge The Importance of "On Certainty"*, Amherst, The University of Massachusetts Press, 1978, p. 104. See also Morawetz, T. H. "Wittgenstein and Synthetic A Priori Judgments", *Philosophy*, n. 49 (1974), pp. 429–434.

[59] OC 454.

[60] The use of Wittgenstein's thought to clarify Newman ideas is not completely arbitrary. See Haldane, J. "Infallibility, Authority and Faith", *The Heythrop Journal*, Vol. XXXVIII (1997), pp. 267–282.

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more existential features of Christianity; or with the idea of social liberation of the Christian message. It may be possible to compare the characteristic elements of each of these choices with the paradigmatic propositions, in such a way that all subsequent reflections will suffer from those effects by which elements of falsity within these propositions would overrun the whole game and call into question the fact that this can be played. Thus, for instance, if Aristotelian categories are rejected, then Aquinas' theory cannot be accepted either. For coherent features within these theological theories arise from paradigmatic statements; since these statements contribute to found these theories, to eliminate the statements themselves means to quit the game. On the contrary, all theological tradition is brought into existence within an entirely structured theoretical system that would fail if it is manipulated in some of its basic points: these points are the methodological propositions. In fact, if inquiry were conceived as having not found and putting in doubt where the truth is, to inquire would influence the "methodological propositions" of the Christian faith. And it is for this reason that in such cases Newman states that to have doubts would mean to be excluded from the body of the Church. Inquiry would deny the fundamental act that makes one a Christian, that is precisely the act of faith.

The main thesis of *On Certainty* is that what we find impossible to doubt is not what man can *know* for certain, rather what we *take* as certain or what we *treat* as certain, or what really plays that particular role for us. As a result, the present argument does not question the faculty of knowing; rather, it focuses on some logical status that may be attributed to certain facts. In other words, there seems to be a factual "a-priori", for these defining and method-determining elements are essential to human life. What seems more important is that in their characteristic of a foundation role these "a priori" are not a matter of knowledge.[61] All in all, the fact that the feature of a foundation role in the act of belief is not merely a question of knowledge, is again exactly the argument that Newman and Wittgenstein state against the empiricists and the sceptics.

To conclude, it is not difficult to find similarities in the ideas of Newman and Wittgenstein. It may be possible to question the way such a comparison is made. Yet, in my opinion, it is definitely not just by accident that, with the exception of Moore, Newman is the only philosopher to which explicit reference is found in Wittgenstein's last remarks. Once again, this accounts for the fact that Newman's theories to date remain extremely interesting and stimulating from a contemporary philosophical perspective.[62]

[61] Finch, H. L. R. "Wittgenstein's Last Word: Ordinary Certainty", *International Philosophical Quarterly*, n. 15 (1975), p. 384.

[62] I would like to thank D. Z. Phillips, Teresa Iglesias and Gemma Lougheed for their critical comments on the previous version of this essay.

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List of abbreviations

BPP = *Bemerkungen über die Philosophie der Psychologie, Werkausgabe Band 7*, Frankfurt a.M., Suhrkamp, 1984.
GA = *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1979.
PU = *Philosophische Untersuchungen, Werkausgabe Band 1*, Frankfurt a.M., Suhrkamp, 1984; English version *Philosophical Investigation*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 1997.
T = *Tractatus Logico-philosophicus, Werkausgabe Band 1*, Frankfurt a.M., Suhrkamp, 1984.
OC = *Über Gewissheit, Werkausgabe Band 8*, Frankfurt a.M., Suhrkamp, 1984; English version *On Certainty*, Oxford, 1969.

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