"READING CUSTOM AS ILLATIVE SENSE"

A THEOLOGICAL ACCOUNT OF JOHN HENRY NEWMAN’S

APPROPRIATION OF A REALIST INTERPRETATION

OF DAVID HUME

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis explores the notion that John Henry Newman offered an
epistemological system that in some way mirrors the image of the non-skeptical,
realist reading of Hume that we have only seen become popular over the last few
decades and that understanding this commonality to Newman’s system is extremely
helpful in making sense of the complicated notion he names the illative sense and
the function it is to play in the practice of the Christian faith. I first formulate the
historically accepted skeptical epistemology associated with Hume, with specific
attention given to his discussion of the problems surrounding the idea of causation.
I contrast this traditionally rendered Hume with the model provided by his
contemporary, Thomas Reid, which includes explicit interaction with this
understanding of Hume's philosophy.
I next attempt to complicate this reading of Hume as well as to present my alternative understanding of his work as a realist and a defender of a more sophisticated, tenable, and responsible common sense intuitionism. To further strengthen what many philosophers regard as a complete nonstarter, I introduce a group of prominent Hume scholars who have sympathy with this realist interpretation that has come to be referred to as “The New Hume.”

The following section is devoted to Newman’s complicated conversion from Anglican intellectual elite to Catholic priest and then, in turn, to an overview of the system he puts forth in his *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*. I then defend idea that Newman’s religious epistemology shares a framework strikingly similar to some form of a realist interpretation of Hume. In this discussion, I rely heavily upon the texts of both the *Treatise* and the *Grammar* to make explicit the ways in which Newman’s argument is ordered after and borrows from Hume’s.

Having made clear this similarity with both Hume’s argument and philosophical vocabulary, my final section is devoted to the topic of the illative sense and the role the epistemological system Newman builds upon it functions in the life of the believer. To this end, I begin my discussion with an account of how the phenomenon of conscience is what precipitates Newman’s departure from Hume’s entirely secular philosophical conclusions. Having demonstrated why philosophy is always, then, a thoroughly theological practice for Newman, I go on to depict how this common sense system centered entirely on the illative sense functions for Newman in his own account of his own life in his *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, as well as a
brief depiction of what the illative sense ought to look like in our own practice of Christian theology and faith today. I conclude by offering that the epistemological model here presented serves to clarify and strengthen our own understanding of our role as Christian theologians. And for this to be the case we need Newman and for Newman we need Hume.
For Beth Meiners
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INTRODUCTION

The following work is focused on explicating the philosophical relationship between the Scottish Enlightenment philosopher, David Hume, and the Catholic theologian, John Henry Newman. Admittedly, at first glance, these two figures are indeed strange bedfellows. Hume is most well known for his skeptical philosophy, critique of miracles, and attacks on organized religion, while Newman is remembered for his ardent defense of the Catholic tradition and his role as bishop and cardinal. On the face of it, these two could not appear more different and the tradition has certainly treated them so. Yet, what we will examine in the following enquiry is the idea that perhaps the lines in this particular story are not so definitively drawn.

Like any other bit of writing, the idea to write on the commonalities between Hume and Newman did not suddenly occur to me ex nihilo. In fact, my obsession with David Hume and the empiricist tradition that followed from his writings goes back over a decade. Having encountered Hume as undergraduate, my copy of Hume’s A Treatise of Human Nature, one of the two primary works that will be the focus of our examination, has margins filled with all the comments one might expect from an overly eager, religiously enthusiastic college student. My philosophy
courses held up Hume as the great enemy of religion and the notes I made for myself for future research were faithful to that tradition.

It was not until I was able to read Hume under the guidance of more focused Hume scholars during my first graduate degree that my understanding of his system and contributions began to change. I still found myself in sharp disagreement with his critiques of religion but I could not help but admire the ease with which he dismantled the Lockean system and demonstrated the serious predicament of our philosophical tradition. Upon reaching the conclusion to the Book One of the *Treatise*, however, I became convinced that Hume’s genius lay far deeper than the traditional understanding of his work gives him credit. I began to pursue the idea that Hume’s skepticism was simply a game he was playing with us by which he was attempting to defend the primacy of common sense.

With this idea in mind, I worked back through the *Treatise* and now my margins are filled with comments marked out, written over, and replaced with notes of agreement. I found in Hume a philosophical ally, one that has been constantly interpreted according to his earliest critics rather than through honest examination of the text. Convinced as I was by this controversial notion, I was yet overwhelmed by the immensity of the thesis, especially when coupled with the fact that my philosophical training was still in its adolescence. I ended up taking time off from graduate studies and my thoughts on Hume were relegated to offhand comments during late night conversations at the bar.

Returning to graduate school for theology, I no longer had the opportunity to take courses strictly on Hume and while I found small ways to discuss my interest in
a realist interpretation of his work, it was another thinker whose ideas began to
grab hold of my attention. In John Henry Newman I saw a Catholic convert, a
theologian turned philosopher, and someone for whom faith did not always come
easy. The courses that I was given the privilege of taking were refreshing and
invigorating for me because I felt that I had finally found the theologian that wrote
and thought like I thought.

In his On the Development of Christian Doctrine, I saw laid out precisely the
reasons for my joining the Roman Catholic Church explicated with a precision and
elegance that had always escaped me. His Apologia Pro Vita Sua gave me insight
into his life of faith and the struggles of bringing into harmony philosophical
opinion, religious commitment, and complicated social and ecclesial issues. It was
in Newman’s An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent, the second of the two primary
texts upon which we will be relying in the following assessment, that I found again
David Hume. It became clear to me that Newman was at the very least writing out of
a similar background to that out of which Hume worked and lived. The similarities
between the two works were striking, even more so because they finished with such
widely differing conclusions. As I continued my study of this text, it became
apparent to me just how striking these commonalities were and that Newman’s
argument echoed a realist reading of Hume that, in part, implicitly demonstrates
where Hume went wrong with a philosophy that brought him so close to truth. It is
this aspect of Newman’s work that is the focus of the present project as it helps
bring into clarity certain aspects of Newman’s religious epistemology that have
remained somewhat elusive; particularly, it clarifies what Newman means by his “illative sense.”

It was for these reasons that I set out on the present examination with David Hume and John Henry Newman, yet there is one more philosophical figure dealt with here in need of some explanation, the Scottish champion of commonsense realism, Thomas Reid. It must be admitted that Reid does not easily fit into contemporary theological discourse. A contemporary of Hume, Reid was the prominent philosophical figure of the day and it was his Common Sense Realism that was the standard epistemology. He enjoyed the success in his lifetime that Hume never did as he held a prominent position at the University of Aberdeen whereas Hume’s efforts to find a position at the University of Edinburgh were constantly rebuffed. The history since then, however, has told a very different story.

While Hume’s fame has only grown since his death, Reid’s has, in large part, fallen into disrepute. It might be regarded by many theologians today to be very strange indeed, for a theological work to spend any time with Reid given the role that Common Sense Realism is regarded to have played in the rise of American evangelical fundamentalist views concerning inerrancy in the 19th and 20th centuries. George Marsden, in his *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, charts the lineage of Reid’s common sense philosophy through anti-Darwinian critiques and into a more general American philosophical tradition that greatly influenced conservative positions regarding scripture.\(^1\) The story that Marsden tells is one that

\(^1\) George Marsden, *Fundamentalism in American Culture*, 7, 14, 28. The entirety of his first chapter is given over to precisely this topic.
is true to both the historical turns of evangelicalism in the United States and Reid’s Common Sense Realism.

Despite the fact his philosophy is often regarded among contemporary theologians as laughably absurd, the use to which I put Reid in the following work is to function historically as what would have been regarded as the obvious alternative to Hume by 19th century English theologians. My engagement with him is merely to demonstrate what his position was, how Reid saw his epistemology as fundamentally different from Hume, and how striking it would be for a theologian like Newman to disregard his religiously infused system for Hume’s much more secular one. It is in no way an attempt to revitalize what is widely regarded as a failed philosophy. With these caveats in place, I can now try to explain what is I am attempting to do in the following discussion.

The thesis of the following work is very simply this: John Henry Newman offered an epistemological system that in some way mirrors the image of the non-skeptical, realist reading of Hume that we have only seen become popular over the last few decades and understanding this commonality to Newman’s system is extremely helpful in making sense of the complicated notion he names the illative sense and the function it is to play in the practice of the Christian faith. As this covers a wide range of topics, it must be admitted that there is more to this discussion than what can be said here, probably several lifetimes worth of work left to be done, yet what is attempted in the present project is a beginning that hopes to clear the way for some of that work to be done in the future.
To this end, the first chapter of this discussion lays out the traditional reading of Hume’s comments in the first book of *A Treatise of Human Nature* as well as in the entirety of his *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. I formulate the historically accepted skeptical epistemology associated with Hume, with specific attention given to his discussion of the problems surrounding the idea of causation. I contrast this traditionally rendered Hume with the model provided by his contemporary, Thomas Reid, which includes explicit interaction with this understanding of Hume’s philosophy.

The purpose of Chapter Two is both to complicate this reading of Hume as well as to present my alternative understanding of his work as a realist and a defender of a more sophisticated, tenable, and responsible common sense intuitionism. To further strengthen what many philosophers regard as a complete nonstarter, I introduce a group of prominent Hume scholars who have sympathy with this realist interpretation that has come to be referred to as “The New Hume.”

Chapter Three is devoted to Newman’s complicated conversion from Anglican intellectual elite to Catholic priest and then, in turn, to an overview of the system he puts forth in his *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*. I then defend the idea that Newman’s religious epistemology shares a framework strikingly similar to some form of a realist interpretation of Hume. In this discussion, I rely heavily upon the texts of both the *Treatise* and the *Grammar* to make explicit the ways in which Newman’s argument is ordered after and borrows from Hume’s.

Having made clear this similarity with both Hume’s argument and philosophical vocabulary, I turn in my last chapter to the topic of the illative sense
and the role the epistemological system Newman builds upon it functions in the life of the believer. To this end, I begin my discussion with an account of how the phenomenon of conscience is what precipitates Newman’s departure from Hume’s entirely secular philosophical conclusions. Having demonstrated why philosophy is always, then, a thoroughly theological practice for Newman, I go on to depict how this common sense system centered entirely on the illative sense functions for Newman in his own account of his own life in his *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, as well as a brief depiction of what the illative sense ought to look like in our own practice of Christian theology and faith today. I conclude by offering that the epistemological model here presented serves to clarify and strengthen our own understanding of our role as Christian theologians. And for this to be the case we need Newman and for Newman we need Hume.

Before embarking upon the work of this project, I need to acknowledge several people without whose help, encouragement, and guidance I would have long ago given up on this work. First, I cannot emphasize enough the incredible effect that my advisor, William Portier, has had on both every aspect of the following work as well as my formation as a graduate student. I am forever grateful for this time I have been given to be guided by his gracious counsel. Next, I would like to thank the other two members of my committee, Professors Sandra Yocum and Dennis Doyle, for their flexibility in being willing to work with me on this project throughout its many twists and turns as it developed into something very dissimilar from the details of my initial proposal. Lastly, I am forever indebted to my brother, Jay
Martin, and to my dear friends, Jim Sias and David Wheeler-Reed, for their willingness to read, critique, and discuss all that I have here attempted to do.

Any virtues of the following work are the result of the heroic efforts of all of those mentioned above. Whatever mistakes and failings remain are mine alone.
I never thought of calling in question the principles commonly received with regard to the human understanding, until the 'Treatise of Human Nature' was published in the year 1739. The ingenious author of that treatise upon the principles of Lock - who was no sceptic - hath built a system of scepticism, which leaves no ground to believe any one thing rather than its contrary.

-Thomas Reid

In the history of philosophy, there are few figures more controversial than that of David Hume. At a time when the western tradition seemed to be enjoying exciting, new progress toward a more defensible and useful approach to metaphysics and epistemology, Hume’s A Treatise of Human Nature is published and western tradition was brought to its knees as it appeared that the whole of philosophical knowledge might finally be ultimately and completely out of reach. In one elegant work, Hume had seemed to have demonstrated the utter failure of the Lockean and Cartesian systems, showing that upon accepting their premises, one is immediately damned to a complete and despairing skepticism. Hume’s system

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2 Thomas Reid, The Works of Thomas Reid, 95.
represents, Bertrand Russell writes in his *A History of Western Philosophy*, an end, claiming that in Hume’s direction it is impossible for one to go further.³

As exemplified in the quote above, the effect of Hume’s work on Thomas Reid simply cannot be overstated, and even that towering pinnacle of Enlightenment philosophy, Immanuel Kant, cited Hume as having awoken him from his dogmatic slumber.⁴ It simply cannot be denied that the western philosophical tradition is in part indebted to the Humean legacy, however it is to be understood. As to just why his thought had the impact that it did, we must first examine the Humean system encountered by Hume’s contemporaries.

I. The Traditional Humean System

1. Impressions and Ideas

Hume begins his discussion with the assertion that every *perception* of the mind, by which he means to include the entirety of mental content, can be divided into that of either impressions or ideas, which are distinguished from each other by the liveliness with which they strike the mind.⁵ Those perceptions of sensation, passion, and emotion he places under impressions, as they are the first to appear in the mind and, thus, strike one most vivaciously. Ideas, by which he means those “faint images” of the above impressions in thinking and reasoning, not only lack in force upon the mind, but also are causally reliant upon these impressions for their initial emergence. Given the fluidity and subjectivity of terms such as ‘vivacity’ or

³ Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy*, 659
‘liveliness’, naturally the boundary between impression and idea is intentionally vague allowing for the rare impression to fall in its vivaciousness beneath that of some equally rare lively idea. He appeals, however, to common experience in defending this distinction and moves forward under the assumption that doing so should not strike his reader as being problematic.

Despite his usage of these terms in ways that differ slightly from those of his predecessor, John Locke, Hume’s starting point is a rather straightforward continuation of Locke’s own presuppositions.6 Locke’s contention that there is nothing in the mind that is not first in the senses is fully endorsed here by Hume’s assertion that the genesis of all mental content, all impressions and ideas can be traced back to some original impression of sensation or another, and, thus at last, the external world. One’s imagining themselves, for instance, walking the streets of gold of the New Jerusalem despite never having actually experienced such an event, is constructed out of one’s initial impressions of gold, cities, streets, beauty, etc., being made available to the imagination by their replication as ideas.7

In such an exercise, one must rely on the two categories of impressions given, sensation and reflection. Impressions of reflection, as opposed to those of original sense perception discussed above, are created in the experience of reflecting upon

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6 Nicholas Jolley, *Locke: His Philosophical Thought*, 39. “‘All those sublime thoughts, which tower above the clouds, and reach as high as heaven itself, take their rise and footing here: in all that great extent wherein the mind wanders, in those remote speculations, it may seem to be elevated with, it stirs not one jot beyond those ideas, which sense or reflection, have offered for its contemplation.’”

7 Ibid., 8.
previous impressions of sensation or idea copied from them. In the example provided above, one experiences the sensation of gold which creates a copy of itself in the form of the idea of gold as a color, reflecting upon that idea of that color brings rise to an immediate impression of beauty and desire, which then again creates corresponding ideas of themselves.

Working in conjunction with these two varieties of impressions are their parallel ideas of both memory and imagination. An idea of memory is the imprint left on the mind of an impression of sensation of perhaps the colors of a painting of paradise one saw previously at a museum. An idea of imagination is the fruit of the experience of imaging oneself walking the very streets of gold, the ideas created by such an exercise being weaker than those created by impressions of actual sensations. In attempting, then, to construct any sort of philosophical system, Hume holds the Lockean position that we are provided with only these and the relations between them with which to make comparisons, combinations, and constructions.

2. Seven Philosophical Relations

In attempting to bring to light the origin of our ideas, especially of those ideas that have been the concern of philosophical investigation, such as the external world and causal relations, Hume has us reflect on our own experience of thinking concerning these complex notions. In doing so it becomes clear, he argues,

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8 Ibid., 11.
9 Ibid.
that there are seven different ways in which we commonly bring ideas and impressions in relation to one another so as to form new and more complex thought. It is crucial, then, that we make sense of these philosophical relations, before we can begin properly analyzing his infamous epistemological conclusions.

Hume recognizes seven philosophical relations by which ideas and impressions give rise to new perceptions: resemblance, identity, relations of time and place, proportion in quantity or number, degrees in any quality, contrariety, and causation. Upon reflection, he tells us, it is easy to see that four of these relations rely solely on reflecting upon ideas, those of resemblance, contrariety, degrees in quality, and proportions in quantity or number. Just in virtue of reflecting upon any collection of perceptions, the mind cannot but help to analyze them in terms of their similarities to and differences from one another, or the degree to which they resemble or are contrary to each other.

Further, any idea entertained bears with it notions as to those simple perceptions that constitute it and the degree to which that idea has them. If an object is thought of as being large, we always have some notion as to how large it is, that is, the degree to which it has the quality largeness. Proportion in quantity, then, arises when in reflecting upon that large object, the mind also immediately recognizes the idea of it as bringing with it some notion as to whether the object is singular, for instance, a tree, or denotes a plurality, as in a forest.

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10 Ibid., 50.
11 David Pears, *Hume’s System*, 70.
The remaining three relations, *identity, relations of time and place,* and *causation* are of a nature, Hume assures us, that they can change in degree without resulting in any change in the ideas themselves. An object’s being *identical* to itself holds despite the object and whatever changes it might experience. The relation does not change the object nor the object the relation. Whether an object is *closer* or *farther* away from an individual, or was passed ten minutes or an hour *ago,* also demands no change in the idea of the object itself. And lastly, regardless of whether event *a* caused event *b* or vise versa, the ideas of the objects themselves remain completely intact.

There is with this second type of *relation,* however, something Hume finds particularly strange. It occurs to him that with regards to *identity* and *relations of time and space,* the mind plays an entirely passive role, relying solely on the biological processes of sense perception to provide the proper conditions for their arising. This seems not to be the case with the relation of *cause and effect.* Here, Hume argues, the senses seem to provide us only with ideas of the two objects or events independent of one another. As for what it is that produces within the mind this notion of something being in someway *causally linked* with another, the perception ultimately responsible Hume finds frustratingly elusive.

II. The Failure of Traditional Epistemology

1. Causation, Constant Conjunction, and Necessary Connexion

   As already mentioned above, Hume’s system, following Locke, holds that for an idea to be present in the mind, there must be a corresponding initial sense
impression which first gave rise to it. Thus, that most basic idea that objects and
events are causally related to one another must have arisen from some previous
sense experience, and to make his system ultimately cohere, he simply needs to
locate it. If one is seeking to understand the primary relation between causes and
their effects it seems reasonable that one should start with explaining what is meant
by cause and effect. This he does in two ways:

I find in the first place, that whatever objects are
consider’d as causes or effects, are contiguous; and that
nothing can operate in a time or place, which is ever so
little remov'd from those of its existence...[Secondly],
Some pretend that ’tis not absolutely necessary a cause
shou’d precede its effect; but that any object or action, in
the very first moment of its existence, may exert its
productive quality, and give rise to another object or
action, perfectly co-temporary with itself. But beside
that experience in most instances seems to contradict
this opinion, we may establish the relation of priority by
a kind of inference or reasoning.12

In short, the two definitions Hume entertains are related to both spatial and
temporal contiguity or dispositions of the mind to link either events or objects
together.13 From these two, we can establish three rules for causation: First, events
are spatio-temporally contiguous; second, that an effect never precedes its cause;
and third, one that we must infer but that Hume precedes by assuming, particular
instances of causal regularity give rise to ideas of general regularities.14 It is here
that Hume first senses that his system might be in trouble.

13 Abraham Roth, “Causation,” 95.
The problem lies in the fact that we are constantly witnesses to events that appear to follow these three rules but yet are very clearly not causally conjoined. It is often the case that upon seeing a certain food placed upon the dinner table that one’s mind immediately leaps to the expectation of another. A child could be easily forgiven, for instance, if they came to believe that the presence of mashed potatoes for dinner was in itself the cause of gravy, the two so commonly appear together. Yet despite the fact they the two are so often temporally and spatially constantly conjoined, there is, of course, no causal link between the two and so we must concede that despite the presence of all three of the above rules, something more is needed for a proper account of causation. There is, Hume notes, “a necessary connexion to be taken into consideration.”

To discover the impression responsible for this idea of necessary connection, Hume begins analyzing those instances in which he finds himself believing the events to be necessarily conjoined. The difficulty, Hume finds, is that in each of these instances the only relations between the two events that seem even remotely related to his causal intuition are those of contiguity and temporal succession. In his *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Hume provides the example of tossing a piece of dry firewood on a fire and the expectation in his mind that, rather than extinguishing the fire, that the firewood increases it. Yet, despite this unassailable intuition, Hume can find nothing in his observation of the event that would render such an effect necessary. What is it that makes it such that the wood

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16 Hume, *Enquiry*, 34.
burst into flame and how does it make itself known to our senses? Having found every instance of cause and effect entertained to be similarly deficient, Hume turns his attention elsewhere.

We must, therefore, proceed like those, who being in search of any thing, that lies conceal’d from them, and not finding it in the place they expected, beat about the neighbouring fields, without any certain view or design, in hopes their good fortune will at last guide them to what they search for.

Despite all of his searching, however, Hume finally must admit defeat, for whatever quality or relation he happened upon, he immediately found another causal event that lacked it. The darkness of rain clouds causing the falling of rain is immediately undermined by the experience or rain falling from white clouds as well as from the fact that there are many instances of cause and effect that have nothing at all to do with color. Hume notes that in the end it is simply the host of our past experiences that instruct us as to those events that are necessarily or only accidentally conjoined. This is not, however, in itself a problem. After all, Hume notes, whether or not we can provide an immediate account of causation, our intuitions concerning causation seem to lead us through our world with a high degree of success. Perhaps it is simply the case that the necessity of causal sequences is not immediately accessible, yet our past experience of these events render future instances of them

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17 While it may be countered that in this instance, Hume was simply in need of better science rather than a more philosophically robust account of causation, it should be noted that even on a molecular, atomic, or subatomic level, Hume would argue that the scientific analysis of our everyday encounters with causal connections are based on nothing more than smaller and more complex, yet philosophically equivalent, instances of constant conjunction of events.
18 Hume, Treatise, 55.
so probably likely to occur with the same causal influence on one another that, in
the end, it comes to virtually the same thing. Where the past has shown itself to be
uniform, so then will the future, and any lacking of uniformity will be met with
varying degrees of probability based on the degree to which the past has been
uniform.19 Here again, however, he argues that we have a problem.

2. The Uniformity of Nature

While holding that this is the way in which our minds make causal
inferences, Hume’s system still demands as much of a rational account of this
psychology as possible. The problem lies in the fact that by making the move from
posing a necessary connection between a cause and its effect in the past, to then
accepting a uniformity with the future, we must now give an account of this notion
of uniformity. Given the parameters of Hume’s system, to provide such explication,
we must, of course, rely entirely upon matters of fact and experience and relations of
ideas. In doing so, it should become immediately evident that any appeal to a priori
arguments must be discarded out of hand, a rejection that should be not at all
surprising given that Hume has placed himself firmly within the empiricist
tradition.20 Here then, he is left with simply our experience of uniformity in the past.
If in the past, events of type x have been uniformly conjoined to events of type y,
then I can be assured that such conjoining will continue in the future. In other
words, the future resembles the past. But why should we ever think a thing like this?

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19 Stephen Buckle, “Hume’s Sceptical Materialism,” 566.
20 Graciela De Pierris, “Causation as a Philosophical Relation in Hume,” 517.
It turns out, according to Hume, that we expect the future to resemble the past simply because it always has. This, as has just been noted, however, is that for which we are trying to give an account. The very principle that we are determined to understand is that which is responsible for the arising of this idea in the first place. If it has been the case that the past has been uniform, then the future will only be uniform if we hold that the past and the future are uniform with each other! This is not just another hurdle which Hume must work around, it entirely derails his enquiry altogether. In relying on itself for its own evidence, the probability of all of our inductive reasoning becomes zero. Moreover, given that our account of the idea of causation in the mind entirely relies upon induction, we are left with only a complete skepticism regarding cause and effect.

It gets worse, Hume tells us, given that our very notions of perceptions, impressions, and ideas are all dependent upon causal connections. The external world causes perceptions in the mind in the form of impressions. These impressions cause ideas of themselves to arise. In this one fell swoop, we have not only been left with skepticism regarding cause and effect, but also the external world, personal identity, and reason itself as well. The only thing that can possibly account for such a belief occurring in the mind is simply an entirely irrational custom or habit. Rather than providing us with the certainty Locke thought he had garnered for us, Hume has demonstrated that the traditional epistemology has skepticism as its only end. Perhaps not, though, an entirely despairing skeptical one, Hume notes.

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21 Roth, “Causation,” 104.
22 Hume, Enquiry, 71.
“Philosophy would render us entirely Pyrrhonian,” he tells us, “Were nature not too strong for it.” In other words, while not the robust philosophical system for which we were hoping, nature has provided for us the consolation of being entirely unable to succumb to the reality of our skeptical position. And perhaps, Hume argues, this is sufficient enough to carve out something that resembles rationality for ourselves, even if such resemblance is only a useful fiction.

3. The Effect of this Argument on the Philosophical Tradition

It is here, Bertrand Russell writes, that the empiricist project undertaken by Locke has failed. Perhaps, he continues, something serviceable can arise from its ashes but for anything to do so it must manifest itself in a manner that cannot be entirely empirical. Immanuel Kant recognized in this discussion a massive turn in the nature of philosophy:

Hume dwelt in particular upon the principle of causality, and quite rightly observed that its truth, and even the objective validity of the concept of efficient cause in general, is based on no insight, that is, on no a priori knowledge...From the incapacity of our reason to make use of this principle in any manner that transcends experience, he inferred the nullity of all pretensions of reason to advance beyond the empirical.

The entirety of Kant’s metaphysical and epistemology system is recognized as a sustained response to the damning critique of Hume’s work on the philosophical tradition up to that point. As has already been demonstrated above, it is to Hume

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23 Hume, Treatise, 414.
24 Russell, A History of Western Philosophy, 674.
25 Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, 606-607.
that Kant points as responsible for what initially led him to write in the first place.

The great Charles Darwin, in both published and unpublished works, notes his familiarity with Hume’s work and the effect of Hume on geologists Charles Lyell, James Hutton, and John Herschel, all of whom were massively important to the development of Darwin’s theory, has been well established. While it appears that their grasp on the particulars of Hume’s discussion of causation was lacking, even according to this traditional interpretation of Hume, their scientific models were built on critiques of precisely this argument in the *Treatise*. Even the contemporary theologian Cyril O'Regan, in his *Gnostic Return in Modernity*, cites him as being the catalyst for the “epistemological turn” in English and Continental philosophy, claiming that it was in the post-Lockean world brought about by Hume that the idea of religious knowledge experienced its most dramatic shift.

4. Of Miracles

In the course of this traditional reading of Hume, however, there is the persistent question as to how the system Hume puts forth here can be reconciled with his discussion in the chapter “Of Miracles” in his *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. The problem raised is a legitimate one and should be dealt with fully as Hume’s comments on miracles are among the most widely discussed by later theologians. If his system ends in a complete skepticism, then how is this to be squared with the certainty with which he critiques the idea of the miraculous?

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Hume very simply defines a miracle as “a violation of the laws of nature,” the most egregious of which he in turn discusses being the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, the miraculous events and prophecies of the Old Testament, and the idea of resurrection.\textsuperscript{28} When evaluating such events, he tells us, the wise person proportions their belief to the degree to which such miraculous effects have been conjoined to their everyday causes in the past.\textsuperscript{29} This mining the past for instances of miraculous events ultimately leads Hume into a discussion concerning the merits of testimony. One should move forward with confidence in the belief that adding a dash of some specific spice to their favorite meal will make it taste better simply because they received the trick from their mother who received it from her mother, who received it from…and on and on. Yet while my own culinary adventures are often taken with a similar confidence, such a confidence is not nearly as strong as my confidence that the sun will rise tomorrow. Of this particular belief I can proceed with complete confidence given that I have the testimony of the entirety of history informing me that such an event has daily taken place. So then, how should one proceed in the case of a person being raised from the dead?

According to Hume, there are limitations to the reliability of testimony. A whole host of liars attesting to the reality of some event matters much less than that of a single person of whom it is widely believed is entirely reliable. Yet there are cases, Hume argues, in which the event being described is so bizarre that no amount of testimony could possibly render such belief in the event rational. In the instance

\textsuperscript{28} Hume, \textit{Enquiry}, 76.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 73.
of a purported resurrection from the dead, the testimony of the uniformity of the world in accordance with natural laws will always win out against the testimony of people. Nature herself tells us that in such a case there must have been some mistake made on the part of the witnesses; perhaps the assumed deceased was only thought to have died when in fact they had not, or this individual claiming to have been resurrected has only disguised themselves so that those around them believe them to be a person who has died. Regardless of the reality of the situation, the uniformity of nature renders all miracles impossible to believe in. It is never reasonable to believe in miracles and anytime one does it must be called faith, which must always be entirely non-rational.\(^3\)

Such an explanation of Hume's account of miracles should raise the eyebrow of any critical reader of his works. He has just convinced us earlier in the same text that we are never justified in our beliefs concerning cause and effect, that it is also the very foundation of any notions of the uniformity of nature, and that therefore we must remain entirely skeptical regarding laws of nature.\(^3\) How then, can Hume turn around and critique the idea of the miraculous on these very grounds?

According to prominent Hume scholar, Keith Yandell, in his *Hume's Inexplicable Mystery*, Hume can only legitimately attempt to do so by arguing that the uniformity of nature is one of those beliefs that we cannot but help believing whereas belief in the miraculous (which, for Yandell, is simply shorthand for the

\(^3\) Ibid., 84-85, 90.
\(^3\) Ibid, 28.
entirety of religious belief) is simply not.\textsuperscript{32} This, Yandell argues, is nothing more than a matter of opinion on Hume’s part as we have no reason to assume that the religious intuition is not furnished to us by Nature in a manner that is just as trustworthy as that intuition regarding the laws of nature. It is due to this oversight (among other perceived inconsistencies in Hume’s work) that Yandell concludes that Hume’s account of miracles and religion is “deeply flawed,” although still able to provide great insight as to how one ought to proceed in the philosophy of religion.\textsuperscript{33}

And so has Hume’s thought concerning religion been characterized. It has been widely held that either Hume was simply inconsistent in not allowing religion the same status as scientific intuition, or that Hume’s critique of miracles is damning indeed and that his earlier argument concerning laws of nature is flawed. Despite the belief that these two arguments cannot be made consistent with each other, Hume’s work has been regarded as a problem for both religion and epistemology, and one that must be worked through rather than merely ignored.

\textbf{III. Thomas Reid’s Critique of Hume}

1. Thomas Reid’s Commonsense Critique

Thomas Reid is one of the earliest philosophers to take up precisely this charge of working through Hume, arguing that he is in error, not in the logical progression of his arguments, but in the assumptions upon which he constructs his epistemology. The focus of his critique is that this system of impressions and ideas

\textsuperscript{32} Keith Yandell, \textit{Hume’s “Inexplicable Mystery”: His Views on Religion}, 319.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 342.
inherited from Descartes and Locke, which he christens the *ideal system*, is inherently directed toward skepticism and, thus, contains some “original defect” and must itself be rejected before we can begin to construct a serviceable epistemology.  

This *ideal system* Reid likens to a Trojan Horse, whose outward appearance is both beautiful and innocent, but which carries in her belly the “death and destruction” of all knowledge and commonsense.  

He argues that Hume rightly demonstrates that adhering to such a system ultimately annihilates causation, time and space, body, and even soul, leaving us with nothing more than thoughts, sensations, and passions without a subject.  For the empiricist to reject such a conclusion is inconceivable but to accept it is absurd. After all, why is it that we admit that these ideas may “eat, drink, and be merry” but do not offer the same latitude to the chimera, who is, of course, nothing more than another idea?  

As mentioned above, the problem lies in the acceptance of Hume’s first principle: “[We] may divide all the perceptions of the mind into two classes or species which are distinguished by their different degrees of force and vivacity...ideas [and] impressions.”  

Reid holds, however, that just as Hume asks for an account of the person, of causation, of the external world, so the same ought to be required of this principle as well.
Moreover, if Hume calls into question the trustworthiness of all reasoning, why should we not hold this same skeptical line in regards to his reasoning concerning impressions and ideas, which brought us to this skeptical conclusion in the first place? To this question, Reid argues, Hume has no answer. He claims that Hume further contradicts himself by believing, against his own principles, that his work should be read and his “metaphysical acumen” honored, despite his work and acumen being instances of precisely what he claims quite simply cannot be trusted. Reid offers that rather than this skeptical system so fraught with inconsistencies, that we instead turn to the powers of commonsense, which, even with all the angels and deities carried with it, still ask of us a lesser degree of trust. It is his contention that “this article of sceptical creed is indeed so full of mystery...it appears to require as much faith as that of St. Athanasius.” Our error lies in following Hume as he followed Locke, and rather than looking to the philosopher for first principles, Reid encourages us to appeal to the common experience of the “vulgar”. In conclusion, Reid’s argument is that Hume has made precisely this error. It is from the vast fields of commonsense that his first principles should have been harvested; instead, Hume, in his pride, sought after that elusive quality of necessity from within the hallowed halls of the university, and so inherited their foolishness.

41 Reid, Inquiry, 409.
42 Ibid., 331.
2. Commonsense Epistemology

Prior to his interaction with Hume’s work, Reid describes himself as having been firmly in the grip of Berkeley’s idealist system.\(^{43}\) He became convinced, however, that Berkeley’s idealism falls victim to Hume’s skeptical conclusions, for precisely the same reasons, and thus his foray into Hume was also his departure from Berkeley as well as the whole of the *ideal system* upon which their work was founded. As seen above, having recognized the dangers of this system, Reid then worked to replace it with one built upon the foundation of commonsense.

He begins his discussion with the assertion that the faculties of the human mind are no less trustworthy in achieving their ends as the organs of the human body are suited to achieving those for which they have been created.\(^{44}\) Despite Hume’s skeptical position, Reid notes, he never failed to believe that his hand would move his pen across the page properly to communicate his thoughts, that his eyes would be able to guide him towards the chair on which he sat while he wrote, or that his ears would alert him to the presence of a visitor at the door even during his most intense speculation.\(^{45}\) Given that the senses are responsible for providing us our only true access to the world, it is with the senses that any account of knowledge must begin.

Reid begins his discussion with an immediate departure from the *ideal system*. In this understanding of knowledge, he argues, the mind passively receives individual monads of sensory perception that the mind then throws together and

\(^{43}\) Nicholas Wolterstorff, “Hume and Reid,” 398.
\(^{44}\) Reid, *Inquiry*, 397.
\(^{45}\) Ibid., 20.
compares against each other to create ideas and belief. This, Reid states, is all fiction. Rather, Nature furnishes to the mind complete concrete bodies that are only separated and broken down into their elemental parts during the process of scientific investigation.\textsuperscript{46} These “concrete bodies” present to the mind sensations that are complete, which cause to arise in the mind memories with which these sensations are coupled. I see a rose as a rose, intact and compound, and that sensory experience calls to mind memories of past roses to which this experience is immediately connected. The human experience, Reid contests, is filled with observations of this sort. The entirety of humanity approaches them with the opinion that such unreflective beliefs are perfectly useful and warranted exactly as they are.\textsuperscript{47}

I conclude, then, that the belief which accompanies sensation and memory, is a simple act of the mind, which cannot be defined. It is in this respect like seeing and hearing, which can never be so defined, as to be understood by those who have not these faculties; and to such as have them, no definition can make these operations more clear than they are already. In like manner, every man...knows perfectly well what belief is, but can never define or explain it.\textsuperscript{48}

Any attempt, then, to analyze belief further is quite simply a muddying of the waters. One does not, he argues, find themselves inundated with a myriad of perceptions that they must then turn into something sensible. Rather, the moment of discovery as to the identity of the thing beheld is simultaneous with its initially being

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 27.
\textsuperscript{47} Wolterstorff, “Hume and Reid,” 406.
\textsuperscript{48} Reid, \textit{Inquiry}, 30.
In other words, we do not experience brownness, largeness, flatness, smoothness, and tallness, etc., then out of them construct the image of a table. It is only after seeing a table, immediately as a table, that one can analyze such an experience and break it down into its component parts. And furthermore, anyone who tries to claim otherwise is not only confused, but also stands against the weight of the whole of human experience.

In this moment of our enquiry, then, we are faced with a decision. Either we choose to stand against commonsense and commit ourselves to the idea that our phenomenological experience of our own perception should be discarded for the sake of philosophical commitments, or we free ourselves from the burden of this ideal system and embrace the reality of the boundaries of our speculations. To this, Reid replies that while it is often the case that the multitude must be guided by philosophers, there are occasions when commonsense demands that the "...Philosopher follow the multitude, or make himself perfectly ridiculous." If our conclusion must be one of skepticism, as Hume has clearly shown, Reid contends, then be skeptical of the ideal system by championing the powers of common intuition.

**Conclusion**

And so in the end, we are left with a choice between Hume’s skeptical conclusions or a philosophy of commonsense. As has been seen already, the legacy

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50 Reid, *Inquiry*, 490.
of the *Treatise* on the history of philosophy has been incredibly strong. This work, along with Hume’s other writings, has been referenced countless times among the books subsequent thinkers have furnished since his time. Yet the lasting effect of Reid’s has been almost largely absent until a recent revival of his thought, largely through the contributions of Yale’s Nicholas Wolterstorff in the late 20th century. It would appear that when faced with the same decision, Hume or Reid, the philosophers of the intervening centuries have, by and large, chosen to wrestle with Hume, those familiar with Reid being largely dismissive of this appeal to commonsense. And this reality despite the fact that during their lives, it was Reid who enjoyed the successes of his work, having long held a position at the University of Aberdeen, unlike Hume who never did find a permanent teaching position.

Our current interest, however, is not why Hume has been so largely favored by history, but simply why the subject of this entire work, John Henry Newman, found a home for his thought in an epistemological system that seems to so closely align with that of Hume’s, rather than in that of Thomas Reid’s. Surely this alleged skeptical conclusion of Hume’s epistemology would prevent some like Newman from engaging in precisely the work he does, but is it possible that the Hume presented above is not the one with whom Newman would have had to square his own system had he recognized these similarities himself in the pages of the *Treatise*? The subject of the following chapter is to demonstrate that this appears to be the case. The following chapter argues that despite the witness of the intervening history of philosophy, Hume is quite clearly not the skeptic that he has been made out to be and that it is this misreading that disqualifies Reid’s
commonsense critique and philosophical system. Following on the heels of this discussion, the subject of the third chapter will be my contention that not only is Hume not a skeptic, but that Newman’s epistemological system in many ways mirrors Hume’s discussion in Newman’s effort to discuss the notion of assent, the cornerstone of Christian belief and praxis, and our recognizing this commonality aids us in turning one of theology’s most vicious critiques into our philosophical ally.
CHAPTER TWO

THE NEW OR COMMONSENSE HUME

Nothing is more dangerous to reason than the flights of the imagination, and nothing has been the occasion of more mistakes among philosophers. Men of bright fancies may in this respect be compar’d to those angels, whom the scripture represents as covering their eyes with their wings.

-David Hume

In the last chapter, we examined the traditional understanding of Hume’s epistemology, particularly in reference to causation and the problem it raises for the entirety of the philosophical enterprise. As has been referred to already, however, this skeptical interpretation of his work is not the only one available, nor is it, I will here argue, the most convincing. There has been a resurgence of interest in the Humean project over the past two decades due in large part to a radical reading of Hume as causal realist spearheaded by Janet Broughton, Galen Strawson, and John P. Wright.

The issue raised by those promoting the New Hume, as this controversial interpretation has been christened, is that for a philosopher who has been assumed to be promoting an all-encompassing skepticism, Hume spends a great deal of time making some rather concrete claims concerning psychology, ethics, and religion in the sections of his Treatise immediately following his alleged skeptical conclusion.
Is it possible that an individual with the philosophical acumen of David Hume could not have noticed such an obvious inconsistency? Those who subscribe to the New Hume thesis think this unlikely, arguing that a close reading of the text makes it clear that the traditional reading can only be supported by overlooking significant portions of Hume's work.

In what follows, we will be examining the New Hume and the critiques it raises for a traditional interpretation of Hume like the one found in our previous discussion. I will defend, at least in part, their thesis that Hume should be understood as a causal realist and that the entirety of the Humean corpus more fully coheres against such a background. Where the New Hume struggles, however, is in providing a unified account of exactly what Hume’s realism looks like. I will argue that certain of their realist interpretations are as violent to the text as the traditional reading. In contrast to these views, I will demonstrate that Hume appropriates a commonsense epistemological system in the vein of Thomas Reid, yet one that is more compelling and useful.51

51 Given the restrictions of the present medium, I will be unable to draw out the philosophical history that goes all the way back to Aristotle’s account of phronesis out of which Hume appears to have constructed his commonsense approach. For the moment, it should simply be noted that I am in no way meaning to imply that the commonsense tradition discussed here is original to Hume, even if the manner in which he understands it is.
I. The New Hume

1. The Conclusion to Book One of the Treatise

Hume’s first book of *A Treatise of Human Nature*, “Of Knowledge”, concludes with a reflection on his philosophical journey thus far. He begins by confessing the fear and isolation of the position in which he has found himself.

I call upon others to join me, in order to make a company apart; but no one will hearken to me. Every one keeps at a distance, and dreads that storm, which beats upon me from every side. I have expos’d myself to the enmity of all metaphysicians, logicians, mathematicians, and even theologians; and can I wonder at the insults I must suffer?\(^52\)

It is clear then, that Hume recognizes the gravity of his contribution thus far and the skeptical conclusions he has reached. Up to this point, the Traditional Hume and the New Hume agree. Insofar as he is levying a sustained critique against the Cartesian and Lockean realist epistemologies, Hume has been massively successful. There is no denying that Hume has found himself at this point in a radically skeptical position. Where the current debate is focused is on whether or not he leaves himself in this position or if out of the ashes of his attack on the works of Descartes and Locke, a more serviceable and robust epistemology is born. According to the position of the New Hume, the clues as to where Hume goes from this point lie in the remainder of the closing reflection.

\(^{52}\) Hume, *Treatise*, 172.
It is immediately clear that Hume is not at all comfortable simply ending his investigation here. He writes that he recognizes the absurdity of his position when so much of what he has demonstrated to be unknowable are those ideas “which are common to human nature” and for which he feels strongly compelled to continue to hold despite his commitment to his previous discussion. Experience and habit, Hume confesses, are all that remain to explain this belief in *necessary connexion* for which he has spent so much effort searching. These two “flights of fancy” are our last defense from the total skepticism that has been steadily advancing toward us. These subscribers to the thesis of the New Hume suggest that, for Hume, they are enough.

Despite the discovery that our belief in cause and effect has its genesis in the imagination rather than in any sensory experience, Hume finds that he is “absolutely and necessarily determin’d to live, and talk, and act like other people in the common affairs of life.” In committing ourselves to the epistemology inherited from Locke, we must conclude that reason cannot dispel these sceptical conclusions, yet, Hume rejoices, “nature herself suffices to that purpose,” curing us of our philosophical melancholy. Our philosophy must be tempered by the reality of our position in the world. In other words, as Hume writes in the *Enquiry*, a work that has long been regarded as a clarification of the thought put forth in the text with which we are

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53 Ibid.
54 Ibid., 175.
55 Ibid.
56 Ibid.
currently concerned, “Be a philosopher; but amidst your philosophy, be still a man.”

The Cartesian and Lockean error lies not in failing to reach Hume’s skeptical end, rather it lies in the absurdity of claiming to restrict one’s epistemology to only those ideas that can be known with certainty. Descartes reduces the foundation of his system to the oft-quoted (yet never actually found verbatim in his *Meditations*) *cogito ergo sum*. Here Descartes has forgotten amidst his philosophy to “be still a man.” He claims to have left himself with one foundational belief, yet his very actions betray him. He writes his thoughts down with a pen, sits upon a chair to write more comfortably, and continues to eat and drink, the concreteness of which he does not question. Locke’s system, having been built on Cartesian principles, fairs no better.

In a voice very reminiscent of Thomas Reid’s critique that sometimes the “philosopher must follow the multitude”, Hume demonstrates that the great sin of the philosophers lies in thinking that they can escape their position as human persons and write about the world as if exterior to it. The world that remains after the Lockean analysis is one that in no way resembles the world in which we actually live. We simply must accept that any account of causation must always be from within a causal world and one in which “nature herself” has already furnished the requisite belief. To this end, Hume concludes, “Human Nature is the only science of

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man; and yet has been hitherto the most neglected.”\textsuperscript{59} Having come to this conclusion, he ends his epistemological speculation and turns to passions and morals for the remainder of his enquiry.

2. Personal Correspondences

We do not have to rely entirely upon his remarks in that final section of the first book of the \textit{Treatise}, however, for insight into Hume’s actual epistemological position. There are several letters in which he comments on the critiques levied against him by his contemporaries, demonstrating what he alleges are their misconceptions of his system. In a 1754 letter to one John Stewart, then Professor of Natural Philosophy at the University of Edinburgh, he makes the bold assertion, “I am not such a Sceptic, as you may, perhaps, imagine.”\textsuperscript{60} The remainder of the letter is given over to demonstrating that his critics mistake his epistemological comments for metaphysical commitments in regards to his treatment of causation (e.g., “we have no reason to doubt that anything could arise without a cause” versus “things can arise uncaused”) as well as forget that there are “many different kinds of Certainty; and some of them as satisfactory to the Mind, tho perhaps not so regular, as the demonstrative kind.”\textsuperscript{61}

In an earlier 1734 letter, five years before the publication of his \textit{Treatise}, to a Dr. George Cheyne, Hume gives an account of the philosophical background out of which he develops his speculations. Inherited from antiquity, he remarks, is the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{59} Hume, \textit{Treatise}, 177.
\item \textsuperscript{60} J.Y.T Greig, \textit{The Letters of David Hume: Volume 1}, 186.
\item \textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 187.
\end{itemize}
habit of almost every philosopher to be predisposed to invention and flights of imagination rather than the experiences of the discipline of living a common life. “Every one consulted his Fancy in erecting Schemes of Virtue & Happiness, without regarding human Nature, upon which every moral Conclusion must depend...This therefore I resolved to make my principal study, & the Source from which every I wou’d derive every Truth in Criticism as well as Morality.”

Here we see that, once again, Hume would distance himself from the abstruse treatises of philosophy's past and commit himself to the guiding light of human nature, a human nature actually lived rather than one composed completely of conjecture.

The most telling passage, however, is found in Hume’s letter to the aforementioned Thomas Reid in 1763. In this correspondence, Hume is responding to a request to review Reid's *An Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense* offered to him by Hugh Blair, an influential Scottish minister and academic. This was not the first time that Hume was to encounter Reid, in fact, the two had corresponded with each other on several occasions and were always complimentary, even if critical, of each other. Reid’s work, as has been demonstrated previously, is a defense, oftentimes intended to be at odds with Hume, of an entirely commonsense approach to epistemology and metaphysics. What is so interesting about this particular letter, however, is that in critique, Hume offers only a very minor grammatical correction, stating, “You may judge how unexceptionable the whole appeared to me, when I could remark so small a

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62 Ibid., 16.
blemish.” Surely had Hume’s position been so contrary to Reid’s own there would have been a whole host of critiques given, yet on the actual content of the work, Hume has nothing but praise.

According to Hume’s own perception of his position, then, we must move forward under the assumption that this most basic argument of the these new interpreters of Hume is correct. Hume is not the skeptic that history has made him out to be. What remains, however, is an account of the details of the epistemology Hume actually offers. And for this, we turn to the writings of the New Humeans for help.

II. The Hume of the New Humeans

One of the earliest and most sophisticated works promoting a new interpretation of Hume’s theory is that of Galen Strawson’s *The Secret Connexion* (1989). Here Strawson commits himself to the conclusion that Hume clearly believed, in at least some sense of belief, in causal connections. This, he argues, is obvious and incontrovertible. What is not clear to Strawson is whether Hume does so in a philosophical sense or in a manner that is completely at odds with his epistemological commitments. While the New Hume describes an interpretation of Hume in some roughly realist manner, the claim is a general one that has been explicated in different ways by the various interpreters who have claimed to share

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63 Ibid., 376. Interestingly, Reid’s response to this letter is one that is equally effusive and warm, joking that despite their religious disagreements, Hume would be more welcome to Reid’s philosophical meetings with his colleagues than even St. Athanasius.
this intuition about Hume’s work. In this next portion, we shall consider in turn Galen Strawson, Simon Blackburn, John Wright, and Janet Broughton.

1. Galen Strawson

Strawson offers that the traditional ‘Humean’ account of causation is roughly that causation is nothing other than regularity of succession, and seeing as Hume’s name is commonly attached to the “Regularity Theory of Causation”, this claim must be received as entirely accurate. Yet, Strawson argues, everything that Hume has said in reference to causation (whether eventually rescued or not) pertains simply to our knowledge of causal powers and not the powers themselves. In this skeptical tradition of which Hume has always been assumed to be a part, such a positive (and positivist) claim of the sort "causation is nothing other than regularity of succession" would be completely out of character. “Indeed this just is the ‘Humean’ view,” Strawson tells us, “[but] Hume never held it.”

According to Strawson’s interpretation, the causal system to which Hume adheres is one which assumes our world to be regular, the cause of which, however, remains entirely hidden from us in virtue of our empiricist presuppositions. More than this, however, Strawson concludes that for Hume, while our belief in causal regularity is bestowed upon us by Nature herself, our belief is able to be discussed in traditional philosophical terms as evidenced by Hume’s discussion of this belief as concerning “secret connexions,” a phrase that Strawson finds very much

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65 Ibid., 13.
66 Ibid., 31.
philosophically charged.67 There is a sense, then, in which Strawson recognizes a sort of Reidian commonsense strain at work in Hume’s philosophical account, yet this only extends as far as the natural recognition of causal regularity in the world.68 When it comes to the interworking of these elusive connections, Strawson interprets Hume as providing insight as to the metaphysical necessity of causal sequences, despite being entirely hidden from us. This he refers to as Hume’s “empiricist mistake”.69 His error is not in holding to this metaphysical necessity, but rather lies in his committing himself to such a strict empiricism in the first place.

2. Simon Blackburn

Simon Blackburn, in his article “Hume and Thick Connexions”, argues that while elegant in its ingenuity with regards to offering such a radical interpretation of Hume's thought, Strawson has gone too far. For Blackburn, Strawson’s opposition to the Regularity Theory, referencing fundamental forces constitutive to nature, is not to simply offer an alternative reading to Hume, but to depart from any Humean picture, “New” or otherwise.70 For Blackburn, what Hume actually offers is a distinction between what he calls “Thick” and “Straightjacket” causal connections, the first indicating an assumed yet still rather vague causal connection between two events and the latter being a belief in a strict causal necessity between two events. The difference here can be thought of with regards to a connection intuited as

67 Ibid., 239.
69 Strawson, The Secret Connexion, 237.
compared to one that is demonstrated. It is his opinion that Strawson puts forth a reading of Hume as having committed himself to Straightjacket causal connections, while Blackburn himself sees in Hume only references to Thick connections.\(^{71}\)

Agreeing with Strawson that one simply cannot read as the skeptic so often championed by the Early Analytic logical positivists, he disagrees that Hume’s realist causal theory is one that works. Strawson views Hume as offering a Straightjacket approach to causation, one contradictory to his empiricist commitments, yet serviceable for those of us wiling to eschew such limited perspectives. Blackburn argues that such a contradiction must have been fully apparent to Hume and so concludes that the only option left is to read Hume as providing a Thick account of causation, one, Blackburn believes, too weak to provide any real assistance to us. He would have us imagine a “Bare Humean”, an individual who functions as Hume describes with regard to the reality of causal connections but one that lacks entirely any sort of theoretical account of them.\(^{72}\) This, for Blackburn, is the Hume that should have been. Strictly speaking, then, Blackburn disagrees with the central thesis of the New Hume in that he understands Hume as a somewhat incomplete realist. Yet, as will be demonstrated below, his “halfway house” of Humean interpretation remains useful for our discussion.

\(^{71}\) Ibid., 106.
\(^{72}\) Ibid., 109.
3. John Wright

Our next influential proponent of the New Hume interpretation is John Wright, especially concerning his 1983 work, *The Sceptical Realism of David Hume*. According to Wright, the skepticism so often put forth in traditional Hume scholarship is one that Hume himself held, but held only as a restriction to the overly far-reaching conclusions of the scientific method. For Hume, he argues, science is more than simply a predictive activity in which one relies upon observed past regularities to determine future events. Rather, science is the search for physical causes. The issue again, Wright notes, is that the whole of Hume’s discussions of science seem all to lead to the skeptical conclusion that knowledge of such causes are forever beyond our reach. Yet, for all of this skeptical discussion, Wright finds it disturbing that Hume insists on talking of our interaction with the physical world as being one that entails not skepticism at all.

In a manner Wright finds interestingly, if strangely, Wittgensteinian, he interprets Hume’s *custom* as providing grounds of justification for that which is philosophically unjustifiable. Just as Wittgenstein’s later writings concerning “language games” indicate that justification is simply a function of the languages used within the context of a social life, Wright argues, Hume finds justification is not objective as we have been made to believe by philosophers of the past, but functions entirely within our context of existing as natural, organic beings. In this manner, the world has an intrinsic, yet purely functional, intelligibility to it that we can make

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74 Ibid., 22.
sense of simply by observing ourselves in the grip of nature, even if we are given no true access to it. Thus for Hume, Wright concludes, meaning and truth lie outside of the world of our experience, and human ideas are therefore inadequate to the natural objects they refer.\textsuperscript{75}

4. Janet Broughton

Our last New Humean, Janet Broughton, offers an interpretation that is much weaker than those put forth by Strawson or Wright. Separating herself from the “sceptical realism” that characterizes their Humean systems, Broughton argues that Hume never does recover from the charge of skepticism and, in fact, embraces it. She finds in the \textit{Treatise}, three distinct categories of thinkers: false philosophers, true philosophers, and the vulgar.\textsuperscript{76} The false philosophers are those who believe, despite their obvious epistemological distance, that the reality of causal connections are not yet within their grasp but carry on hoping that reason will someday remedy this. The vulgar are those nonphilosophical peoples who are neither bothered by our lack of epistemological access to causation’s secrets nor ever even recognize it, as they find themselves faced with the presence of causal indicators, e.g., the heat of the fire \textit{causes} burns, without ever knowing or needing to know why these characteristics strike as the indicators they are. The true philosophers, according to Broughton, Hume sees as those who understand our epistemological predicament and move forward in their work with the knowledge that, as the vulgar are not

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 26.
\textsuperscript{76} Janet Broughton, “Our Aim in All Our Studies,” 202.
bothered by this problem, then neither should they be, and thus, are perfectly willing to assume causations presence while also being wholly skeptical about it.\(^7\)

In this, Broughton has separated herself from those who label Hume a “sceptical realist.” By her account, Hume would have recoiled at the thought, having spent so much time demonstrating and arguing for such deeply skeptical conclusions. Instead, Broughton’s Hume is the true philosopher who accepts both his epistemological limitations as well as his inability to free himself from the determinations of nature to pursue such a skeptical position. Thus, Hume turns out to be a skeptic, through and through, in regards to knowledge of the secret connexions of causal sequences, yet a realist only insofar as he is willing to philosophically use the natural position of the vulgar to further his discussion, rather than as seeing it as an end to all his enquiries.\(^7\)

**III. The Commonsense Hume**

1. Book One as *Reductio*

    While each of these scholars have presented a compelling picture of the New Hume in their own way, there is a sense of foreignness in their writings that I do not find when engaged with the original works of Hume. It seems to me that despite having in part rescued Hume from the dogmatic skepticism with which he has been charged by the history of philosophy since his time, they each then try to return Hume to precisely the same philosophical system in which the traditional Humeans

\(^7\) Ibid., 203.

\(^7\) Ibid., 208.
have placed him. It is my contention, however, that the only consistent way to read
the Hume of the first book of the Treatise as the same Hume of the conclusion to the
first book, as well as both of the remaining books, is to understand Hume's initial
comments to be intended as a sustained *reductio ad absurdum* against the
philosophical rationalist and empiricist systems of the past.

As has already been referenced above, at the end of Book One, Hume
describes himself as being in the unenviable position of having demonstrated to the
intellectuals of his day the futility of all their investigations.79 He characterizes
himself as sharing in their despair at the emptiness of their philosophical position
yet then goes on to claim that he has been freed from this hopelessness by the
relentless march of Nature. Custom provides that which philosophy has failed to
provide, a way to move forward and a foundation for all our enquiries.

Rather than a return to the broken philosophies of the past, Hume is here
embarking on precisely what Blackburn has coined the “Bare Hume.”

Imagine a character we might call the Bare Humean. The Bare Humean misses out this capacity for apprehension
or theory, so does indeed lack the representative idea of thick connexions that these are supposed to give us. But
she goes through the functional change which Hume describes, and conducts her expectations and actions
accordingly...She can understand that finding ever more simplicity and [ever] more general patterns may be ‘set us
as a task’, so that there will always be more to know about nature...What else does she need? Are we sure she
is missing anything at all – isn’t she a bit like you and me?80

80 Blackburn, “Hume and Thick Connexions”, 109
Is this not exactly what Hume describes in his conclusion to Book One? He talks about the experience of setting his work aside and engaging in the realities of the human experience, entertaining guests, playing backgammon, and conversing with friends, and in so doing finding that the “vulgar” approach to the understanding of human nature feels so much more lively and useful than the cold philosophy to which he returns some hours later. Assuming that Blackburn is correct and that the Bare Humean does sound like you and me, then surely this is the account of the foundation of human nature, which is precisely that which Hume has been trying to provide all along. Thus, we must conclude that Hume has more in common with the Bare Humean than he does with either the Sceptical Realism of Strawson and Wright or the serviceable philosophical skepticism offered by Broughton. In this, Hume has demonstrated himself to be a commonsense philosopher. Yet, he does so, not by choosing vulgar intuitions over philosophy like Reid does, but by crafting a philosophy that founds itself upon those intuitions.

2. The Commonsense Hume on “Is and Ought” and Faith

This is somewhat easier to see in regards to his infamous “Is/Ought” discussion from Book Three of the Treatise. Here, Hume is once again faced with the failure of the philosophers of the past, in this case in providing a workable system that can fully capture our moral experience.

In every system of morality, which I have hitherto met with, I have always remark’d, that the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary way of reasoning, and establishes the being of a God, or makes observations concerning human affairs; when of a sudden I am
surpriz’d to find, that instead of the usual copulations of propositions, *is*, and *is not*, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an *ought*, or an *ought not*. This change is imperceptible; but is, however, of the last consequence. For as this *ought*, or *ought not*, expresses some new relation or affirmation, ‘tis necessary that it shou’d be observ’d and explain’d; and at the same time that reason shou’d be given, for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it.\textsuperscript{81}

In his now famous article, “Hume on ‘Is’ and ‘Ought’”, Alasdair Maclntyre demonstrates that rather than seeking to make evident the falsity and invalidity of all our moral claims, Hume is simply again demonstrating the secret workings of Nature, this time to provide the moral link that we cannot explain philosophically yet that we all perceive in our ordinary experience of life.\textsuperscript{82} He is not, Maclntyre tells us, “trying to say that morality lacks a basis; he’s trying to point out that basis.”\textsuperscript{83}

The same seems true of Hume’s discussion of miracles. It is certainly outside the scope of the present work to argue that Hume was in fact religious, nor do I feel that there is evidence in his work to that effect. Yet, he ends his account of miracles with the claim that “mere reason is insufficient to convince us” of religious truth, but that whoever is moved by *faith* to believe “is conscious of a continued miracle in his own person.”\textsuperscript{84} To borrow from Blackburn, does this not sound like you and me?

This interpretation is even more evident when coupled with his concluding remarks in his *A Natural History of Religion*:

\textsuperscript{81} Hume, *Treatise*, 302.
\textsuperscript{82} Alasdair Maclntyre, "Hume on ‘Is’ and ‘Ought’", 459-60.
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., 466.
\textsuperscript{84} Hume, *Enquiry*, 90.
The universal propensity to believe in invisible intelligent power, if not an original instinct, being at least a general attendant of human nature, it may be considered as a kind of mark or stamp, which the divine workman has set upon his work; and nothing surely can more dignify [humankind], than to be thus selected from all the other parts of the creation, and to bear the image or impression of the universal Creator. But consult this image, as it commonly appears in the popular religions of the world. How is the deity disfigured in our representations of him! It would be consistent with the picture I have presented above to argue that Hume is not here condemning the “vulgar” religious, but rather the religious dogmatist, those individuals who speak with such authority about the “reasonableness” of religion. Religion, for those who are religious, is something that begins in faith, in a connexion felt, rather than in the realm of philosophical enquiry. Here again, there is a strain of Commonsense Philosophy running throughout Hume’s work that we just cannot ignore any longer. And even if John Henry Newman, the subject of our remaining discourse, was not simply a believer in the vulgar sense, the foundation of his faith is that same felt connection that Hume seems willing to defend.

**Conclusion**

In leaving behind the traditional, positivist interpretations of the past, we are again faced with a decision, in this case between a skeptical realism or a Humean and Reidian commonsense philosophy. The debate concerning the New Hume is, of course, not settled, nor will there ever been complete agreement as to exactly what

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85 Hume, *Four Dissertations*, 114. This passage (as well as its interesting similarity to Romans 1) was brought to my attention by David Wheeler-Reed.
Hume was trying to accomplish. Yet for those who have found the arguments convincing, all that is left is to continue moving forward. It is my contention not only that Hume offers us a robust and compelling appropriation of a commonsense approach to philosophical enquiry, but also that, at least to some degree, this Humean system is strikingly similar to that upon which John Henry Newman based his own epistemological system. And it is precisely this topic that we will concern ourselves in the following chapter.

Custom, then, is the great guide of human life. It is that principle alone, which renders our experience useful to us, and makes us expect, for the future, a similar train of events with those which have appeared in the past. Without the influence of custom, we should be entirely ignorant of every matter of fact, beyond what is immediately to the memory and senses. We should never know how to adjust means to ends, or to employ our natural powers in the production of any effect. There would be an end at once of all action, as well as of the chief part of speculation.  

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86 Ibid., 29.
CHAPTER THREE

THE NEW HUME AND CUSTOM AS ILLATIVE SENSE

As the structure of the universe speaks to us of Him who made it, so the laws of the mind are the expression, not of mere constituted order, but of His will. I should be bound by them even were they not His laws; but since one of their very functions is to tell me of Him, they throw a reflex light upon themselves, and, for resignation to my destiny, I substitute a cheerful concurrence in an overruling Providence.

- John Henry Newman

An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent

As has been previously discussed, the effect of Hume’s work in history cannot be overstated. Whereas Reid’s legacy has waned ever since the recognition he enjoyed during his life, excepting some very recent resurgence of interest, Hume’s writings have come to be recognized as some of the most important works in the entire history of thought. While his readers, critiques, and followers have varied widely, few are as enterprising, nor as surprising, as the great Anglican-turned-Catholic theologian and philosopher, John Henry Newman.

My aim in what follows is to provide an account of Newman’s religious epistemology that demonstrates its commonalities with the Humean realism of the previous chapter. I will demonstrate that Newman’s system mirrors Hume in at least a similar way to the realist interpretation that has been the focus of our

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87 60-61.
investigation thus far, and that his similarities with Hume’s system and the structure of the first book of the *Treatise* is both clearly seen in Newman’s epistemology as well as crucial to understanding his project. Beginning with some brief biographical remarks, the majority of our attention will be on Newman’s *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, the pinnacle of all of his philosophical speculations published in 1870.

In this highly technical epistemological work, we ought to recognize an interesting affinity with the Humean project, even if Newman would have believed that Hume failed to follow his arguments to their natural Christian end, and an appropriation of the same vocabulary utilized by Hume’s account of *custom* and *habit* in his own foundational concept of the *illative sense*. In true Newmanian vocabulary, the goals of the present chapter will be largely *notional*, depending heavily upon the abstract and general, while the following chapter will be almost entirely *real*, demonstrating how his illative sense functions in the course of our

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88 It should be noted that there has been much already written on the relationship between Hume and Newman. Much of the debate, however, is situated in the question as to whether Newman actually ever read Hume. As the conversation has progressed by this point to the recognition that Newman’s familiarity with Hume’s writings is a foregone conclusion, I have simply assumed the now standard position that given the similarities in vocabulary and structure between them, that Newman is aware of Hume’s claims in the *Treatise* and *Enquiry* even if it cannot be demonstrated that Newman in any way relied upon them in his own work. For further discussion of this issue, see J. M. Cameron “The Night Battle: Newman and Empiricism” in *Victorian Studies* Vol. 4, no. 2 (1960), 99-117; Fergus Ker, “‘In an Isolated and, Philosophically, Uninfluential Way’: Newman and Oxford Philosophy,” in eds Terrence Merrigan and Ian Turnbull Ker, *Newman and the word*, Vol. 27. (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 2000), 155-179; Ryan Vilbig, “John Henry Newman and Empiricism” in *Newman Studies Journal* Vol. 9, no. 2 (2012), 13-25.
intellectual and spiritual formation. First, however, we must begin with an introduction to Newman himself.

I. The Life and Times of John Henry Newman

The world in which John Henry Newman (1801-1890) lived and worked was in many ways similar to that of Hume's and Reid's, despite being almost a century removed, in that he too wrote and worked in the highest echelons of academia, having been a Fellow of Oriel College, Oxford, for a significant portion of his life, and yet, was at the same time importantly different. To better understand these specific nuances of the later Newman, however, we must look back to certain particularities of his youth.

Even being somewhat taciturn about his family life, Newman provides us with enough clues to piece together an intellectual and spiritual foundation on which the Newman of philosophical and theological fame can be properly constructed. Newman, the oldest of six children, was raised in the Anglican faith although he confesses that he had no “formed religious convictions” until the age of fifteen, when his classics teacher encouraged his conversion to Evangelicalism.89 This conversion was not the rejection of the faith passed down to him from his family; rather it was the recognition by a gifted child that despite his own intellectual acumen, his abilities were insufficient to allow him to live the life of virtue he sought. It is in this childhood conversion that we find the first appearance of that stage on which he was to spend his entire life performing.

In the adolescent conversion of a sixteen-year-old young man, we are provided already with Newman’s constant battle against liberalism, against the notion that the self and her noetic movings can be adequate substitution for creeds and dogma. Yet, despite his rejection of what could be described as a naïve liberal humanism, Newman could not escape his intellectual giftedness and the pendulum swinging between youthful arrogance and evangelical spirituality eventually settled in the more traditional and intellectually interested Anglican communion; these “creeds” and “dogmas” of an evangelical disposition giving way to the religious sophistication first encountered in the Oxford Movement during his time as an undergraduate student at Trinity College. It was in defense of this via media, strong in its Catholicity yet definitively Anglican nonetheless, that Newman committed his early years, and in which he found himself under constant critique as a specifically vocal member of the Oxford Movement who were known as Tractarians.

Having decided upon becoming a priest and an academic, Newman had found himself at the heart of the religious conflict between the stilted religious discourse, practice, and skepticism of the Anglican academic elite and the subjective, anti-intellectual spirituality of Protestant Liberal Evangelicalism. This Tractarian Newman wrote continuously in defense of three fundamental propositions; first,

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81 Ibid., 89-90. “The Tractarian Movement...was a profoundly religious movement, religious in the fullest and deepest sense of the word, embracing as it did all the truths of revelation and all the ordinances, rites, and ceremonies of the visible Church, without which there is no real Christianity, or at best a thing maimed and stricken, like a branch lopped off the living trunk.” (Bouyer, *Newman: His Life and Spirituality*, 227.)
that dogma is the foundation of Christianity. The thrust of the liberal Protestantism with which Newman saw himself in conflict was a rejection of dogma for the sake of the primacy of subjective religious experience. This new wave of Protestant ideology sought to hold the personal in higher esteem than the ecclesial, claiming that the Holy Spirit is at work more in the lives of the individual than in the church universal. The second stronghold of the Tractarians was that there was such a thing as the visible Church, with sacraments and rites through which we receive grace, and that, “this was the doctrine of Scripture, of the early Church, and of the Anglican Church.” And their last principle was that there should be a strict adherence to the Episcopal system as laid out in the Epistles of St. Ignatius and reinforced in the Thirty-Nine Articles, the defining tenets of the Episcopal communion.

It was in regard to these Thirty-Nine Articles, however, that Newman and his fellow Tractarians first found themselves at odds with the Anglican hierarchy. In his “Tract 90” (1841), Newman forcefully laid out his thesis that the Articles can and ought to be read in the most Catholic sense possible. Newman began this tract with the bold claim, “It is a duty which we owe both to the Catholic Church, and to our own, to take our reformed confession in the most Catholic sense they will admit: we have no duties towards their framers.” Newman put forward six controversial but central ideas in the tract; the first being that it is entirely false that the Articles were

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93 Ibid., 62.
94 Ibid.
95 Ibid., 127.
drawn as an attack against the idea of Popery; second, that the “bark” of the Articles apparent critique of the Papacy even as traditionally construed by Anglican theologians, was far worse than its “bite”; third, that the Articles were tolerant of much of not just that which can be named ‘Catholic’ but also that which could be properly called ‘Roman’; fourth, that the Articles could not be a rebuttal to the Roman doctrines defended at Trent because the Articles were formed two years before the Council completed and official Council teachings put forth; fifth, that the Convocation of 1571 through which the Articles gained their authority itself claimed that the only doctrines to which the faithful could be religiously held where those found in the Old and New Testaments and those the Catholic Fathers and Bishops of Antiquity gleaned from Scripture; and finally, sixth, Newman argued that the Articles themselves are sufficiently vague as to allow for an interpretation fully consistent with the Catholic position.

As one might imagine, the reception of “Tract 90” by both the Anglican religious hierarchy and the Oxford intellectuals was less than supportive of these ideas. In fact, the critiques against the tract as well as against Newman himself were so brutal that in the aftermath of its publication, Newman saw his entire world turned on its head. “I saw clearly that my place in the Movement was lost,” he

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96 Ibid., 86-87.
97 Ibid., 86.
98 Ibid., 86-89.
99 Ibid., 90.
100 Ibid.
101 Ibid., 90-91.
wrote, “public confidence was at an end; my occupation was gone.” In his mind, Tract 90 was a “supreme effort to dissuade the Tractarians from taking what he had always regarded as an inadmissible step, the step to Rome.” For Newman, this via media contained all of the richness of the Roman Catholic tradition, without the ills of “Romish” superstition and idolatry that plagued the Catholic communion. Yet, despite his intention, his readers saw a defense of Roman Catholicism and an attempt to undermine Anglicanism. In his John Henry Newman: The Challenge to Evangelical Religion, Frank Turner argues that the Catholicity of Newman’s tracts was, in fact, never Newman’s intention but that he inadvertently painted himself into a corner in his critique of contemporary Anglican practices.

His sympathy for the Roman tradition, however, had finally firmly ensnared him, even if his reason was still desperately clinging to some form of Anglo-Catholicism, and his audience made it clear that even this weaker Romanism had no place among Anglican intellectuals. In this singular event, Newman saw both his place among the Tractarians, to which he had been passionately committed as his life work, and his identity as a faithful Anglican, taken from him. He wrote his bishop in Oxford, under heavy pressure by the Oxford clergy and intellectuals to either recant or leave, and resigned his place in the Movement.

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102 Ibid., 93.
103 Bouyer, Newman: His Life and Spirituality, 231.
104 Frank Turner, John Henry Newman: The Challenge to Evangelical Religion, 198. Turner carries this idea further to claim that Newman was forced into his conversion to Catholicism by the response to his Tractarian writings as well as certain relationships that had become strained and bombastic by the 1840s. For a critique of this position, see also Cunningham, Lawrence S. "John Henry Newman: the challenge to evangelical religion." Horizons 30, no. 1 (March 1, 2003): 144-146.
Having found himself pushed out of Oriel College and relegated to the role of a parish priest in Littlemore, Newman struggled with how to position himself still under the authority and leadership of his bishop and yet remain in intellectual dissent with the official position of the episcopacy regarding his theological contributions. After all, to simply walk away from the Anglican Church or to even remain in the Anglican Communion but simply disregard the sovereignty of the episcopate would be to make precisely the liberal Protestant move by placing the subjective, even if intellectual, experience above that of dogma and tradition. “The most oppressive thought,” Newman confesses in his *Apologia*, “in the whole process of my change of opinion [concerning the Roman Catholic Church], was the clear anticipation, verified by the event [of Newman’s conversion], that it would issue in the triumph of Liberalism.” 105 And yet, despite his best efforts to restore himself to right relation to his bishop during his time at Littlemore, Newman found even these efforts of restoration to be frustrated and rejected time and again.

It was during this time that he came to the resolutions of, first, writing a book on the development of Christian doctrine and then, second, “if, at the end of it, my convictions in favour of the Roman Catholic Church were not weaker, of taking the necessary steps for admission into her fold.” 106 Having been cast out of the Oxford Movement and relegated to the outer reaches of the episcopacy, Newman’s confidence in both the Anglican hierarchy as well as in his own spiritual intuition had taken a heavy blow, and so, when he returned to the Church Fathers, he found

106 Ibid., 206.
himself finally convinced that the Roman Catholic Church was the only true Church. Thus, on October 8th, 1845, Newman, surrendered his position in the Anglican Church and asked Father Dominic, the Passionist, to guide him into the Roman Catholic Church.

Key to this turbulent conversion from Anglican intellectual elite to Roman Catholic priest was the notion of assent. Newman recognized that his intellectual commitments that had placed him in conflict with the Anglican Church were of a nature entirely different from those sentiments espoused in liberal Protestantism. To this end, he set out to provide a religious epistemology that respected both Church authority as well as intellectual conviction. It is this notion to which he devoted his efforts in his *An Essay In Aid of a Grammar of Assent*.

II. The Grammar of Assent

1. Newman’s Epistemological System

   The Grammar of Assent, most simply put, attempts to demonstrate the proper analysis and reconstruction that ought to occur in the process of reading and knowing. To this end, as Alan Crowley notes in his “The Performance of the Grammar: Reading and Writing Newman’s Narrative of Assent”, one might be forgiven if in reading certain portions of the Grammar, Jacques Derrida’s (1930-2004) face comes to mind rather than that of Newman’s. In our current

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philosophical milieu, the call for the reader to recognize the way in which they read themselves into the reconstruction of a text belongs, most fundamentally, to Derrida. Yet, while there are certainly similarities in the analysis Newman provides, it is Newman’s view that in reading and analyzing a text we reconstitute the text to the ideas on which the text coheres rather than rewrite the text in our own voice.\textsuperscript{110} In this, it is crucial to keep in mind that Newman’s task is thoroughly hopeful in that “recasting the mind of the original author is not a game of guessing at intentions” but a process of evaluating a reader’s relationship to a text, which separates his system from the contemporary Derridian position.\textsuperscript{111} In Derrida, this process that he baptizes “deconstruction” is essentially the same, however, his necessarily ends in the systematic disintegration of a text.\textsuperscript{112} For Newman, \textit{contra} Locke, reading and knowing are active roles that contain within themselves a myriad of activities and, therefore, there are different modes rather than just simply degrees to which one reconstitutes the text or assents to an idea.\textsuperscript{113} \textit{Contra} Derrida, on the other hand, such an active participation does not disturb the integrity of the text.

Newman begins his discussion with a distinction between what he coins notional assent and real assent. Notional assent is assent directed at theories, generalizations, and abstractions, while real assent is always directed at concrete entities or events:

\begin{quote}
All things in the exterior world are unit and individual, and are nothing else; but the mind not only contemplates
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{110} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., 148.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 139.
\textsuperscript{113} R. A. Naulty, “Newman’s Dispute with Locke,” 453.
those unit realities as they exist, but has the gift, by an act of creation, to bring before it abstractions and generalizations, which have no existence, no counterpart, out of it.\textsuperscript{114}

It is in this context that we find an initial resemblance to Hume’s philosophy. The opening to the second section of Hume’s \textit{Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding}, “Of the Origin of Ideas”, makes a strikingly similar distinction:

Every one will readily allow, that there is considerable difference between the perceptions of the mind, when a man feels the pain of excessive heat, or the pleasure of moderate warmth, and when he afterwards recalls to his memory this sensation, or anticipates it by his imagination.\textsuperscript{115}

John Milbank, in his “What is Living and What is Dead in Newman’s \textit{Grammar of Assent}”, describes this early part of Newman’s epistemology as a “radical empiricism.”\textsuperscript{116} Beyond just the similarities between Newman’s notional and real and what Hume goes on to christen impressions and ideas, however, Hume’s figuring of the imagination as fundamental to his epistemological system should be noted for our discussion in the following chapter.

Returning to Newman’s account of assent, he considers notional assent, assent directed at abstract generalities and theory, as being under five heads, which are differentiated from one to the next by the degree to which the mind is engaged

\textsuperscript{114} Newman, \textit{Grammar}, 7.
\textsuperscript{115} Hume, \textit{Enquiry}, 9.
\textsuperscript{116} John Milbank, “What is Living and What is Dead in Newman’s \textit{Grammar of Assent}”, 46. The term “radical empiricism” often also refers to William James’ building into Hume’s empirical system direct sensory experience of the relations for which Hume, traditionally construed, claimed to not be able to provide an account, such as identity and cause and effect. Regardless of whether Milbank uses this term to denote Hume’s or James’ epistemological system, here is a clear linking of Newman’s system to Hume’s, as James’ system assumes Hume’s as its starting point.
by their operation. The first and most superficial of these, profession, are those assents made almost entirely without reflection. These are the assents of “wavering restless minds” that vacillate from position to position so suddenly and often as to render them as having almost no position. The individual who, for instance, considers themselves Catholic in an only nominal sense due to the fact that they were perhaps raised in a Catholic home and environment, assent to whichever particular Catholic doctrines they do is in only this most feeble fashion.

Newman’s second type of notional assent, credence, he defines as having “no doubt” about a proposition or set of propositions. Painting this kind of assent in much more positive terms than the last, he describes it as the “means by which, in high and low, in the man of the world and in the recluse, our bare and barren nature is overrun and diversified from without with a rich and living clothing.” By this, Newman is referring to the knowledge gained without question through, for example, the process of education; credence is of the utmost importance but makes no demands of us other than our obedience. The fruit of such acceptance and humility is his third category, which he calls opinion.

In this assent, credence is reflected back to the external world encompassing all that is commonly referred to as conviction. With these first three classes of assent the mind is formed, to our detriment in profession and to our benefit in credence and opinion, but very little is demanded of the intellect. The remaining

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118 Ibid., 51-52.
two categories, presumption and speculation, however, are of a quite different nature.

Presumption, Newman claims, is assent to “first-principles,” by which one goes on to reason about any given subject.\textsuperscript{119} It is in presumption that we see Newman again grappling ideas that we also find at the core of Hume’s thought. Newman’s epistemological first principles follow the convention of Locke and Hume, traditionally construed, referencing the impressions of sensory experience on the mind and out of them constructing views about, for instance, the existence of an external world and its contents, the causal regularities of that world, and the origin and constitution of the moral law. They differ, however, in that Newman accepts the Reidian position, which, again, was the prominent epistemology of the day, that we just quite simply cannot doubt the trustworthiness of our senses or reason. “We are what we are,” Newman asserts, “and we use, not trust our faculties.”\textsuperscript{120}

Newman christens this notional assent “presumption,” because its very nature is that it oversteps what is logically justified by the evidences. One takes the experiences of observing two events that are constantly conjoined, putting a pot of water over a high heat and seeing the water begin to boil, perhaps, and, just as with Hume, names the first the cause of the second despite never having observed what it is that necessarily connects them in the assumed causal manner. Newman recognizes that while the senses are not in need of defense, there is an account that must be made as to what renders such presumption justifiable.

\textsuperscript{119} Ibid., 57-58.
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid., 59.
The final mode of notional assent, speculation, Newman uses to describe the “most direct, explicit, and perfect” assents to all philosophical, mathematical, theological, social, political, and scientific reasonings. These speculations are expressed as general propositions pertaining to abstract theories that are the harvest of those most strenuous of the intellectual exercises. It is in speculation that the individual carves up this world of experience into fields of belief upon which they profess their allegiances. It is when the abstract contents of speculation are directed at the concrete that notional assent turns to real, and it is to this assent which now we must turn.

If in notional assent the mind is attuned to its own constructions instead of things, in real assent, then, the mind is directed toward the things themselves as represented by their impressions gained in sensory experience. Real assent is where theory meets particularity, where abstract generalities are applied to the reality of the concrete. In this way, both notional and real assent are necessary to the thinking process and are complementary. Newman does, however, provide three important caveats to his discussion of real assent. First, just in virtue of being an instance of real assent does not necessitate that the proposition to which has been assented be in fact true. It is often the case that one’s beliefs pertaining to actual concrete events and things are in some way misguided or confused. This, however, is not a deficiency in the assent itself but rather in the manner the subject has chosen to apply it.

121 Ibid., 72.
Second, real assent is not necessarily practical in that it is rarely simply knowledge that leads one to action but instead assent viewed through the lens of the passions.\textsuperscript{123} One might know that a particular wild beast is dangerous but it is the fear that actually causes the individual to flee. And his last caveat is that real assents are necessarily personal and, thus, vary in their form from subject to subject.\textsuperscript{124} Two individuals can easily assent to the same abstract principle, however, real assent includes not just some particular thing or event but also one's perspective to it, which no two individuals can exactly share. Newman paints a compelling picture of a consistent epistemology; however, his system still rises or falls on whether or not he can account for the justification of presumption, as it is the abstraction from the abstractions of presumption that allow for speculation. There is some faculty of the mind, he tells us, that leads one from experience to assent in the generalities of causal regularity, moral strictures, and religious belief. This crucial element Newman names the illative sense.

2. The Illative Sense

Newman begins his discussion of the illative sense by noting that the philosophical controversy of the preceding centuries has been centered on the idea of certainty. There had been those who argued that the limitations of our experience and reason restricted us from ever doing anything other than speaking in probabilities – as previously demonstrated, this would be the traditional

\textsuperscript{123} Newman, Grammar of Assent, 79.
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid., 80.
understanding of Hume. This language of probabilities, depending upon the particular epistemological system advanced, leads either to claims of mere regularity, causal or moral, or to complete skepticism. Newman argues that certainty is furnished, however, by the “common voice of mankind.”\(^{125}\) This move, Newman recognizes, comes at a philosophical cost in that we must, once and for all, give up this Cartesian hope of deriving merely from \textit{a priori} principles any kind of serviceable epistemology. To this he simply responds that if the use of this voice is illegitimate in that it fails to provide logical justification for itself then it is logic that is at fault; “[If] logic finds fault with it, so much the worse for logic.”\(^{126}\)

What might here appear as an off the cuff refusal to adhere to the strictures of philosophical inquiry is, rather, a calculated rejection of a certain deeply held epistemological position; namely, that one can assess their own phenomenological experience of their own epistemological process by appealing to some external static reality. From the hallowed days of Plato and Aristotle, knowledge has been defined as (at least relevantly similar to) justified true belief. That is, for a belief of mine to be considered knowledge, it must be that it is in fact actually the case, I believe it to be the case, and that my believing it on the grounds of the reasons I have for it are in some manner justified. The issue of justification, however, has long vexed the philosophical community. How much justification did one need for even their most basic true beliefs to be justified? It is Newman’s position that such a

\(^{125}\) Ibid., 337.
\(^{126}\) Ibid., 398.
question cannot even be properly understood. "We are what we are," Newman responds, “and we use, not trust our faculties.”

Ian Ker, in his *The Achievement of John Henry Newman*, describes this illative sense for Newman as being akin to the sense of taste in that this faculty is spontaneous and unselfconscious. The very act of its exercise is unprompted and in its use, erases any presence of itself. One does not decide to taste, nor is one conscious of the fact that a sense has been employed; there remains nothing except for the experience of the taste itself. The illative sense, then, as Newman has conceived it, seems to leap right off the pages of the conclusion to the first book of Hume’s *Treatise*:

> It is by the Illative Sense that we come to this conclusion, which no logic can reach; and so again, it is by the Illative Sense that we reason out, from the data we possess, that nature is uniform, and it is by a defect in that sense, that we go on farther to pronounce, if we pronounce the laws of nature to be invariable...[Nothing that] I have been saying about the instrumental character or the range of the Illative sense interferes with its being, as I have considered it, a personal gift or habit.

An examination of the text, as I provide in what follows, demonstrates that not only has Newman happened upon the same idea as Hume for the foundation of his epistemology, but also that the structure of Newman’s discussion very closely mirrors Hume’s as well. Given that the nature of the following argument rests in similarities in language and structure between Newman’s *Grammar of Assent* and Hume’s *A Treatise of Human Nature*, I would ask that you forgive my heavy reliance

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in this next section on original quotations as I allow the texts to speak for themselves.

3. Humean Similarities

The area that most concerns us here is Newman’s discussion of presumption as a kind of notional assent. As mentioned previously, in presumption, Newman is referring to assent to first principles.\textsuperscript{130} A central first principle to which we so commonly give our assent, he tells us, is causation. Our notion of cause and effect is first grounded in our assent to the notion that everything that exists must have a cause for its existence. This, Newman tells us, is derived from our experience of ourselves, that is, “we argue analogically from what is within (sc., intuition) to what is external to us.”\textsuperscript{131} Interestingly, early in Hume’s discussion of the idea of cause and effect, we find a similar assertion:

“Tis a general maxim in philosophy, that \textit{whatever beings to exist, must have a cause of its existence}. This is commonly granted in all reasonings, without any proof given or demanded. ‘Tis suppos’d to be founded on intuition, and to be one of those maxims, which tho’ they may be deny’d with the lips, ‘tis impossible for men in their hearts to really to doubt of.\textsuperscript{132}

Newman continues his discussion by concluding that “the notion of causation is one of the first lessons which [one] learns from experience.”\textsuperscript{133} Returning to Hume,

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\textsuperscript{130} Ibid., 57.
\textsuperscript{131} Ibid., 64, interpolation added.
\textsuperscript{132} Hume, \textit{Treatise}, 56.
\textsuperscript{133} Newman, \textit{Grammar}, 64, interpolation added.
“’Tis therefore by Experience only, that we can infer the existence of one object from that of another.”\textsuperscript{134}

Again to Newman:

Since causation implies a sequence of acts in our own case, and our doing is always posterior, never contemporaneous or prior, to our willing, therefore, when we witness invariable antecedents and consequents, we call the former the cause of the latter, \textit{though intelligence is absent}, from the analogy of external appearances. At length we go on to confuse causation with order...\textsuperscript{135}

Hume then tells us:

We remember to have had frequent instances of the existence of one species of objects; and also remember, that the individuals of another species of objects have always attended them, and have existed \textit{in regular order} of contiguity and succession. Without any further ceremony, we call the one cause and the other effect, and infer the existence of the one from that of the other.\textsuperscript{136}

Returning once again to Newman:

There are those philosophers who go farther, and teach, not only a general, but a \textit{necessary uniformity} of in the action of the laws of nature, holding that every thing is by law, and exceptions impossible; but I do not see on what ground of experience they take up this position.\textsuperscript{137}

And then in Hume:

For after a frequent repetition, I find, that upon the appearance of one of the objects, the mind is \textit{determin’d} by custom to consider its usual attendant, and to consider it in a stronger light upon account of its relation to the first object. ‘Tis the impression, then, or

\textsuperscript{134} Hume, \textit{Treatise}, 61.  
\textsuperscript{135} Newman, \textit{Grammar}, 65, emphasis added.  
\textsuperscript{136} Hume, \textit{Treatise}, 61.  
\textsuperscript{137} Newman, \textit{Grammar}, 67, emphasis added.
determination, which affords me the idea of necessity.\textsuperscript{138}

Here then, we have seen that there is, at the very least, an uncanny resemblance between these two accounts, one that is made even more striking by the fact that Hume describes this propensity to reach the bounds of experience in beliefs concerning cause and effect in the following way:

There are some who maintain, that bodies operate by their substantial form; others, by their accidents or qualities...All these sentiments again are mix'd and vary'd in a thousand different ways; and form a strong presumption\textsuperscript{!}], that none of them have any solidity or evidence, and that the supposition of an efficacy in any of the known qualities of matter is entirely without foundation. This presumption must encrease [sic.] upon us, when we consider, that these principles of substantial forms, and accidents, and faculties, are not in reality any of the known properties of bodies, but are perfectly unintelligible and inexplicable.\textsuperscript{139}

Given these striking similarities, including the fact that both Newman and Hume call this overstepping of that which is furnished by experience in causal reasoning presumption, it must be recognized that Newman’s illative sense being described as a custom or habit bears an incredible resemblance to Hume’s conclusion that it is habit that saves us from complete epistemological despair.

Thus, despite Reid’s commonsense response to Hume being by far the more prominent epistemology of the day, we should recognize that Newman chose to return to a more Humean language of custom and habit. The fact that the structure of his discussion of the epistemological difficulty inherent in presumption follows extremely closely that of Hume’s, and that they supply the very same concept as

\textsuperscript{138} Hume, \textit{Treatise}, 105, last emphasis added.

\textsuperscript{139} Ibid., 107, emphasis added.
solution, demonstrates that while Reid’s intuitionist epistemology may have first kept him from any philosophical despair, it is in a similar commonsense approach to that of Hume that Newman finds an intellectual home.

4. The Grammar of Assent and Reid’s Epistemology

As mentioned previously, Reid’s epistemology has gone through something of a resurgence, thanks in large part to the work of Nicholas Wolterstorff. It is Wolterstorff’s contention that Reid’s genius lies primarily in his insight that the fundamental problem of epistemology is not involving any sort of alleged distance between ourselves and the external world, an issue of which Reid is entirely dismissive, but in the insistence on addressing epistemological concerns individually rather than communally.140 Despite the fact that the majority of our beliefs are formed through our interactions with other knowers, the history of philosophical enquiry treats each person as an epistemological island.141 For Reid, the reason that such a massive portion of our epistemological ground and experience has been overlooked is because the social operations involved fall

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140 Wolterstorff, Thomas Reid and the Story of Epistemology, 163.
141 Wolterstorff contends that this is true in both the analytic and continental philosophical traditions in a footnote on 163. It is my opinion that Wolterstorff is mistaken on this front, misunderstanding the different manners in which the idea of a text has been treated in the continental tradition. For instance, in his Truth and Method, Gadamer holds that the properly hermeneutically trained mind includes an historical consciousness with which our reading of a text is contrasted so as to highlight the ways in which the collective historieswe have inherited work with the text. To this end, it is only coming to a text in dialogue with the whole of one’s historical, and thus also, social, position that a text can be properly treated; see Gadamer, Truth and Method, 310-311.
outside the classical knowledge categories of apprehension, judgment, or reasoning.\textsuperscript{142}

It is his belief that one finds in the example of formal language as compared to natural language, by which he means, “what we had before attained of artificial language,” parallels to the principles of and the manner by which we believe testimony.\textsuperscript{143} In short, Reid sees something interestingly similar between the way in which we accept an artificial language schema to represent that system of signs and signifiers that are innate to us, and the passage from someone’s conveying some idea to us and our, not just believing that they believe this idea, but also appropriating that belief for ourselves. In doing so, Reid presents us with the beginnings of a rubric by which we can philosophically assess testimony as knowledge acquisition, which he, argues Wolterstorff, unfortunately left incomplete.

Regardless of Reid’s insight into the communality of our epistemological experiences and his alleged insufficiently formalized comments surrounding testimony as knowledge acquisition, Newman’s rejection of the Reidian system appears to be due to a flaw much more fundamental to his system. In her \textit{Scepticism and Reasonable Doubt}, Jamie Ferreira argues that for Newman, Reid’s great mistake was in seeking to render commonsense a product of the faculty of reason rather

\textsuperscript{142} Ibid., 164. Wolterstorff suggests that Reid’s account here is insufficient given that contemporary analytic epistemology is still focused almost entirely on the individual yet eschews these restrictive, archaic categories. It is his belief that the skeptical tradition that began in Locke and Descartes set the parameters from within which philosophy would be done up into our modern age.

\textsuperscript{143} Ibid., 169,
than a separate faculty entirely with which reason works in tandem.\textsuperscript{144} Reason, Newman believes, can only take one back to first principles, on which there has only ever been incredible controversy. The faculty of the illative sense, a sense that is quite literally bred and conditioned into us by the community into which we are born, provides us with the epistemological first principles accepted and refined throughout the history of a community. So where Reid takes commonsense to be a “gift of heaven,” Newman sees it as the gift of God at work in human society.\textsuperscript{145} It is this difference that leads Reid to restrict commonsense to merely self-evident truths whereas Newman extends the illative sense to aiding in all matters of natural reasoning.\textsuperscript{146} Reid allows for reasoning concerning first principles and non-demonstrative forms of certainty, yet he excludes both from the role of commonsense.\textsuperscript{147}

So while it cannot be denied that Newman would have found fault with Hume, the defect in Hume’s system would have lain in his inability to extend the illative sense to its natural end in religious belief, a failing that Newman can fix. Reid’s commonsense epistemology, however, assumes so different a nature to his illative sense that Newman has no option other than to regard it as an interesting but ultimately untenable position. It must be admitted that Newman never explicitly does, yet in analyzing the epistemological position that Newman advances and the structure and vocabulary that Newman employs, we must conclude that

\textsuperscript{144} Jamie Ferreira, \textit{Scepticism and Reasonable Doubt}, 172.
\textsuperscript{145} Ibid., 175.
\textsuperscript{146} Ibid., 176.
\textsuperscript{147} Ibid., 177.
Newman chose to write in a mode shared by Hume rather than in the Reidean tradition that was the dominant epistemology of the day. And, thus, Newman draws on notions similar to the ‘habit’ of Hume’s epistemological conclusion rather than Reid’s commonsense to set up his discussion of Theology and Religion.

**Conclusion**

Having given an account of Newman’s illative sense and demonstrated his commonalities with Hume’s discussion of custom and habit, what remains for our discussion is an examination of how the illative sense is used, what it accomplishes for us in our lives of faith, and what this means for the Christian and Catholic communities and even human society at large. Such is the topic of the next and final chapter. Following in Hume’s footsteps, Newman insists that leaving philosophical and theological enquiry at the level of the notional is intellectually irresponsible and misleading. For an idea to be worthy of discussion, it must make some actual difference in the manner in which we live our lives and interact with one another. For Newman, the notional side of the illative sense is by far the smaller and it is with this *real* application of it that he is most concerned and, thus, so must we.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE ILLATIVE SENSE IN LIFE AND PRACTICE


My true informant, my burdened conscience, gives me at once the true answer to each of these antagonist questions: - it pronounces without any misgiving that God exists: - it pronounces too quite as surely that I am alienate from him; that “His Hand is not shortened, but that our iniquities have divided between us and our God.” Thus it solves the world’s mystery, and sees in it only a confirmation of its own original teaching.

There is nothing more backwards for Newman, than the belief that abstract speculation should exist independently of any real application in the exercise of living. It therefore follows that our discussion to this point Newman would consider dangerously incomplete. Thus far, we have examined the traditional understanding of Hume’s philosophy, the revised reading of Hume that we have referred to as the ‘New Hume’, as well as Newman’s discussion of the illative sense and its striking similarities with the realist Humean project. What remains, then, is to demonstrate the particular differences in Newman’s system that allow him to understand his epistemological work as inherently theological in manner that Hume was never able to recognize and then to provide a brief account of the illative sense as it is employed in our religious, philosophical, and everyday life.
With regard to the difference in Hume and Newman’s religious conclusions, it must be always maintained that the story behind one’s religious opinions, as they take place in the space of life lived and not the blank pages awaiting a philosopher’s pen, is entirely too complex and particular to suggest that a textual analysis like the one we are presently undertaking can arrive at any determinate conclusions. That being said, however, we can proceed by looking for any convergences of probabilities in the accounts that they have left to us upon which we can construct our most reasonable explanations.

To this end, our discussion will center on the role imagination plays for both Hume and Newman in the analysis of conscience. It would appear that Newman’s deviation from Hume’s regarding conscience as a brute phenomenon that demands no further account of itself is precisely what gives Newman intellectual grounds for belief in God. It is in the workings of the imagination on conscience for Newman that the illative sense provides moral and, consequently, religious knowledge. Upon demonstrating the uniqueness of Newman’s application of the illative sense regarding religious belief, we will then look at the illative sense at work.

To take such a difficult, yet fundamental concept and track its progression through our actual epistemological experience is indeed a daunting task. It seems, however, that for Newman the illative sense was not present simply in his logical calculations, but in the different movements of his life as well. In this we are given the rare opportunity to match a thinker’s philosophical contributions to the actual practice of their life. It is this topic that will be of our first concern. Once we have identified the illative sense at work in Newman’s world, we will then examine his
comments concerning the correct manner in which he believes it is to be employed both by the Christian laity and the Catholic theologian. Only after we have a clear, or at least, a clearer, understanding of Newman’s views of the illative sense at play, will we then turn our attention to the implications of the illative sense in the modern world and, most specifically, in our modern religious epistemology.

I. What Makes a Philosopher a Believer?

While it may be well and good that Newman relies heavily upon a system similar to the realist interpretation of Hume for his own epistemological system, it would appear that this only raises yet another issue. If there is such similarity in their epistemological system, how is it that they seem to arrive at such different positions regarding religious belief? Hume is often championed as one of the most important secular philosophers while Newman is now Blessed John Henry Newman, having been beatified by the Catholic Church in 2010. As mentioned above, it seems that the parting of ways for these two great thinkers centers on the notion of conscience. Let us begin with Hume’s account.

One of the difficulties with contrasting Hume and Newman on conscience is that it is not a word that Hume uses more than a handful of times in his entire work. The word shows up a mere four times in the Treatise and not at all in either the Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding or the Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals. Its first appearance in the Treatise, however, gives us a clue as to how to proceed going forward. In the first section of Book Three, Hume argues that, “Reason is wholly inactive, and can never be the source of so active a principle as
conscience, or a sense of morals.” In order to understand his position on conscience, then, we must look at what he says concerning moral sense.

Given the restrictions and focus of the present enquiry we will restrict our examination to one central passage on the moral sense in the conclusion to the third book of the *Treatise*:

> It requires but very little knowledge of human affairs to perceive, that a sense of morals is a principle inherent in the soul, and one of the most powerful that enters into composition. But this sense must certainly acquire new force, when reflecting on itself, it approves of those principles, from whence it is deriv'd, and finds nothing but what is great and good in its rise and origin.

What we can gather from Hume’s comments here is that he finds the notion of conscience to be, not only brute, but also providing for its own philosophical justification. That is, he believes that a moral sensibility is part of the very construction of our being, innate to us and beyond our ability to investigate any further into its origin.

While the genesis of conscience must be regarded as philosophically unanalyzable, the same does not follow for the workings of conscience in our moral lives. While the presence of a moral sense allows us to make moral judgments, it does not in and of itself make clear how we go about the actual navigating of our moral lives. Given that we have already been told that it is not reason that furnishes

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149 Ibid., 394.
the means for this activity, Hume looks elsewhere eventually settling on the imagination.\footnote{Ibid., 164.}

It is in the work of the imagination (manifesting as sympathy) that we take the morally charged situations we encounter in the course of our daily lives, imagine what we would feel if we were at the center of each of them, and utilize the sympathies for others created of these practices to motivate our good and just actions.\footnote{Mark Collier, “Hume’s Theory of Moral Imagination,” 260 – 261.} In this moral psychology, then, it is the imagination that takes our innate conscience and unpacks from our experience all the richness of our moral lives. This system, though admittedly mysterious, is complete, innate, and non-rational. As such, philosophically we can make nothing more of its genesis. This is not the case for Newman.

The imagination functions similarly for Newman as it does for Hume in that the imagination does not cause action, that is the role of the passions, but it “finds a means of stimulating those motive powers.”\footnote{Newman, Grammar of Assent, 78} As in Hume’s system, for Newman the imagination is an affective link between persons and the objects they encounter that creates images in the mind that lead us to action.\footnote{David Hammond, “Imagination in Newman’s Phenomenology of Cognition,” 23.} This creation of images in the mind is what also allows an individual to become aware of constant conjunctions of events, what Newman calls convergences of probabilities, and thus,
begin to piece together the beginnings of a moral (or causal) system that impels us to act.\textsuperscript{155}

When it comes to conscience, which he also describes as moral sense\textsuperscript{156}, Newman's position begins in the same place as does Hume's:

\begin{quote}
I must start from some first principle; - and that first principle, \textit{which I assume and shall not attempt to prove}, is that we have \textit{naturally} a conscience...I assume, then, that Conscience has a legitimate place among our mental acts; as really so, as the action of memory, of imagination, or as the sense of the beautiful...\textsuperscript{157}
\end{quote}

Upon reaching this conclusion, however, Newman's argument takes a decidedly different turn. Rather than resting with the notion that the conscience is innate, Newman argues that the very the fact of our conscience providing us the tools of moral beliefs, begs for explanation:

\begin{quote}
As then we have our initial knowledge of the universe through sense, so do we in the first instance begin to learn about its Lord and God \textit{from conscience}...[From] the recurring instances in which conscience acts, forcing upon us importunately the mandate of a Superior, we have fresh and fresh evidence of the existence of a Sovereign Ruler, from whom those particular dictates which we experience proceed...\textsuperscript{158}
\end{quote}

It is in the notion of conscience, then, that Newman finds that which philosophically leads him to God. And insofar as he appropriates an epistemology similar to the Humean system to do so, Newman is demonstrating that religious belief is inherent to the best that secular philosophy has to offer. The only options left to them are to

\textsuperscript{155} Ibid., 28.
\textsuperscript{156} Newman, \textit{Grammar of Assent}, 102
\textsuperscript{157} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{158} Newman, \textit{Grammar of Assent}, 60-61, emphasis added.
accept it, as he does, or to ignore it, as Hume did. Having demonstrated the justification behind Newman’s departure from the same position inherent in Hume's conclusions, we can now safely return to the focus of this investigation, the illative sense.

II. The Illative Sense at Work in Newman’s Conversion

The description of the illative sense with which we have been working is one that places this fundamental level of knowledge acquisition, not at the level of mere intuition, but at that of stimulus and response. As discussed in the previous chapter, Newman’s separation from the Reidian intuitionism of his day was due to Newman’s belief that the illative sense is not a type of reasoning but rather another faculty altogether; the illative sense then is to be used, not trusted. 159

Discussed in other terms and in other guises, the early 20th century philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, in his Philosophical Fragments, provides the following example of knowledge of this sort:

I see a picture; it represents an old man walking up a steep path leaning on a stick. – How? Might it not have looked just the same if he had been sliding downhill in that position? Perhaps a Martian would describe the picture so. I don’t need to explain why we don’t describe it so. 160

In the analogy Wittgenstein provides, what the picture is depicting is never in question. Despite the recognition that the picture could be described otherwise, he notes that for us, the understanding is immediate and any justification of its verity

159 Newman, Grammar of Assent, 59.
160 Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, 60, n. (b).
unnecessary. Assuming that the illative sense as we have described it is at least relatively close to that which is described by Wittgenstein, then what remains is to find instances in Newman’s account of his own theological and ecclesial journey in which he appears to rely on such knowledge.

There are three distinct places in his *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* where Newman describes knowledge of precisely that sort. Our first indication of Newman’s reliance on the illative sense is found in his discussion of his part in the Oxford Movement in 1832.

The main principle of the movement was as dear to me then as it is now, as it ever was. I have changed in many things: in this I have not. From the age of fifteen, dogma has been the fundamental principle of my religion: I know no other religion; *I cannot enter into the idea of any other sort of religion*; religion, as a mere sentiment, is to me a dream and a mockery. As well there can be filial love without the fact of a father, as devotion without the fact of a Supreme Being. What I held in 1816, I held in 1833, and I hold in 1864.

The idea of even entertaining another religion Newman finds to be quite simply impossible. Even at the time of his writing of the *Apologia*, he names these certain dogmas of his youth as the foundation of all of his Christian belief and upon which

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161 There is, of course, much more to be said on any alleged connection between Wittgenstein’s and Newman’s accounts of knowledge of this sort. It should be understood that for the purposes of our present discussion, the allusion to this passage from the Philosophical Investigations is given only to provide clarification of Newman’s position and commits itself to no substantial claims concerning Wittgenstein’s theories of knowledge acquisition.

162 Newman, *Apologia*, 61 (emphasis added)
he later built his Catholic identity.\textsuperscript{163} We find a similar discussion in Newman’s account of the years leading up to his conversion:

...speaking historically of what I held in 1843-4, I say, that I believed in a God on a ground of probability, that I believed in Christianity on a probability, and that I believed in Catholicism on a probability, and that these three grounds of probability...[were] of a special kind, a cumulative, a transcendent probability but still probability; inasmuch as He who so willed, that in mathematics indeed we should arrive at certitude by rigid demonstration, but in religious inquiry we should arrive at certitude by accumulated probabilities; - He has willed, I say, that we should so act, and thereby enables us to do that which He wills us to do, and carries us on, if our will does but co-operate with His, \textit{to a certitude which rises higher that the logical force of our conclusions}\.\textsuperscript{164}

Here Newman confesses that the act of his conversion was that which could not be logically justified by the reasons he had provided. The certitude of his faith and of his decision to enter the Church was of a sort for which a traditional epistemological account cannot be satisfactorily given, only experienced by the possessor. It is, for all that, no less persuasive or any less proper. Notice the similarities between this passage pertaining to his personal conversion and the following epistemological discussion from the \textit{Grammar}:

\textit{[The] Illative Sense is employed on reasonings from primary facts, as well as directed towards personal issues. And thus it is the instrument of induction toward particulars, and determines what are general laws, and what conclusions cannot reach beyond bare probability...It is by the Illative Sense that we come to this conclusion, which no logic can reach; and so again, it is by the Illative Sense that we reason out from the data}

\textsuperscript{163} Ibid., 63.
\textsuperscript{164} Ibid., 183 (emphasis added)
we possess, that nature is uniform...\textsuperscript{165}

Newman’s great fear surrounding this decision to leave the Anglican community for Rome lay in making the mistake that was so often championed by the proponents of liberal Protestantism; placing personal conviction and individual spiritual experience above the authority of the Church. In his conversion, however, Newman’s certitude, which he describes as given to him by God, was not regarding a change in dogma, it is demonstrated in the selection above that the foundational aspects of his faith remained the same, but in a recognition that the true possessor of these principles of faith was the Catholic communion.\textsuperscript{166} And, as we see in the conclusion to his \textit{Apologia}, immersing himself throughout his life in the world of the Church, in her practices, rituals, histories, and controversies, Newman’s certitude regarding these beliefs never left him:

These are the principles on which I have acted before I was Catholic; these are the principles which, I trust, will be my stay and guidance to the end.\textsuperscript{167}

This, then, as best as we are able to determine, are indications that for Newman, the illative sense did not remain a notional, but was very real and present in his life. In our discussion of Newman’s \textit{Apologia}, we have been given an insight into how Newman saw this sense functioning for him. Yet, his story of conversion is a unique mix of theologian, priest, and person and in this way it is intended to be descriptive

\textsuperscript{165} Newman, \textit{Grammar of Assent}, 354-5.
\textsuperscript{166} Newman, \textit{Apologia}, 183. There is, of course, much to be said as to whether or not Newman is correct in this assertion that the Church of the Apostles is identical to that of the Church in Rome, however, the present discussion is concerned only with the validity of Newman’s rational process and, therefore, must leave debates concerning the value of his defense of Catholicism for (perhaps) another time.
\textsuperscript{167} Ibid., 250.
rather than normative. We are fortunate in that Newman also wrote at length concerning how he believes the illative sense ought to be understood and how it should function for both the theologian and the faithful who daily inhabit the pews.

### III. The Two Species of Religion

Newman divides his discussion of religion into natural and revealed religion, demonstrating how the illative sense is at work in each. He begins his discussion of religious inference by noting that there are three channels through which nature provides us with religious knowledge. These three are our own minds (conscience), the voice of [hu]mankind (history), and the course of the world (the natural world).\(^{168}\) Had we not spent the time discussing the illative sense that we have, we might be tempted, given some of his language, to equate the illative sense with the conscience. He describes the conscience as a “personal guide,” and states that he uses it in that he “must use [himself].”\(^{169}\) We now know better, though, and can see that the conscience for Newman functions as similar to the manner intuition does for Reid, and thus, rather than a sense it is itself a form of reasoning. In this, the conscience as that source of knowledge “nearer to [us] than any other,” suggests to us many things about God, life, and morality.\(^ {170}\) Yet, it is by the illative sense that the conscience is refined and reformed.

It is in the voice of humankind that we find the rites and devotions of the Christian faith throughout history. As opposed to the Christian faith revealed, this

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\(^{169}\) Ibid.

\(^{170}\) Ibid., 385.
knowledge is that which is gained from one’s immersion in the Christian community. Just as watching television, reading the paper, and going to sporting events allows Americans access to a common sense of what it means to be an American, so does being an active participant in the Christian community furnish one with a sense of what it means to be Christian, Catholic, etc. The illative sense allows us to pick up the habits and customs of our different environment and thus discern the proper common behaviors for inclusion in these groups. Through this voice of humankind we develop a sense of sin and redemption, of the everyday trappings of human nature and divine transcendence.171

The third source of knowledge Newman discusses in this section concerning Natural religion is the course of the world. It seems only reasonable, he argues, that if the established order of things indeed has a Creator, then it must surely “speak of His will in its broad outlines and its main issues.”172 Yet, that which speaks the loudest in our experience, however, tends to give evidence more of God’s absence or lack of control than that which is in accordance with what has been revealed to the Church. This is accurate, Newman confesses, but only when these channels stand in isolation. It is for those who are truly seeking and who have, again, immersed themselves in those communities that properly hone their illative sense, that Nature is able to refine their experience of the order of the world through other means:

My true informant, my burdened conscience, gives me at once the true answer to each of these antagonist questions: – it pronounces without any misgiving that God exists: – it pronounces to quite as surely that I am

171 Ibid., 387.
172 Ibid., 391.
alienated from Him; that "His Hand is not shortened, but that our iniquities have divided between us and our God."\textsuperscript{173}

It could be easily argued, it seems, that what Newman here implies is that if one does not arrive in agreement with the sentiments expressed above, then the conscience has been either actively ignored or indirectly quieted. In other words, everyone deep down knows the above statement to be true and, thus, anyone in disagreement is being either willfully dishonest or simply insufficiently reflective. Such a claim should strike us as being both wildly assumptive and virtually impossible to defend. If we return to our discussion of the illative sense, however, we will see that the illative sense is to some degree formed. So while it may not follow that all nonbelievers are guilty of improperly listening to the voice of their consciences, it may still in fact be the case there is some culpability for failing to immerse oneself in an environment or community in which the individual’s most basic epistemological sense is intentionally and appropriately fostered. This is the religion that Nature reveals to each of us and the foundation upon which we construct our social, religious, and philosophical intuitions.

\textbf{IV. The Work of the Theologian and the Life of the Faithful}

For Newman, then, theology, while directed toward the Divine Will and Its Holy Presence in the world, is a notional discipline. Both the aims as well as the fruits of theological investigation are necessarily restricted to generalities, meaning that they can be taken and applied without changing their form, to any individual

\textsuperscript{173} Ibid., 392.
Christian. Working in this abstraction, the relation to these theological propositions to which one assents is one of inference. It is the work of the theologian to take the web of crisscrossing abstract theological waters and, for the sake of the Church and its members, connect one premise to another until there remains in their wake a navigable canal through which the faithful can follow.\textsuperscript{174}

The subject of belief, rather than the coldly logical content of abstraction, however, is that which awakens the mind, being directed at not simply what is true but also that which is beautiful, which kindles devotion, rouses the passions, and ultimately forms character.\textsuperscript{175} Logical deductions and dispassionate rationality, while crucial to an individual’s epistemological and intellectual development, fail to move us to faithful action. Dogma has the power to inflame, to raise up a people in defense against injustice or kneel in humility. While this path carved out of the void of confusion by the theologian is the fruit of notional investigation, those who sail upon her calmed waters do so through the practice of religion. The Revelation of God in the scriptures and the living tradition of His Church sustain their heavy vessels, the Wind of the Spirit powers them ever closer to their goal. This channel may be the work of theological abstraction and generality, but the passage is unique to each traveler, its gray and dispassionate constructions painted in all the vibrant hues of the particular wonders and horrors of life.

It is, for Newman, the illative sense that guides the theologian in their work. It is in the customs and habits inherited from the theologians and philosophers of

\textsuperscript{174} Ibid., 260.
\textsuperscript{175} Ibid.
the past through which the theologian is able to successfully navigate the dangers and traps lurking just below the surface of their notional voyages. It is the illative sense that also leads the individual toward proper Christian living. The Idea of Christianity, is, quite simply, the inherited customs, habits, and dogmas of the history of the Catholic faith, handed down to each generation and thrust into particularity and concreteness of Christian living through the illative sense. Thus, for the theologian as theologian, the illative sense takes the ten thousand difficulties\textsuperscript{176} of their own life of faith, and abstracts from them the notionality of theological doctrine for the sake of the faithful in the pew. For the person of faith, the illative sense applies these generalities of intellectual discovery to those particular ten thousand difficulties of their own life. In so doing, the theologian’s world is forever illuminated by the brilliance of the practices of the Catholic faith, and for the obedient disciple, the path forward has been made clear by the illuminations of the theologian stretching out before them. And thus, the light infinitely reflected between them assures both that these overwhelming difficulties never once become a doubt.

Conclusion

Now that we have given an account of the illative sense as it appears in Newman’s life as well as discussed its role in theology, religion, and the formation of intuition, what remains is for us to discuss the implications for both the theologian and the lay faithful today. It is my contention that there are three direct

\textsuperscript{176} Newman, \textit{Apologia Pro Vita Sua}, 214.
consequences of our discussion that must be recognized in today’s Catholic faith. The first is that given that we inherit the customs and habits of the stored histories of the communities of which we are apart, the broadly Christian history of the Western World entails that modern Western intuitions are formed explicitly out of an, admittedly, generic Christian backdrop. For the theologian, this provides the grounds for the argument that one’s belief in God is, epistemologically, properly basic (rationally construed without need for further defense). This, then, is to suggest that an individual’s simple, intuited belief in God is, in virtue of its historical and social setting, logically consistent and that beliefs that are deviant from it require support that it does not. It is for the theologian to foster the laity’s religious intuitions by reinforcing them by the truths of the faith that have been revealed to the Church through scripture and tradition.

Secondly, our discussion highlights the importance of investment into the rebuilding and widening of the Catholic community. For the theologian, it is crucial that the doctrines of our Catholic faith are taken from the realm of the notional, even while notionally developed and refined, and presented in the concreteness of the real. For the laity to be able to participate in the manner that they must, both for their own good and formation as well as for the good of the future faithful who will be formed out of the Catholic environment we now maintain, the theologian must provide a map through the heretical pitfalls that lie in wait with which the community can translate doctrine into action.

And lastly, it should be now clear that there is a base commonality to our epistemological system and that of those whose intuitions have guided them to
different ideological conclusions. Newman’s discussion, I have argued, recognized in earlier epistemologies the foundations of a shared intuition. In accepting a framework similar to the Humean system, Newman, to borrow a phrase, has reached across the aisle and established a point of agreement between the Christian religion and secular philosophy. This gives the theologian an opportunity to demonstrate an alignment in perspective concerning social goods as well as giving the Christian faithful, not just the ability, but also the imperative, to partner with others of their community to achieve these normative ends. Questions of active conversion are replaced with a focus on community formation and Christian witness that begins in ideological controversy (e.g. “I believe x and you should too”) is subsumed by the joys of the Christian life of action.
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