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Reflections about Newman and Wittgenstein on Knowledge, Certainty and Language

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Abstract

In breaking out from the analytic paradigm of certainty, St John Henry Newman is credited with keeping channels open for new streams of thought to irrigate philosophy in the century after his. Contemporary commentators sometimes see themes in Newman that anticipate ones taken up by Wittgenstein after him. This paper explores some simple convergences and divergences between Newman's and Wittgenstein's tendency of thought. It draws mainly on Newman's philosophical writings, in such as the *Oxford University Sermons* and *the Grammar of Assent*, and from Wittgenstein's mid to later writings, from such works as *The Blue Book*, *Philosophical Investigations* and, of course, *On Certainty*. It argues that Newman's attention to speech as distinct from the rest of what might be called language is critical. This paper eventually challenges the assumption that Wittgenstein has provided the last word on approaches to knowledge such as Locke's. Instead, it proposes that within Newman there is already a more powerful critique, one that would cast Wittgenstein as the last protesting exemplar of an approach he is thought to have dismantled.

Keywords

Newman, Wittgenstein, Knowledge, Certainty, Language

Introduction

The paper breakdown is very simple. There are prefatory remarks on the extent to which Wittgenstein immersed himself in Newman's ideas. There follows a discussion of some convergences between Newman and Wittgenstein. These are illuminating in themselves, but they also sharpen some real divergences in the thinking of Newman and Wittgenstein sketched in the second half of the paper. In the end, there is the strong conjecture that Wittgenstein, for all his sinuous, beautiful, difficult and original turns of thought, failed to make what is for Newman a vital distinction: between speech and verbal argumentation. This

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failure is at the heart of the dissonance between the thinkers despite surface similarities.

Prefatory remarks: Wittgenstein and Newman

What influence, if any, did Newman have on Wittgenstein? The Wittgenstein scholar Wolfgang Kienzler wrote a paper on this very question. He maintained in it that Newman's *Grammar* 'was probably the single most important external stimulus for Wittgenstein's thought'[1] in the final half-decade of the latter's life. He then goes on to cite various sources and associations of Wittgenstein with Newman's work in general and with the *Grammar* in particular. Kienzler's claim about the *Grammar* being the 'single most important' stimulus on Wittgenstein is difficult to substantiate because the evidence on which we must rely is circumstantial, though interesting for all that. There are mentions of reported conversations here, a cryptic reference there, lecture prompts elsewhere.

By the obvious and overriding preoccupation in Newman with faith and religious commitment, things were not set fair for his writings to touch the Cambridge scholar profoundly. If Wittgenstein 'did religion', it was not in any obvious way. He once complained to his student Maurice Drury, a young man who aspired to Anglican orders,[2] about the 'infinite harm' done by 'Russell and the parsons'.[3] It seemed that Wittgenstein rejected philosophising in religion. As for Catholicism, he was as much attracted to its symbolism as repelled by its system of justification. In general, there is support for a tentative conclusion that Wittgenstein found something interesting and perhaps resonant within a writer whose religious overtness sat ill with a quietist, mystical tendency presumed of Wittgenstein. And there is, at least on the surface, a convergence of themes and interests in Newman's writings on assent and Wittgenstein's on certainty such as to make a brief comparative study worth the while.

[1] W. Kienzler, "Wittgenstein and John Henry Newman on Certainty" in M. Kobe ed., *Deepening our Understanding of Wittgenstein* (Amsterdam: Rodopi 2006), p. 117.

[2] Maurice Drury – he lasted a year at theological college before training to be a doctor and psychiatrist. He and Wittgenstein remained friends and kept in contact until the latter's death.

[3] F. A. Flowers, Ian Ground, eds., *Portraits of Wittgenstein* (London: Bloomsbury, 1999), p. 780.

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Some Convergences

a) The Pretensions of Paper Logic

Newman and (later) Wittgenstein are alike in a distinct downplaying of the power of analytic paradigms, of strictly structured logical representation, to explain and order our humanity and the world about us. In different ways and with different motivations both Newman and Wittgenstein sought to expose the pretensions of logic. On his return to philosophy, Wittgenstein began a sustained attack on 'belief in analysis as the inevitable method of philosophical clarification'.[4] We are under an illusion that logic can gives us an *a priori* clue to the order of the world. In this we exhibit 'our craving for generality',[5] a variously-sourced urge to project a governable order onto things that may simply resist our categorising.

Newman's motivation is, as ever, related at bottom to religious faith. His attack on the Lockean ascendancy[6] was predicated on the insufficiency of language to articulate the grounds for certitude, how the standard of tight logical language is too high and too narrow for much of the way we proceed according to convictions. People really receive religious faith on prompts that would be mutilated in the attempt to extrude them into premises so as to satisfy what 'love of truth' is alleged to demand. According to Newman, the assent of faith was analogous to acts of genius or acts of common sense. In some such cases, there may be a difficulty of articulation in that assenters 'see the truth, but they do not know how they see it' and if asked to show how, 'they get entangled, embarrassed, and perchance overthrown in the superfluous endeavour'.[7]

Is Newman's and Wittgenstein's alignment on the pretensions of logic accidental or indicative of a deeper philosophical unity? There is already the suggestion of divergent philosophical motivations. Newman attacks the presumption that the concrete judgements of the mind – that 'organon more delicate, versatile, and elastic'[8] than the instrument of paper logic – must nonetheless be pressed into logical forms in order to be credentialed. Wittgenstein, for his part, attacks

[4] P.F. Strawson, *Freedom and Resentment and Other Essays* (London: Routledge, 1974), 155.

[5] L. Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books*, (Oxford: Blackwell), 1958, 17. Hereafter *Blue Book*.

[6] Begun in such writings as the *Oxford University Sermons* and most explicitly in his later work *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*. J.H. Newman, Fifteen *Sermons preached before the University of Oxford* (London: Longmans, 1909), hereafter *US*. J.H. Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (London: Longmans, 1903), hereafter *GA*.

[7] J.H. Newman, *The Via Media* (London: Longmans, 1908), vol. 1, p. 339.

[8] *GA*, p. 271.

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the philosophical conviction that there is a pure, crystalline apodictic stream that runs beneath the perceived messiness of ordinary language.

> When we think about the relation of the objects surrounding us to our personal experiences of them, we are sometimes tempted to say that these personal experiences are the material of which reality consists … these personal experiences again seem vague and seem to be in constant flux – Our language seems not to have been made to describe them. We are tempted to think that in order to clear up such matters philosophically our ordinary language is too coarse, that we need a more subtle one.[9]

In brief, it appears that where Newman contrasts the false warrant of logical precision with the subtlety and versatility of the concretely judging mind, Wittgenstein asserts that we can go nowhere outside of ordinary language for a preciser language with which to address what 'rudimentary' ordinary language struggles to address. Each thinker, in assaulting the presumption of the analytic paradigm, draws us to a different terminus: Newman to the meaning creature; Wittgenstein to the variegated meanings of the meaning creature.

b) Contra Scientism

In different ways, Newman and Wittgenstein reacted against the presumption that the scientific method gave the last word on understanding reality. Breaking out from its proper domain (cf. *The Idea of a University*),[10] the presumption was gaining force that the method of science should bestride the university curriculum and oversee the subsumption under itself of other disciplines insofar as they could admit of this, the discarding of those that could not. The particular bite of scientism was its power to draw from the constant stock of 19th Century scientific advancement. Nature seemed to be yielding up its secrets under the interrogation of its powerful, reductive, analytical way. This lent compelling moral force to the ethic of belief summarised in Locke's 'love of truth' dictum. The young and gifted thinker, W K Clifford gave eloquence to a case that was being commonly made elsewhere – 'it is wrong always, everywhere, and for any one, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence'.[11]

In directly challenging the paradigm set by Lockean apodicticity, Newman effectively sought to turn the tables on this ethic of belief and shift the burden of proof back in the direction of credulity if only to preserve those proper, but scientifically unassimilable, objects of credence

[9] *Blue* Book, p. 45.

[10] J.H. Newman, *The Idea of a University*, (London: Longmans, 1907). Hereafter *Idea*.

[11] W.K. Clifford, "The Ethics of Belief", *Contemporary Review*, 29 (Dec 1876 - May 1877), p. 295.

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as scientism would attempt to bury. In any portion of Newman's philosophical writing starting from his series of *University Sermons* begun in 1826 to his debate with A M Fairbairn in the 1880s, we are never too far from a rebuke of the vaunting claims made on behalf of science.

The Wittgenstein scholar Professor Ray Monk holds that Wittgenstein, notwithstanding the significant philosophical development through his life, was similarly constant in his opposition to scientism, 'the view that every intelligible question has either a scientific solution or no solution at all'.[12] Wittgenstein, like Newman, had very high aesthetic sensitivity. It should not, then, surprise us that Wittgenstein aligns with Newman in defending standards of judgment in areas of life such as art and the expression of feeling that were non-empirical but nonetheless real. In this, Wittgenstein draws a distinction between 'ponderable' and 'imponderable' evidence.[13] One's aesthetic judgment might be such as to be convinced of the authenticity of a picture upon evidence imponderable; at the same time, this judgment may be supported by ponderable evidence such as documentation of provenance.

Wittgenstein's account of imponderable evidence about judgment is reminiscent of Newman's about concrete judgment. Wittgenstein offers an example about reading the expression of another, say, distinguishing a real look of affection from a pretended one. The distinction relies on imponderable evidence of 'subtleties of glance, of gesture, of tone'[14] that quite escape description. For Newman, the thought that leads to judgment 'is too keen and manifold, its sources are too remote and hidden … to admit of the trammels of any language'.[15] In summary, Newman and Wittgenstein set themselves against the presumed hegemony of the scientific method, and for very similar reasons. Both recognise aspects of life, for example, the arts, that are not available to the method of science.

> What is valuable in a Beethoven sonata? The sequence of notes? The feelings Beethoven had when he was composing it? The state of mind produced by listening to it? 'I would reply,' said Wittgenstein, 'that whatever I was told, I would reject, and that not because the explanation was false but because it was an *explanation*.'[16]

Both defend a human standard of judgment whose validity is not vitiated by its incapability of articulation. And Newman, I think, would

[12] R. Monk, "Wittgenstein's forgotten lesson", July 1999, (online) available at https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/ray-monk-wittgenstein (accessed 03/12/2017).

[13] See, for example, the section in Philosophical Investigations entitled 'Philosophy of Psychology – a Fragment'. L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2009), hereafter *PI*.

[14] Wittgenstein, *PI*, §360.

[15] *GA*, p. 284.

[16] R. Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (London: Vintage Books, 1991), p. 305.

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have shared the observation Wittgenstein made about the perceived value of science and art: 'People nowadays think that scientists exist to instruct them, poets, musicians, etc. to give them pleasure. The idea that these have something to teach them – that does not occur to them'.[17]

c) Contexts of Certainty

> Des Cartes has kindly shewn how a man may prove to himself his own existence, if once he can be prevailed upon to question it …[18]

There is similarity in the way Newman and Wittgenstein treat certainty and doubt. Wittgenstein drew attention to the linguistic context in which a doubt would make sense (and so doubt without meaningful context is not a doubt at all). Newman, for his part, rejected the hectoring of logical doubt and held the attempt to prove one's proofs as facile as it would it be interminable.[19] Their own positions were refined in opposition to views about them whose influence was not negligible. For example, Wittgenstein's reaction to G.E. Moore's common sense philosophy bears some resemblance with Newman's to W.G. Ward's remarks on intuition and certainty.

For a little background, Wittgenstein's collection of thoughts posthumously published as *On Certainty* were in great part a reaction to Moore's writings. The opening of *On Certainty*[20] rounds on a claim in Moore's 1939 paper *Proof of an External World*[21] in which the latter attempted to establish his thesis by drawing attention to very basic human observations, say, of gesturing with a hand. Newman, in his philosophical musings,[22] took up against a claim in W.G. Ward's[23] privately circulated work *On Nature and Grace*.[24] This work, though a 'treatise on theology', opened with a philosophical introduction which Ward asserted to underpin all that followed. The claim in question was

[17] L. Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1977), p. 36.

[18] Samuel Johnson, *The Works of Samuel Johnson, LL.D.: With Murphy's Essay*, vol. 1, (London: George Cowie, 1825), p. 209.

[19] Cf. *GA*, p. 95.

[20] L. Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, ed. Anscombe & Von Wright, tr. Paul & Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1975). Hereafter *OC*.

[21] G.E. Moore, "Proof of an External World", *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 25 (1939) pp. 273-300.

[22] Edward Sillem ed., *The Philosophical Notebook of John Henry Newman* (Louvain: Nauwelaerts, 1969), vol. 2. Hereafter *PN ii*.

[23] William George Ward (1812-1882), who published as W.G. Ward, graduated from Oxford in 1834. A very gifted mathematician, he was subsequently elected a Fellow of Balliol. He was drawn into the Oxford Movement towards the end of the 1830s, in time representing a faction within that movement which Newman felt at odds with its original intent.

[24] W.G. Ward, *On Nature and Grace*, 1859 (privately circulated).

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the assertion that even the sceptic was compelled to trust their memory and reason.

Table 0

Ward and Newman	Moore and Wittgenstein
… you [a sceptic] deduce argumentative conclusions. In so doing … you are compelled to assume two propositions … viz. that (1) your memory, and (2) also your reasoning faculty, may legitimately be trusted … W.G. Ward, *On Nature and Grace,* p.18	I can prove now … that two human hands exist … [b]y holding up my two hands, and saying, as I make a certain gesture with my right hand, 'Here is one hand', and adding, as I make a certain gesture with the left, 'and here is another'. G.E. Moore, "Proof of an External World", p. 273
[A]s it would be improper to say that I believe in my being … so it seems to me an improper use of terms … to say that I have faith in those faculties … as there is no faith properly in these exercises of my being, so there no scepticism about them properly … Newman, *PN ii*, p. 33–7	If you know that here is one hand, we will grant you all the rest. When one says that such and such a proposition can't be proved, of course that does not mean that it can't be derived from other propositions; any proposition may be derived from other ones. L. Wittgenstein, *OC,* §1

Newman's rejection of Ward's approach and Wittgenstein's of Moore's have similarities. Wittgenstein reprises the question of the reliability of memory or sense: '[s]uppose someone were to ask: "Is it really right for us to rely on the evidence of our memory (or our senses) as we do? Moore's certain propositions almost declare that we have a right to rely on this evidence".[25] Wittgenstein's response to Moore approximates to that which Newman gives to Ward. Both their interlocutors had advanced on propositional certainty. However, the giving of grounds 'comes to an end … the end is not certain propositions' striking us immediately as true … it is our *acting*, which lies at the bottom of the language game'.[26] Compare this to Newman's: '[w]e are what we are, and we use, not trust our faculties'.[27]

Newman and Wittgenstein both answer their opponent by an attempt to force them out of a misplaced conviction to consider the contexts in which their conviction can have the sense it has. So, for example, where Moore began his deliberations on certainty by asserting that he knew that he was wearing clothes, standing up, holding papers, speaking in a lecture hall, and so on, Wittgenstein called attention to the context of asserting 'know', 'am certain', 'doubt', and so on. In brief, we do not ordinarily say we know or are certain of the things Moore lists; instead,

[25] *OC*, §201, §202.
[26] *OC*, §204.
[27] *GA*, p. 61.

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argues Wittgenstein, we know, doubt, and are certain in appropriate language settings – that is, those settings in which the holding of doubt is naturally live.

Likewise, when Ward spoke of 'trust' in one's reason and memory, Newman simply pondered quietly in his philosophical notes and more loudly in his *Grammar* that to speak of 'trust' in these contexts is simply unmeaning. In his more elaborate unpacking of Ward's argument in his *Philosophical Notebook*, Newman argues that our sense of self as reasoning, believing, feeling, remembering, and so on, is bound up with the consciousness of 'I am'. 'I am a reasoning/remembering/feeling creature' is originate within the consciousness of 'I am'. To speak in a strong sense of trusting reason in this context is to load terms such as 'trust' and 'reason' with an unnatural freight. We have no test of reason prior to its exercise in the basic awareness of self and its objects. In a race between use of reason and any putative test of its reliability, the former will always beat the latter to first base. In considering the very question of the trustworthiness of reason, we will already be reasoning.

d) Assent and Doubt

This naturally leads onto the question: what is an appropriate context to speak of certainty and doubt? If one were brave enough to hazard a generality in Wittgenstein's various responses, it would be a tendency to seek in the setting of linguistic situations a cogency of use. As Wittgenstein noted: 'Doubting and non-doubting behaviour. There is the first only if there is the second'.[28] In simple terms, 'doubt language' and 'certainty language' have particular language settings the insensitivity to which was part of Moore's difficulty. Within a particular language game, 'doubting' has its place. I gaze over the sea to its far horizon. There appears a hazy lump that might be low cloud or land far distant. Doubt belongs here. Or perhaps someone tells me some rumour which does great discredit to a friend. Again, doubt has its place here.

There are, on the other hand, places where doubt is simply unintelligible. There is for Wittgenstein a standard of objective certainty, about which he writes: 'But when is something objectively certain? When a mistake is not possible. But what kind of possibility is that? Mustn't mistake be logically excluded'?[29] The logical exclusion of doubt inheres in a situation when 'doubting is unintelligible in such a way as to make it impossible to understand what it would be to be mistaken'.[30] Wittgenstein's standard of unintelligible doubt draws on examples of

[28] *OC*, §354.
[29] *OC*, §194.
[30] F. Stoutland, "Wittgenstein: On Certainty and Truth", *Philosophical Investigations*, 21:3, (July 1998), p. 205.

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scepticism advancing to the point when interlocution is no longer possible. That is, the shared frame of reference that all interlocution implies can be radically disowned in a type of linguistic insurgency. He wrote that if confronted with someone who radically doubted the deep history of the earth, he would not know 'what such a person would still allow to be counted as evidence and what not … I should have to doubt all sorts of things that stand fast for me'.[31] Again, if someone 'doubted the existence of his hands … we might describe his way of behaving like the behaviour of doubt, but his game would not be ours'.[32]

And what would be for Newman a context for assent-threatening doubt? Two candidates can be set aside. First, the 'could be otherwise' logical attack[33] on concrete matter is given very short shrift by Newman. We can always suppose the suspension of those very regularities of nature upon which we form our everyday sense of the world, but that mere possibility of supposition should not disturb the peace epistemologically. This logical nag did not trouble Newman in the way it had minds of a generation or two before his, who then felt themselves bullied into making epistemological concessions. Newman's policy was to meet Locke and his philosophical descendants head on rather than make do with a bluff certainty or, in some way, sue for a lesser epistemological peace.

Second, there is another 'could be otherwise' attack that arises not from logical dubitability but from what *could* obtain concretely. Newman's example of 'Great Britain is an island' mooted a standard for legitimacy of assent that would brook being upset even as the natural order of things still obtained. If it should turn out that, after all, Great Britain *was* part of the European mainland, this would not radically disrupt our sense of the world in the way the suspension of the regularities of nature would. Newman's argument for the illegitimacy of doubt in the case of 'Great Britain is an Island' rested on this: '[n]umberless facts, or what we consider facts, rest on the truth of it; no received fact rests on its being otherwise'.[34] Wittgenstein echoes this in his example of whether he was possessed of a brain. Whilst 'everything speaks in its favour, nothing against it', it is nonetheless 'imaginable that my skull should turn out empty when it was operated on'.[35] For Wittgenstein as for Newman, '[w]hat I hold fast to is not one proposition but a nest of propositions'.[36]

[31] *OC*, §234.

[32] *OC*, §255.

[33] Cf. M. Jamie Ferreira, *Doubt and Religious Commitment: The Role of the Will in Newman's Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980) p. 92: '[w]e can assent only when the doubt we recognize is not more than that involved in the admission that the negation is not logically contradictory'.

[34] *GA*, 295.

[35] *OC*, §4.

[36] *OC*, §225.

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In thus constraining the space for the legitimacy of doubt, Newman and Wittgenstein question the security of the distinction between logical and empirical doubt.[37] All along, it would seem, sensitive minds, haunted by the inadequacy of the logical credentials of their deepest convictions, had simply created an epistemological spectre out of a 'craving for generality' and their deep adherence to an encompassing analytic paradigm. Both recognised the 'corrigibility and dubitability of human beliefs', but this did not mean a 'genuine dubitability for either Wittgenstein or Newman',[38] as M. Jamie Ferreira put it. She aptly juxtaposes Wittgenstein's remark '[w]hat I need to shew is that a doubt is not necessary even when it is possible'[39] with Newman's 'to be able to doubt is no warrant for disbelieving'.[40]

Nonetheless, as regards the need for contexts that relevantly set questions of certainty and doubt, we find once again that Newman and Wittgenstein stand on ground superficially similar but with different philosophical stratification. Just as over the pretensions of logic, where the thinkers find their different motivations drive them onto the same ground, so is the case here, I maintain. There as here, Newman draws us to attend to the meaning creature, Wittgenstein to the variegated meanings of such a creature.

Some Divergences

a) Newman's Doctrine of the Concrete

Running through the critical dialogue between Newman and Wittgenstein is an ambiguity about this simple word 'language'. Newman draws out a distinction between speech and language as 'verbal argumentation'.[41] When someone thinks or speaks now, language and reason identify with each other as they merge into the ancient sense of logos in which reason and speech are synonymous. As Newman put it:

> It is called Logos: what does Logos mean? it stands both for reason and for speech, and it is difficult to say which it means more properly. It

[37] For example, Newman's *Grammar* refuses the Lockean cordoning of intuitive and demonstrative certainty from other certainties maintained with the same strength. In a similar vein, Wittgenstein writes: 'one cannot contrast mathematical certainty with the relative uncertainty of empirical propositions. For the mathematical proposition has been obtained by a series of actions that are in no way different from the actions of the rest of our lives … If the proposition $12 \times 12 = 144$ is exempt from doubt, then so too must non-mathematical propositions be' (*OC*, §651, §653).

[38] M.J. Ferreira, *Doubt and Religious Commitment*, p. 94.

[39] *OC*, §392.

[40] J.H. Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (London: Longmans, 1909), p. 6. Hereafter *Dev*.

[41] GA, 360.

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> means both at once: why? because really they cannot be divided, — because they are in a true sense one.[42]

Newman held: 'To say words *mean* things is incorrect for *words* can mean nothing. *I* mean'.[43] Strictly speaking, we do not *use* words, we *word*.

Herein lies a danger: because the way we come to formulate our understanding and the way we report what we have come to understand seem to meet in 'words' or 'language', we think the latter will do to convey the former, that we can 'translate across without loss' and feel that 'language' univocally addresses both. To aver that 'cat meaning/concept' is fully contained in the word 'cat' has a plausibility after the fact. We think that what it is telling us is that 'cat' has intrinsically delivered to us the meaning *cat* since no sooner said than understood. But *no sooner said* is too late for *now*. The noun – the word on paper – apparently 'verbs' itself instantly before my eyes. It is as though I did nothing and the word on the page did all. I look on them and they seem to reanimate and 'do their own meaning'.

This distinction between living speech and its upshot in material words is important for Newman. It ultimately derives from what I call his 'doctrine of the concrete'.[44] It is a doctrine that radically circumscribes what abstract notions can do by recovering the sense that 'being gets thought going'. 'No real thing', Newman tells us, admits 'by any calculus of logic, of being dissected into all the possible general notions which it admits, nor, in consequence, of being recomposed out of them'.[45] Experiencing something and relating that experience are in altogether different spheres. In brief, one cannot build a real house with ideal bricks. And so the translation from experience to words about that experience is not lossless. Experience of anything is, as it were, invincibly analogue, our conceptions of which are necessarily digitized.

Newman applied the abstract-concrete incommensurability thesis to the concrete fact of reasoning itself. 'Paper logic, syllogisms, and states of mind are incommensurables'.[46] Just as there is inadequacy and slippage in the attempt in words to address any experience in the concrete, so too in the attempt to address the concreteness of reasoning. To nail the essence of reasoning demands a substantive answer to 'what is the

[42] *Idea*, pp. 276-7.

[43] J.H. Newman, *The Theological Papers of John Henry Newman* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976, 1979), vol. 1, p. 56. Hereafter *TP* i.

[44] Newman's doctrine was a working out of a basic point in Aristotelian epistemology: namely, that there is no science of singulars. On the other hand, Newman seems to do more with this philosophically.

[45] *GA*, p. 282.

[46] J.H. Newman *Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979), XXXI volumes, henceforth *LD* followed by volume number. This reference: *LD* XXIV, p. 105.

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reasoning by which I now try to answer questions like this'? For Newman, there was a radical difference between: i) reasoning understood as a living operation (what I and you do *now*) and ii) the post-facto reflection on this living operation that outs in principles of reason.[47] This concrete/abstract pattern between reasoning and principles of reason finds a parallel in speech and the 'material word'.[48]

When we speak/think we can't be 'somewhere detached' to draw a distinction *simultaneous* with our thinking/speaking (except in trivial ways - loudness etc.). Let us call speaking/thinking *logos-ing*. When *logos-ing* is itemised into material words, the latter bear in themselves what is lost in translation from concrete to abstract – rendering them 'a serviceable, though imperfect instrument'.[49] If material words, then, belong on the abstract side, how can they ever be used to build completely back to the operation of the concrete *logos*, the individual living reason? As said, one cannot build a real house with ideal bricks. And yet note that a big, solid house composed from brick-concepts is silly to the imagination. However, the concrete exercise of reasoning (speech) composed out of reason-concepts (material words) is not silly to the imagination. And this is at the heart of the dissonance between Newman and Wittgenstein, in spite of surface similarities.

b) 'Complexity' in Newman's Mature Thought

'Complexity' has different connotations, among them these two:

(i) There is the complexity of composition, say, of a mass of tangled wires or reams of computer machine code. Here we have a sense of this complexity as a bundle of composing elements with or without order.

(ii) There is the complexity of a *wholeness* which cannot be analysed all at once in its wholeness but from which we may afterwards draw strands of reflection. For Newman, such is reasoning as it stands to the account of reason.[50] Such are the

[47] Cf. *US*, p. 257: 'Reasoning, then, or the exercise of Reason, is a living spontaneous energy within us, not an art. But when the mind reflects upon itself, it begins to be dissatisfied with the absence of order and method in the exercise, and attempts to analyze the various processes which take place during it'.

[48] Words in and of our natural discursive contexts in contrast to words from revelation which come into our understanding but are from a transcendent source.

[49] *GA*, p. 362.

[50] Cf. *US*, 258: '[h]ere, then, are two processes, distinct from each other,—the original process of reasoning, and next, the process of investigating our reasonings'.

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> concrete objects we apprehend to our abstractions about these objects.[51] Such is Truth to specialised branches of study.[52]

In i) we are able to detach ourselves from the complexity and recognise it as a bundle of constituents. In ii) we are not able to detach ourselves from the complexity so as to pronounce in real time on its constituency.

The foregoing prefaces a danger that we now can highlight: in reacting to the apodictic idealism of, say, Locke, there is a way of burying in one's own account the same idealism that one picks out in the more overtly apodictic account. For example, William James opposed perception foundationalism of a Lockean character:

> No one ever had a simple sensation by itself. Consciousness, from our natal day, is of a teeming multiplicity of objects and relations, and what we call simple sensations are results of discriminative attention, pushed often to a very high degree.[53]

One could nonetheless assert the above with the same 'knowingness about knowing' that one apparently censures in Locke or Descartes. Once we think we can 'name the fuzziness' of knowing – that is, by affecting an exterior view of this 'teeming multiplicity of objects and relations' – we are offering in another form a detached semantic. It is detachment, rather than clarity, that tells against Lockean or Cartesian apodicticity. We can approach the complexity of reasoning with the conceit of knowing the composing element (multiplicity of objects, relations …). In this we would exhibit the *a priori* idealism of Descartes or Locke, only we would be suppressing by anonymization our own semantic detachment.

When Newman addresses the concrete exercise of reason as *complex*, he does not affect to have a handle on the inchoateness of this complex consciousness as though to speak of it from detachment. Reasoning is not an art (as in rule-guided craft). He is careful to say that when we afterwards reflect on this complex concrete experience, we may tease out analytical markers. They are ever abstract and after-the-fact compared to the concrete exercise of reasoning itself. When Newman referred to probabilities in a mind's coming to judgment in concrete matter, he was not speaking about assent thus: 'here is a mind faced with a bundle of probabilities which it computes to assent'. On paper, 'probabilities'

[51] Cf. *Dev*, 55: '[i]t is a characteristic of our minds, that they cannot take an object in, which is submitted to them simply and integrally. We conceive by means of definition or description; whole objects do not create in the intellect whole ideas'.

[52] Cf. *Idea*, 45: '[a]ll 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'.

[53] William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, vol. 1, (New York: Henry Holt & Co, 1890), p. 224.

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is bounded and separate as a grammatical word. What are reported as 'probabilities' after the fact are features in an invincibly analogue portrait of a certitude. Their concrete life begins in their inseparability within a scene of certitude. They are parts of the scene as ear, nose and mouth are parts of a portrait. His account of concrete judgment in terms of probabilities is, then, an *account*, a reflection after-the-fact on the reasoning itself. He is not telling us what *is* going on, rather what it is *like*, in our coming to certitude.

c) 'Complexity' in Wittgenstein's Later Ideas

If language as we use it, and thus our reasoning, is such as to rule out apodicticity about it, then Newman and Wittgenstein seem at one. The difficulty is in locating Wittgenstein in regard to this conviction. Is Wittgenstein embedded in or a spectator of its truth? The same conviction could rest on an ontological, embedded consideration or upon a detached abstraction. In disclaiming analytic paradigms in favour of language games, similarities, family resemblances, and so on, there arises the temptation that one has 'named the fuzziness' of language. It is this complexity of practices 'out there' in the middle-distance, defying essential account and setting its own rules – rules that shift in time like the movement of a river bed.

At times, Wittgenstein is very close to an ontological realisation of this conviction. At other times, he seems to veer away to an abstracted realisation. His later writings give the impression of a plane continually close to touching down before rising off again into the sky. For example, there is a strong ontological awareness in certain of his passages – that is, the sense of speech always beating language analysis to first base: 'Why should I translate the expression "brick!" into the expression, "Bring me a brick"?'.[54] His argument against radical scepticism chimes with Aristotle's argument with those who deny the Principle of Non-Contradiction.[55] Wittgenstein says, 'If you are not certain of any fact, you cannot be certain of the meaning of your words either'.[56] And when Wittgenstein insists our rational judgments are actions that do not follow from a chain of justifications (in the Lockean sense), he again

[54] *Blue Book*, pp. 77-8.

[55] Aristotle asks his opponent to step back and consider what is entailed by the very expressibility of their thesis. 'The starting-point for all such arguments [against PNC-deniers] is … that he shall say something which is significant both for himself and for another … The person responsible for the proof, however, is not he who demonstrates but he who listens; for while disowning reason he listens to reason. And again he who admits this has admitted that something is true apart from demonstration (so that not everything will be 'so and not so')' (*Metaphysics* IV iv).

[56] *OC*, §114.

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evinces this ontological awareness.[57] His distinction between ponderable and imponderable evidence further attests to someone attending to the feel of what it is like to come to concrete judgment. When Wittgenstein held to 'use a word without justification does not mean to use it illegitimately',[58] he joins Newman on the frontline against Lockean presumption. Further, we find both in Newman and Wittgenstein the sense of active appropriation of our certitudes. This conduces to an ontological aspect of knowing. 'Newman', as M Jamie Ferreira observed, '… makes us aware of the value of the content of the category of "active recognition". Rephrased in a Wittgensteinian idiom, certitude is a "taking hold"'.[59]

At other times, there is the suggestion of idealism about language. When Wittgenstein writes 'what is logically possible or impossible is wholly dependent upon what our grammar permits, what makes sense in a given language system',[60] he appears to have given himself permission to be detached from all discourse. An oft-quoted corrigibility criterion – '[a]n inner process stands in need of outward criteria'.[61] – seems also vulnerable to an ideal reading. In fairness to Wittgenstein, it may well be that he did not have this understanding of how the correction would 'work'. Perhaps his reading would be more along the lines of Peter Strawson's: '[t]he essential point is that a person does not have (or need) grounds or reasons (does not apply criteria) for saying correctly that he himself understands, in the sense in which others must have them to say it of him'.[62]

The feel of one oscillating between embeddedness and detachment persists in Wittgenstein's doctrine of *meaning-as-use*. Wittgenstein discussed how propositions have a life when they are to all appearances inert marks on paper. He asserted: '[i]f we had to name anything which is the life of the sign it is its use'.[63] Is 'use' a thing observed or manifest *now* in my discourse with you? Are 'backgrounds' of discourse part of a hermeneutic of meaning or are they simply *behind us when we speak together* – that is, not in the way? Again, the same temptation to feel I can abstract myself from this 'use' presents itself. Once I abstract myself from this 'use' and export it into the myriad practices of language games going on 'out there', I substitute the complexity of holism (ii) for the complexity of a composite (i), in which the composing particulate is 'language practice' in all its myriad forms. This seems to overwhelm

[57] Cf. *OC*, §204: 'the end is not certain propositions' striking us 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'.

[58] *PI*, §289.

[59] M.J. Ferreira, *Doubt and Religious Commitment*, p. 59.

[60] *PI*, §520.

[61] *PI*, §580.

[62] Strawson, *Freedom and Resentment and Other Essays*, p. 145.

[63] *Blue Book*, 4.

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any foundationalism about language with its seeming lack of apodicticity. But the presence of apodicticity would be disguised in the knowing of the composing aggregate.

c) Deflation in Newman and Wittgenstein

Deflation is the progeny of an apodictic univocity applied to both human and non-human nature. The mentalist philosophy and the corpuscularian physics of early modernism worked hand in glove, both playing off imaginal elements that co-opt us into our self-diminution. If I and you can be *absolutely* captured by our biological precincts, the way is open for spiritual and philosophical deflation. We *feel* a privacy in our thinking, and yet the new science professes essential understanding of concepts and their formation. What security is there in the distinction between private thinking and public expression? Newman and Wittgenstein developed distinctive responses to this question.

Newman's response might be called a radical 'aspectuality'. The question above gets its disturbance power if *space* is granted as an epistemological primitive, which Newman blocks. If I require something known, like *space*, as foundational in my explanation of how knowing works, then something is wrong. His aspectual way asserts that one's sense of space is given *with* one's sense of things in space. In an early sermon entitled 'The Immortality of the Soul', Newman the young preacher put it in forceful rhetoric: '[t]o every one of us there are but two beings in the whole world, himself and God'.[64] For Newman, there was an epistemic drop from knowledge of oneself and God to knowledge of everything else. The latter is not lived and felt in the way that the first is. The latter is from a perspective whilst the first is from immediate experience. In life and perception, the epistemological concomitant to this is that everything is ordered according to a person's aspect on things. For us, nothing in natural knowledge *is* for us without being *is from* – that is, from one's human aspect. Newman writes 'of no unity have we practically experience, but of self'.[65] Newman's powerful introspection, his chariness about physical phenomena as 'evidence' in itself, his cavils about what matter and space consist in lend some force to a personal, 'aspectual' character in his deliberations. In proffering a 'unity' sense of self before a 'unit' sense of self, Newman rejects the absolute definition of human beings by their biological precincts, and the possibility of the inner/outer or private/public conundrum.

[64] J.H. Newman, *Parochial and Plain Sermons* (London: Longmans, 1907), vol. 1, p. 20.
[65] *TP* i, p. 39.

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Wittgenstein, for his part, was considered to have answered the whole question in his 'Private Language' criticism. In so doing, he is often seen to have finished off a Cartesian line of thought that, in different ways, had stranded into much or most modern philosophy. However, there is a danger that he has simply replaced one source of deflation with another, more powerful source - a clear-cut Cartesian univocity with a hazy *Sprachspiel* thesis every bit as univocal. This can more powerfully co-opt us in our own deflation than atomism and other accounts working off the infinitesimal. In bringing about our own deflation, the *ubiquitous* of 'language' will do a better job than the *infinitesimal* of 'atoms' on the imagination. That is, something can be perpetually beyond reach and yet be 'there' in the ubiquity of language practice. It would be like mist squeezed out of the fist that tries to grasp it and yet folding back over it. It is the end-point of a disenchanting ploy in detached semantics. To quarrel with it is to use it, and thus affirm it, and thus surrender to its claim. It appears that we cannot get behind language except with another language, so woe to us.

Conclusion

Wittgenstein as a philosopher seems in the Socratic tradition of a pursuer of awkward, but important, lines of thought within a pioneering way of doing philosophy. He seems to me like Plato in being charismatically wrong in the tendency of some his answers: wrong suchwise that the philosophical vistas he opened up by these answers have inspired thought since. Against a tradition of theorists, moralists and sceptics whose circumstances of life allowed them safety from the straitening implication of their ideas for the rest of us, Wittgenstein appears as one letting go. He is a philosopher-mystic of a latter day, a thinker prepared in some way to live by his thinking, 'recovering "philosophy as a way of life"'.[66] There is perhaps an element of tragedy in Wittgenstein. Whereas an arrogant theorist could purchase a sense of atomic, absolute mastery for the price of rendering the person as an atom in their propositions, in Wittgenstein there is a preparedness to live in the implications of his thinking. There is sometimes the hint of him as a victim of a proposition he cannot help but propound to himself. In a deflating thesis, there are winners and losers, the emancipated and the enslaved. If anything, Wittgenstein seems as much the latter as the former. He has liberated himself into deflation.

All this acknowledged, this paper has called for a re-evaluation of how Wittgenstein is placed in respect of Newman. It is not simply that

[66] I. Ker, T. Merrigan, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to John Henry Newman*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 264.

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Newman anticipates themes that Wittgenstein will take up more fully. There is, sure enough, strong resonance between the two thinkers. And there is at least the suspicion that Wittgenstein's *On Certainty* draws on examples given in Newman's *Grammar*. However, the resonance of Newman's thinking with Wittgenstein's later work is not pure, but like that between two strings not quite in tune. There are beats and then attenuations. Newman and Wittgenstein fundamentally separate in the tendency of the latter (at least in a major strand of posthumous interpretation) to park the unformulable in a vague middle distance of language practice – there but analytically evasive. Whereas in Newman the unformulable arises as constitutive of human reason in its concrete manifestation: our experience of the concrete is not and cannot be resolved exhaustively into a collection of after-the-fact propositions about that experience. Newman holds that we cannot cover the breach between concrete experience and our reflection on this by assuming the signification of words independent of the creature that means by them. All things said, Newman is identified within semantic embeddedness, on a line that stretches back to the Socratic tradition and passing through High Scholasticism. Wittgenstein in his later philosophy seems to glide asymptotically to this line, ever wanting, it would appear, an 'outsideness' to 'speak of his speaking' in a way disallowed by true embeddedness.

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