TRUST REDUNDANT: ST JOHN HENRY NEWMAN AND WILLIAM JAMES ON THE EVICTION OF THE PERSON FROM PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract If there are no persons, then trust between persons is redundant. Within modern philosophy and much contemporary philosophy the place of the person and the personal is often problematic. The prestige of mathematical and empirical investigation has elevated a disciplinary standard whose objectivity seems to require that the study of the person fall under its impersonal canons. St John Henry Newman and William James in different ways protested against this. Though James, Newman's younger contemporary, suspected an 'intellectualism' in Newman's approach to things of religious faith, there is some resonance between them, especially as regards relocating the person as central in philosophical, especially religious philosophical, investigation. This paper argues that both thinkers gave particular attention to the present experience of consciousness to draw conclusions at odds with epistemological and psychological ideas prevalent in their day and that Newman before James had already argued convincingly for reversing the eviction of the person from philosophy.

Keywords Person, Trust, Newman, James, Locke, Epistemology, Empiricism

Résumé S'il n'y a pas de personnes, la confiance entre les personnes est superflue. Dans la philosophie moderne et dans une grande partie de la philosophie contemporaine, la place de la personne et du personnel est souvent problématique. Le prestige de l'investigation mathématique et empirique a élevé une norme disciplinaire dont l'objectivité semble exiger que l'étude de la personne soit soumise à ses canons impersonnels. St John Henry Newman et William James ont protesté de différentes manières contre cette tendance. Bien que James, le plus jeune contemporain de Newman, ait soupçonné un « intellectualisme » dans l'approche de Newman des choses de la foi religieuse, il y a une certaine résonance entre eux, en particulier en ce qui concerne le fait de replacer la personne au centre de la recherche philosophique, en particulier de la recherche philosophique religieuse. Cet article soutient que les deux penseurs ont accordé une attention particulière à l'expérience présente de la conscience pour tirer des conclusions en désaccord avec les idées épistémologiques et psychologiques qui prévalaient à leur époque et que Newman, avant James, avait déjà défendu de manière convaincante l'idée d'inverser l'éviction de la personne de la philosophie.

Mots clés Personne, cofinance, Newman, James, Locke, épistémologie, empirisme

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Introduction

Two thinkers, St John Henry Newman and William James, though deeply divided by outlook nonetheless found common ground over the place of the person and the personal in the philosophy. By their different lights, they came to the view that the person, understood as a true agent among the causes and effects generally considered in nature, had been wrongly evicted from philosophy, and philosophy was much the poorer for it. Both Newman and James in their separate ways questioned the availability of the person as an empirical object of study. James had it that we know the meaning of 'personal consciousness' so long as we do not have the job of defining it, which latter is the 'most difficult of philosophic tasks'[1] (James, 1890, p. 225). Newman, in his famous doctrine of the illative sense and in other places, defended the person as the starting point rather than the end point of enquiry. He wrote that our being with all its faculties 'is a fact not admitting of question, all things being of necessity referred to it, not it to other things'[2] (Newman, 1903, p. 446-7).

In the mid to late nineteenth century, theirs was a minority view, set against an ascendant, reductive materialism that was making daily conquest of the cultural imagination by its apparent ministry to temporal needs and desires, by the new light it shed on old questions, by mysteries cleared up and fresh theoretical paths opened. The question would naturally occur: if a reductive empiricism had yielded so much success in the study of non-human nature, why would not it be equally availing in the study of human nature?

Neither Newman nor James was anti-science – quite the contrary. Newman greatly admired Francis Bacon as a pioneering empiricist, rejoicing that his approach had led to a way 'whereby bodily discomforts and temporal wants are to be most effectually removed from the greatest number'[3] (Newman, 1907, p. 190). He was also critically open to the 'Darwin theory' when many about him were not. 'Mr Darwin's theory,' Newman opined to a correspondent 'need . . . not be atheistical, be it true or not; it may simply be suggesting a larger idea of Divine Prescience and Skill'[4] (Dessain & Gornall eds., 1973, p. 77). As for James, his cosmopolitan education and early studies in medicine and physiology meant that his mature turn to the philosophy of psychology was not prompted by a disdain for empirical science. He appreciated its method and felt humanity's debt to science to be 'literally boundless'[5] (James, 1897, p. 325).

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[1] William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, vol. 1 (New York: Henry Holt & Co, 1890), 225.

[2] J H Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, (London: Longmans, 1903), 446–7. Hereafter *GA*.

[3] J H Newman, *The Idea of a University*, (London: Longmans, 1907), 190. Hereafter *Idea*.

[4] S Dessain & T Gornall SJ eds., *Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman*, Vol. XXIV (Oxford: Clarendon, 1973), 77. Hereafter *LD* XXIV.

[5] William James, *The Will to Believe* (New York: Longmans, 1897), 325.

On the other hand, they both resisted the presumption that natural science is the final arbiter of what is true. Their attitude to the empirical sciences was one of appreciation rather than adoration. They mixed genuine praise with pointed caveat. For Newman, the laws of physics were not laws at all, rather formulae under which phenomena were conveniently represented[6] (Newman, 1903, p. 57). The Baconian empirical method was wonderful in its domain, but not fitted for what he called the mental and moral sciences[7] (Newman, 1903, p. 384) – that is, the sciences of the person. For James, science was characterized essentially by method rather than by 'fixed belief'. And yet, he noted that a 'fixed belief' habitually attended the practice of the sciences of his day, namely 'that the hidden order of nature is mechanical exclusively, and that non-mechanical categories are irrational ways of conceiving and explaining even such things as human life'[8] (James, 1897, p. 323-4).

What had led to a state of affairs by which the material success of a method, the empirical method, had required the sacrifice of the person? Why, as Newman and James in their different ways had asked, could not we acknowledge, celebrate, and enjoy scientific progress without falling on our knees to materialism and kindred theses? From their distinct premises, Newman's addresses in 1850s Dublin and James's lectures decades later at Harvard both contained a call for largeness of mind and a protest against the hardening of the intellectual arteries in those who presumed the march of the empirical way must be over territory once claimed by another metaphysic.

All this, as they had warned, made for the abolition of the person. The person argued away, what of God? And what of prayer, that gracious communication and infallible sign for James of a 'living religion'[9] (James, 1917, p. 464)? Hearts alive to God, thought Newman, could trace in their days a providential strand even upon 'a mutilated and defective evidence'[10] (Newman, 1909, p. 200). Break the thread of *I and Thou* and the fallout would be immense. Written mid-century, Matthew Arnold's elegiac lines in 'Dover Beach'[11] (Arnold, 1878, p. 164-5) coupled the 'melancholy, long, withdrawing roar' of the sea of faith with a new and frightening loneliness in a disenchanted universe, where lay about us 'drear and naked shingles of the world', a place where prayer was not heard and has never been valid.

But for every Arnold, caught in an epochal twilight, there was another in thrall to a future rational, powerful, and mechanical, and someone else with an eye for profit and the commodification of the poor, and still another to provide a philosophy for all these new things. Writing later in the same decade, the Scottish essayist Thomas Carlyle, when surveying the

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[6] Cf. *GA*, 57.

[7] Cf. *GA*, 384.

[8] William James, *The Will to Believe*, 323–4.

[9] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Longmans, 1917), 464.

[10] J H Newman, *Fifteen Sermons preached before the University of Oxford*, (London: Longmans, 1909), 200. Hereafter *US*.

[11] Matthew Arnold, *Selected Poems of Matthew Arnold* (London: Macmillan, 1878), 164–5.

sciences of his day, noted the decay in Europe of the 'Metaphysical and Moral Sciences' before the rise of the Physical Sciences 'cultivated exclusively on mechanical principles'[12] (Carlyle, 1899, p. 66). Those shingles 'drear and naked' for Arnold gleamed with hard promise for others. Shone by the spent sea of faith, their time had come. And so against Arnold's lyric of loss and uncertainty there was another that sang the morning of the material, capturing imaginations by an air of inevitable progress and the brute beauty of its metaphors. Thence could arise an intellectual vision unclouded by conflict industrial, mechanistic, and cataclysmic of a century to come.

Not all were captured or converted. We do not know quite what it was in James's alchemy that set him against the intellectual mainstream. He was from a wealthy and high-achieving New England family. His father broke from Presbyterian roots to refashion himself as a Swedenborgian. Perhaps influenced by that sect's preoccupation with visions, mysticism and revelations, his eldest son wanted to be open to spiritual phenomena uncensored by scientific prejudice and to study them dispassionately and sympathetically according to an avowed pragmatism. His would be a genuinely scientific, rather than reductive, approach. Whilst being purely methodological, it would be open to all there might be of the spiritual and mystical phenomena barred at the gate by the 'fixed belief' of a more reductive science. With Newman, though, we have a clearer idea of his motivations. From the early days of his intellectual career, he had set his face against treating the things of the person and the things of faith as though entirely available to the principles and methods of the experimental sciences. As a young Oxford don preaching at the University church, he warned of 'the usurpation of Reason in morals and religion'[13] (Newman, 1909, p. 67-8). By this he meant a baleful tendency operating under the name of 'Reason' which would presume to treat religion and morals solely by secular lights.

Newman noted this tendency all about him in 1830s England, a zeal to apply impersonal solutions on problems whose cause and cure lodged in the person – '[h]ence political economy is to supersede morality… hence we are promised laws which shall *prevent* bribery and corruption'[14] (Ker & Gornall eds., 1979, p. 90). Prominent thinkers and politicians such as Robert Peel and Lord Brougham saw in science and literature a cure for the immorality of the lower classes. A steady immersion in these would be the 'parent of virtue' and the 'nurse of religion'[15]. Newman was alarmed by 'the fashion of the day to consider the human mind as a machine and to think that education will do any thing for it'[16] (Ker & Gornall eds., 1979, p. 91). Two decades on, in the midst of a mid-19th century information age, he worried that the proliferation of printed information

[12] Thomas Carlyle, *The Works of Thomas Carlyle*, Vol. 6 (London: Chapman & Hall, 1899), 66.

[13] *US*, 67–8.

[14] I Ker & T Gornall SJ eds., *Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman*, Vol. III (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979), 90. Hereafter *LD* III.

[15] G Tracy ed., *Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman*, Vol. VIII (Oxford: Clarendon, 1999), 534. Hereafter *LD* VIII.

[16] *LD* III, 91.

would impart a 'process feel' to education in which '[t]here is to be nothing individual'[17] (Newman, 1907, p. 142). He conveyed his concern in lines like '[w]hat the steam engine does with matter, the printing press is to do with mind'[18] (Newman, 1907, p. 143). What is there of a personal 'taking hold' of one's convictions when they are presented simply as the automatic impress of impersonal evidence on a mind passive before it?

The great mistake was to believe that one could be somewhere entirely detached from human contexts to judge of things not only deeply human but also that required a human eye to weigh them. Standing apart from logic, mathematics and natural science were subjects whose truths were more recondite – such as history, ethics, metaphysics, and theology. These must rely in good measure on 'moral proof'[19] (Newman, 1909, p. 112). Their truths and lessons must be discerned, for they do not rest on the surface. This calls on the whole person – their intellect, experience, learning, judgment – and in which 'antecedent probability may have a real weight and cogency which it cannot have in experimental science'[20] (Newman, 1909, p. 112). To gain depth in religious or moral understanding, one had to use principles connatural with them, not least, that persons are fundamental actors – causes *sui generis*. Hence a preparation of the heart and a proper moral disposition were of inestimable importance if one were to receive religious and moral truth aright. Starting points awry, there could never be a sound weighing in these matters. Colouring things in apocalyptic tones, the young Newman had seen in this something in preparation for centuries, a vaunting rationalism which would occupy the 'seat in the temple of God, as His representative,'[21] (Newman, 1909, 68) if it could.

It would be easy to style Newman's as a romantic reaction to a scientific industrialism imposing on soft shires the hard lines and corners of a built environment – as though what was delicately and indefinably human had once found safe lodging in the infinite halftones of remembered meadows now lost under mills. But neither Newman nor James was at odds with the hard truths of a dawning age. Their protest was not against the thump of pistons or clatter of coal. Newman lived in a time of railways and steamboats, of wondrous new constructions of bridges, roads, and tunnels. He calmly ventured the safety of his journeys on the enduring properties of iron, steel, and steam. As for James, his life saw in and out the entire second industrial revolution in the USA, when rail track connected the cities and spanned the continent, when massive mechanization, startling economic growth and an urbanized, increasingly imported workforce gave shape to the America we know today.

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[17] *Idea*, 142.

[18] *Idea*, 143.

[19] Cf. J H Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, (London: Longmans, 1909), 112. Hereafter *Dev*.

[20] *Dev*, 112.

[21] *US*, 68.

The Quarrel

Their quarrel was with a philosophy. Newman attacked it on an epistemology front, James more on a philosophy of psychology front. Their target was a philosophical tendency traceable in some measure to a thinker they both had time for, John Locke. Newman praised him in words comical in our hearing but presumably fair praise in a Victorian's, in one work calling him 'grave and manly'[22] (Newman, 1907, p. 319) and in another attributing to him a 'manly simplicity of mind'[23] (Newman, 1903, p. 162). James, for his part, numbered Locke in an honoured tradition to which he claimed his own pragmatism was heir, that is, of English and Scottish empiricism[24] (James, 1899, 443-4).

On the other hand, James castigated Locke, Hume, and others for bequeathing to philosophy and psychology a view of mental operation necessarily founded on elemental entities, simple ideas, impressions, qualities or the like. 'No one', said James 'ever had a simple sensation by itself'[25] (James, 1890, p. 224). It is a fundamental and crass mistake, thought James, to identify consciousness with neat abstractions about it. And here we may reflect on the mystery of how a fertile and generous mind such as James's could be led to denounce Newman under a charge of 'intellectualism'[26] (James, 1917, p. 434-5) – for James's thesis was more generally and more penetratingly taken up by Newman before him.

Like James, Newman attended to the fundamental distinction between the living mind and those abstractions about it which must necessarily be after-the-fact. Reasoning is a 'living, spontaneous energy within us'[27] (Newman, 1909, p. 257) for which there is neither art[28] nor formula nor rule by which it can be brought under sufficient concept. The reason for this is simple and profound. Reasoning must go before the very enquiry which would purport to capture it under concept. To nail the essence of reasoning demands a substantive answer to 'what is the reasoning by which I now try to answer questions like this'? It would require 'a thought from nowhere', a radical detachment so that one can be a real–time spectator of one's own mental life. As James observed:

> *'[w]hether anywhere in the room there be a mere thought, which is nobody's thought, we have no means of ascertaining … [t]he only states of consciousness that we naturally deal with are found in personal consciousnesses, minds, selves, concrete particular I's and you's.'*[29] (James, 1890, p. 226)

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[22] *Idea*, 319.

[23] *GA*, 162.

[24] Cf. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 443–4.

[25] William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, Vol. 1, 224.

[26] Cf. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 434–5.

[27] *US*, 257.

[28] When Newman says that living reasoning is not an 'art', he means 'art' in the sense of a skill based on formulaic principles and procedures that could be set down on paper.

[29] William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, Vol. 1, 226.

Anticipating this was Newman in his oft-quoted remark 'egotism is true modesty'[30] (Newman, 1903, 384-5). For he was speaking of enquiries into the mental and moral self. Since there are no abstracted selves, I can only start from the self I am. It seems as if the elementary psychic fact were not thought or this thought or that thought, but *my* thinking, every thought being, as it were, owned.

One tenet of Locke's came in for particular criticism from Newman. Locke's 'ethic of belief' – as it was later called – denied that we should call 'knowledge' anything not intuitive, demonstrative, or immediately present to sense (in descending order of knowledge). All else was consigned to probability or, worse, to 'enthusiasm'. That Locke packaged this in his *Essay*[31] (Locke, 1997) with much that seemed sane, perspicuous, and generous-minded accounted for its enduring influence, despite initial objections from such as Berkeley and Leibniz. In Newman's day and beyond, Locke still stood for good sense and sound thinking[32]. At first blush, does not it stand to reason that we should not call *knowledge* what lacks proper credentials? To claim something as knowledge without full comprehension and full proof of the object was, especially in religion, a mark of that intellectual folly Locke called 'enthusiasm'[33] (Locke, 1997, IV.xix).

Newman objected: in naming our knowing thus restrictively, Locke was shutting off far too much of what we may reasonably hold as knowledge. I know I have parents though I have no memory of my birth; I know Britain is an island though I have never circumnavigated it; I know I shall die someday though I do not know the future; I know Cairo is a great city in Egypt though I have never been there. Locke's thesis might sound reasonable in the laboratory of the mind but would not work for a day out in the field of life.

Of course, the demand for a ground to one's knowledge, one's 'true belief with an *account*', goes back to Plato (for example, his *Theaetetus*). And perhaps as in many of Plato's great enquiries, the question has as much potential to gather as to scatter. What is the 'account' that justifies? Is the 'account' necessarily a watertight verbal formula, such as Locke would lay down? Or is it, as Newman would hold, of concrete knowledge, like a 'cumulation of probabilities . . . too fine to avail

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[30] *GA*, 384–5.

[31] Cf. John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding,* (London: Penguin, 1997).

[32] Walter Mayers, Newman's boyhood tutor, had commended a book to Newman for its being comparable to the "days of Locke for sound conclusive reasoning" (*LD* I, 34). Many decades on, Andrew Fairbairn, a Scottish theologian and Principal of Mansfield College, Oxford, attacked Newman for his *Grammar of Assent*, citing among other things "his criticism of Locke" as one of the traits of a sceptical work (cf. A M Fairbairn, "Catholicism and Religious Thought", *The Contemporary Review*, May 1885, http://www.newmanreader.org/works/error/fairbairn1.html).

[33] Cf. John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding,* Book IV, Chapter xix.

separately, too subtle and circuitous to be convertible into syllogisms'[34] (Newman, 1903, p. 288)? In other words, an appeal to an experience of coming to know in the concrete backed by what Newman called elsewhere the 'common voice'[35] (Newman, 1903, p. 344).

Newman's very fine philosophical antenna discerned in Lockean epistemology the seeds of depersonalization and scientistic atheism. For it seems implicit in Locke's thinking not just a claim to know, but a claim to know what *knowing* essentially is. I might know this cup is on the table or that book is on the shelf. How by this or a derivative way could I come to know what knowing is? How can I directly *know* as a conceptual object that knowing by which I know anything at all? And although the philosophical difficulties of such a claim were hinted at by thinkers again as far back as Plato (whose *Charmides* dwelt a little on questions like this), it escaped many a mind in Newman's time, whose intellectual imaginations were more taken by its air of soundness and objectivity. But once you hold that human knowing can be essentially known, you welcome into the room a thought that can be nobody's thought. As something no human mind can originate, it must be fallen in with as a *given* before we even begin our thinking.

This 'given' wore the air of something the upshot of sophisticated enquiry – a conclusion rather than the presumption it more truly was. This breezy certainty taken to the study of the mind was replicated in the study of nature. Hence the 'fixed belief'[36] (James, 1897, p. 324), as James observed, of a fundamental mechanical nature to reality, often presumed by scientists but not warranted by science. For Newman, it was manifest, for example, in the presumption of 'necessary uniformity in the action of the laws of nature'[37] (Newman, 1903, p. 70). By his ethic of belief, Locke was touting epistemological hygiene before the messy experiential feel of coming to know anything. Inevitably, this would work to upgrade the claims of science and downgrade the personal claim to know in common workaday matters, the suppression of what Robert Pasnau called a 'social epistemology'[38] (Pasnau, 2010, p. 27-31), wherein what people ordinarily said they *know* about this or that still counted as knowledge 'proper'. The upshot was the privileging of a knowledge paradigm which claimed universality and necessity along with a justification deficit for all that we thought we knew which nonetheless could not meet such a high standard. It was

[34] *GA*, 288.

[35] *GA*, 344.

[36] W James, *The Will to Believe*, 324.

[37] *GA*, 70 and cf. *GA*, 70–1. Take Newman's example of the small variances in the earth's orbit. What explains these? We could assume a relation between "falling bodies on earth" and attractions between "cosmical bodies". Falling bodies on earth and tiny orbital perturbations (with appropriate sensory augmentation) can be experienced. Assuming uniformity of nature gives a desirable notional connection for what is an "absence of experience".

[38] See R Pasnau, 'Medieval Social Epistemology: Scientia for Mere Mortals', *Episteme*, Vol. 7, Issue 01 (February 2010): 27–31.

an exchange in which an embedded epistemic vantage was in order of precedence put second to a theoretic vantage.

A Faustian Exchange

It was a Faustian exchange. What did it promise? In modern philosophy, there was perhaps the sense of great gain, a rush of exhilaration in the escape velocity from the raddled, save-the-appearances, unfit-for-purpose, authority-bound Aristotelian religious world. The writings of Hobbes and Locke are thick with an emancipatory elation[39]. A new moral source was to be found in cultivating a hermeneutic of suspicion to received opinion, a certain 'manliness' in testing for oneself the worth of a prior thesis. This continued to power the conviction of leading thinkers for generations after, so much that W K Clifford's 19th Century paean to the Lockean way – that it is 'always and everywhere wrong to believe something on insufficient evidence'[40] (Feinberg & Shafer-Landau eds., 2017, p. 155) – is still bright with its originary glow.

What did it demand? In short, the eviction-by-deconstruction of the person from philosophy. The powerful new intellectual imagination of the early moderns released the theoretic eye to range over all things, reordering them to univocity. It required a scientific imagination to become scientistic – hardened before all it surveyed, stretching, and chopping to its Procrustean paradigm. Unreceptive and incurious outside its sphere and above all hostile to *mystery*. Mystery confronted the post-Lockean intellectual as unbecoming for a rational mind, demanding a recasting to something congenial to its methodology.

The confidence of the early moderns like Locke, who flew rather than fell out of Aristotelian orbit, fired intellectual imaginations long after. It gave an imaginal shape to that emancipation-by-reason as a resolving of myriad complexities to a few fundamentals. Hume, for example, was inspired by Newton's elegant distillation of cosmic paths to simple laws[41]. Grand unifying theories like Newton's projected along with themselves a vision of this conquest of mystery by reason. The apparent power of mathematical and scientific theory to bring a hitherto complex universe to satisfying order would eventually tempt the search for grand unifying concepts which could bring the 'messily human' aspects of life into order. Like Alexander hungering for new conquests, where

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[39] See Charles Taylor, "Challenging Issues About The Secular Age" in *Modern Theology*, 26:3 (July 2010): 404–416. He writes on the social imaginary of the "immanent frame" that he thinks the child of Latin Christendom.

[40] W K Clifford, "The Ethics of Belief", in Joel Feinberg and Russ Shafer-Landau, eds., *Reason and Responsibility: Readings in Some Basic Problems of Philosophy*, 16th edition (Boston: Cengage, 2017), 155.

[41] Hume wrote his *Treatise* and his later *Enquiry into Human Understanding* charged by the idea of introducing the experimental method into the study of human nature and to attain a "science of human nature" (D Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963), 5). His desire, inspired by Newton's methodology, was that "the only solid foundation . . . to this science of human nature] . . . be laid on experience and observation" (D Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1896), xx, http://oll-resources.s3.amazonaws.com/titles/342/0213_Bk.pdf).

could that new intellectual imagination go now powered by the conviction that the 'fundamental conceptions of truth have already been found by science'[42] (James, 1897, p. 53)? Well, to the mystery of the person. To the *self* as that most desirable conquest for the pride of the scientist.

In Newman's day, Jeremy Bentham's *Principles of Morals and Legislation*, in asserting a hedonic foundation to morality, is typical of this endeavour. For him, moral science entirely resolved to the natural motors of pain and pleasure. 'Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain, and pleasure. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do'[43] (Bentham, 1889, p. 1). For such a mind, it presumably made no sense to dwell on occult matters of 'person', 'volition' and 'conscience', since these seem to disappear under the rationalist gaze like mist before sunlight. The distinction so vigorously defended by Newman – between the empirical sciences and the mental and moral sciences – was simply dissolved in the search for answers whose power was alleged on their simplicity and range.

What a 'gain' to explain human phenomena without need of that hypothesis, the person! In *Idea*, Newman remarked on the creeping assault on the person as a fit object for higher study. This tendency would be remorselessly towards the abolition of the person. How would this be effected? By marginalizing personal agency and volition, by passing over them in silence and ultimately dissolving them into physical causation. Proceed from an *a priori* view of things philosophically and one may 'ignore so influential a being as man'[44] (Newman, 1907, p. 53). And so, what was at first respectfully quarantined is then discarded as a proper agent in the material world: 'a professor is found, more hardy than his brethren… who takes on him… to pronounce the influence of mind in the visible world a superstition'[45] (Newman, 1907, 56).

This free-ranging eye could thereby gain a certain elation in the conviction of clearing up the 'mystery of the person'. But this would come at the price of rendering persons as atoms in a depersonalized scape, their personal canons discarded, their former certitudes downgraded to probabilities. In his philosophical musings, Newman complained: 'Hitherto a man was allowed to believe till it was logically brought home to him that he ought not to believe: but now it seems

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[42] As James described the hubristic intellectual atmosphere in the Harvard of his day. See William James, *The Will to Believe*, 53: "In this very University [Harvard], accordingly, I have heard more than one teacher say that all the fundamental conceptions of truth have already been found by science, and that the future has only the details of the picture to fill in. But the slightest reflection on the real conditions will suffice to show how barbaric such notions are."

[43] J Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1889), 1, https://books.google.co.uk/books/about/An_Introduction_to_the_Principles_of_Mor.html?id=NhksAAAAIAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=kp_read_button&redir_esc=y.

[44] *Idea,* 53.

[45] *Idea*, 56.

tacitly to be considered that a man has no liberty to believe, till it has been brought home to him in a rational form that … he has a right to do so...'[46] (Newman, 1976, p. 84).

Like a great glacier crushing the contours of an older landscape, this new intellectual imagination seemed to press down on older forms of understanding, revered salients frozen, cracked and crushed beneath. Terms equivalent to reason, certainty, knowledge, cause, and so on were indeed rescued from the intellectual rubble of scholasticism. But, having lost their place in an abandoned medieval synthesis, they became susceptible to fresh connotations commodious to one's convictions or in disparagement of another's. Despite the efforts of early moderns such as Hobbes and Locke to 'fix' the meaning of certain words, the capacity of key terms to become loaded rhetorically could work new and enduring mischief. Newman, in his last major intellectual clash[47], found himself labelled a sceptic upon an understanding of 'reason' so broad against his own pointed use as to make any attempt at rebuttal like fencing with the fog.

And since this was a Faustian exchange, it prepared for the emancipation and desolation of the ages that followed. We become strangely vulnerable in the new power of our knowing. Because of this, the character of Newman's and James's intellectual age mixed unbounded confidence with profound anxiety. Like Jack London's character who ignored warnings and hiked through freezing Yukon forest to his slow death, the new intellect is slowly shivered to pieces in epistemic territory out of which it has frozen itself. It has been betrayed by its own scientistic overconfidence. 'No!' said James, 'our science is a drop, our ignorance a sea'[48] (James, 1897, p. 54).

It seems, then, that there was a hardness to which Newman and James objected. Not of material, iron, steel, stone, rather the hardness of a *word*, a proposition that would purport to be final, whose truth necessarily went behind and before, that has never needed someone to utter it, and that must inevitably frame our reasoning[49]. By this word, progressive minds would already know the nature of any object of enquiry – geological, astronomical, physiological, personal, or what have you – that might come before them insofar as the object, whatever it might be, must be presumed to have a nature amenable to its scrutiny. There was to be nothing in the universe but was analysis–friendly, methodologically docile, grooved for exhaustive decomposition – merely awaiting the emancipated knower and their analytical instruments. There was nothing in the universe invincibly analogue before their methodologies. Whether considering non-human or

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[46] J D Holmes ed., *The Theological Papers of John Henry Newman on Faith and Certainty*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976), 84. Hereafter *TP* i.

[47] With A M Fairbairn (1838-1912), a Scottish theologian and first principal of Mansfield College, Oxford.

[48] W James, *The Will to Believe*, 54.

[49] James offers an example of such a proposition: 'the hidden order of nature is mechanical exclusively, and … non-mechanical categories are irrational ways of conceiving and explaining even such things as human life' (W James, *The Will to Believe*, 324).

human phenomena, all reality was pre-digitized down to kinds of fundamental entities congenial to analysis. There was implicit subscription to what Ray Monk called 'the view that every intelligible question has either a scientific solution or no solution at all'[50] (Monk, 1999). Purporting as a necessary proposition reached by self–discarding logical steps, it worked on the imagination rather than reason. In the end, the proposition inveigled as rational and convinced as oracle.

Both Newman and James in their different ways questioned that *a priori* desire for crisp, reductive analysis in its tendency to put a Procrustean demand on the matter under study so that it should always be frameable for that detached enquiry, even when it did violence to the subject matter, such as, for example, the subject of the human person. To vary the metaphor: we could ask why should every aspect of reality be 'easy peel' for logical or empirical analysis? Might it not say something about the enquirer rather than the object of enquiry that it is presumed to be so? That someone finds the measurable always meaningful is no warrant for the assumption that the meaningful is always measurable. It could amount to the triumph of clarity over truth. The assumption once granted, there can arise the breezy, dispassionate objectivity of the expert in human sciences, evincing detachment from, essential knowledge of and predictive power over what hitherto had seemed all too messily human. Like the rest of nature, the mysteries of the person must yield to the final, absolute, and univocal gaze of the empirical sciences.

The Importance of Personal Knowing

Both Newman and James might with some justice be called radical empiricists in their preparedness to treat empirical things empirically and without prejudice to let experience speak to them in all its particularity, and thus determine the methods by which it might be investigated. As Newman argued, vastly the greater part of life – human affairs, politics, aesthetics[51], ethics, religion – is not congenial to the analysis of the scientist, mathematician, or logician. James echoes Newman when he maintained that such taken-for-granted ways of personal knowing are 'outside of well-drilled scientific circles, the dominant forms of thought'[52] (James, 1897, p. 324).

Personal knowing, reasoning as the living stream of thought (James) or as a living spontaneous energy (Newman), was not epistemologically sterile simply by being analytically averse. One of Newman's signal epistemological doctrines is summed up in the remark: 'all men have a reason, but not all men can give a reason'[53] (Newman, 1909, p. 259). That is, the accuracy of human

[50] R Monk, "Wittgenstein's forgotten lesson", in *Prospect*, July 1999, (online) available at https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/regulars/55561/wittgensteins-forgotten-lesson (accessed 01/04/2024).

[51] Wittgenstein pondered: "What is valuable in a Beethoven sonata?" He said he would reject any explanation "not because the explanation was false but because it was an *explanation*." (cited in R Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*, (London: Vintage Books, 1991), 305).

[52] William James, *The Will to Believe*, 324.

[53] *US,* 259.

judgment is often attended by an incommunicability. In acts of genius as much as in acts of common sense, a person may 'see the truth, but they do not know how they see it'[54] (Newman, 1909, p. 380). He offered further examples: a 'peasant who is weather-wise' and yet is 'unable to assign intelligible reasons why he thinks it will be fine to-morrow'[55] (Newman, 1909, p. 332); a new judge should 'lay down the law boldly, but never give his reasons, for his decision was likely to be right, but his reasons sure to be unsatisfactory'[56] (Newman, 1903, p. 303); and an expert climber who sees a way to ascend but cannot convey it.

The 'energy', then, of our living reason may be spontaneous but it is not spurious. The personal reasoning that leads to judgment 'is too keen and manifold, its sources are too remote and hidden . . . to admit of the trammels of any language'[57] (Newman, 1903, p. 284). 'Scientific philosophers' might disparage 'personal knowing' in theory, but they have to run with it in practice. Banished through the front door, it must be readmitted through the back. In a long and friendly critical interchange with his friend William Froude (something of a devout Lockean), Newman wrote: 'I certainly do think that scientific philosophers must, if they are fair, confess too, that there are truths of which they are certain, tho' they are not logically proved'[58] (Dessain & Gornall eds., 1976, p. 115).

Given all this, we can see why Newman fixed on *assent* – personal 'ownership' by an act of will – as key in his epistemological rearguard against Locke.

> *'They [his previous efforts against Locke] were like attempts to get into a labyrinth, or to find the weak point in the defences of a fortified place. I could not get on, and found myself turned back, utterly baffled . . . At last, when I was up at Glion over the Lake of Geneva, it struck me: 'You are wrong in beginning with certitude—certitude is only a kind of assent—you should begin with contrasting assent and inference.' On that hint I spoke, finding it a key to my own ideas.'*[59] (Ward, 1912, p. 278)

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[54] *US,* 380.

[55] *US,* 332.

[56] *GA,* 303.

[57] *GA*, 284. Other thinkers have pondered on this ineffable fine–tuning. Ludwig Wittgenstein offered an example about reading the expression of another, say, distinguishing a real look of affection from a pretended one. The distinction relies on imponderable evidence of "subtleties of glance, of gesture, of tone" (L Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, tr. G E M Anscombe, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1953), §360) that quite escape description.

[58] C S Dessain & T Gornall SJ eds., *Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman*, Vol. XXIX, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976), 115. Hereafter *LD* XXIX.

[59] J H Newman, journal memorandum, October 30, 1870, cited in Wilfred Ward, *The Life of John Henry Cardinal Newman*, vol. 2 (London: Longmans, 1912), 278.

Whether in matters of faith or in ordinary contingent matter[60], many of his deepest concerns turned on this. By it he resisted that tendency in Victorian intellectualism to sideline a person's coming to judgment in favour of an automatic epistemological impress of 'evidence' on a mind passive before it. One reason for his suspicion of Paleyan physical theology was an alleged denaturing of religious faith by leaving no active space for 'I' in 'I believe'. 'Evidence', in this view, should work on the mind irrespective of that mind's moral preparation. I am, as it were, passively inducted into belief simply by the 'evidence'. Coming to faith would then be a procedural upshot of ratiocination – 'that we make up our minds by Reason without Faith, and then we proceed to adore and to obey by Faith apart from Reason'[61] (Newman, 1909, p. 182). He developed this critique effectively to argue whether in regard to education, religion or epistemology, the closing of the space that would shut out the 'I' of 'I learn' or the 'I' of 'I believe' also bars the 'I' of 'I know'.

Moved by the same concern, Newman rejected the move by some philosophers to go from antecedent probability to philosophical necessity. It made redundant the witness of constant personal experience. I might expect the sun to rise tomorrow, but it is a far different thing to assume this or any physical law as a law of necessity. I am certain I shall die, says Newman, but not because of some necessary 'law of death'[62] (Newman, 1903, p. 299). If we find things generally to be so, we do not glimpse them as 'necessary laws'. Our aspect on them is and remains an aspect of their generality rather than of their necessity. 'Generality' is something we can ascribe to past things without presumption of the future. Writing to William Froude, Newman echoes his remarks in the Grammar: '[t]here are philosophers who teach an invariable uniformity in the laws of nature; I do not see on what ground of experience or reason that they can take up this position'[63] (Dessain & Gornall eds., 1976, p. 113).

Yet Newman and James in their different ways were confronting the power of an intellectual imagination that projected a cosmic order too beautiful to be broken. Small wonder that things like miracles became problematic – '[i]magination' Newman noted, 'is the basis of Hume's argument against miracles'[64] (Holmes ed., 1976, p. 47). As James commented: "Science' in many minds is genuinely taking the place of a religion. Where this is so, the scientist treats the 'Laws of Nature' as objective facts to be revered'[65] (James, 1917, p. 57). To think that to be properly scientific one ought to go on a metaphysical 'fixed order' of 'necessary laws' betrayed minds captive

[60] Cf. the priest in Newman's novel *Loss and Gain* who answers Charles Reding's question about what is to make a person believe: "What is to make him believe! the *will*, his *will*." (J H Newman, *Loss and Gain*, (London: Burns, 1848), 342. Hereafter *LG*).

[61] *US*, 182.

[62] *GA,* 299.

[63] *LD* XXIX, 113 and cf. *GA,* 70.

[64] *TP* i, 47.

[65] W James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 57.

to an analytic paradigm of reason which exchanged that experiential holistic apprehension (*nous*) which gives first principles to procedural reason (*episteme*) for the presumption that all subject matters were 'analysis-friendly'.

Newman showed his intellectual formation in a world before academic specialisms could cut intellectual paths so deeply grooved as to confine a career effectively within it. He never lost the intellectual holism of the old school. He was prepared to discern fundamental principles in different aspects of human activity and experience – in literature, morality, history, religion, for example – whose warrant was in their responding to life rather than to analytic paradigm. He contested the 'triumph' of *episteme* over *nous, of* concluding rightly over drawing right conclusions[66]. He questioned the privileging of procedural reason over that of the acquisition of true first principles. It is the person who must weigh.

In Contemporary Thought

For all the challenge of different philosophical movements since, this intellectual imagination is still very much with us. The 'ideal optimism'[67] (Newman, 1903, p. 350) which Newman associated with the School of Locke lives and breathes in Locke's latter-day disciples. We live in times when optimism and belief in inevitable progress, the very signature of a rationalist metaphysic, too often attend a western intellectual approach to questions of the person, culture, religion and much else. Central in this worldview is the image of the scientist as a neutral applier of powerful methodologies. Alongside this a philosophical atmosphere imbuing a mind with the conviction that there is nothing beyond the compass of logical or empirical methods. Whether Polanyi was right to allege 'greater intellectual satisfaction'[68] (Polanyi, 2002, p. 3-4) as the driving motive of Copernicus in mooting his heliocentric thesis, the image of the scientist by definition a dispassionate, detached enquirer before all subject matters, standing apart from and over the object of study, should arouse suspicion. This especially applies when the object of study is the *self*. The completely analysable self is the completely dismissible self.

For Newman as for his mentor in philosophy, Aristotle, it is the mark of an untrained mind[69] to assume the clarity and control we feel logic or experimental science gives to us should thereby determine them to be pre–eminent in all fields of enquiry. 'In old times,' Newman commented 'the mason's rule which was in use at Lesbos was, according to Aristotle, not of wood or iron, but of lead, so as to allow of its adjustment to the uneven surface of the stones brought together for the

[66] Cf. *LD*, VIII, 556.

[67] *GA*, 350.

[68] M. Polanyi, *Personal knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2002), 3-4.

[69] Cf. Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics* (London: Penguin Classics, 2004), I.vii.

work'[70] (Newman, 1903, p. 355). Logic has its place. In a mind disengaged from the concrete, logic has ethereal sway. 'While we talk logic', Newman says, 'we are unanswerable'[71] (Newman, 1903, p. 268). Yet the clarity logic affords is at the price of being distanced from the concrete. And granting that the empirical sciences are built on the facts that sense brings before us, it would be irrational to 'trust to anything but sense in a matter of sense'[72] (Newman, 1909, p. 111).

In the study of the self – the 'mental and moral sciences' – formal inference (strict logic) and experimental science little avail. As mentioned above, we must fall back on the personal weight and cogency antecedent probability might offer in the construction of our 'moral proof'[73]. Newman's genius lies in his most precise treatment of the necessary imprecision attending our attempted analysis of the mind. His signal doctrines on the mind flowed from a capacity for interrogating things as they present in the messiness of 'real-time'. Among these doctrines: the true modesty of egotism[74] in the study of self, the relegation of logic to suggesting promising and unpromising enquiry routes, the radical incapacity of verbal argument to reach truth in concrete matter (only the truth-like), the supremacy of a person's mind – that organon 'delicate, versatile, and elastic'[75] (Newman, 1903, p. 271) – in establishing genuine proof, and the centrality, improvability, and incommunicability of the illative sense.

And though they drew different conclusions, Newman and James were alike in their attending to the *present feel* of one's thinking and experiencing. When we do this, we must abandon Locke and his 'ideas'. For why should it be that just because I perceive, say, a cyclist riding over a bridge, my idea of 'a–cyclist–riding–over–a–bridge' should be so similarly congenial to spatial analysis?

> *As each object may come and go, be forgotten and then thought of again, it is held that the thought of it has a precisely similar independence, self-identity, and mobility. The thought of the object's recurrent identity is regarded as the identity of its recurrent thought… The continuous flow of the mental stream is sacrificed, and in its place an atomism, a brickbat plan of construction, is preached, for the existence of which no good introspective grounds can be brought forward, and out of which presently grow all sorts of paradoxes and contradictions… These words are meant to impeach the entire English psychology derived from Locke and Hume...*[76] (James, 1890, p. 196)

[70] *GA*, 355.

[71] *GA,* 268.

[72] *Dev*, 111.

[73] Cf. *Dev*, 112.

[74] *GA,* 384–5.

[75] *GA*, 271.

[76] W James, *The Principles of Psychology*, Vol. I, (New York: Holt and Company, 1890), 196.

The vividness of *this* particular concrete experience is for Newman peculiarly intense[77]. By this he draws our attention to the fact that any particular – even in non-human nature – has something of *depth*. He reminds us that empirical sciences are *views*, a set of powerful shorthands, for our making sense of the world and for profiting thereby. As abstractions or views, their power is bought at the price of alienation from concrete experience. Thus the wobble of the earth's orbit is 'smoothed over' by laws of nature. Thus the personal doings of humans are brought under apparent order by statistics. In both cases we have the temptation of the abstract ('necessary laws' or statistical averages) ruling the concrete (observable natural phenomena or the singular behaviour of a person). Newman warns us to resist this temptation. 'Let units come first, and (so–called) universals second; let universals minister to units, not units be sacrificed to universals'[78] (Newman, 1903, p. 279).

In reflections like these Newman is protesting against the assumption that the generic and statistical approaches to human doings must be canonical – able to offer necessary prescriptions instead of probabilities. He effects a Copernican revolution in empiricist epistemology and natural science, reinstating the primacy and priority of concrete experience. We couldn't know anything general unless we could know something particular[79]. As the tendency to think laws of nature are of necessity so the tendency to think that human statistics have mastery when really they are subordinate to particulars and persons living individual lives. As Newman observed, no statistical average of deaths in London under horse-drawn cab will augur this or that one's death today[80]. After all, statistical averages are possible only because there are no average persons. So called laws of nature are possible because every part of the created order is particularly what it is. The abstract is ever downstream of the concrete and parasitic upon it. When we admit we do use 'person explanations' in ordinary life but feel that serious science requires something altogether more nailed–down, are we *always* showing commendable rigour or *sometimes* that we are captive to a Lockean paradigm of knowledge? We should resist being bounced to choose between scientific order or subjective fancy. We must not sideline *appropriate* clarity. If the subject matter will not bear the geometer's rule, what of the carpenter's?

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[77] "Aristotle", according to the Newman scholar Johannes Artz: "does not see the same brilliance in the 'singular' that Newman sees in the 'concrete', the genuinely real as contrasted to the flat and pallid abstract universal"– J Artz, "Newman's Contribution to Theory of Knowledge", *Philosophy Today*, Vol. 4, Issue 1 (April 1960), 18.

[78] *GA*, 279.

[79] For Newman, it seems the first something we dimly know is not a something, but a *someone* – for a child recognizes on instinct "in the smiles or the frowns of a countenance which meets his eyes, not only a being external to himself, but one whose looks elicit in him confidence or fear" (*GA*, 62). The first thing we ever recognize is a face. Could it be that every recognition thenceforward, be it ever so impersonal, is dimly derivative of that first facial recognition?

[80] Cf. *GA*, 279: "A man who is run over in the street and killed, in one sense suffers according to rule or law . . . but what is not clear is how all these various conditions met together in the particular case . . . That this particular man out of the three million congregated in the metropolis, was to have the experience of this catastrophe, and to be the select victim to appease that law of averages, no statistical tables could foretell."

Concluding Remarks

When philosophy suppressed the person, it deprived itself of an explanatory recourse which completely escapes notice owing to its ubiquity. We do not just know things: we know persons. In non-human nature, we range over particulars as instances from which we form abstractions which give us, we feel, breadth. In the person, we encounter an instance, a particular with obvious *depth*. To set them in contrast: when we observe ice cream is beloved of children, cold on the palate, and likely to react with the lactose intolerant, we are saying something about ice cream, wherever it shows up. When we observe Jenny does not return things she borrows, John likes collecting clocks, and Jemima is forever apologizing for what she did not do, we are saying something about each person, rather than distributing their traits across humankind. When Jenny does not return that nice pen she borrowed – 'well, you *know* Jenny'. For this reason, Newman quarrelled with the tendency to compose figures in history from stereotypes – 'without the trouble of direct inquiry, to draw the individual after the peculiarities of his type'[81] (Newman, 1903, p. 32). To know a person, we must have experience of encounter. 'All men have their price,'[82] (Newman, 1903, p. 279) a cynic might hold – that is until they deal with Fabricius.

This personal way of knowing other persons by which we implicitly locate tendencies and features in an undistributed way as characteristically picking out a person rather than in a distributed way as defining a species would be quite astonishing if it were not so commonplace. Used to a standard scientific way of explaining effects by appeal to essential features of a substrate which will 'do what it does' wherever it distributed, we meet another way which locates and terminates a host of explanations at the point of the individual, the person. It forces on us the thought that in the very thing sidelined by respectable scientists and philosophers – that is, the person and the particular – lies the possibility of measures thought more authoritative – natural laws and statistics. Let it be said once again that it is only from individuals following out the possibilities of the personal and particular that the generic and statistical can arise.

And it is our interactions with persons in all their individuality that remind us of this. The person is the icon of the particular and the prophet of cosmic surprise. Persons catch us unawares, change their minds, change course, make us think again, surprise us, break our templates. They force us back from stereotype to go case by case. They instance the contingency of our revered recipes for how things are. They teach humility not just before persons but before nature itself, forcing our

[81] *GA*, 32.

[82] *GA*, 279. Newman used the example of the famously upright Roman commander, Gaius Fabricius Luscinus in illustration. "All men have their price; Fabricius is a man; he has his price;" but he had not his price". Newman went on to remark: "[u]ntil we have actual experience of Fabricius, we can only say, that, since he is a man, perhaps he will take a bribe, and perhaps he will not".

power to speak of things to wait on the power of things to speak to us. Persons are not simply imprisoned by empirical facts that go before and behind. There are cases, wrote James, 'where a fact cannot come at all unless a preliminary faith exists in its coming'[83] (James, 1897, p. 25).

It reminds us that for all the dazzle of grand, unifying theories, concrete particulars are the grist of epistemology as of other sciences. Yes, we all expect the sun to rise tomorrow, water to feel wet, rocks to resist the impress of our fingers, for this is how we generally find things to be. But we go wrong philosophically when we go from general expectation of how things go to an attribution of inherent necessity. So insistently did Newman regard the particular and the concrete as the grounding of all philosophy that he went far beyond its application to persons, extending it to all experience. The scientist might discern in the cosmos repetition and rhythm, but their formulae represent general and contingent states of affairs rather than necessary laws. The dance of nature is not a line dance.

Though regarding the 'laws of nature', the move from *general* to *necessary* seemed to Newman a philosophical sleight of thought, it does not change the facts that come before us. Whether we think the laws of the cosmos general or necessary, the world goes on. Rather it changes *us* in our stance to all that there is, offering power at the price of disenchantment. We can read nature 'as a machine and as a work; if we come to it with the assumption that it is a creation, we shall study it with awe; if assuming it to be a system, with mere curiosity'[84] (Tracy, 1999, p. 559). It sponsors the conceit that we can place ourselves 'somewhere' outside of all that there is to rule definitively on it. At a stroke, the constant attendance to the concrete and attestation of experience are redundant. They have been as a ladder kicked away on the rise to the realm of necessity. If we now know what knowing *essentially* is and nature's laws as *of necessity*, we do not need to check anymore. If particulars of experience are redundant then so are the *experiencers* – persons. And if the person is redundant then so is trust in persons.

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[83] W James, *The Will to Believe*, 25.

[84] *LD* VIII, 559.

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