

STUDY MATERIALS: Newman and Kierkegaard

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Lesson 1: Introduction

Two centuries have elapsed since the birth of John Henry Newman and nearly as long since the birth of Soren Kierkegaard, the former in London, the latter in Copenhagen. Of the two, Newman was better known during his lifetime, but it is doubtful that anyone could have foreseen the continuing and growing influence he would have after his death. As for Kierkegaard, he thought of himself as a citizen in a market town, writing in

a language that few could read. He became faintly notorious among a small circle in Copenhagen, but when he collapsed and died at the age of 42 his contemporaries would have been pardoned for thinking of his life as quirky, spendthrift and finally tragic, if only in a minor key. Nonetheless, Kierkegaard would become the best known Danish thinker and he is read and pondered and argued about to this day, nor is there any sign of this abating. Indeed, quite the reverse.

Such facts invite reflection on the vagaries of reputation, particularly in theology and philosophy. While they are quintessentially university subjects, it is possible to think that those in any age who are ensconced as professors in universities, and in whose hands the passing on of the discipline largely rests, are, like the programs they administer, monuments to mediocrity. Kierkegaard asked to be spared the attention of professors. The prayer went unanswered - or rather the answer was no. For nearly a century his thought has been grist for university mills which, if Kierkegaard himself understood what he was doing, is the death of his effort. He did not want to provide yet another occasion for professors and students to reduce to mental exercises the great tasks of life.

Newman is all but identified with Oxford although he spent more than half of his life exiled from the university he loved. His conversion to Catholicism made him no longer eligible as a fellow of his college, but this conversion was a point toward which earlier deeds had been vectoring almost inexorably, as at least in retrospect it seemed to him. Newman was alive to the temptation to intellectual pride that is indigenous to the university, the sense that one is not like the rest of men. Sometimes those other men belong to other colleges than Oriel and one's sense of superiority was, so to say, intramural. He had, he tells us, an aversion to "paper logic," the notion that the great shifts and moves of life are somehow merely the conclusions of arguments. He would come to emphasize the difference between changing one's mind and changing one's life, however linked the two might be.

Of the two men, it was the more obscure in his lifetime, Kierkegaard, who was convinced that he would achieve posthumous recognition as a major religious thinker. His journals are replete with expressions of this conviction, much of what he wrote is addressed to his future reader. Newman sought simply to fulfill the duties of his state of life. His writings were linked to quite specific efforts, often they were occasioned by contingent circumstances and must have seemed to share in the evanescence of the moment. Of course there are the sermons. But does one write sermons for the ages? In any case, Newman seems not to have given much thought to his posthumous reputation.

In their different ways, again, the two men have in common the effort to rescue ethical and religious activity from a kind of rationalizing tendency, what Newman would call Liberalism. Newman loved to cite St. Ambrose to the effect that God did not choose to save his people by means of dialectic. God did not become man in order that men might become theologians. To imagine that Christianity invites us to a life of scholarship, as if that were its central point, or to historical research, is to miss its essential point. Christ became man to save us from our sins and to make possible for us an eternity lived in

the presence of God. This life is an anteroom in which we prepare ourselves, with the help of grace, for that future.

While there are agreements between the two in this regard -- we will consider the differences later - Kierkegaard is the more insistent that the character of his writings is such that they are meant to resist consumption by the usual scholarly methods. They are not invitations to learning. They are not meant to tell us something we do not already know. Rather, they are meant to get us to exist in the knowledge we have, to be what we know we ought to be, to become what we are.

Even as I write that paragraph I am aware that I seem to be perverting Kierkegaard's message by thus stating it abstractly. My defense is that he did the same himself - not in the works that make up what he called his literature, but elsewhere, in the journal, and above all in *The Point of View of My Work as an Author*. I will try to convey something of the immediate impact of the works of indirect communication while profiting from the observations Kierkegaard himself makes about what he was up to in them.

Autobiographical Aside

Both Newman and Kierkegaard are above all Christians concerned with their own response to Christianity and with that of others, particularly their contemporaries. I have cited a remark of David Swenson's to the effect that Newman was trying to find the objectively true church so he might join it, while Kierkegaard was seeking so to live that those who lived as he did would constitute with him the true church. A well-turned phrase which in the manner of well-turned phrases is less than just to either man. But having mentioned Swenson, let me digress.

It was my great privilege to be introduced to Kierkegaard as a young graduate student at the University of Minnesota in 1952 by Professor Paul Holmer. Holmer was carrying on a tradition that had begun with Swenson at Minnesota, one that had its origin in the contingent fact that Swenson one day found in a used book store on the fringes of the campus a copy of a book by a Dane whose name was unfamiliar to him. Soren Kierkegaard. Of course it was in Danish. Minnesota has a rich Scandinavian background, and Swenson could read it. He bought it, took it home, and was never the same again. The book, which he would eventually translate, had the intriguing title, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments*. Swenson and his wife devoted their lives to making the thought of Kierkegaard known. English readers of Kierkegaard would do well to feel a profound gratitude to Swenson. And to Walter Lowrie who produced a shelf of English translations of Kierkegaard, often with somewhat cloying prefaces, but for all that a great contribution to the dissemination of Kierkegaard's thought. In more recent years, Howard Hong and his wife have established all but proprietary rights to the Englishing of Kierkegaard. First, a multi-volumed edition of the Journal and then the regular appearance of uniform editions of the published works. Danish is a lovely language and it is well to acquire some competence in it, but few will reach a point where they cease to be dependent on these great translation efforts. Kierkegaard is said to be the pre-eminent Danish stylist, but doubtless his Danish dates, as does Newman's English. Its artfulness makes reading it

a task more demanding than reading the newspaper. So let us praise those who make it possible to read Kierkegaard in reliable English translations.

Newman's mastery of English is universally recognized. His is not a telegraphic English. His periodic sentences build, exfoliate, carry one along, but it is an acquired taste in a time when the written language has fallen on evil days. Some will remember that Joyce in *Ulysses* provides a masterly imitation of Newmanian prose. Translation may not be necessary in the case of Newman, but one needs to shift into a more leisurely gear, much as one does in reading Trollope - an author Newman loved. Newman of course did not write in order to call attention to his writing and so long as we are conscious of his style it cannot have its maximum effect. As one becomes habituated to it it becomes an almost pure medium through which mind speaks to mind or, as he hoped, heart speaks to heart.

The Point of the Course

In this course I am interested in Newman and Kierkegaard as Christian thinkers for whom the Christian vocation was the central fact of life. How then can a mere philosopher presume to offer such a course? With fear and trembling, needless to say, but also in the realization that both men make fundamental contributions to our understanding of the relationship between faith and reason. (It is no accident, as the Marxist used to say, that Newman is cited by name in John Paul II's *Faith and Reason*.) I shall be stressing what each man had to say of the knowledge of the ordinary human being and how each of them, because of their confidence that knowledge was not confined to the campus, became critics of the turn that had been taken by modern philosophy - however much each of them was influenced by modern philosophy. Newman will speak of the relation between Natural and Supernatural Religion, indeed this is a kind of leitmotif the *Grammar of Assent*. Kierkegaard, on the other hand, will in the Protestant way, reject the project of natural theology.

A final and obvious similarity between John Henry Newman and Soren Kierkegaard. Their thought is bound up inextricably with their person. To read either of them is to hear a quite distinctive human voice - even when it becomes a choir of voices, as with Kierkegaard - but more importantly the events of their personal lives become essential and thematic to what they have to write - almost always with Kierkegaard, on the great occasion of the *Apologia* for Newman, though the personal source of what he had to say is by no means confined to that work.

In the lectures that these lessons accompany, I kept to a severe separation of the two men until the end when I sought to compare them. In these lessons I shall not refrain from cross references as we proceed. For all that, I will begin here as I did in the lectures with Kierkegaard. The justification for this will have to emerge from the narrative. At the end I can look back and invite your agreement that the order I chose was best.

As the lectures will have made clear, and as will be developed more in these lessons, Newman and Kierkegaard were prolific writers. The published work marches across the

shelf. Kierkegaard's Papers, published of course posthumously, involve more volumes even than his published work, and there are letters. In the case of Newman, the collected letters alone can overwhelm, running as they do to over thirty huge volumes. It has been quipped that Newman will never be canonized -- his cause has been introduced - just because he wrote so many letters. There are few who in less than a lifetime devoted exclusively to it could hope to master the thought of either man, let alone of both. And we of course must be selective. But the justification for that selectivity - that is, showing that it is guided by the authors themselves - can only be formulated as we proceed.

Let us then transport ourselves to Copenhagen in the early nineteenth century.

Suggested Reading

Father Ian Ker is the foremost Newmanian of our times and has produced a large and small biography as well as editions of key works of the great cardinal. You might wish to wallow in the large biography of Newman by Ker published by Notre Dame Press in 1988.

Lesson 2: The Kierkegaardian Literature

It has become a cliché to refer to Soren Kierkegaard as the Melancholy Dane and, as is often the case with clichés, there are good grounds for it. Certainly Soren's description of his own upbringing does not bring a smile to the mouth of the reader. The youngest child of an elderly father, his childhood was spent in close proximity to his paternal parent. Michael had come to Copenhagen from Jutland where he had prospered. After the death of his first wife, he got a servant with child, married her, and had more children. Soren was the youngest. There is almost no reference to his mother in all his writings, but his father is a dominant, even suffocating, presence. After retirement, Michael devoted himself to his soul, the study of theology, and brooding over his past. What stuck in his mind even more than later events was an episode that had occurred when he was a lad in Jutland, out on the heath shepherding, cold, poor. In a fit of rage he shook his hand at the heavens and cursed God. Years later, as an old man, he became convinced that this event marked him and that he himself was under a curse. When his children began to die, he became convinced that he was condemned to outlive them all. This was the grim religiosity that he sought to pass on to his son, confiding in him that dreadful event of his childhood. Soren referred to his father's revelation about that Jutland curse as the Great Earthquake.

He did well in school and advanced to the university where he seems to have engaged in the usual antics. Obscurely related, there is some reason to think that classmates

took him to a brothel. As with his father, this was an event that he brooded over ever after. But he continued to be a fitful student - until his father died. This occasioned a first publication, *From the Papers of One Still Living*, the title conveying surprise that his father's dread that he would outlive all his children, even Soren, had proved untrue. In a tribute to his father, he began to take his studies seriously and advanced to the Magister's degree - the highest degree, equivalent to the Ph. D. or S. T. D. His dissertation topic was devoted to irony in Socrates as displayed in the Platonic dialogues. What next? His plan was to prepare himself for the ministry in the Danish Lutheran Church.

Another personal event with lifelong consequences was his engagement to Regine Olsen, a girl ten years his junior. She was by all accounts a lively outgoing girl, not at all an intellectual, and perhaps represented for him entry into the natural and domestic as well as an object of romantic love. No sooner had the engagement been announced - it was a quite public and formal thing, with an exchange of rings - than he became convinced he had made a tragic mistake. He was convinced that he had a thorn in the flesh that prevented him from living an ordinary human life as lover and husband. The visit to the brothel? Perhaps. Confiding as Kierkegaard is in his journal he proves quite reticent about such details as that. All that is clear is that he felt there was something in his life, his past, his personality, that acted as an obstacle to marriage. Break the engagement? That would not have been honorable. Rather, what he sought to do was to bring Regine to the point where she would drop him. The obliquity of this approach proved to be characteristic of Kierkegaard's literary efforts. He would always in his published writings try to bring people to the point where they would themselves do what he thought they should, and would do it because it was their desire not his.

The Literature

Nor is this merely a parallel. When Kierkegaard launched what he called his literature, the chief addressee of what he wrote was Regine Olsen. For the rest of his life he would think of her, refer constantly to her in his journal, wonder if eventually they could be reconciled. As for Regine, she married another and went off to the Caribbean with her colonial governor husband and when she returned later to Copenhagen, Soren sought her out, not to talk to her, that would have been too direct, but to see her, pass her on the street - all very romantically mysterious. She on her part seems to have been puzzled to hear that he still remembered the long ago event of their engagement. Kierkegaard liked to draw attention to the way in which, for certain minds, there is a disproportion between external events and subjective reaction to them. There is no more massive instance of this in his own case than the discrepancy between what his love for Regine meant for him and what it meant for her.

Apart from two flying trips to Berlin, Kierkegaard never left Denmark, and apart from a few visits to the countryside, he never left Copenhagen. Like his hero Socrates, he was urban through and through, a man of the city. He did not marry Regine, he did not take orders in the Danish church, he did not seek a university job, but his short life was lived in the conviction that he had a mission from God and one that took the form of writing,

producing the "literature." What he had inherited enabled him to devote himself entirely to the task he took to be his and, since in the manner of the times he was his own publisher, engaging and paying a printer to bring out and distribute his books, at the time of his death he had pretty well depleted what he had inherited.

There are two basic schools of thought with respect to Kierkegaard's published work. The first takes as its guide the retrospects Kierkegaard himself wrote, particularly those brought together in the posthumously published *The Point of View of My Work as An Author*. The second takes these self-assessments to be after the fact and scarcely regulative of our understanding of the books as they came out. Moreover, the retrospects were written at a time when there were still more books to come.

The tendency of the second school is to take Kierkegaard as a writer pretty much like any other one might undertake to study. An enormous scholarly industry has thus grown up around the writings of Kierkegaard and as one peruses it it will seem pretty much the same in kind as that which grew up around Kant or Hegel or Scotus or Aristotle. Those who are members of the first school, while marveling at and profiting from this mountain of scholarship, are likely to think that it is a monument to a fundamental misunderstanding of the aim and purpose of the Kierkegaardian literature.

Here is one of the illustrations Kierkegaard himself gives of such a misunderstanding. A young man is called into the army and, as he stands in line with his fellow recruits, is talking volubly. The sergeant calls out, "Silence in ranks." The young man goes on talking. The sergeant confronts him. "I said silence in the ranks." "Yes, yes, I heard you. And the meaning of your command is that people such as I when lined up as we now are should cease to speak. I understand that perfectly." "Shut up!" the sergeant roars. The point of the anecdote is to show that there is a kind of understanding that amounts to a misunderstanding. The appropriate way for the recruit to show he understands the command is to obey it and stop talking.

Not counting his dissertation and the little book occasioned by the death of his father, Kierkegaard became an author in order to establish one central and commanding thing - what does it mean to be a Christian? Drawing on his own experience, he became aware that one's claim to be a Christian can go hand in hand with a way of living quite out of harmony with that claim. This was or had been true of himself, in some sense always would be, and doubtless it was the case with many others. As a member of the clergy he might have addressed the issue with authority, but he had no such ordained authority. What might one human being do for others, not by invoking the authority of the church or indeed the authority of his own life?

To approach the thing directly would be to invite the misunderstanding-understanding of the recruit. Those Kierkegaard addressed knew all about Christianity; it wasn't information about it they needed, say catechetical instruction. In any case, he is assuming that his reader knows what the Christian task is. The problem is, the way he knows it. He knows it perhaps as the talking recruit knows what the command to be silent means. What was needed was an oblique approach. What was needed was what Kierkegaard called Indirect Communication.

Stages on Life's Way

If Danes who thought of themselves as Christians were not living as Christians, what kind of life were they living? Or what kinds of life? As a residual influence of Hegel, Kierkegaard would ask what categories they were living in.

The first point here is that there is a split or discrepancy between a surface or nominal acceptance of Christianity - we're all baptized, aren't we? -and the real animating springs of one's existence. The most obvious candidate for the latter would be a life lived for pleasure. *Aisthesis* is the Greek word for touch, the basis of sensuality, so this first and obvious possibility could be called Aesthetic. One who professed to be a Christian actually lived his life in aesthetic categories.

The first work in the Kierkegaardian literature conveys this, as well as the range and variety of what counts as aesthetic. The work is *Either/Or*. The disjunction is expressed in different volumes - the first devoted to the aesthetic, the second to another non-Christian set of categories, the Ethical.

Leading one's life in ethical as opposed to aesthetic categories (of whatever modality) is preferable, but the point of the literature is that the religious, certainly Christianity, is not to be confused with the ethical. Further works go on to make this point, notably *Fear and Trembling*.

So here we have what he thought of as stages on life's way. This suggests a progression from one to the other, indeed the assimilation of the earlier into the later, such that one must bring the material of the aesthetic under the law of ethics and then see that the universal canons of ethics are less than the religious and of Christianity, however much the ethical becomes a part of the religious life. The "ethico-religious" becomes a familiar conjunction.

To lay it out like this is of course all wrong. Kierkegaard as an author did not set out to say to his reader: you claim to be a Christian but actually are living in aesthetic categories. Rather what he proposed was this: Let's talk about aesthetics. This led Kierkegaard to become the author of authors. *Either/Or* is attributed to *Victor Eremita* - the pseudonyms Kierkegaard devised were not meant to deceive - and the motto of the first volume was taken from the English poet Young: "Are passions then the pagans of the soul, reason alone baptized?" Nothing is more familiar in the history of moral philosophy than the formulation of arguments to show that the pursuit of pleasure cannot be fulfilling for us, cannot be our happiness or ultimate end. What Kierkegaard attempts to show is the existentially self-refuting character of the aesthetic life. It is a life of despair because it is impossible of realization. Call this an internal rather than an external criticism.

The collapse of the aesthetic in the realization that it is a life of despair opens the way to the ethical. But the move is one of freedom rather than the necessary assent a cogent proof demands.

The range of the aesthetic is from the shifting moods of the *Diaspalmata* with which volume one begins, through the analysis of Don Giovanni as presented by Mozart, ending in the Diary of the Seducer. Pretty racy stuff at times and this masks the overall aim of the authorship, to make clear what it is to be a Christian. By speaking of aesthetics from within the aesthetic sphere and trying to show that on its own terms it is impossible of realization and thus a life of despair, Kierkegaard removes a great obstacle to bringing one's life into conjunction with one's claim to be a Christian.

Suggested Reading

The Point of View of My Work as An Author

Suggested Writing

A book review of *Fear and Trembling*.

Lesson 3: Away from the Poet!

The symbol of the aesthetic is the seducer. The symbol of the ethical is the spouse. The ethical is genially conveyed in volume two of *Either/Or* by Judge Wilhelm in what may be letters to the young man who seems to be responsible for the contents of the first volume.

The aesthete lives in the moment and there is no link between the moments of his life. He thus acquires no history. Responsive to the change and changing, there is no real plan to his life. He is always on the *qui vive* for fleeting pleasure. His life is episodic, discontinuous. Don Giovanni conveys this most powerfully in the aria in which Leporello tells us that there have been two thousand conquests in Spain alone. There is a madness in this. There is despair.

By contrast, the ethical is the acquisition of a history, the moments of one's life form part of a plan and one which is governed by the duties and goods universally applicable to human beings. With maturity one falls in love and marries, but now love is not just the flight of the bumblebee. It is linked to procreation and family and thus to the future. The ethical is the realization of the universally human, becoming what a human person is meant to be.

It is sometimes said that the contents of volume two are dull compared to those of volume one. So they are, and this is deliberate. There is a kind of complacency in the outlook of Judge Wilhelm. He is proud and grateful for the life that is his. Are these domestic comforts the meaning of Christianity?

There followed the same year, 1843, a little book called *Fear and Trembling*, attributed to Johannes a Silentio. Its purpose is to show the inadequacy of the ethical, of the universally human, from the point of view of Christianity. The Abraham story from Exodus conveys this. Abraham and Sarah have lived into their old age without a child through whom could be fulfilled the promises God made to Abraham. His progeny were to be as numerous as the sands of the sea and the stars of the sky. And then improbably Sarah is with child and Isaac, the child of their advanced years, is born. Finally the means of the realization of God's promises are at hand. And then in a dream Abraham is instructed to take Isaac to Mount Moriah and there sacrifice him. He gets up and immediately sets off with his son.

It is a familiar story. And, because it is familiar, we know how it comes out. Isaac is spared, a ram is offered in sacrifice, father and son return to Sarah. Johannes a Silentio so presents the familiar story as to deprive us of the anticipated comfort of its ending. It took Abraham three days to get to Mount Moriah. What did he think along the way about the command he was obeying to sacrifice his only son? What did he say to Isaac? How did he explain the trip to Sarah? All we need do is imagine Abraham telling Sarah that he had a dream in which he was instructed to sacrifice their son to get a sense of the discrepancy between the command and what is normally expected of a father.

We are confronted with a teleological suspension of an ethical absolute. Do not take innocent life is a moral absolute. God is commanding Abraham to act contrary to that absolute, it is suspended, for the purpose of testing his faith. The mark of the religious is that an ethically forbidden act becomes something holy and pleasing to God.

Despite the prominence of the Abraham story in showing the inadequacy of the ethical, the symbol of the religious is the celibate, one who forgoes the natural pleasures and satisfactions of the married life to devote himself entirely to God. The connection of this with Kierkegaard's own broken engagement is obvious.

Indirect Communication

Very well. We have a string of pseudonymously published works which begins in 1843 with the publication of *Either/Or, Repetition* (Constantine Constantius) and *Fear and Trembling*, three the first year of the project, the same year he took one of his trips to Berlin. But that is only a fraction of the project of indirect communication.

Guided by *The Point of View*, we note the appearance of a parallel series of books that also begins in 1843, *Edifying Discourses*, authored by Soren Kierkegaard and published under his own name. The interplay between the *Discourses* and the pseudonymous works is meant to keep the overall point of the authorship present. Kierkegaard did not want anyone to think that, having devoted himself to worldly writing, aesthetic stuff, he repented, got religious and began to write things like the discourses. The fact that the two are simultaneous was important to his effort. And there is a third factor, that would have been operative for his contemporaries, namely the way Kierkegaard himself was living. Since it was soon known that he was the author of the pseudonymous works as

well as of the discourses, over and above the puzzlement this might cause, the reaction could well be that he was a pretty industrious and serious fellow. Someone serious enough to take seriously. It was to remove this possibility - an intrinsic basis for taking the writings to heart - that Kierkegaard contrived to live in such a way that he seemed a man about town, a ne'er-do-well who seemed always to be lounging around public places. Thus he tells us he would go to the theater in the evening, be prominent in the lobby, and then when the curtain went up hurry off home to his writing desk. How could the reader take seriously the writings of such a gadabout?

Away from Philosophy!

And still we are not done giving a sense of the complexity of Kierkegaard's indirect communication. The movement through the pseudonymous literature thus far described obeys the command, "Away from the poet!" That is, away from the aesthetic and through the ethical to a realization of what it truly means to be a Christian. Not of course as a matter of mere understanding. If Christianity is a way of life, to think about it and not live it is a way of misunderstanding it. The literature is meant to put the reader in the position where he might freely move onward. But if he does this, *he* does this -- no one can do it for him.

There is another movement in the literature, and it obeys the command, "Away from philosophy!" In this movement, Kierkegaard is interested in confronting the misunderstandings of Christianity that are peculiar to the intellectual, to the philosopher, to the sophisticated thinker.

It is this movement that we emphasize in the lectures. The pseudonymous author Johannes Climacus has two books attributed to him, *Philosophical Fragments* and *Concluding Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments*. This name was one Kierkegaard had already employed in a little work begun in 1842, and left unfinished. *Johannes Climacus or De omnibus dubitandum est*.

Kierkegaard's contemporaries would not have known of this book, of course, any more than they could be privy as we are to his journals and papers. We can see in this story, this philosophical novel, as it were, the underpinning of Kierkegaard's belated but profound dissatisfaction with modern philosophy.

He had begun as an enthusiast for Hegel's philosophy. Tells us that he translated passages into Danish to better to grasp their meaning. Eventually, he became disenchanted with Hegel and came to consider Hegelianism as a promissory note that could never be redeemed. Hegel was one of the heirs of the Father of Modern Philosophy, Rene Descartes, so there is a sense in which modern philosophy is the target of the philosophical novel.

Johannes Climacus is the main character of the philosophical novel, not its author. He is a university student who is beginning the study of philosophy. He is told that the way we begin philosophy is by casting into doubt all presumed claims to know. We doubt everything. *De omnibus dubitandum est*. Johannes takes the advice literally with comic

and eventually disastrous results. Kierkegaard has great fun with the qualifications of the maxim that everything is to be doubted made by professors surprised to be taken literally, and the upshot is that neither they nor anyone else could possibly follow such advice. This means that the keystone of modern philosophy crumbles. Methodic doubt, taken as a universal requirement, is a chimera.

If universal doubt is impossible, we must recognize that everyone already knows things, that is, prior to studying philosophy. Underlying this critique then is the ordinary human capacity to know untutored by philosophers.

When Johannes Climacus becomes one of Kierkegaard's pseudonymous authors, his target is the way in which philosophy can lead to a misunderstanding of Christianity.

In the background there are at least two things. On the one hand, there is Immanuel Kant and a little work called *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*. In it, Kant proposes to give an account of Christianity that will make it acceptable to a mind illumined by the Enlightenment. One with such a mind will wince when he reads of the miracles Christ is said to have performed. He will clear his throat and lift his brows when he is reminded of the hypostatic union of human and divine natures in Christ. But being magnanimous, he does not just dismiss the whole thing. Christianity may not redeem him but he thinks he can redeem Christianity. All one has to do is to throw out everything in Christianity that is unacceptable to the rational mind. What is left? Well, the Sermon on the Mount, for one thing. The ethical teachings of Jesus. These have the further attraction, we are told, that they are just what any reasonable person is likely to think about how we should act.

And then there is Hegel. In his *Philosophy of History*, Hegel reminds his reader that as Christians we are commanded not only to love God but to know him. How are we to know him? Through history which is the providential plan unfolding. We might object that historical events seem as often as not to just happen. They are very difficult to reduce back into determined causes. At the end of *War and Peace*, Tolstoy suggests that Napoleon was accounted a great general but this was due to the fact that his orders were not carried out. Hegel acknowledges that history can look like that, a chain of chance events. That is why we need Philosophical History. This will enable us to go beyond the initial appearance of chance and randomness to the realization that the events of history come about with necessity.

Of course the random and fortuitous may characterize your life and mine, but we are not world historical individuals. The philosophical historian will concentrate on them, people such as Napoleon, and then will see the pattern and logic in the unfolding of the temporal sequence, God's plan. Providence. Nor does this entail that Napoleon is a conscious agent of Reason in history. The Cunning of Reason employs him for her own devices, turning his actions to the ends of history.

Christianity is an historical religion. It focuses on the birth of Christ, his life and passion, as the very meaning of it all. Hegel holds out the hope that philosophical history will enable us to see the necessity with which Christianity appeared historically.

Very well. Let those two reminders suffice to get a preliminary sense of the target of the pseudonymous literature meant to lead us away from such philosophical misunderstandings of Christianity as we find in Kant and Hegel.

Suggested Reading

Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*.

Kant, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*.

Suggested Writing

Describe and compare the two movements of the literature, away from the poet, away from philosophy.

Lesson 4: Themes from the Fragments

The two works attributed to Johannes Climacus as author, which are meant to describe the movement away from philosophy - that is peculiarly philosophical misunderstandings - to a true realization of what it means to be a Christian, have a style appropriate to their target, but we must not think that their method is a philosophical refutation of the Kantian and Hegelian claims. These books are not philosophical in that sense. Like the other pseudonymous works they are exercises in indirect communication. They are devised to provide occasions for the nominally Christian thinker to see how distorted an account of Christianity he has philosophically accepted. At that point, he might jettison either his faith or his philosophy, but the hope is that he will see that his philosophical account is not an account of what Christianity truly is.

The Fragments

The initial step of the *Fragments* is to recall what we mean when we say that Socrates is a teacher. Socrates is of course the name of a definite historical personage and peculiar and distinctive doctrines are associated with his name. For example, that when we say we learn something we are really just remembering it. That is not the Socrates who has a role to play in the *Fragments*. It is not that his peculiar account is rejected but rather that it is seen as an instance of something generic that is found in any account of a human teacher.

The teacher addresses a student. Not only does this transaction presuppose that the student understands the language the teacher speaks, the teacher assumes that the student has the capacity to understand what he is saying. The teacher doesn't give

that capacity but, again, presupposes it. This means that, if the student learns what is being taught, he does so by employing a capacity he already has. Thus, when he comes to understand what is taught, *he* understands. Of course, he acknowledges that the teacher was the occasion for this happening, but the teacher is not the cause of it in the sense that what is learned is held on the basis of the teacher's having taught it. When I understand that the sum of the internal angles of a plane triangle is 180 degrees I do not add "as Father Casey said." He did say this, of course, and he taught me plane geometry, but if I understand him I am no longer dependent on him, I don't hold the proposition to be true because he says so but because I understand it and know it to be true.

So those are two elements present when we speak of the human teacher, call him Socrates. Such a teacher presupposes that his student has the capacity to understand; furthermore, the teacher is an occasion for the student's understanding. And there is a third element and that is that the time I learned this truth is not part of what I learned. I don't learn that the sum of the internal angles of a plane triangle are equal to 180 degrees at 10.30 on October 1944, even if it should have been the case that that was the precise time I understood it. If that were relevant to my understanding it would have to be relevant to you and anyone else understanding it, and of course it isn't. You listened to other voices in other rooms at other times and however you cherish those memories of your initiation into the mysteries of plane geometry they are not part of what you understand when you understand a geometrical truth.

Very well. All this is obvious. It is meant to be. Johannes Climacus lays it out far more elegantly than this. Then what? Then he suggests that we imagine what a non-Socratic teacher would be like. That is, a teacher whose activity did not involve the three elements of our generic Socrates' activities. All he need do is negate those elements.

The non-Socratic teacher will not presuppose the capacity for the truth is his disciple; rather, he will confer that capacity.

The non-Socratic teacher will not be a mere occasion for grasping the truth; he will be the truth grasped.

The non-Socratic teacher is one whose activity is characterized by the time in which he acts.

Climacus now begins to reflect on these negative elements in the case of the non-Socratic teacher. If in the case of Socrates, the student has the capacity and is inclined to the truth, in the non-Socratic case he is antithetical to the truth, receding from it. The capacity the non-Socratic teacher gives him must counter this polemical or negative attitude toward the truth. We might say that he saves the disciple from error. We might call the time in which he appears the Fulness of Time. The negative state of the disciple *vis-a-vis* the non-Socratic teacher may be called Sin.

At this point, Climacus imagines his reader's reaction. What he has proposed as a through experiment, a kind of construction of a possibility, has a very familiar ring to it.

Indeed it does. Christ is not mentioned but the point indirectly being made is that Christ the Teacher is not at all like a human teacher, another Socrates. Everything about his teaching differs from that of the merely human teacher.

Has Climacus proved that there is such a non-Socratic teacher? No. All he hopes to do here is provide his reader who may have confused the truth of Christianity with natural or philosophical truth with an occasion to see that this is a distortion of orthodox Christianity. And what will the reader do then? That is up to him.

Proving God's Existence

The reduction of Christianity to the categories of philosophy by Kant and Hegel is vulnerable to the reminder made by Climacus. There is a substitute for Christianity rather than a true grasp of what it is. The truths of Christianity are not amenable to teaching and learning in the usual sense. All that seems right as rain.

But Climacus is not content with this. Apparently he associates such Kantian and Hegelian distortions with any philosophical effort to arrive at knowledge of God. Thus, we find him attacking the whole effort to formulate proofs of God's existence. The heart of his criticism is sweeping indeed. The reason we cannot prove the existence of God is that we cannot prove the existence of anything. Proofs always presuppose existence; they do not establish it.

Is that true? When Sherlock Holmes identifies the perpetrator of a crime has he proved the existence of a criminal? If we assume that Fifi LaRue is a suspect and that Sherlock proves she did it, that is what he proves, not that Fifi exists. So Climacus may seem to have a point. But what if the upshot of the investigation is that no crime has been committed and that thus none of the suspects is the criminal. Here we might say that there is a state of affairs we took to involve a crime and now we see it does not. But we neither prove or disprove the existence of the state of affairs. Again, Climacus seems to have a point.

So let's try this. An astronomer has observed certain phenomena and he develops the hypothesis that their explanation is a planet called Zircon hitherto unknown, never observed, whose gravitational field explains the phenomena in question. We would not say that he has proved the existence of Zircon. Indeed, we can imagine him and ourselves asking, but is there a Zircon, does Zircon exist? Deep minds devote themselves to the matter. And then a brilliant suggestion is made. If there is such a planet it should become visible at exactly 11:24 at an observatory in the Midwest on such and such a date. Its appearance or non-appearance will be proof positive of the existence or non-existence of Zircon.

Telescopes are readied, trained on the spot, a hush falls over the northern hemisphere. Of two things one. 11:24 comes and goes and Zircon does not appear. Or 11:24 comes and voila, there is Zircon. Reporters report that the existence of Zircon has been proved. Are they guilty of sloppy thinking, of a fallacy perhaps? If Climacus were to say that the whole enterprise presupposed the existence of Zircon, would he be right? Only

in the sense that the negative result too presupposed the existence of Zircon. Zircon is the name we give to the presumed cause of the phenomena with which we began. What Climacus could of course rightly say is that our proof does not produce the existence - or the non-existence - of Zircon. If Zircon did not exist we could not come to know that it does. But before we know it, we don't know it, and what proves do is to move us from not-knowing to knowing.

Well, one could go on. If this is meant to do away with the very possibility of a natural theology - that is, proofs of God's existence that function like other natural proofs - it just doesn't. Fortunately, that is not the major aim of the *Fragments*.

What Climacus is opposing, the philosophy he wishes to lead us from, is what St. Paul had in mind in Colossians when he said *videte ne quis vos decipiat per philosophiam*: watch out lest you be led astray by philosophy. This is philosophy forgetful of its limits. Philosophy that assumes that anything put forward as a truth must be subject to its canons and criteria. It is when philosophy presumes that the mysteries of the faith are either intelligible to natural reason, like any other truth claim, or are false, that philosophy has gone off the rails. It is the mysteries of faith, especially the nature of Christ the teacher, that Climacus is concerned to defend against the encroachments of false and presumptuous philosophy.

Faith

What characterizes the disciple of Christ is faith. How is faith described in the *Fragments*? In speaking of God - quite apart from attempted proofs - Climacus proposes that we recognize that God is the unknown. Moreover, he suggests the somewhat romantic notion that our desire of knowledge secretly wills its own downfall or failure. That is, the desire to know is a covert quest for the unknown, what cannot be known, what exceeds our capacity to know. If God is the Unknown then of course we have a kind of natural desire to know God, which means knowing that he cannot be known. All this is paradoxical, and the object of faith is a paradox.

Of course we might react in different ways to this affront on what we take to be the natural character of reasoning. What is proposed can be rejected as absurd, as nonsense. Well, that is what it is, in a sense. It lies behind our capacity to understand, is the secret *telos* of our passion to know. To reject it is called by Climacus the unhappy passion. On the other hand, the acceptance is the happy passion, which is another name for faith.

Faith does not understand what is proposed - it is an absolute paradox, not only the Unknown but the Unknown become present in time - but it withdraws all objects to it and rests in the acceptance of it.

On the title page of *Philosophical Fragments* we find the following complex question: "Can a historical point of departure be given for an eternal consciousness; how can such a point of departure be of more than historical interest; can an eternal happiness be built on historical knowledge?" If the *Fragments* as we have discussed it thus far

may seem to be directed against the Kantian misunderstanding, we turn now to Climacus on the Hegelian misunderstanding.

Suggested Reading

Philosophical Fragments, chapters one and two.

Suggested Writing

Compare and discuss the reason for distinguishing the Socratic and the non-Socratic teacher.

Lesson 5: Is Kierkegaard a Fideist?

A great deal has been written since the death of Kierkegaard in 1855 on the question of the historical Jesus. The relation between Christianity and history interested Kierkegaard - and his pseudonym Johannes Climacus - because Hegel held that something called Philosophical History could establish the truth of Christianity. The life of Christ took place in time, the miracles he performed, his resurrection. Aren't these, accordingly, historical events and can't they therefore be adequately handled by the historical method? They certainly are the objects of the Christian's faith - that Christ was born in Bethlehem, that he taught and healed and worked miracles, that he suffered, died and was buried, and that on the third day he rose again. Not all of these figure as items in the Creed but they are what believers believe. Could their truth be established by an application of the historical method? If so, isn't Hegel stating something fairly obvious?

A first distinction Climacus makes is between the eyewitness and the follower. What he is getting at is that all sorts of people heard Jesus, saw what he did, but not all of them believed. Believer and non-believer might agree on what they had seen, but the believer professes that Jesus is the Messiah and the non-believer does not. Has the believer seen something the mere eye-witness has not? Both would seem to have the great advantage over us that there are contemporary with these events. "It is easy for the contemporary learner to acquire detailed historical information. But let us not forget that in regard to the birth of the god he will be in the very same situation as the follower at second hand, and if we insist upon absolutely exact historical knowledge, only one human being would be completely informed, namely, the woman by whom he let himself be born. Consequently, it is easy for the contemporary learner to become a historical eyewitness, but the trouble is that knowing a historical fact - indeed, knowing all the historical facts with the trustworthiness of an eyewitness - by no means makes the eyewitness a follower . . . "

What Climacus's discussion seems to require is a distinction between two senses of history. As the above passage makes clear, there is nothing to prevent or object to in the quest for the most accurate historical knowledge of what actually happened in the first century of our era. This inquiry would make use of and profit by the various techniques of historical research that have been developed. But what would its most successful possible outcome amount to? Presumably the most accurate and exhaustive account of Our Lord's life.

But this account, given the way it is arrived at - and presuming the objectivity and reliability of those methods - would be one on which believers and non-believers could agree. That is indeed what happened. Climacus' point is that historical account could not just as such produce faith, that is, cause one to be a believer, any more than being an eyewitness of Christ's acts and words automatically make one a follower or believer. Some accepted him as the Son of God, others did not.

There is a second sense of history that is involved in the believer's professing that for us men and for our salvation the son of God became man. That happened. It happened at Christmas. It happened in Bethlehem. It happened as Luke tells us about it in his Gospel. The believer believes these as historical events.

Now history in this second sense includes and goes beyond history in the first sense. It is not a matter of further historical research in the first sense that establishes that the baby born in Bethlehem is the Messiah. Faith goes beyond merely being an eyewitness, it requires eyes to see and ears to hear, but these are not just the natural senses everyone has. Faith is the substance of things hoped for. It is accepting as true what is not seen or understood in the usual senses of those terms.

A Notable Asymmetry

There is a tendency in Climacus to suggest that just as historical knowledge in the ordinary sense does not entail faith, so faith does not entail historical knowledge in the ordinary sense. This tendency is expressed by his suggestion that faith requires next to no historical details in order to come into play. If one were told simply that God appeared as man and little else, that would be enough. Surely this is wrong. Historical knowledge of the usual sort is part and parcel of what the believer believes. It is not the whole thing, but without it, faith would have nothing on which to bear.

Pius X in his condemnation of Modernism specifically mentioned as anathema the suggestion that Christian faith was not grounded in the historical. Already of course the suggestion was that the serious employment of the historical method would undercut and disprove the historical facts which undoubtedly are included in what believers believe. In reacting to this threat, many believers said things not unlike what Climacus comes close to saying. Namely, that religious faith is independent of historical claims - in the ordinary sense of historical - and thus the disproving of those historical claims would not affect religious belief.

The most egregious form of this dissociation is still heard among "defenders of the faith" whose defense is its destruction. If the tomb of Christ were found and his bones were found there this would not, it is said, affect our faith in the resurrection. Christ's rising from the dead is thus taken to be compatible with the historical truth that he did not rise from the dead. Resurrection then receives a completely ethereal meaning and the robust realism of Christian belief is eroded.

If, *per impossible*, the bones of Christ were found in a grave in Jerusalem, that would disprove and falsify our faith in the resurrection. Either he rose from the dead or he did not. If he did not, our faith, as St. Paul said, is in vain and we are the most miserable of men.

What the believer has to contend with are unfounded claims that purport to undermine Christian faith. Of course the believer does not think that anything that could be discovered could undermine his faith. Further, he is confident that the application of the historical method can only support and establish the historical (in the usual sense) component of his faith.

But to return to the target of Climacus. Any suggestion that history -- even Philosophical History -- can establish the central truths of Christianity is wrongheaded. Hegel's suggestion is that Philosophical History will make our acceptance of Christianity a matter of knowledge in the usual sense, its truth having been established in the usual sense. Faith in the usual sense would thus, as Climacus saw, be rendered pointless.

Faith and Paradox

One of the reasons that Climacus gives short shrift to philosophical efforts to make the claims of Christianity into ordinary knowledge claims that can be established or disestablished in the ordinary way, is his definition of faith. At the center of Christian belief is the God-Man. Climacus' suggestion is that such a phrase embodies a paradox. The Incarnation entails that the eternal has become temporal, the divine has become human. But the eternal and temporal are contraries -- a thing is either eternal or temporal. The human and the divine is such that either a person is human or divine. For the believer to hold that Christ is human and divine, that the eternal word has become temporal, is thus a paradox. The question is: what is a paradox?

The suggestion is that it is a contradiction, such that to assert it would be to utter an absurdity. What is believed is an absurdity. One of the great problems of interpreting Kierkegaard, and his pseudonyms, is to understand how literally he means this.

In his Journals Kierkegaard wrote that he was a corrective and not a norm. His effort is not to lay out the contents of Christianity for readers who had no idea what it was. Au contraire. He presupposes that his readers have all the information they need about Christianity. The problem is that they say and do things which are incompatible with what they know. He has decided against a direct refutation, a flat out historical discussion, for example. Rather, he will present the confusion in such a way, in such an exaggerated way, that his reader will get the point more easily. The demands of

rhetoric, or at least its practice, permit excesses that are taken to be justified insofar as they provide the needed shock treatment.

That is the benign interpretation of Kierkegaard's tendency to speak of the content of Christianity as consisting of contradictory claims. Far from considering that alleged fact to be a hindrance, it is welcomed as calling attention to what an extraordinary thing Christian faith is. *Credo quia absurdum*.

As that quote from Tertullian suggests, even this is susceptible of a benign interpretation. After all, it was St. Paul would said that Christianity was a scandal to the Jews and folly for the Greeks. Folly. Foolishness. Christianity is judged by non-believers as foolishness. By the world's standards it is nonsense, by heaven's it is the highest wisdom.

So Kierkegaard and his pseudonyms are not without their authoritative counterparts.

Fideism

Nonetheless, the word that seems to fit the viewpoint adopted by Johannes Climacus is fideism, and fideism is a heterodox understanding of faith. For the fideist, believing is not a reasonable act; what is believed is neither established by what is known nor could it be disestablished by what is known. Faith is simply a different realm from reason and there is no overlap between them. That is a position the Catholic must reject.

Alas, it is not easy to pin down Climacus and even more difficult to pin down Kierkegaard himself on the matter. In the Journals he seems to be making the Pauline point. To the unbeliever, the content of faith may seem nonsense, but "from the other side", that is, for the believer, it is not. If fideism is at least a tendency in Kierkegaard, it is possible to find such passages which make the unequivocal attribution of fideism to him problematic.

One paradox of the Kierkegaardian authorship is that his apparent obscurantism goes hand in hand with an enormous learning. And we must be careful in getting the point of the denials he makes.

Item. The longevity of Christianity does not establish its truth.

Item. Biblical studies cannot establish the truth of the Bible. These denials may seem to dismiss as undesirable Church history and biblical studies, but of course that is not their purport. But Kierkegaard was alive as were few others to the intellectual pride which can grip the scholar and lead him to think that he is establishing the truth of Christianity, that finally the whole thing will be put on a secure and scientific footing.

Of course what we have become familiar with is the debunking attitude of those who engage in such studies. Here, Kierkegaardian irony and derision are quite in order.

Suggested Reading

Fragments, chapter 3 and Interlude.

Suggested Writing

Why is one tempted to charge Kierkegaard with being a fideist?

Lesson 6: Knowledge and Virtue

I mentioned earlier that despite his distinction between the ethical and religious as life stages, Kierkegaard comes to talk with ease about what he calls ethico-religious knowledge. This can be explained either because early stages are subsumed into later ones -- as the passions of the soul are baptized by coming under the sway of reason -- or because of Kierkegaard's acceptance of the way in which the moral provides a kind of analogue to the religious. It is the second possibility I wish to explore now.

Knowledge and Virtue

One of the oldest questions in moral philosophy asks whether knowledge is virtue, that is, is knowing what one ought to do tantamount to doing it. What is the relation between knowledge and practice, knowing and doing? In his *Protagoras*, Plato has Socrates defend the notion that virtuous action is simply a function of knowledge. He uses the analogy of the art of perspective. In judging the relative size of physical objects we can be misled because of the greater or lesser distance from the observer of what is seen. The art of perspective corrects for distance by reminding us that distant things seem small and close things large. Moral judgment requires an analogous art of perspective, this one bearing not on distance but on time. Assuming that moral judgments are appraisals of the relative force of pains and pleasures, the suggestion is that one can go wrong because a present pleasure is wrongly judged to trump a future pain it will bring about, or a present pain is misjudged relative to the future ease and pleasure it can insure. That is, the one drink too many is incorrectly compared to the massive pain of the next morning's hangover, and the discomfort in the dental chair is given undue weight relative to the sparkling incisors it insures.

The heart of the position here attributed to Socrates is that one cannot not act contrary to the correct judgment of moral perspective.

The reason for that is that reason is what is distinctive in us, it is what is dominant in us, and it is simply unacceptable that reason could be dragged around by lower powers, such as the desire for pleasure or repugnance to pain.

The trouble with the position is that we all, alas, have had experience of acting contrary to our own best lights. It is human, all too human, to do the evil we would not, and not do the good that we would. But if knowledge or reason is not the sufficient cause of good action, and if reason is what makes us to be human agents, there would indeed seem to be a fissure in our very being.

Ethico-religious Knowledge

It can be seen that this moral question as to how knowledge of what we ought to do relates to our doing or not doing it is analogous to the question of the way in which accepting Christianity at one level leaves unanswered the doing or enacting of its message. We are urged to be not simply hearers of the word, but doers also. This parallel between morality and religion is a commonplace of reflections on religion. It is hardly surprising then that it becomes a leitmotif of the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments*.

When we turn to that work we find a celebration of what is called the subjective thinker and the assertion of the primacy of the subjective. And we find the famous definition of truth which may seem to have the effect of relativizing all truth claims, making them simply a function of our desires. I propose to come at this claim somewhat obliquely.

In speaking of subjective thinking, said to be especially relevant to the moral and religious, Climacus invokes Aristotle's distinction in *On the Soul* III, 10 between theoretical and practical knowledge. When we use our mind theoretically the aim is the perfection of thinking as such, namely, acquiring the truth of the matter. When we use our mind practically, the truths we acquire are ordered to an activity beyond and other than thinking, such as choosing. Practical thinking does not reach its completion in thinking, therefore, but in the activity it guides and directs.

This is why Aristotle says in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that one does not become good by philosophizing. That is, taking a course in ethics, perhaps receiving a high grade, does not as such make one a good man. A good student, perhaps, but the discussion of action in the way in which this is done in class or seminar is an instance of thinking not knowing, certainly not an instance of the moral doing that is under discussion. It is when moral knowledge is thought of as like this, that is, like that we find in Aristotle's *Ethics*, that it seems preposterous to suggest that possession of it is one and the same with acting in accord with it.

Now if one thought that there is such knowledge and then there is something else called action that follows from it, it could become quite mysterious to know what happens between the knowing and the action. Aristotle's solution is that practical knowledge in its full sense is what animates the particular actions performed. Practical knowledge in the full sense is embedded in singular actions. That is, there are degrees of practical knowledge, and that found in the *Ethics* is less practical than that present in this action or that. And Aristotle said, in partial defense of the Socrates of the *Protagoras*, that it would indeed seem impossible to have here and know the correct judgment of what I should do and not do it. The reason is that such here and

now knowledge is embodied in the action already taking place. Correct judgments in the singular are a function of our moral character, that is, the bent of our appetite. If **A** is what I really want and **a** is clearly here and now the best way to achieve **A**, I do **a** forthwith. The moral task is to get our appetite glued to what truly is our good and fulfillment, then virtuous action should come with ease.

Subjectivity is the Truth

Let us turn now to Climacus' discussion of truth. Truth resides in a relation between thought and being -- some define truth as thought's conformity with being, while others reverse this to being's conformity with thought -- but, Climacus says, everything obviously depends on what we mean by being. He proposes to take being to mean human being, and then the question of truth becomes one of the relation of our thinking to what we are. So we are back in familiar territory. Climacus then says that all essential knowledge relates to existence. "That essential knowledge is essentially related to existence does not mean the above-mentioned identity which abstract thought postulates between thought and being; nor does it signify, objectively, that knowledge corresponds to some existent as its object. But it means that knowledge has a relationship to the knower, who is essentially an existing individual, and that for this reason all essential knowledge is essentially related to existence. Only ethical and ethico-religious knowledge has an essential relationship to the existence of the knower." This is the basis for the famous definition of truth as subjective. "Here is such a definition of truth: *An objective uncertainty held fast in an appropriation process of the most passionate inwardness is the truth, the highest truth attainable for an existing individual.*"

Many have taken this to be a way to justify any claim as true if only one feels strongly enough about it. The definition offered by Climacus is taken to be a wild innovation without precedent in previous thought. This is clearly false.

Is Climacus a Thomist?

It is false first on the level of the ethical. Aristotle, and Thomas Aquinas after him speak of practical as opposed to theoretical truth. The latter is had when the mind's judgment is in conformity with the thing judged. Practical truth, on the other hand, is had when the mind's judgment as to what to do is in conformity with correct or rectified appetite, that is, with an appetite informed by virtue, disposing us to our true good. That disposition, inclination, prevents the appetite for an apparent good from deflecting the judgment. This judgment is made in the course of performing the action. That, again, is why Aristotle allows, in partial defense of the Socrates of the *Protagoras*, that it does indeed seem possible that one could act otherwise than in harmony with this knowledge.

Thomas Aquinas goes on to liken the act of faith to this practical judgment, the judgment of practical wisdom or prudence. The role of the will in belief is inescapable. *Nemo credit nisi volens*, St. Augustine wrote: only those believe who will to. Of course the will is moved by grace, and the good that draws us is the promise of

happiness. That is the motive for accepting as true what we cannot in this life comprehend or understand to be true. This dark knowledge of faith will be rewarded in heaven, where we will see even as we are seen.

Faith is an intellectual virtue, a habit of mind which disposes to the acceptance of the truths God has revealed. Since in this life the mind cannot be fixed on these truths on its own terms, by understanding them, the role of the will moved by grace is essential to the assent of faith. Faith is thus a gift, not an acquisition, as if one just chose to have it.

Any appraisal of Kierkegaard -- or his pseudonyms -- on the question of faith and its object must take into account the nature of the literature, the role of a particular pseudonymous work, and Kierkegaard's over-all purpose as the author of the authors.

To those who wished to reduce Christianity to a knowledge claim like all others, the truth of which can be decided by application of standard philosophical criteria, Kierkegaard is there to thwart the effort. He will do this by indirectly reminding his reader that he does not really regard Christ as a teacher on the same level as Socrates or any other merely human teacher.

He is there to make the unsettling reminder that all the natural sciences in the world, all the history imaginable, all the scriptural scholarship you might wish for, cannot establish the truth of the essential Christian claims. In this life we cannot *know*, in the sense of *prove*, the trinity of persons in God, the union of human and divine natures in Christ. These must be believed because they cannot be known -- in this life.

Moreover, he will suggest that the object of faith is a contradiction, involving the claim that opposites are identical, that the eternal is temporal, the human divine. It is here that Kierkegaard seems most opposed to Catholic orthodoxy. And yet, as I have suggested, even here he has Pauline precedents.

Kierkegaard is a corrective, not a norm. His indirect method would be useless in giving instructions on Christianity to those with no knowledge of it. He himself stresses this. His is a rhetorical effort which makes use of extreme statements to recall the nominal Christian to the realization of what it means to be a Christian. When books and passages in the literature are simply extracted and separated from that overall purpose the intent of Kierkegaard is distorted.

Suggested Reading

Concluding Unscientific Postscript, Part Two, chapter two.

St. Thomas, *Disputed Questions on the Virtues*. South Bend: St. Augustine Press, 1998, pp. 40-44.

Suggested Writing

Three to five pages on the affinity of the ethical and religious.

Lesson 7: A Long Life

The lifespan of John Henry Newman (1801-1890) embraces the shorter span of Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) but there is no indication that either man had ever heard of the other. This is not at all surprising, of course. In the third millennium, with global communication all but instantaneous, we are inundated by such a flood of useful and useless information, items fill the television screens of the world for a few hours and then give way to some fresh outrage or sensation, it is difficult for us even to imagine a time when the railroad and telegraph were new. In *Walden* Thoreau writes of the way the railway brought time to the small towns of America, the scheduled arrivals and departures introducing a precision into the sun's passage overhead it hitherto had not had. Nor is it simply weather disasters, scandal and political upheavals that receive media attention. It was a first-time feature of the ecumenical council held in Rome from 1962-1965 - Vatican II - that it was covered and commented on and, as we say, spun by a horde of interested observers. Leaked documents, confidential briefings on supposed secret meetings, media pressure on the council meetings themselves - we can forget how utterly new all this was. I mention to suggest that a Newman and Kierkegaard might nowadays be covered like celebrities, their visages flashed to the far corners of the world, their ideas analyzed, digested, refuted, affirmed. Under such attention, interest in them would doubtless soon have been exhausted.

Which is doubtless why God placed them in the 19th century. Both men saw the rise of the power of the media -and both in their different ways suffered from it - just as both were aware of the more unsavory aspects of Enlightenment sponsored political developments and deplored the rise of what Newman would label Liberalism. The encroachment of the public on the private, the tendency to see people as faceless members of the mass rather than as individual persons with an eternal destiny, was condemned by both men. Fittingly enough, the filter through which they saw the world was their own person - not in an egocentric way, but in the conviction that for each of us our own life is our principal task, working out our salvation. That this has social implications is clear from the way both Newman and Kierkegaard felt compelled to address their fellows - not as a mass, but as persons - and remind them of their eternal destiny.

Milestones

As with Kierkegaard, there are certain events in Newman's life which loom large and give it the shape and direction it took on. We find none of the childhood traumas in Newman's life that characterized Kierkegaard's. When Newman tells the story of his religious opinions an otherwise untroubled Christianity is brought up short in 1816 when he speaks of being converted to a dogmatic Christianity - that is, a faith with doctrines of a quite definite sort, acceptance of which is to guide the Christian life. The following year, Newman entered Trinity College, Oxford and a long if choppy love affair with the university began.

When Newman took his B.A. in 1820 it was characterized as a "poor degree." Like many brilliant students he was undone by the rigors of final examinations. His university career seemed over. But then in 1822 he was elected a fellow of Oriel College and once more his life was on track. Kierkegaard prepared himself for but did not take orders in the Danish Lutheran Church. Newman's university life was one with his clerical vocation. In 1825, he was ordained a priest in the Anglican Church, and was already engaged in pastoral work in Oxford. In 1828 - and this is a milestone - he was named Vicar of St. Mary's, which was the University Church. It was from its pulpit that he was to preach sermons that continue to be read today - we will be examining some shortly - and when you go there you will find a commemorative plaque on the pulpit commemorating Newman's occupancy of it.

Newman's trip to Italy - he sailed in December 1832 and returned the following July - involved of course time in Rome, spent largely with Anglicans, and characterized by the wariness that would linger long in Newman's attitude toward the Catholic Church - but it was when he went on to Sicily and fell ill that a time of reflection was forced upon him that led him to see his return to England in a new light. "I have a work to do in England." It was also at this time that, becalmed off Sicily, he wrote the immortal "Lead, Kindly Light."

The work that awaited him in England became known as the Oxford Movement. Newman had published his first book, on the Arians of the Fourth Century, in 1832. On July 14, 1833, John Keble preached a sermon called "National Apostasy" which initiated the Movement. From this time through 1841, Newman was one of the leaders of the Movement which sought to see the English Church, not as Protestant, but as the Catholic Church in England. It represented a *Via Media*, a path between Protestantism on the one hand and the supposed excesses and distortions of Rome on the other. Newman and his fellows sought to find in the history of the English Church justification for their understanding of it, while not insisting that their interpretation was exclusive. They were willing to settle for the acceptance of the Catholic version of Anglicanism as legitimate. Tract 90, written by Newman, appeared in 1841 and the reaction to the Oxford Movement, which had been growing, crystallized and it became inescapable that the bishops of the Anglican Church did not see themselves as successors of the Apostles, that the clergy of the Church thought of themselves as Protestants not crypto-Catholics, and finally that Newman's position in Oxford was untenable.

In 1842 he moved to Littlemore, a small town outside Oxford, where his sister Jemima had contributed money to the building of a church. With various companions, Newman lived a quasi-monastic life in the L-shaped building at Littlemore. (If you go there today you will find it in the care of an order of nuns, German in origin, who have restored the buildings, the library, the chapel where they chant the office angelically, and are eager to acquaint visitors with the historic role the place played in Newman's life and beyond.)

In 1843, Newman resigned as vicar of St. Mary's.

In 1845, on October 5, he resigned his fellowship at Oriel.

On October 9, 1845, at Littlemore, he was received into the Catholic Church.

The Convert

Newman's conversion to Catholicism divides his life almost exactly in two. It was his 45th year, he had 45 years yet to live.

The prolonged, gradual and almost reluctant conversion to Catholicism is put before us with great candor in the *Apologia pro vita sua*. Up to the very end, Newman resisted the direction in which his heart and mind were pulling him. He would have been forgiven if he had seen his conversion as a downwardly mobile step. He had been one of the leaders of his Church, he was a recognized member of an intellectual elite, the congregations to which he preached hung on his every learned and complicated word. As a Catholic he entered a Church made up of the old Catholic families who had survived persecution and internal exile and carved a place for themselves. They did not particularly welcome Newman. And there was as well the immigrant Church, the Irish, lower class by and large. There was no triumphant Roman celebration at the acquisition of so prestigious a convert. Newman's Catholic life was to have as many ups and downs as his Anglican life had had.

In 1847, Newman was ordained a Catholic priest in Rome. The following year he founded the Birmingham Oratory of St. Philip Neri and there continued to live a community life with those of his friends who had come into the Church with him.

In 1851, Newman was appointed rector of the Catholic University of Ireland. Until 1858, when he resigned he devoted himself to this project. *The Idea of a University* is made up of lectures Newman gave setting forth his vision of the institution.

In 1864, in response to an attack on him by Charles Kingsley, he published the pamphlets that eventually became the *Apologia pro vita sua*, his narrative account of the history of his religious opinions which brought him into the Catholic Church.

In 1870 he published a book he had spent his lifetime preparing in one form or another, beginning with the Oxford University Sermons delivered at St. Mary's. The book was *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*. In it, Newman examines the difference between what he called notion and real assent, and casts light on the mental acts which go into a religious conversion. In that same year, Vatican I defined papal infallibility as a dogma of the Church.

In 1879, the newly elected Pope Leo XIII, named Newman a cardinal. This, coupled with being named an honorary fellow of Trinity College a few years earlier, brought a certain serenity to Newman's twilight years. For over a decade he lived on, seemingly having outlasted the controversies and opposition that had marked his life both as an Anglican and a Catholic. Anglicans had accused him of duplicity, pretending to be one of them when he had already gone over to Rome and seeking to take as many with him as he could. Among Catholics, there were often mutterings about what he wrote, suggestions that his views were heretical or nearly so, and there were times when

Newman felt that he was under a cloud in Rome. His great contemporary, Cardinal Manning, another convert, seemed wary of Newman and vice versa, and Manning knew the ropes in Rome as Newman did not. Students often feel a tendency to choose Newman over Manning, to lionize the one and demonize the other. This tendency should be fought. The two men made complementary and essential contributions to the Catholic Church in England. They were both stormy petrels.

Newman lived a long and extremely active life - as a preacher, an author, a controversialist, a churchman - but it would be difficult to argue that his was a planned life. Throughout, he responds to the demands and opportunities of the moment, of the situation in which he finds himself, the duties of his state in life. Thus, for example, the University Sermons he preached as a young man were doubtless each of them simply the task of the moment, and yet they hang together in a way that was very likely not fully intended and can be seen by us as a first go at the issues that would reach their ultimate treatment many many years later in the *Grammar of Assent*. So too when Kingsley attacked Newman and called into question the veracity of the Catholic clergy, Newman seized on the opportunity to address his fellow Englishmen and recount for them the history of his conversion. Anyone looking for a single knockdown argument to explain his conversion will be disappointed. But not for long, because Newman reminds his reader of how complicated a matter a conversion is. Changing one's mind might be done on the basis of a single argument, but even a cogent argument does not suffice to change one's life. This is far more subtle matter. Irrational? Let's discuss what we mean by rational or reasonable, would be Newman's response to that charge.

Given the range and number of Newman's writings - he published two novels, he wrote poems and hymns, he incessantly produced articles on one subject or another, and pamphlets, as well as collections of sermons; he was an historian, a controversialist, a philosopher and theologian of sorts - given all this, we must of course be selective in our treatment. We will discuss:

- The University Sermons
- The Philosophical Notebook
- The Apologia
- The Grammar of Assent

Suggested Reading

Ian Ker, *John Henry Newman A Biography*. Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 1988.
 Michael Finch, *Newman Towards the Second Spring*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991.

Lesson 8: University Sermons

The University of Oxford was founded in the 13th century in the very first wave of universities which suddenly sprang up across the continent. There had long been traffic between England and Paris, and that continued when the schools of Paris were incorporated into a university. Oxford and Cambridge came into being.

The medieval university was a clerical institution, When Chaucer speaks of "a clerke of Oxenford" he was referring to a student of the university who would have at least low level clerical status, set off from the laity by tonsure at least. For its first three hundred years and more Oxford was a Catholic place and shared the practices of Paris where the master of theology was expected to lecture, dispute and preach. Henry VIII's depredations had their effect on the university but one is struck by the persistence of traditions and practices whose compatibility with the changing religious and theological ethos were only gradually and belatedly recognized. The fellows of the colleges continued to be celibate: it was a condition of being in residence, clearly a clerical carryover. The tendency of fellows to take orders is yet another indication of this. One sometimes wonders if it wasn't the Catholicism that was part of the very stones of Oxford that influenced Newman and Pusey in their effort to find room for Catholicism in the English Church.

Like his medieval predecessors, John Henry Newman preached to the university, in his case from the pulpit of St. Mary's of which he was vicar. These sermons were gathered together under the title *Fifteen Sermons Preached before the University of Oxford between 1826 and 1843*. This book, edited and introduced by Mary Katherine Tillman, has been reissued by University of Notre Dame Press (1997). As the fulsome title indicates, the sermons span the years during which Newman was slowly being drawn to the Catholic Church. Shortly after the last one, he resigned his post as vicar and withdrew to Littlemore.

As befits their provenance, these sermons address issues which would be of especial concern and interest to university folk. Let us have before us the titles of these sermons. 1. The Philosophical Temper, First Enjoined by the Gospel (1826) 2. The Influence of Natural and Revealed Religion Respectively (1830) 3. Evangelical Sanctity the Perfection of Natural Virtue (1831) 4. The Usurpations of Reason (1831) 5. Personal Influence, the Means of Propagating the Truth (1832) 6. On Justice as a Principle of Divine Governance (1832) 7. Contest Between Faith and Sight (1832) 8. Human Responsibility as Independent of Circumstances (1832) 9. Wilfulness, the Sin of Saul (1832) 10. Faith and Reason Contrasted as Habits of Mind (1839) 11. The Nature of Faith in Relation to Reason (1839) 12. Love, the Safeguard of Faith Against Superstition (1839) 13. Implicit and Explicit Reason (1840) 14. Wisdom, as Contrasted with Faith and with Bigotry (1841) 15. The Theory of Developments in Religious Doctrine (1843)

One can divide these sermons chronologically using the Mediterranean trip as decisive. Thus sermons 1-9 would antedate Newman's participation in the Oxford Movement, while 10-15 could be seen as products of that participation, certainly as influenced by it.

But it is the themes of the sermons that provide the approach to them and to the unity Newman saw when he gathered them together under a common title. Natural and Revealed Religion - here is a contrast that will be retained until it exercises a crucial function in the *Grammar of Assent*. This is a version of a wider question: what is the relationship between reason and faith, between seeing and believing. Early on we are alerted to the fact that reason has a tendency to usurp territory that does not rightly belong to it. The 5th sermon on personal influence strikes a note that becomes essential to Newman's understanding of how we change our lives. In the later sermons, the contrast and complementarity of faith and reason almost dominates, and something that has been seeking clarity in the early sermons now announces itself: the contrast between implicit and explicit reason.

In the first sermon, Newman addresses the charge that revealed religion is hostile to the advance of philosophy and science and deals with it as much as a historical distortion as a theoretical problem. Newman is not interested in a falsely erenic kowtowing to science. It is a deplorable fact of recent times that philosophers and scientists have considered their work inimical to religion. This is not due to the demands of their disciplines, but is a moral flaw. What is the remedy? "The philosopher has only to confess that he is liable to be deceived by false appearances and reasonings, to be biased by prejudice, and led astray by a warm fancy; he is humble because sensible he is ignorant, cautious because he knows himself to be fallible, docile because he really desires to learn. But Christianity, in addition to this confession, requires him to acknowledge himself to be a rebel in the sight of God, and a breaker of that fair and goodly order of things which the Creator once established. The philosopher confesses himself to be imperfect; the Christian confesses himself to be sinful and corrupt."

What does Newman mean by "natural religion," a term he acknowledges some refuse to use? When religion is called natural "it is not here meant that any religious system has been actually traced out by unaided Reason" (Sermon 2). This is so because Newman recognizes no time when reason was unaided. That is, natural religion appeals to revelation, to powers exterior to the visible world. It is the sociological and historical fact of the religions of mankind that Newman means by natural religion. And he places the role of Conscience as central, and conscience implies a relation between the soul and something exterior and superior to itself. He speaks of obedience to conscience as involving faith. If natural religion is thus found among the heathen, the task becomes one of defining supernatural religion. "Such, then, is the Revealed system compared with the Natural - teaching religious truths historically, not by investigation; revealing the Divine Nature, not in works but in action; not in His moral laws, but in His spoken commands; training us to be subjects of a kingdom, not citizens of a Stoic republic; end enforcing obedience, not on Reason so much as on Faith." Furthermore, Natural Religion is a kind of prelude and preparation for Revealed

Religion. "For as Revealed Religion enforces doctrine, so Natural Religion recommends it. It is hardly necessary to observe that the whole revealed scheme rests on nature for the validity of its evidence."

When Newman speaks of the usurpations of reason, he is thinking of such assaults on moral knowledge as the utilitarian calculus and the absurd assumption that somehow learning of some abstract sort is the key to moral betterment. His essay on "The Tamworth Reading Room" of 1841 is particularly interesting in this regard. As for religion, it is the assumption that religious beliefs are to be treated on the level of scientific hypotheses and subjected to a probative procedure that exercises him. But it is the distinction between implicit and explicit reason we should dwell on.

This is the topic of the 13th sermon which dates from 1840, and is thus late, but what Newman has to say in it can be seen as the culmination of the reflections on faith and reason found in a number of the earlier sermons, for example, 7, 10 and 11. "Faith, then, as I have said, does not demand evidence so strong as is necessary for what is commonly considered a rational conviction, or belief on the ground of Reason; and why? For this reason, because it is mainly swayed by antecedent considerations. In this way it is, that the two principles are opposed to one another: Faith is influenced by previous notices, prepossessions, and (in a good sense of the word) prejudices; but Reason, by direct and definite proof" (Sermon 10, n. 26). Perhaps we feel a little *frisson* of embarrassment on reading this. We should not. What Newman is getting at is that a revelation, like a moral code, addresses us as persons, as we are, not as abstract intellects. One of the prejudices of the time against which he will struggle is the assumption that there is a single and uniform rational test - evidentiary in some sort - to which every knowledge claim, theoretical or practical, moral or religious, must submit. The fantastic nature of this claim is too often overlooked. Were one to seek to apply it to the vast bulk of our daily doings he would see what comic consequences it would have.

Like Kierkegaard, he will speak of the similarities as well as the dissimilarities of faith and reason. "And here, again, we see what is meant by saying that Faith is a supernatural principle. The laws of evidence are the same in regard to the Gospel as to profane matters. If they were the sole arbiters of Faith, of course Faith could have nothing supernatural in it. But love of the great Object of Faith, watchful attention to Him, readiness to believe Him near, easiness to believe Him interposing in human affairs, fear of the risk of slighting or missing what may really come from Him; these are feelings not natural to fallen man and they come only of supernatural grace..." (Ibid., n. 38, emphasis added).

One of Newman's most attractive impulses is to protect the faith of the simple from the charge of irrationality or superstition. The distinction he draws between implicit and explicit reasoning has application to this, and to much else besides. Newman wants us to recognize that we use our minds and reason in a direct and spontaneous way and that this is what we may reflect on and analyze in terms of methods of reasoning. But if reasoning did not take place, there would be nothing to reflect on. Like so many of

Newman's fundamental insights that has the simplicity of the self-evident, once it is stated. And we can easily guess the consequences of forgetting it. "All men reason, for reason is nothing more than to gain truth from former truth, without the intervention of sense, to which brutes are limited; but all men do not reflect upon their own reasonings, much less reflect truly and accurately, so as to do justice to their own meaning; but only in proportion to their abilities and attainments. In other words, all men have a reason, but not all men can give a reason. We may denote, then, these two exercises of mind as reasonings and arguing, or as conscious and unconscious reasoning, or as Implicit Reason and Explicit Reason" (Sermon 13, n. 9).

Let this suffice to give something of the flavor of Newman's first go at themes to which he will return in the *Grammar of Assent*. There is no substitute for reading through these sermons oneself, and reflecting on them, noting the links between them and the cumulative effect of distinctions made first tentatively and then with greater assurance and clarity. Newman is groping toward the elements of what will be his great contribution to the way in which human beings actually use their reason in moral and religious matters, and the way it differs from other uses of reason.

Before saying some things about Newman's reply to Kingsley, I want to draw your attention to Newman's *Philosophical Notebook*.

Suggested Reading

John Henry Newman, *Fifteen Sermons Preached Before the University of Oxford*. Ed. Mary Katherine Tiillman. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997.

Suggested Writing

Make an outline of sermon 2 or 5 or 10.

Lesson 9: Gentleman Philosopher

Later scholars have certain advantages over the contemporaries of a thinker in that papers and letters that remained private during the author's lifetime come into the public domain with the passage of time and later students of a man's thought can rummage about in things that cast new light on the writings published during his lifetime. In the case of Kierkegaard, we have all the volumes of his Papers at our disposal, volumes which contain his diaries, notes on reading, first sketches of proposed works. And there are besides his letters. Mention has already been made of the enormous treasury of Newman's correspondence. But there is as well another precious source for understanding his thought that has been made available to us. I refer to *The*

Philosophical Notebook edited by Edward J. Sillem and A. J. Boekraad, 2 volumes, published in 1970. This complements an earlier study on Newman's proof of God's existence based on conscience, written by Boekraad and Henry Tristram.

Attentive readers of the University Sermons will have noticed the way in which Conscience is introduced, e.g. in Sermon 2. It will loom large in Newman's thought to the end of his life, and it is in the notebook that we find an explicit effort to construct a proof for the existence of God on the basis of Conscience. This effort is late, in 1859, and 1864, but it may be taken to be a formal effort at which has been informally suggested earlier. The text of the notebook was first made public and commented on in *The Argument from Conscience to the Existence of God* by Adrian J. Boekraad (with the assistance of Henry Tristram of the Oratory), published in Louvain by Editions Nauwelaerts in 1961. The notebook itself, edited by Edward Sillem and revised by Boekraad was published in the same city and by the same publisher in 1970. Actually, the last publication is in two volumes, the second of which provides the text of the philosophical notebook. Volume one is an exhaustive study by Sillem of Newman's philosophical formation, his sources, his library, that enables us to read both the notebook and the *Grammar of Assent* more intelligently.

Newman was not a professional philosopher - the species was more or less unknown in his day. University dons were not so specialized in what they tutored students in. Philosophy was learned as an element in a wider culture and of course in Newman's case theology - or divinity - would have provided the context for all his intellectual interests.

The Proof from Conscience

There is a God because there is moral obligation. That is the nerve of the proof. How does it go? "I should begin thus. I am conscious of my own existence. That I am involves a great deal more than myself. I am a unit made up of various faculties... " One does not believe that he exists - it is more fundamental than that. One is conscious of his existence. "Consciousness indeed is not of a simple being, but of action or passion, of which pain is one form. I am conscious that I am, because I am conscious of thinking (cogito ergo sum) or feeling or remembering, or comparing, or exercising a *discourse*" (P. 104).

The parenthetical appearance of the Cartesian maxim may surprise, but Newman will go on to question the apparent discursive move signified by *ergo*. One is aware of himself as existing insofar as he is aware of sensing, remembering, thinking, and of course all of these activities have objects. Being able to do these things is what one is aware of in knowing he exists. "This view of the subject brings us a step further, as revealing an important principle. Sentio, ergo sum. To call this an act of argumentation or deduction, and (to say) that it implies faith in that reasoning process which is denoted by the symbol of the 'ergo' seems to be a fallacy" (P. 105). The consciousness of thought and being, or sensation and being, "are brought home to me by one act of consciousness, prior to any exercise of ratiocination..."

Much of this preliminary discussion is a matter of taking exception to the position of W. G. Ward. On now to the employment of conscience.

Newman distinguishes two chief ways in which we use the word. "By conscience I mean the discrimination of acts as worthy of praise or blame... Here then are two senses of the word conscience. It either stands for the act of moral judgment, or for the particular judgment formed. In the former case it is the foundation of religion, in the latter of ethics" (p. 111). Newman wants to distinguish the voice of conscience, the fact that all have a primary consciousness of right and wrong, from particular judgments of right and wrong where men differ. That is, he is not proceeding from some such claim as this (however true) that everyone recognizes that murder is wrong, but rather from something more fundamental to and presupposed by such judgments, namely the sense that some things are right and others wrong. Particular injunctions give us conscience in the moral sense. "In what I am going to say about conscience then, I put aside any question of the moral sense or moral law, as regarding particular decisions or informations, and am speaking of it only in that light in which, however we may differ in moral judgment from others, nay, from our former selves, one and all ever recognize it, I mean, as a sanction or command" (P. 113). At this point, underscoring that he is returning to a favorite theme, Newman quotes a passage from the University Sermons, sermon 2. "Conscience is the essential principle and sanction of religion in the mind. Conscience implies a relation between the soul and something exterior, and that mover, superior to itself; a relation to an excellence which it does not possess, and to a tribunal over which it has no power. And since the more closely this inward monitor is respected and followed, the clearer, the more exalted, and the more varied its dictates become, and the standard of excellence is ever outstripping, while it guides, our obedience, a moral conviction is thus at length obtained of the unapproachable nature as well as the supreme authority of that, whatever it is, which is the object of the mind's contemplation. Here then, at once, we have the elements of a religious system... Moreover, since the inward law of conscience brings with it no proof of its truth, and commands attention to it on its own authority, all obedience to it is of the nature of Faith." Because conscience *commands* - praises, blames, threatens, implies a future, witnesses the unseen "it is more than a man's own self." Newman uses "faith" here because, unlike our certainty of our own inner states, conscience is pointing to something beyond ourselves. "This is Conscience, and, from the very nature of the case, its very existence carries on our minds to a Being exterior to ourselves; for else, whence did it come?" (P.114).

Not only does Conscience make us aware of God, it also enables us to discern some of his attributes, and Newman goes on to discuss these. But we have the core of his argument before us now.

Appraisal

It is of course easy to imagine the psychiatric and sociological and anthropological dismissals of what Newman is saying here. Conscience would be called the internalization by the individual of the mores of the tribe. No doubt Newman would then

wish to discuss the tribe's tendency to impose obligations - not this one or that one, but obligation tout court.

Reductionist efforts, in short, simply put off what they regard as the evil day, that is, the human creature's sense of his creatureliness and his answerability to someone greater than himself. Passing this off on tribal mores would then appear simply a misidentification of the source or perhaps a waystation on the recognition of the source.

Of course I am simply guessing as to how Newman would respond to such criticisms of his view. As he puts it forward, he clearly sees it as something universally recognized.

Should we draw attention to the difference between the so-called cosmological proofs of God's existence - from motion, efficient causality, etc - and Newman's more subjective approach. The several allusions to Descartes may make us think that Newman regards the inner world as primary, what we first know, with then the need to infer something beyond it. Isn't this what the proof from conscience does? The fact of conscience is immediate, not inferred, but the author of conscience is reasoned to, and Newman uses "faith" to indicate this transition from the inner to the outer.

Newman's apparent employment of Descartes is accompanied by remarks that indicate his quite special interpretation of it. The activities of the faculties are defined in terms of their objects and presumably it is the seeing of a color that provides the occasion for consciousness of seeing. Newman does not suggest that there are object-less activities of such faculties as seeing and touching. But the fact is that it is no simple matter to figure out Newman's epistemological position in all its amplitude. It is difficult to enlist him in the ranks of subjective idealists but one can wish for more clarity as to his positive view.

What should be stressed is the basic and chief interest of Newman, and that is the religious. It is no surprise that he will seek the sanction of the religious in the moral phenomenon of science, the latter involving the person as such, and not as a mere observer of the world. Moreover, the discussion of conscience seems to locate it in what Newman calls Natural Religion, a presupposition of Revealed Religion, something that can be subsumed into a supernatural role.

Letter to a Duke

This may be the place to mention a famous letter that Newman wrote to the Duke of Norfolk concerning his loyalty to the pope. If asked to give a toast, Newman wrote, he would happily toast the pope, but first he would toast his conscience. This letter has sometimes wrongly been taken to mean that Newman holds a Protestant view of conscience, such that the judgment of my conscience always validates acting in accord with it. That he could scarcely think that the particular judgment of conscience is thus its own warrant, is clear from the discussions that go into the proof of God's existence from conscience. The judgment of men differ on the morality of courses of action, and one's own judgment may alter. The judgment of conscience is not infallible.

In the wild wake of Vatican II dissenting theologians often sought to invoke Cardinal Newman as their ally. The *Letter to the Duke of Norfolk*, with its strong defense of the judgment of conscience, was taken to justify the individual Catholic's rejecting teachings of the Church. Ian Ker's discussion of the letter makes clear what a distortion of it such attempted use is. For Newman, the judgment of conscience is the proximate decision as to what I ought do here and now in these contingent circumstances. Since, Newman writes, "conscience is not a judgment upon any speculative truth, any abstract doctrine, but bears on something to be done or not done" (Newman continues) "it cannot come into direct collision with the Church's or the Pope's infallibility; which is engaged on general propositions, and in the condemnation of particular and given errors" (Ker, p. 689). Newman concluded the letter to the duke with the following often quoted passage: "I add one remark. Certainly, if I am obliged to bring religion into after-dinner toasts (which indeed does not seem quite the thing) I shall drink - to the Pope if you please - still, to Conscience first, and to the Pope afterwards." To find in this carefully phrased remark the seeds of rebellion requires inventiveness indeed. It was because he followed his conscience that Newman was loyal to the Pope.

Suggested Reading

Newman, *Letter to the Duke of Norfolk*.

Suggested Writing

Outline and analyze the letter to the duke.

Lesson 10: Reply to a Critic

All historical events are contingent and might easily not have happened, but some contingencies are more intriguing than others. If Charles Kingsley had not written so intemperately, gratuitously accusing Newman, and indeed the Catholic clergy of mendacity, Newman would not have had the occasion to lay before his fellow Englishman the reasons for his conversion to Catholicism, a conversion which had saddened, vexed, puzzled many. And there were a few who thought that Newman had been dissimulating during the long years he remained an Anglican, that he had already gone over to Rome, and hid this in order to take others with him.

With the passage of time, the occasion for the writing of *Apologia pro vita sua* has faded into oblivion, losing what interest it had. No one cares what Kingsley wrote; everyone wants to read Newman's account of the history of his religious opinion. In the book that eventually was formed from the original pamphlet response, Kingsley all but drops out of the picture. It would be too much to suggest that Newman was on alert for some such

occasion as that provided by Kingsley so that he could respond to what he rightly took to be a widespread puzzlement and curiosity about what he had done. Nonetheless, he welcomed the opportunity and responded in a way that made his response utterly transcend the occasion for it.

Structure of the Work

The *Apologia* is divided into five chapters which follow the chronology of Newman's life.

1. History of my Religious Opinions up to 1833.
2. History of my Religious Opinions from 1833 to 1839.
3. History of my Religious Opinions from 1839 to 1841.
4. History of my Religious Opinions from 1841 to 1845.
5. Position of my Mind since 1845.

On the face of it, this seems a pretty pedestrian approach. The fourth chapter is by far the longest, as given the dates it covers we should expect. But it is the frankness with which Newman lays bare his mind to the reader that makes the book such compelling reading. It is almost as if he puts himself in the position of observer of his own past life, with privileged access of course, and wishes to place before us the developments and currents of his thought whether or not these put him in a particularly good light.

The great argument of the *Apologia* is that one can only understand so great a change in a person's life as a religious conversion in terms of all the factors, however seemingly unimportant, that converge upon a given point. Newman is not suggesting that he is laying before us a map of universal cogency, such that a reader might trace the same route and come to the same decision. It is the singularity of each person's case that is stressed by stressing the singularity of Newman's own. This is his story. These are the events in his life, the thoughts, the friends, the study, that led him over time to the momentous decision to enter the Church he had hitherto pilloried and leave the Church whose long champion he had been. To expect that his conversion - or anyone's - could be equated with an argument, a single realization or change of mind, is, Newman is suggesting, a fundamental mistake. Arguments matter, of course, but they are never by themselves decisive. That seems to be his view. Moreover, conversion looks to be the result of the convergence of a great many factors none of which by itself would be compelling.

The *Apologia* is therefore a disarming book. Readers took to it because they rightly had the sense that he was confiding in them the deepest secrets of his life. If Newman had been a bit of a pariah among his fellow Englishmen, the *Apologia* changed that.

Chapter 1 takes us through the Mediterranean trip to Newman's return to England and thus Chapter 2 begins with a discussion of what came to be called the Oxford

Movement. Theological liberalism - "the theological and biblical speculations of German" - were a threat to the Church. Newman sees the Oxford Movement as a natural evolution rather than the result of some committee decision. Newman saw his own contribution as providing primacy to "personal influence" rather than to abstract theological argument, and he began the Tracts for the Times in that conviction. Individual minds would be expressed and thus the tracts with different authors would not seem to appear *ex cathedra*. Newman's own position could be summed up in three propositions: First, was the principle of dogma - and liberalism is equated with the anti-dogmatic principle; Secondly, he was confident of a certain definite religious teaching based on dogma, that is, there is a visible church; Third, the episcopal system, bishops as successors of the Apostles. As for Rome, Newman regarded the Pope as the Antichrist, beginning with Gregory I c. 600. But he liked the Council of Trent and saw celibacy as of apostolic origin. Newman developed the doctrine of the Anglican church as a *Via Media* between Protestantism and Popery. And he interpreted the 39 Articles of the English Church as favorable to that view. Tract 90 was the culminating document and it consolidated Newman's enemies despite the fact that he claimed the support of the great Anglican tradition for his views.

Newman did not think that Liberalism could be countered only with negatives. A positive view of the church had to be developed in manifest contrast to Liberalism. That was his hope for the *Via Media*. In 1839, an event of crucial importance occurred. "About the middle of June I began to study and master the history of the Monophysites. I was absorbed in the doctrinal question. This was from about June 13th to August 30th. It was during this course of reading that for the first time a doubt came upon me of the tenableness of Anglicanism" (P. 113). The fifth century controversy seem to present a remarkable parallel to that of the nineteenth century. "I saw my face in the mirror, and I was a Monophysite. The Church of the *Via Media* was in the position of the oriental communion, Rome was where she now is; and the Protestants were the Eutyhchians" (114). If the Eutyhchians and Monophysites were heretics, he found it difficult to see how Anglicans were not. At this upsetting juncture, a Protestant friend cited the remark of St. Augustine on the Donatist heresy. "'Securus iudicat orbis terrarum.' He repeated these words again and again, and, when he was gone, they kept ringing in my ears. 'Securus iudicat orbis terrarum.'" This decided ecclesiastical difficulties on a simpler basis than antiquity - the judgment of the whole church, the church catholic. This pulverized the theory of the *Via Media*.

At this point, Newman's reader expects him to announce his conversion. He does not. Rather he recounts the way in which he fought against the tendencies of his thinking. He renewed and sharpened his attacks on Rome, eschewing now doctrinal points, concentrating on supposed aberrations of practice and devotion. He decided to undertake another effort to prove the Catholicity and Apostolic character of the Anglican communion. But he also contemplated resigning St. Mary's and withdrawing to Littlemore. And then in the summer of 1841, at Littlemore, he received three blows "which broke me."

In reviewing his earlier study of the Arian heresy he found something he had overlooked before and which was starker than the realization brought on by the Monophysite heresy. "I saw clearly, that in the history of Arianism, the pure Arians were Protestants, the semi-Arians were the Anglicans, and that Rome now was what it was then, 'the extreme party.'" That was the first blow. The second was the bishops, who one by one began to attack him. The third was the appointment by Canterbury and the Prussian Court of a joint bishop of Jerusalem.

"From the end of 1841, I was on my death-bed, as regards membership with the Anglican Church, though all the time I became aware of it only by degrees" (141). His conversion was four years off, in 1845 and the crucial fourth chapter of the *Apologia* records Newman's often desperate efforts to avoid the direction in which he was being led. He sought to show that the Anglican church had the note of sanctity, one of the marks of the true church. But he could not avoid the fact that his own view of the church was rejected by its bishops. "The Bishop of London has rejected a man, 1. For holding *any* Sacrifice in the Eucharist; 2. The Real Presence; 3. That there is a grace of ordination" (150). How could he fail to act? "Again, sometimes when I was asked, whether certain conclusions did not follow from a certain principle, I might not be able to tell at the moment, especially if the matter were complicated, and for this reason, if for no others, because there is a great difference between a conclusion in the abstract and a conclusion in the concrete, and because a conclusion may be modified in fact by a conclusion from some opposite principle. Or it might so happen that my head got simply confused, by the very strength of the logic which was administered to me, and thus I gave my sanction to conclusions which were really not mine; and when the report of these conclusions came round to me through others, I had to unsay them. And then again, perhaps I did not like to see men scared or scandalized by unfeeling logical inferences, which would not have troubled them to the day of their death, had they not been forced to recognize them. And then I felt altogether the force of the maxim of St. Ambrose, 'Non in dialectica complacuit Deo salvum facere populum suum.' I had a great dislike of paper logic." It was not logic that carried him on, anymore than the quicksilver in the barometer changes the weather. "Great acts take time." Gradually, his responded to the practice of devotion to the Blessed Virgin and he worked on the notion of the development of doctrine in the Church. He provides us with contemporary summaries he made of where he stood. And then, finally, this. "I came to the conclusion that there was no medium, in true philosophy, between Atheism and Catholicity, and that a perfectly consistent mind, under those circumstances in which it finds itself here below, must embrace either the one or the other. And I hold this still: I am a Catholic by virtue of my believing in a God; and if I am asked why I believe in a God, I answer that it is because I believe in myself, for I feel it impossible to believe in my own existence (and of that fact I am quite sure) without believing also in the existence of Him, who lives as a Personal, All-seeing, All-judging Being in my conscience" (182).

Suggested Reading

Newman, *Apologia pro vita sua*, edited by Ian Ker. London: Penguin Books, 1994.

Suggested Writing

List the half dozen major events on the way to Newman's conversion as he recounts it in the *Apologia*.

Lesson 11: Liberalism as the Enemy

The great enemy against which Newman fought, the chosen enemy of the Oxford Movement, was Liberalism, characterized as the anti-dogmatic principle. One could piece together from the constant references to it in the *Apologia* what Newman meant by Liberalism. But there is no need to do this. He provided an Appendix in which he explained with consummate clarity what he meant by the term, and what he did not mean.

He begins by noting that merely calling Liberalism the anti-dogmatic principle is insufficient. Moreover, Newman is concerned lest his criticism of Liberalism be understood to be directed against such fellow Catholics as Montalembert and Lacordaire. "If I hesitate to adopt their language about Liberalism, I impute the necessity of such hesitation to some differences between us in the use of words or in the circumstances of country..." Newman had attacked Liberalism while he himself was a Protestant and did not have internal Catholic emphases in mind. He does remark wryly that he was inconsistent as a Protestant to take exception to Liberalism and similarly Lacordaire is inconsistent as a Catholic to call himself a liberal.

These opening paragraphs merely clear away possible misunderstanding. Newman could have little doubt that what he meant by Liberalism is incompatible with Catholicism. And what now beyond its being anti-dogmatic does he mean by Liberalism?

He begins with reminiscences of Oxford, the reform of the university and the attitude of the men of Oriel among whom he was numbered. The Oriel Noetics considered themselves the elite of the university and had a tendency to look down on others who did not share their views. This elite formed a party that looked forward to future influence in the country and in the Church. They laid them open to ambition and what seemed to others that spiritual evil, the "pride of reason." "Nor was this imputation altogether unjust; for, as they were following out the proper idea of a University, of course they suffered more or less from the moral malady incident to such a pursuit. The very object of such great institutions lies in the cultivation of the mind and the spread of knowledge: if his object, as all human objects, has its dangers at all times, much more would these exist in the case of men, who were engaged in a work of reformation, and had the opportunity of measuring themselves, not only with those who were their equals in intellect, but with

many, who were below them. In this select circle or class of men, in various Colleges, the direct instruments and the choice fruit of real University Reform, we see the rudiments of the Liberal Party." It is as if Newman is seeking the origins of the churchmen who would later oppose the Oxford Movement and would make it impossible for Newman to continue as a member of the university. Intellectual pride, the sense of not being like the rest of men, members of an elite - it is here that Newman locates the origins of Liberalism. "Liberty of thought is in itself a good; but it gives an opening to false liberty. Now by Liberalism I mean false liberty of thought, or the exercise of thought upon matters, in which, from the constitution of the human mind, thought cannot be brought to any successful issue, and there is out of place." We need only check our own reaction to this passage to sense the continuing influence of what Newman is attacking. Something of which we are not free to question or inquire into, something beyond the capacity of the human mind! Does this not perhaps sound like obscurantism to us? But what exactly does Newman number among the things from which freedom of thought is debarred? "Among such matters are first principles or whatever kind; and of these the most sacred and momentous are especially to be reckoned the truths of Revelation. Liberalism then is the mistake of subjecting to human judgment those revealed doctrines which are in their nature beyond and independent of it, and of claiming to determine on intrinsic grounds the truth and value of propositions which rest for their reception simply on the external authority of the Divine Word." Two things, then, or rather a class of things and then the most important instance of it. First principles. That is, self-evident truths, such as the principle of contradiction. Of course Newman does not mean that the mind does not reflect on such starting points. But they are starting points which, reflection reveals, can only be accepted. They cannot be proved. The defense of them is only indirect, which comes to showing that acceptance of them is inescapable. But it is the first principles of faith, revealed truths, that are Newman's main concern and the Liberalism that stirs him to opposition is approaching revealed truth as if it were simply another proposal for reason to appraise and assess. In the time of which he is writing, the years before and after 1820, no one would have accepted the tendency Newman is discerning. "They would have protested against their being supposed to place reason before faith, or knowledge before devotion; yet I do consider that they unconsciously encouraged and successfully introduced into Oxford a license of opinion which went far beyond them."

The tendency was opposed by others, not least by Newman's friend John Keble. In these opening pages on Liberalism, Newman provides us with a portrait of Keble which is meant to be in stark contrast to that of the incipient liberals he has been describing. "Keble was a man who guided himself and formed his judgments, not by processes of reason, by inquiry or by argument, but, to use the word in a broad sense, by authority. Conscience is an authority; the Bible is an authority; such is the Church; such is Antiquity; such are the words of the wise; such are hereditary lessons; such are ethical truths; such are historical memories; such are legal saws and state maxims; such are proverbs; such are sentiments, presages, and prepossessions. It seemed to me as if he ever felt happier, when he could speak or act under some such primary or external sanction; and could use argument mainly as a means of recommending or explaining what had claims on his reception prior to proof. He even felt a tenderness, I think, in

spite of Bacon, for the Idols of the Tribe and the Den, of the Market and the Theater. What he hated instinctively was heresy, insubordination, resistance to things established, claims of independence, disloyalty, innovation, a critical censorious spirit." Once more we can test the influence on ourselves of what Newman is opposing. Call this a portrait of a conservative, if you will, but in what has preceded and in the allusion to Francis Bacon, one can see that for Newman the alternative to Keble is the deracinated man, the autonomous individual, the solitary intellect that is a blank slate and must make sense of the world ab ovo, one without a family or antecedents, without an upbringing or a culture, without a tradition in which he lives and in which the world and himself have become familiar to him. All that is to be swept away and the untrammelled to roam freely over what is left of the terrain. The alternative to Keble is the false freedom that ultimately enslaves.

Much of this lay in the future, or course, and Newman is being as prophetic as he is being descriptive. At the same time, he was characterizing those who eventually drove him from Oxford. He had been asked to reconsider that judgment, but says he cannot. "I cannot modify these statements. It is surely a matter of historical fact that I left Oxford upon the University proceedings of 1841." He remarks that not a single Liberal came to his defense.

It would be difficult to overestimate the importance of these pages of Appendix A of the Apologia which lead up to summarizing Liberalism in 18 propositions. They function as *Quanta cura to Lamentabili*, so to say.

1. No religious tenet is important, unless reason shows it to be so.
2. No one can believe what he does not understand.
3. No theological doctrine is any thing more than an opinion which happens to be held by bodies of men.
4. It is dishonest in a man to make an act of faith in what he has not had brought home to him by actual proof.
5. It is immoral in a man to believe more than he can spontaneously receive as being congenial to his moral and mental nature.
6. No revealed doctrines or precepts may reasonably stand in the way of scientific conclusions.
7. Christianity is necessarily modified by the growth of civilization, and the exigencies of times.
8. There is a system of religion more simply true than Christianity as it has ever been received.

9. There is a right of Private Judgment; that is, there is no existing authority on earth competent to interfere with the liberty of individuals in reasoning and judging for themselves about the Bible and its contents, as they severally please.
10. There are rights of conscience such, that every one may lawfully advance a claim to profess and teach what is false and wrong in matters, religious, social, and moral, provided that to his private conscience it seems absolutely true and right.

These ten (of the eighteen) propositions may be said to sum up what Newman opposed as theological Liberalism. After each of these he might have appended that let him who espouse this anathema sit, in the manner of ecumenical councils prior to Vatican II. Far from fading from the scene, many of these remained the clichés of the rationalist opponent of religious belief. And of course there were believers who sought to accommodate the charge, to grant it, in effect, and thereby void religious belief of its substance.

We cited in a previous lesson Newman's remark in the *Apologia* that in true logic the choice was between Atheism and Catholicism. The context of the remark enables us to see what he had in mind. But he returned to it in December 1880 in a note appended to the *Grammar of Assent*. His further explanation, read with the condemnation of Liberalism fresh in our minds, is instructive.

Of course some readers were astonished to be told that the only possible alternative to Catholicism is Atheism. Newman at first seems to be about to withdraw the remark. What he does is propose the parallel of Bishop Butler "that there is no consistent standing or logical medium between the acceptance of the Gospel and the denial of a Moral Governor." What Butler means is that, if the arguments brought against Natural Religion are fatal to it, they are equally fatal to Christianity.

What Newman wishes to say is that Theism puts one on a path that leads to Catholicism and that denial of Catholicism puts one on a path that leads to Atheism. "...there is a certain ethical character, one and the same, a system of first principles, sentiments and tastes, a mode of viewing the question and of arguing, which is formally and normally, naturally and divines, the *organum investigandi* given us for gaining religious truth, and which would lead the mind by an infallible succession from the rejection of atheism to theism, and from theism to Christianity, and from Christianity to Evangelical Religion, and from these to Catholicity. And again when a Catholic is seriously wanting in this system of thought, we cannot be surprised if he leaves the Catholic Church, and then in due time gives up religion altogether."

That is what he meant when he said that he is a Catholic for the reason he is not an atheist.

Suggested Reading

Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent. Note II*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979.

Lesson 12: The Subjective Accent

Even this brief and brisk account of the thought of Kierkegaard and Newman should suffice to explain why it is so easy to think of them together. Their chronological proximity - the nineteenth century - has something to do with that. One need not subscribe to the view that there is some zeitgeist that captures the minds of people at a given time despite themselves, perhaps even without their being aware of it, to marvel at the similarities between Newman and Kierkegaard. I repeat my suggestion that it was their realization of the incompatibility with Christianity of certain dominant views that explains their kinship.

Kierkegaard saw it as the rise of mass man, of the media, of a loss of moral seriousness, above all the loss of that individuality deriving from the destiny of each person's immortal soul. Kierkegaard saw cultural trends as distracting from and obscuring the one thing needful. Newman had a word for his foe, Liberalism, nor, as we have seen, did he leave vague what he meant by it. As we read through the list of propositions that sum up Liberalism we must be struck by the way in which most of these have become received opinion, beyond criticism.

This suggests that Kierkegaard and Newman failed in their criticisms and warning. But is that true? It would be strange indeed to look for a mass movement against mass movements. Both men are calling us to order one by one. Newman was amused by those who thought there were political techniques for the betterment of men, that a certain use of the mind would result in, well, a change of heart. "The Tamworth Reading Room" could be read as a commentary on the inflated hopes that often accompany the public library system. Libraries began with the notion that there were uplifting books from which readers could only profit; they have ended as champions of the notion that there are no objective standards. Hence the defense of the availability of website porn in libraries. Who are we to impose our views on, etc, etc.?

But the problem is deeper than that. Of course we are affected by what we read and see, for good or ill, but this is disposing and remote, a slow furnishing of the mind that may influence future action. But one does not become good by reading the 100 Great Books.

A small point, An obvious point. Once a familiar one as well, but it gets lost sight of too easily. Kierkegaard's emphasis on the subjective thinker, on subjective truth, and Newman's emphasis on the personal come to the same thing.

The Subjective Turn

In my eight Gifford lectures, "Truth and Subjectivity," I spoke of the affinity of Kierkegaard and Newman due to their emphasis on the existing subject. Moral change is the great analogue of the religious and reflection on it makes clear that, while thought is essential to it, such thought is not that which is exhibited in writing Ethics books, or reading them. We can change our minds, recognize our true good, and yet be far from bringing our lives into line with it. It is not that the abstract arguments for the true good are wrong; they are simply insufficient. They are the beginning of a road that must pass through the heart of the agent. Only by bringing our heart - our desires, our will - into line with the good recognized as true can we act here and now in a way that serves the true good.

Thomas Aquinas contrasted truth in the usual sense, speculative truth - the mental judgment's conformity with the way things are - and practical truth, saying that the latter consists of the mental judgment's conformity with rectified appetite. Rectified appetite is a synonym for virtue. Singular acts are true, in conformity with the end or good, on condition that we have been confirmed in our love of that good by the virtues.

I suggested earlier that the definition of subjective truth Joahannes Climacus provides in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* bears a close resemblance to the Aristotelian and Thomistic account of practical truth. In the case of Newman, we find that similarity chiefly in his discussion of what he calls the Illative Sense.

It may seem irresponsible to pluck from its context, a very dense context, Newman's discussion of the Illative sense in the *Grammar of Assent*. It is the penultimate chapter of the book and presumably an understanding of it depends on everything that has gone before. True as that is, and much as I will insist that what I say here should by no means substitute for a careful and sequential reading of the *Grammar*, Newman himself has provided the means whereby we can locate what he says about the Illative Sense in a wider and more familiar context and one which permits easy comparison with Kierkegaard as well.

Newman wants to show us how the apparently chancey particular decisions we make without the apparatus of formal argumentation are justifiable. But there is more. Not only does he wish to defend practical reason from the hegemony of theoretical reason - as if all reasoning were like the theoretical. The ideal of reason can only be achieved where there is universality and necessity in the object of consideration. But the practical order is the order of contingency and probability. Thus, to assume that practical reasoning must mimic as best it can the procedures of Euclidean geometry will lead to a dehumanizing distortion of it.

I said there was more. Not only does Newman wish to establish the bona fides of practical reasoning, he seems to want to turn the tables on the hegemonist by arguing that the Illative Sense pervades the theoretical as well as the practical. And what is the Illative Sense? It is what Aristotle called prudence. Aristotle restricted prudence to the contingent order; Newman wishes to extend it to the theoretical order as well. "Though

Aristotle, in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, speaks of *phronesis* as the virtue of the *doxasticon* generally, and as being concerned generally with contingent matter (vi.4), or what I have called the concrete, and of its function being, as regards that matter *aletheuein to kataphanai e apophanai* (*ibid.* 3), he does not treat it in that work in its general relation to truth and the affirmation of truth, but only as it bears on *ta prakta*. " Newman regards this Aristotelian restriction of prudence to the practical order as unnecessary, and goes on to argue that in every realm of human inquiry the Illative Sense, that is, prudence, should be in play.

Criticism

There is little doubt that both Kierkegaard and Newman, without intending to do so when they begin, end by disparaging the theoretical. Actually, Kierkegaard seems more careful in this regard than Newman, restricting "subjective thinking" and "subjective truth" to the moral and religious. Newman, on the other hand, wishes to make the peculiarities of practical thinking in moral matters regulative for thinking in general.

Applied to the religious, we can see how this runs contrary to the realization Newman first had at the age of 15 and which he retained throughout his life -- that Christianity was governed by the dogmatic principle, that it consists in a definite doctrine. That does not of course render unnecessary the complementary assertion that the task of the individual is to assimilate the Christian message, that this is a task each has and there is no substitute for it in scholarship or other such activities. But it would be remiss not to point to the unsettling way in which Newman and Kierkegaard magnify the subjective.

Response

This objection could be expanded. But perhaps even the abbreviated version of it just given will suffice to point to the apparent flaw. Can this criticism be deflected or mitigated? I think so. (I refer you again to my Gifford Lectures.)

The theoretical use of our intellect differs from the practical use of our intellect in the end sought -- truth as opposed to the direction of an activity other than thinking -- its object, and its method. It may be said that the more theoretical thinking is the more impersonal it is. When we are engaged in a problem in plane geometry we seem to drop out of the picture entirely. It is not our truth we seek, but simply truth. It is when the agent becomes thematic in the thinking -- what is his good, how should he pursue it, what is permitted to him, what not, etc -- that we might say that thought becomes subjective. Of course, there will be degrees of this. The discussions of moral philosophy -- I think of the *Nicomachean Ethics* -- will be quite different from my here and now judgment of what I must do.

But the example of geometry can serve to make what I take to be the underlying point shared by Newman and Kierkegaard. Pursuit of geometric truth is something a human agent engages in. The criteria for success in that pursuit are independent of the agent. For all that, it is a human being who has decided to devote this time to this pursuit and

that decision is subject to an appraisal different from the narrower geometrical appraisal.

In short, the moral encompasses all we do, and the theoretical use of our mind cannot escape this fact. Here we see the continuing importance of the Kierkegaardian and Newmanian emphasis. Often scientific research - think of cloning - is spoken of as if it had an imperative unrelated to the common good of human beings. More considerations of the wisdom or lack of it involved in carrying off a certain task in medical technology are regarded as irrelevant, obscurantist, an obstacle to scientific progress. But the appraisal of cloning is not confined to the criteria of medical technology. This is something human beings engage in and they must answer for what they are doing in terms of the common vocation of human agents.

Perhaps this can indicate sufficiently the continuing relevance of the two men to whom we have devoted these few introductory hours. We live in a time that fragments the human agent, seeking to grant autonomy to certain pursuits - such as technological 'progress' - as if those engaged in research were just minds, who didn't get up in the morning and go to bed at night, who are children of parents and perhaps parents of children, who are related in innumerable ways and degrees of intimacy to others of their kind. To seek to sweep all that away in the supposed interests of progress is to enter the path of destruction.

There are many reasons to read Kierkegaard and Newman, and it is hoped that these lectures and lessons will have whetted your appetite to go on. Already a century intervenes between us and the century of these two great men. But much of what they had to say, speaking as they were to the peculiarities of their own times, continues to have value for us. Particularly insofar as tendencies they discerned have grown into entrenched attitudes in our time.

Doubtless the common attraction of these two men resides in the fact that they did not succumb to the temptations and faults of religious controversy but kept firmly before their own mind, and their reader's, what the point of the religious is. Both men, it seems clear, were in pursuit of sanctity.

Suggested Reading

Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*. Chapter 9. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979.

Ralph McInerny. *Characters in Search of the Author: The Gifford Lectures*, Glasgow, 1999-2000. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001.

Suggested Writing

A term paper on Kierkegaard and Newman as subjective thinkers.