



John Henry Newman's Concept of Intellectual and Moral Phronesis

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Manifestations of Aristotelian *Phronesis*

John Henry Newman, fellow at Oriel College, Oxford, founding Rector of the Catholic University of Dublin, and founder of the Oratory School in Birmingham, draws on Aristotle's concept of *phronesis* throughout his extensive body of work. For example, when *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, his complex work of religious epistemology, translates *phronesis* into an epistemological register it emerges as the 'Illative Sense.' In his 'Dublin Discourses', published as the first half of *The Idea of a University*, *phronesis* becomes intellectual 'judgment'. According to Mary Katherine Tillman's illuminating suggestion, when Newman thinks it into the ecclesial realm, it becomes 'the sense of the faithful,' when into church history, it is the 'principle of tradition', and when into the ethical realm, it resembles the 'moral sense', 'conscience', or 'wisdom'.¹ Though no one of these manifestations is entirely fungible with Aristotle's *phronesis*, they are similar enough to suggest that Newman returned to the idea of *phronesis* whenever he needed to explain how an individual or community discerns a right action, belief, or practice in contingent, or 'concrete', circumstances.

That Newman employs a range of terms to describe a single phenomena or explores a single concept in a range of discourses should not surprise us. In *The Idea of a University* he explains that because no single English word sufficiently expresses the ideal of intellectual perfection, he must employ a cluster of conceptually similar terms: 'wisdom', a 'philosophical habit of mind', 'intellectual culture', an 'imperial intellect', 'a wise and comprehensive view of things', and so forth.² In turn, other concepts describe constituent parts of the intellectual ideal: intellectual *phronesis*, the "'cultivated Illative Sense', 'right judgment in ratiocination', 'inference', and 'assent'. This panoply of terms illustrates his argument in *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* that 'there is no one aspect deep enough to exhaust the contents of a *real idea*, no one term or proposition that will serve to define it. ... When an idea is very complex, it is allowable, for the sake of convenience, to consider its distinct aspects as if separate ideas'.³ He illustrates this with 'real ideas' like 'animal', 'Platonism', 'Protestantism', and 'the rights of man', but could have included ideas like 'conscience', 'the good life', 'pudence', or 'wisdom'. Just as no one term exhausts a complex idea, so no one intellectual domain can contain it. *Phronesis* is another of these *real ideas* that resists single and simple definitions.

Rather than examine every manifestation of this 'real idea' in Newman's corpus, I will focus on his far-reaching and complex accounts of the virtuous forms and formation of intellectual and

¹ Tillman, *John Henry Newman: Man of Letters* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2015), 212, 333. On the conscience, see Newman *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, edited by I. T. Ker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 107–9; Newman *The Philosophical Notebook of John Henry Newman*, Volume II, edited by Edward Sillem (Louvain, Belgium: Nauwelaerts Publishing House, 1969), 49, 59, 62, 63; Newman, *The Idea of a University*, edited by I. T. Ker (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1976), 413. See also Gerard J. Hughes, "Conscience," in *The Cambridge Companion to John Henry Newman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 189–220; S. A. Grave, "A Moral Sense," in *Conscience in Newman's Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 30–59.

² *Idea*, 114, 124; Newman, *Fifteen Sermons Preached Before the University of Oxford* (US) (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 190, 192.

³ Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, 6th ed. Forward by Ian Ker (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 35–36.

moral reasoning. Within their respective domains, their activity is similar enough that to understand one will help us understand and appreciate the other in multiple ways, including

- The relation between moral and intellectual *phronesis*.
- The complexity and particularity of each person's moral and practical reasoning.
- The necessity of habit and practice for both intellectual and moral *phronesis*.
- The significance of close experience with intellectual and moral exemplars.

The paper concludes by examining how Newman expected Aristotelian intellectual and moral *phronesis* to be cultivated through small communities like the Oxford College and personal relationships like that between Oxford tutor and student. This will be illustrated with the current Oxford course, 'Christian Moral Reasoning'.

Before exploring our main topic, allow me to allay the fears of those readers worried that I may be importing Aristotelian concepts into the ideas of a man better known for his theological, educational, and ecclesial work than his philosophical virtue ethics. It is true that Newman has no single work devoted to practical reason or wisdom. It is also true that many commentators overlook Newman's deep indebtedness to Aristotle. However, despite being a pagan Greek, no figure wields more influence on Newman's intellectual, educational, and moral ideas than Aristotle. Newman initially studied Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, *Rhetoric*, and *Poetics* as an undergraduate at Trinity College, Oxford. He produced a detailed analysis of the *Rhetoric*, inscribed copious notes in his copy of the *Ethics*, wrote an article in 1829 on the *Poetics*, and collaborated with Dr. Richard Whately's defense of Aristotle in the *Encyclopaedia Metropolitana*.⁴ Regarding logic, Newman writes, "The boldest, simplest, and most comprehensive theory which has been invented for the analysis of the reasoning process, is the well-known science for which we are indebted to Aristotle."⁵ In *Rise and Progress of Universities* (RP), he confesses that he thinks Aristotle "the most comprehensive intellect of Antiquity ... the one who had conceived the sublime idea of mapping the whole field of knowledge, and subjecting all things to one profound analysis."⁶ Likewise, Discourse V of *The Idea of a University* includes the following encomium to Aristotle:

While the world lasts, will Aristotle's doctrine on these matters last, for he is the oracle of nature and of truth. While we are men, we cannot help, to a great extent, being Aristotelians, for the great Master does but analyze the thoughts, feelings, views, and opinions of human kind. He has told us the meaning of our own words and ideas, before we were born. In many subject-matters, to think correctly, is to think like Aristotle; and we are his disciples whether we will or not, though we may not know it.⁷

⁴ Edward Sillem, *The Philosophical Notebook of John Henry Newman*, Volume I. (Louvain, Belgium: Nauwelaerts Publishing House, 1969), 151–56. Sillem, 151: "To his studies of these works we can trace the origin of Newman's life-long reflections on our experimental knowledge of individual particular things. In later years these reflections developed into the distinctive Newmanian doctrine of the illative sense." See also Newman, 'Poetry, with reference to Aristotle's *Poetics*', in Newman, *Essays Critical and Historical*, vol. 1 (London: Longman, Greens, and Co., 1907), 1–29; *The Theological Papers of John Henry Newman on Biblical Inspiration and Infallibility*, edited by J. Derek Holmes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 334–37.

⁵ 'Implicit and Explicit Reason', in *US*, 177.

⁶ 'The Strength and Weakness of Universities. Abelard', in Newman, *Rise and Progress of Universities and Benedictine Essays* (RP), edited by Mary Katherine Tillman (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2001), 195.

⁷ *Idea*, Discourse V, 102. See also Discourse III, 59; 'Christianity and Scientific Investigation', in *Idea*, 379.

Finally, after reflecting on intellectual assent to revealed religion in the *Grammar of Assent*, Newman writes, ‘As to the intellectual position from which I have contemplated the subject, Aristotle has been my master’.⁸ All this supports Edward Sillem’s conclusion that we should ‘associate Newman’s name immediately and forever with that of Aristotle’, and suggests that we should not be surprised to find Newman’s huge body of work saturated with Aristotelian ideas.⁹ The extent to which Newman was influenced by Aristotle rather than Aquinas, as one might expect of a theologian, may be illustrated by the fact that Newman thinks much more naturally in Greek terms—*sophia*, *nous*, *episteme*, and *phronesis*—than their Latin near equivalents—*sapientia*, *intellectus*, *ratio*, and *prudentia*—and does not draw on Aquinas’ similar and sympathetic work.

Intellectual *Phronesis*: Natural Inference and the Illative Sense

Because this paper is ultimately about moral prudence, with which readers might be more familiar, we will first investigate intellectual prudence in order to see what light it can shed on its moral counterpart. To fully understand Newman’s concepts relating to intellectual excellence would require a coordinated reading of his *University Sermons*, *The Idea of a University*, and *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*—a worthwhile enterprise far beyond the scope of this essay. Therefore, we will examine those intellectual concepts most immediately similar to his moral concept of *phronesis*. These are ‘informal’ and ‘natural inference,’ ‘real assent’, and the Illative Sense. All four of these ideas bear conceptual similarity with moral *phronesis*. But whereas the *telos* of moral prudence is a good action, the *telos* of these intellectual acts is commitment or assent to right belief or probable truth. As we work our way through these epistemological concepts, readers should be anticipating their possible moral analogues.

Newman describes ‘inference’ as ‘the conditional acceptance’ of some proposition ‘Y’ on the basis of some prior knowledge ‘X’. This ‘conditional acceptance’ falls short of ‘assent’ or ‘certainty’, but holds its intellectual commitment loosely. Inference also comes in three forms. The first is ‘formal inference’, illustrated by syllogisms, symbolic logic, and mathematics. While Newman acknowledges its simplicity and clarity, and its usefulness for clarifying our thoughts for another person, he does not think most people most of the time rely on formal inference, in the same way that most people do not consciously rely on a strict set of moral rules for their behaviour. Instead, he thinks people often arrive at a conditional acceptance of some Y not as the result of formal syllogisms, but as the result of ‘informal inference’, that is, through various independent, but individually inconclusive, strands of probabilities. Whereas Newman describes ‘formal inference’ as an ‘iron rod’, he compares ‘informal inference’ to ‘a number of separate threads, each feeble’, yet together as strong as the iron rod. To insist that only syllogistic ‘formal inference’ could yield intellectually credible inferences would ‘in certain given cases, be irrational and unreasonable’, because it would rule out all the probable judgments people are required to make in order to

⁸ *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (GA), edited by I. T. Ker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 277.

⁹ See Sillem, *The Philosophical Notebook I*, 160–1; Joshua P. Hochschild, ‘The Re-Imagined Aristotelianism of John Henry Newman’, *Modern Age* (Fall, 2003), 334–5; Mary Katherine Tillman, ‘Newman and Aristotle on the Aim of Liberal Education’, in Mary Katherine Tillman, *John Henry Newman*, 261–282; Andrew Meszaros, ‘The Influence of Aristotelian Rhetoric on J.H. Newman’s Epistemology’, *Journal for the History of Modern Theology / Zeitschrift für Neuere Theologiegeschichte*, 2014, Vol. 20 (2), 192-225.

navigate their day.¹⁰ A more serious example of informal inference might be the way a given person comes to conditionally accept some religious or moral belief. There may not be one singly conclusive and irrefutable syllogism undergirding their belief, but rather a number of mutually supporting strands. No one of these might be decisive, but their sum is sufficient for the person, and in Newman's mind, sufficient to be intellectually reasonable.

Newman also describes a third kind of inference he calls "natural inference". He thinks this the most common form of reasoning. It is spontaneous, effortless, and obscure. It moves from "wholes" to "wholes," meaning that the mind moves from a whole X to a whole Y without identifying or being aware of the individual antecedents or chain of probable reasoning that moved the mind from X to Y. This or that 'seems' right, or 'seems' the right thing to do in the circumstance, which is captured in the colloquial phrase to 'follow one's gut' in a given moment or with respect to given proposition. Comparable to a habit or an instinct that can be perfected with experience, it operates like intuitive feel or a cognitive hunch.¹¹ For Newman, natural inference also describes how an experienced scholar or genius follows subtle premonitions, makes predictions, and teases out possibilities even when she is unaware of the antecedent reasons compelling her.¹² Natural inference also describes the way a poet comes upon the right word, or a skilled athlete, veteran farmer, or perceptive psychologist immediately "read" a game, the weather, or a person.

Newman further suggests that natural inference 'is not a general instrument of knowledge', which once learned is applicable to any situation a person might encounter. Instead, it is provincial or departmental. 'It is not so much one faculty, as a collection of similar or analogous faculties under one name, there being really as many faculties as there are distinct subject-matters.'¹³ Thus a single person might have multiple faculties of natural inference, each of which are discipline or sphere-specific. For example, a historian, general, poet, theologian, or physicist may each have no 'sense' for disciplines other than their own, even if within their own discipline they are experts with highly cultivated domain-specific abilities of natural inference.¹⁴ This seems right with respect to intellectual inferences and discipline-specific skills, but is less convincing when Newman applies this to individual virtues and argues that each virtue has its own individual governing *phronesis* that operates differently within different domains, rather than all the virtues being orchestrated by a single conducting prudence.¹⁵ We will return to this below.

Whereas all three forms of inference arrive at a conditional acceptance of a conclusion or proposition, whether one should and does *assent* to that proposition belongs to the reasoning faculty, the virtuous form of which Newman calls the 'Illative Sense'. This faculty of judgment operates alongside formal, informal, and natural inference by integrating their provisional conclusions with all other relevant factors before moving a person (or not) from the conclusions of inference to assent. Its name, 'illative,' is the perfect passive form of the Latin *inferre*, 'to carry' or 'bring into'. Hence, the Illative Sense, as the reasoning-judging-assenting faculty, 'carries' a person into intellectual commitment.

His most illuminating explanation of the Illative Sense comes, unsurprisingly, through a comparison with Aristotelian *phronesis*, the intellectual virtue of practical reason and moral

¹⁰ See *GA*, 187–213. See Newman, *Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman I–XXII* (LD) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961–2008), Vol. XXI, 146.

¹¹ See *GA*, 213–221.

¹² *GA*, 219–20.

¹³ *GA*, 218.

¹⁴ *GA*, 220.

¹⁵ Newman, *GA*, 230.

deliberation that carries a person into reasonable action rather than reasonable belief.¹⁶ Whereas *phronesis* virtuously moves a person to action, so the Illative Sense virtuously moves a person to assent.¹⁷ Comparable to Aristotle's *phronomoi*, or prudent persons, the Illative Sense describes the reasoning faculty as exercised by 'gifted', 'educated', 'or otherwise well-prepared minds.'¹⁸ In Anthony Kenny's words, the Illative Sense is like "an intellectual feel for plausibility, or an intellectual nose to discriminate good evidence from bad."¹⁹ According to Aidan Nichols, it 'gathers up the fragments of experience into a single and unified judgment.'²⁰ Gerard Hughes compares it to the deliberations of a juror who plausibly concludes that a given witness is hiding something, even if the juror cannot represent her thought in a piece of syllogistic reasoning. The conclusion is not by any means groundless, but it utilizes reasonable assessment rather than syllogistic logic.²¹ This is because the Illative Sense employs 'implicit reason', which Newman compares to a rock climber reaching his way cautiously up a cliffside, relying on personal endowments, practice, instinct, probability, and habit rather than an instructional manual. In other words, through the Illative Sense we 'reach' for a conclusion rather than have one formally delivered to us.

Similar to "natural inference," the perfected reasoning faculty, or Illative Sense, is relatively discipline-specific, "so that a given individual may possess it in one department of thought, for instance, history, and not in another, for instance, philosophy."²² All people possess this ratiocinative faculty, but not everyone possesses its perfected form, and no one possesses its perfected form in every discipline or field of knowledge.

Even when the Illative Sense moves a person to 'assent', this assent can be 'notional' or 'real'. Whereas the 'notional' apprehension and assent describe relatively detached acceptance of logical concepts or abstractions, 'real' apprehension and assent describe embodied, affective, personal understanding, conviction, and commitment. This is the difference between abstractly accepting the concept that war is tragic and costly and reading a first-hand account of the Battle of the Somme, visiting Dachau Concentration Camp, or hearing soldiers describe the aftermath of PTSD.²³ The person with 'real' apprehension and assent is not detached from the realities involved, but has personal, imaginative, and affective experience of them, which Newman thinks are more

¹⁶ GA, 228 fn. 1; *Letters and Diaries* XXIX, 115; *Nicomachean Ethics* VI.4. On intellectual *phronesis*, see GA, 228–230. He compares the Illative "sense" to "common sense," "good sense," or a "sense of beauty."

¹⁷ "The sole and final judgment on the validity of an inference in concrete matter is committed to the personal action of the ratiocinative faculty, the perfection or virtue of which I have called the Illative Sense." GA, 223.

¹⁸ GA, 233.

¹⁹ Anthony Kenny, "John Henry Newman," in W.J. Mander, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of British Philosophy in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 516. See Ker, "Editor's Introduction," GA, xix.

²⁰ Aidan Nichols, 'John Henry Newman and the Illative Sense: A Re-Consideration,' in *The Scottish Journal of Theology* vol. 38, 362.

²¹ Hughes, 'Conscience', *Cambridge Companion to John Henry Newman*, 196.

²² *Idea*, 231.

²³ See Aquino, *An Integrative Habit of Mind* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2012), 18.

likely to result in commitment, character formation, and action than instances of ‘notional’ apprehension and assent.²⁴

Though some people may be born with significant abilities in a given discipline, Newman insists that virtuous intellectual reasoning comparable to moral *phronesis* can be developed through practice and close association with learned practitioners. For example, rather than merely access the flood of information newly made available in the mid-19th century through cheaply published books, Newman argues that nuanced intellectual formation and disciplinary acumen require the presence of a living teacher. In a passage equally applicable to a deluge of printed information as to digital, Newman argues that students who wish to become ‘exact and fully furnished’ in any complex and diversified branch of knowledge must ‘consult the living man’. No book ‘can convey the special spirit and delicate peculiarities of its subject with that rapidity and certainty which attend on the sympathy of mind with mind’ in formal and informal conversations. Furthermore, no book can answer the ‘number of minute questions’ that the reader is bound to have on a complex subject. Though ‘the general principles’ of a field might be learned at home, ‘the life which makes it live in us, you must catch ... from those in whom it lives already’.²⁵ What can be ‘caught’ is not only the passion but more importantly the subtle judgment of the senior scholar to whom the student is apprenticed.

Unsurprisingly, Newman defends this apprenticeship model for cultivating virtuous intellectual reasoning by invoking Aristotle:

To use the grand words of Aristotle, “We are bound to give heed to the undemonstrated sayings and opinions of the experienced and aged, not less than to demonstrations; because, from their having the eye of experience, they behold the principles of things.” Instead of trusting logical science, we must trust persons, namely, those who by long acquaintance with their subject have a right to judge. And if we wish ourselves to share in their convictions and the grounds of them, we must follow their history, and learn as they have learned. We must take up their particular subject as they took it up, beginning at the beginning, give ourselves to it, depend on practice and experience more than on reasoning, and thus gain their mental insight into truth, whatever its subject-matter may be, which our masters have gained before us. By following this course, we make ourselves of their number ... directing ourselves by our own moral or intellectual judgment.²⁶

Even though partially acquired through close association with an intellectual mentor, Newman argues in *The Idea of a University* that the “philosophical habit of mind” is also the result of ‘training’, ‘discipline’, and ‘habit’.²⁷ If truly acquired, it is ‘a habit, a personal possession, and an inward endowment.’ It is ‘the formation of a character’ comparable to the formation of a virtue.²⁸

Agent-specific Phronesis and Disagreement

The concepts of natural inference, the Illative Sense, and real assent emerge from Newman’s desire to describe the often subtle, subconscious, and very personal ways people arrive at conclusions and

²⁴ See *GA* 14, 55–56, 62–64, 90–91. See also Ker, “Editor’s Introduction,” in *GA*, xii–xiii; lvii–lxi; Mary Katherine Tillman, “Introduction,” in *RP*, xxvi–xxviii; Laurence Richardson, *Newman’s Approach to Knowledge* (Leominster, UK: Gracewing, 2004), 67–78.

²⁵ *RP*, “What is a University?,” 8–9.

²⁶ *GA*, 221. See also Chapter 1, “The Development of Ideas,” in *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, 33–54.

²⁷ *Idea*, 135.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 105.

commitments. These concepts are part of his complex attempt to acknowledge that not every link in the chain of reasoning can be identified en route to intellectual commitment or moral action, and that because humans are not ‘calculating machines,’ no universal system could replace the need for personal judgment. We reason and act as whole persons within the fluctuating contingencies of life rather than as cold logicians within dapper syllogisms. Newman’s sensitivity to the context- and agent-specific factors of cognitive activity influenced significant thinkers like Michael Polanyi, Pierre Hadot, Bernard Lonergan,²⁹ Friedrich von Hugel,³⁰ and Ludwig Wittgenstein.³¹ For example, Hadot explains that Newman’s *Grammar of Assent* taught him that ‘it’s not the same thing to give one’s assent to an affirmation which one understands in a purely abstract way, and to give one’s assent while engaging one’s entire being, and “realizing”—in the English sense of the word—with one’s heart and one’s imagination, just what this affirmation means for us. This distinction between real and notional assent underlies my research on spiritual exercises.’³² Newman convinced these thinkers that a person’s experiences directly affect how and what they understand or believe, and that what a person understands and believes alters the way that person experiences the world. To borrow Polanyi’s phrase, knowledge—and action—are personal.

This dialectic between theoretical and practical reason, which in their perfected forms are the Illative Sense and *phronesis*, suggests that these two forms of reasoning must ultimately be coordinated for the sake of a moral act or decision. This is because the Illative Sense leads the individual to assent to certain beliefs that partially inform his understanding of the moral order or framework within which he lives, moves, and has his being. Thus, a person’s intellectual assents and beliefs partially determine his picture of ‘the good life’ and shape his desires accordingly. In turn, this moral framework, or moral order, to which the reasoning power commits us, is used by moral *phronesis* as part of its reasoning toward action. As Kristján Kristjánsson argues, practical reason requires ‘a general blueprint of the good life’ in order to determine what might constitute virtuous

²⁹ Bernard Lonergan, “Reality, Myth, Symbol”, in Alan M. Olson (ed.) *Myth, Symbol, and Reality* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980) 32-33. See also Richardson, *Newman’s Approach*, 16 n. 4.

³⁰ See Martin Moleski, “Polanyi and Newman: A Reconsideration,” in *Tradition & Discovery: The Polanyi Society Periodical* 41.2 (2014), 45–55. Martin X. Moleski, S.J., *Personal Catholicism: The Theological Epistemologies of John Henry Newman and Michael Polanyi*. (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000); David Tracy, *The Achievement of Bernard Lonergan*. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), 91–92; Philip A. Egan, “John Henry Newman and Bernard Lonergan: A Note on the Development of Christian Doctrine,” *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia* 63.4 (2007), 1103–1123; F. E. Crowe, ed., *Collection. Papers by Bernard Lonergan, S. J.* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967), ix.

³¹ See Wolfgang Kiezer, “Wittgenstein and John Henry Newman on Certainty,” in Michael Kober (ed.), *Grazer Philosophische Studien - Internationale Zeitschrift für Analytische Philosophie*, Volume 71 (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, 2006), 117. Anthony Kenny, “John Henry Newman,” 516–20; Cyril Barrett, “Newman and Wittgenstein on the Rationality of Religious Belief,” in Ian Ker, ed., *Newman and Conversion* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 89–99; Angelo Bottone, “Newman and Wittgenstein After Foundationalism,” *New Blackfriars* 86.1001 (2005), 62–75; Gerald McCarthy, “Newman and Wittgenstein: The Problem of Certainty,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 49.2 (1982), 98–120; Ker, “Editor’s Introduction,” *GA*, lv.

³² Hadot, Pierre Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?*. Tr. Michael Chase (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 274; *Philosophy as a Way of Life* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 277, 279; Aquino, *Integrative Habit*, 26.

action in any concrete situation and how to achieve it. Following Aristotle, Kristjánsson argues that ‘*phronesis* requires access to a systematic understanding of the good life that can *indirectly* inform and enlighten her further development and decisions’, even if that understanding remains ‘flexible and open-textured’.³³ Daniel Russell similarly argues that only with an overall ‘conception of the good life’, universally applicable, can *phronesis* begin to integrate multiple ethical concerns to arrive at a single good act.³⁴ Thus, the ‘good life’ is an intellectual concept arrived at and assented to through the individual and particular reasoning of the individual.

This necessary coordination accounts not only for the complexity of moral decision making and its agent specificity, but also for the regularity of disagreement between moral agents regarding the good and right thing to do. Newman supplies us with a complex grammar for describing what happens when one person’s reasoning faculty leads them to different conclusions than another. I may find it difficult to see why a person arrives at conclusions substantially different from my own. However, I might understand him better were I able to see the strands of data, experiences, and arguments that influence his processes of informal and natural inference, and were I able to see the relative significance his Illative Sense and his prudent practical reason afford each strand and why. This is one reason why even a group of intellectually and morally virtuous persons may have difficulty resolving contested moral issues. Each person’s reasoning faculty might be working with different data, or might assign similar data different significance, and each one may be within their epistemic rights to reach probable conclusions based on the collective buttressing of individually inconclusive or unidentified supports. Similarly, even if they agree intellectually on a basic set of relevant data, their prudential reasoning might disagree about other morally relevant particulars or how to move from those particulars to an agreed upon action. As Newman says, I might give the same data ‘quite a different interpretation’ because of my own ‘peculiar and personal mode’ of reasoning.³⁵ Furthermore, this personal mode and chain of reasoning remains at least somewhat opaque me: ‘As we cannot see ourselves, so we cannot well see intellectual motives which are so intimately ours, and which spring up from the very constitution of our minds’.³⁶ That, however, does not imply that the interlocutors are equally right or equally wrong, nor that one might not reasonably convince the other, nor that they should not discuss the controversial matter or the foundational concepts that gave rise to the disagreement. Neither does it necessarily rule out the possibility that both parties might agree on a common practical decision even when their theoretical bases and intellectual commitments differ, as often happens.³⁷

Though Newman uses these concepts to explain how people reason and assent, they also offer compelling reasons to practice intellectual humility in the face of entrenched intellectual and moral disagreement, and they do so without surrendering belief in realism to philosophical and moral skepticism or relativism. If Newman is right, then we should engage in dialogue about contested issues with greater intellectual humility, charity, and a genuine and hopeful desire to

³³ Kristján Kristjánsson, ‘*Phronesis* and moral education: Treading beyond the truisms’, *Theory and Research in Education* 12.2 (2014), 165.

³⁴ Daniel C. Russell, *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 29.

³⁵ See *GA*, 217–18. Frederick Aquino explains, Newman’s epistemology acknowledges “the social and intellectual conditions” under which people actualize and integrate their various ideas, commitments, and experiences. Aquino, *Integrative Habit*, 38–9.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ See Nigel Biggar, ‘Tense Consensus’, in *Behaving in Public: How to Do Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 25–45

understand the reasoning-judging-assenting processes of ourselves and others. This is particularly important in plural, liberal democracies, when civic friendship, social virtues, and intellectual and moral humility are required to advance shared practical commitments.

By now, we should be able to anticipate the conceptual analogues between Newman's account of intellectual *phronesis* and the Aristotelian accounts of moral *phronesis*, from which Newman developed his ideas. Newman emphasizes the individual and personal nature of intellectually oriented reasoning, the cultivation of its virtuous forms through habit and close association with intellectual mentors, its domain-specificity, and its slow formation over time.

The Function of Moral *Phronesis*

At this point, I will build footbridges between his accounts of intellectual virtue and moral virtue, and conclude by showing how Newman expected the formation of virtuous practical reasoning to happen in the Oxford of the mid-19th century and how that expectation is still partially fulfilled in at least one current Oxford course. Our immediate concern, therefore, is with prudence as the virtuous form of practical reason, which Newman sometimes associates with 'conscience' and sometimes with *phronesis*. His concept of 'conscience' is no less elaborate than his epistemology, but much less systematic, and a full treatment will here elude us. However, Newman's shifting descriptions of conscience need not distract us from the idea consistently underlying his work in this area.³⁸

One of the obvious connections between his work on intellectual and moral thinking is his insistence that in both spheres people can act reasonably even in the absence of self-conscious reasons and logical demonstrations. Another obvious connection is that Newman is less interested in philosophical 'hard cases' or arguments abstracted from the lived experience of people's lives than he is in accounting for and defending how people actually think, why they commit in thought or deed to one thing and not another, or why two people with the same 'evidence' might draw opposing conclusions. Neither is he interested in pretending that a set of moral rules or a universal law code could eliminate the need for the cultivation of prudent intellectual and moral discernment. As he explains with respect to Aristotle,

What it is to be virtuous, how we are to gain the just idea and standard of virtue, how we are to approximate in practice to our standard, what is right and wrong in a particular case, for the answers in fullness and accuracy to these and similar questions, the philosopher [Aristotle] refers us to no code of laws, to no moral treatise, because no science of life, applicable to the case of an individual, has been or can be written. Such is Aristotle's doctrine, and it is undoubtedly true.³⁹

Though Newman values logic, syllogisms, and laws for their clarity and aide in communication, he insists that personal discernment and deliberation are a *sine qua non* of human existence, could be reasonable even when not reducible to a syllogism, and should be conscientiously, studiously, and rigorously cultivated. In fact, the absence of 'precisianist' laws that could overcome contingency requires the formation of virtue if we are even partially to embody and effect, or as he says just

³⁸ One immediate difference between *phronesis* and conscience is that whereas *phronesis* might address someone else's situation, Newman limits the activity of conscience to one's own. A further difference seems to be that while *phronesis* includes explicit practical reasoning, the determination of right and wrong by conscience is largely implicit and immediate—and sometimes non-inferential or intuitionist—even though it might draw on previous experience and previous acts of explicit practical reasoning. See Grave, *Conscience in Newman's Thought*, 54–55.

³⁹ *GA*, 228. Emphasis mine. See Russell, *Practical Intelligence*, 19.

above, ‘approximate in practice’, the good we desire. Otherwise, virtue, other than the virtue of obedience, would be largely unnecessary.

Newman presses the point further that even when we have access to laws, principles, or rules we are not excused from cultivating prudence, because ‘who is to apply them *to a particular case?* whither can we go, except to *the living intellect, our own, or another’s?*’ Ethical systems ‘cannot ascertain for us, *according to our personal need*, the golden mean.’ Even when possessing moral logic or rules, we need an ‘authoritative oracle’ that is ‘*seated in the mind of the individual...his own judge* in those special cases of duty which are personal to him.’⁴⁰ In a hypothetical situation where Queen and Pope issue diametrically opposed moral demands, Newman explains he would ‘give an absolute obedience to neither’. Such obedience would not be refused in the name of individual autonomy, but in the name of prudent conscience. Though he admits he would freely—and prudently—draw on whatever sources he had at his disposal to help his conscience, whether theologians, clergy, his confessor, or revered friends, in the end, the decision would be his. ‘I must rule myself by my own judgment and my own conscience’, that is, by his own morally and intellectually formed, explicit and implicit practical reasoning.⁴¹ This is the case, he insists, whether in business, personal relationships, thought, speech, recreation, or pleasure. In each case, a person must be guided by flexible and responsive *phronesis*. ‘Thus it is, and not by science, that he perfects the virtues of justice, self-command, magnanimity, generosity, gentleness and all others. *Phronesis* is the regulating principle of every one of them.’⁴²

How, therefore, does Newman think the prudent practical reason operates? Though he insists, contra the demythologizing 19th century ‘Liberalism’ he consistently opposes, that the conscience is ‘Christ’s original vicar’ through which the voice of God comes and on the basis of which we might justifiably infer God’s existence, Newman does not recommend waiting upon immediate divine command for one’s actions. God, it seems, is much more subtle than that. The conscience, along with practical reason, draws on Scripture, experience, example, counsel, affection, and foundational moral principles.

In his ‘Letter to the Duke of Norfolk’, these latter foundational principles are described as the conscience’s habitual apprehension of God’s divine attributes, which is often described as ‘natural law’. For Newman, therefore, this activity of the conscience resembles the activity Aquinas ascribes to *synderesis*, though Newman does not make this comparison.⁴³ Still, the conscience’s apprehension of God’s attributes as natural law provides an authoritative ‘rule of ethical truth’ and ‘standard of right and wrong’. These become the ‘general blueprint’ or ‘conception of the good life’ referred to above.⁴⁴ These principles allow the conscience to perform its second task, which resembles the task Aquinas assigns the conscience, namely, to deliberate from the foundational moral principles to contingent action. Thus, the conscience is also the seat of practical judgment ‘by

⁴⁰ *GA*, 228–29.

⁴¹ ‘A Letter’, 243–44; see also Hughes, ‘Conscience’, in *The Cambridge Companion to John Henry Newman*, 201.

⁴² *GA*, 230. Newman explicitly and approvingly refers his readers to Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, where moral duty, virtue, and *phronesis* are ‘fully considered’. *GA*, 228. See also Newman, “A Letter Addressed to the Duke of Norfolk on Occasion of Mr. Gladstone’s Recent Expostulation,” in *Certain Difficulties Felt by Anglicans in Catholic Teaching*, Volume II (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1900), chapter five, “Conscience,” 246.

⁴³ For Aquinas on *synderesis* and *conscientia*, see *ST I I Q.79 A.12–13*; on eternal and natural law, see *1a2ae, Q. 91–94*.

⁴⁴ ‘Duke of Norfolk’, 247.

which we judge what *hic et nunc* is to be done as being good, or to be avoided as evil' in concrete situations.⁴⁵ Like the personal Illative Sense, the conscience, or prudent practical reason, determines what should be done by 'this given person, under these given circumstances'.⁴⁶ John Finnis describes this two-fold activity of Newman's 'conscience'—knowing moral principles and judging particular actions—as the 'habitual conscience', which reflects and knows, and the 'actual conscience', which judges and moves.⁴⁷ Along with explicit and implicit reasoning, Newman argues that the conscience also hints at or testifies to right and wrong through strong emotion.⁴⁸ This seems to be the way Newman incorporates the affective pleasure and pain that Aristotle thinks the rightly formed person will feel when confronted with concrete actions in the past, present, or future. These strong emotions are often the result of the implicit reasoning that does not arise to the level of conscious awareness.

Finally, we return to a point of criticism I gestured toward above. Newman rightly argues that certain intellectual skills and virtues of natural inference and the Illative Sense are discipline specific. The virtuous reasoning of a physicist, seaman, politician, general, and artist are unique to their particular discipline or sphere. However, when Newman extends this reasoning to deny that *phronesis* serves as the unifying virtue of all the virtues, he is less convincing. Instead, he claims that 'there are as many kinds of *phronesis* as there are virtues.'⁴⁹ That is, each virtue has its own unique *phronesis* and each *phronesis* operates in distinct spheres comparable to the way natural inference and the Illative Sense function within discrete domains of knowledge. Here I fear the analogy between intellectual and moral *phronesis* is not as immediate as Newman thinks.

Newman is right to observe that a person may be disposed to exercise a virtue like honesty or patience within one domain—the workplace—but not necessarily in another—the family. A person may develop moral courage, but not intellectual or physical courage; she may be, Newman says, "just and cruel, brave and sensual, imprudent and patient" in different domains, especially between his or her 'private and public character'.⁵⁰ On the one hand, this is an important point for thinking about moral education. No one has learned a skill or virtue until they have learned it. While they are learning it, they require instruction, encouragement, and practice. The same is true with the virtues. They are often partially formed, episodic, and sometimes context-specific. Given what a virtue is, we should not expect otherwise. Different virtues in a person's character may be at different stages along the way toward maturity, and the same virtue might be more developed in one area than another.⁵¹ However, Newman's suggestion that this requires a unique *phronesis* for each virtue, comparable to domain-specific abilities of natural inference and the Illative Sense, seems unnecessary, since this would still require some overarching *phronesis* to coordinate between the conclusions of each individual *phronesis*, which might issue conflicting directions to the unified person. Furthermore, even if a given virtue or cluster of virtues may be more fully developed in a person than other virtues or virtue clusters, such uneven character formation would mean the

⁴⁵ 'Duke of Norfolk', 257.

⁴⁶ *GA*, 228–9.

⁴⁷ John Finnis, "Conscience in the Letter to the Duke of Norfolk," in Ker and Hill, *Newman After a Hundred Years*, 410. See also Gerard J. Hughes, "Newman and the Particularity of Conscience," in Ian Ker and Terrence Merrigan, eds., *Newman and Faith* (Louvain: Peeters Press, 2004).

⁴⁸ *GA*, 73; 'Duke of Norfolk', 246–61.

⁴⁹ *GA*, 231.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ See Julia Annas, *Intelligent Virtue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 38.

person would not be considered a generally *prudent* person, and it would undermine confidence in the stability and consistency of what virtues he or she appears to possess.

Newman's supposition might also suggest that the individual virtues are relatively unrelated. Instead, I would argue that they are necessarily constitutive of one another. The closest analogy might be the way colours are made by mixing other colours. Though pure red, yellow, and blue are primary, even they are subtly nuanced depending not only on what colours are mixed with them but also which colours they are placed next to. We could debate whether there are comparable "primary" virtues that are not constituted by a mix of other virtues, but I doubt it, even with respect to the acquired "cardinal" or infused "theological" virtues. This view of the mutually constitutive nature of the virtues suggests that a person who pursues a single virtue, whether compassion, humility, patience, or courage, would not be able to cultivate that virtue without a host of other virtues, including the *sine qua non* of prudence, as the master artist drawing on and blending each of the virtues on her palette for the sake of a morally beautiful person.

The Formation of Moral *Phronesis*

This brings us, finally, to the formation of moral virtue. Though Newman is not clear on the relation between conscience, practical reason, and prudence, he consistently maintained, along Aristotelian lines, that practical reason and the conscience are universal, ineradicable, and perfectible, that is, they do not come fully formed, but must be cultivated. In one of his early sermons, he refers to the 'educated conscience'⁵², and in his discussion of *phronesis* in *Grammar of Assent*, he explains that because *phronesis* is an 'acquired habit' it requires practice, experience, models, and training for its strength, growth, 'due formation' and 'maturation' into the virtuous form that can rightly guide action.⁵³ By habit, therefore, 'and not by science', does a person perfect 'the virtues of justice, self-command, magnanimity, generosity, gentleness, and all other' virtues, whether moral and intellectual.⁵⁴ Hence his affirmation, referred to above, of Aristotle's claim that we should heed the 'sayings and opinions of the experienced and aged,' even if not syllogistically 'demonstrated', and trust 'practice and experience' as well as explicit reasoning.⁵⁵

We can now pivot toward the context with which Newman was most familiar and in which he attempted to help individuals form their *phronetic* practical reason, that is, the academic institution, including, of course, Oriel College, the University of Oxford, the Catholic University of Dublin, and the Oratory School of Birmingham. Though Newman compares intellectual and moral virtue, he insists that neither one can replace the other. Somewhat surprisingly for someone who dedicated much of his life to education, Newman soundly denies that we should look to the classroom or laboratory for moral formation. That might seem an inauspicious beginning for learning virtue in the academy, but for Newman, the classroom and laboratory were better geared toward transmitting and advancing knowledge than cultivating virtue. He famously states, 'It is ... a mistake to burden [learning] with virtue or religion. ... Its direct business is not to steel the soul against temptation or to console it in affliction. ... Knowledge is one thing, virtue is another,' and intellectual virtue should not be mistaken for its moral counterpart, however analogous in function and formation.⁵⁶

⁵² 'Usurpations of Reason', in *US*, 66.

⁵³ *GA*, 228. See also 228, 251, 269–70, 305, 345, 353; Hughes, 'Conscience', *Cambridge Companion to John Henry Newman*, 190, 194; Tillman, *John Henry Newman*, 301; S. A. Grave, *Conscience in Newman's Thought*, 45

⁵⁴ *GA*, 230.

⁵⁵ *GA*, 221. See also "The Development of Ideas," in *Essay*.

⁵⁶ *Idea*, V.9.

Along with his objection that the classroom is poorly equipped to cultivate character, in part because it rarely moves beyond notional assent to real assent, Newman also rejected the widespread attempt to use intellectual formation as a means or substitute for moral formation.⁵⁷ In 1841, he published seven anonymous letters in the *London Times*, known as the ‘Tamworth Reading Room Letters’, which targeted former Prime Minister Sir Robert Peel’s speech at the opening of the Tamworth Library. Among other things, Peel recommends ‘controversial divinity’ be excluded from the library in favour of practical knowledge, and promises that if his audience embark upon the path of knowledge, they would find themselves ‘cheered onward by a voice from within, of self-confidence and of self-respect.’ In becoming more knowledgeable, they would ‘become better’ and rise ‘in the scale of intellectual and moral existence.’ Peel concludes by arguing that ‘the pleasures of knowledge’ will overcome ‘the indulgence of sensual appetite’ and lead to the moral improvement of the community.⁵⁸ To Newman, Peel’s message was clear: suppress theology, praise pragmatism, pursue knowledge, expect moral improvement.

Newman’s seven epistolary responses are serious, acerbic, and satirizing, an approach he continues in *The Idea of a University* when he returns to the same theme. Newman lampoons Peel’s insinuation that the chaotic disorder of humanity’s moral passions and actions could be subdued by momentary intellectual distraction—an unconvincing strategy of diversion, Newman thought, that reduces the moral life to a series of impulses and emotions that ignores the usefulness of moral laws, habits, and real moral growth in prudence.⁵⁹ ‘That grief, anger, cowardice, self-conceit, pride, or passion, can be subdued by an examination of shells or grasses, or inhaling of gases, or chipping of rocks, or calculating the longitude, is the veriest of pretences. ... If we seek virtue and inward order, harmony, and peace,’ Newman insists, ‘we must seek it in graver and holier places than in Libraries and Reading-rooms.’⁶⁰ Though Newman freely acknowledges that ‘scientific pursuits’ are ‘intrinsically excellent and noble,’ integral to a liberal education, and beneficial to the community, ‘still they are not, and cannot be, *the instrument* of an ethical training.’⁶¹

In his *Rise and Progress of Universities*, Newman suggests that the Athenians made the same mistake when they substituted the beautiful cultured and educated ‘gentleman’ for the moral conscience, and quickly replaced the ‘beautiful’ with the pleasant, and then the pleasant with the

⁵⁷ In *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, Newman lists eighteen points of “Liberalism” he opposes. The last one is the belief that “virtue is the child of knowledge, and vice of ignorance.” This implies that “education, periodical literature, railroad travelling, ventilation, drainage, and the arts of life, when fully carried out, serve to make a population moral and happy.” *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1908), 296.

⁵⁸ *Sir Robert Peel’s Address On The Establishment Of A Library And Reading Room at Tamworth* (London: Henry Hooper, 1841), 23. In the “corrected” second edition of the published speech these final phrases were changed without explanation to refer to the “uncloying pleasure that springs from mental improvement and increasing knowledge.” *An Inaugural Address, Delivered by the Right Hon. Sir Robert Peel, Bart. M.P., President of the Tamworth Library and Reading Room, on Tuesday, 19th January, 1841. Second Edition, Corrected* (London: James Bain, 1841; Tamworth: J. Thompson), 30.

⁵⁹ Newman, “The Tamworth Reading Room,” in *Discussions and Arguments on Various Subjects* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1907), 264.

⁶⁰ ‘Tamworth’, 268. Though Newman thought study did not lead to religion, he readily admits that religion deepens study and is able to draw out from it riches and resources it is incapable of producing on its own. “Say that Religion hallows the study, and not that the study creates Religion.’ Ibid, 268; 274–75.

⁶¹ ‘Tamworth’, 304.

sensual.⁶² In Newman's mind, the 'religion of the intellect' simply directs people to other less crass but no less harmful vices. It cannot keep them from the 'ordinary sin of the Intellect', which mistakes good taste for moral goodness, ill manners for vice, and a gauche *faux pas* for sin.⁶³ In an oft-quoted line, Newman writes, 'Quarry the granite rock with razors, or moor the vessel with a thread of silk; then may you hope with such keen and delicate instruments as human knowledge and human reason to contend against those giants, the passion and the pride of man.'⁶⁴ Though Newman valued the educated and cultured 'gentleman' produced by the classrooms, laboratories, and dining halls of the university, he denied that academic and cultural attributes could replace moral ones and insists that we look elsewhere for the formation of virtue.⁶⁵

That 'elsewhere' was outside the university *qua* university, but inside the colleges that comprised the university, and inside the rooms of the college tutor. Much like the intellectual formation of discipline-specific inference and the Illative Sense, 'the formation of character, intellectual and moral' occurs through personal relationships with a student's tutor and with one's fellow students in the residential college, or other similar, small morally formative communities.⁶⁶ In these lived experiences, moral understanding is more likely to move from abstract 'notional' assent to embodied 'real' assent and practice. In particular, the small residential college is to function like 'a household' that 'involves the same virtuous and paternal discipline, which is proper to a family and home.'⁶⁷ For Newman, this 'discipline' included 'regularity, rule, respect for others, the eye of friends and acquaintances, the absence from temptation, external restraints.' Thus, the college as a moral community could be a place where a student's 'better thoughts', 'good resolutions', diligence, and steady progress are supported, and his 'waywardness', 'heedlessness', and 'prospective deviations' anticipated and restrained.⁶⁸ In short and at their best, these intentional moral cultures offer students a supportive, attentive, and caring community that desires to help them cultivate the virtues. The Oxford model was to be repeated in Dublin and in the primary and secondary school Newman founded in 1859, the Oratory School. This school was intended to offer a Catholic alternative to England's celebrated Eton School, and to integrate intellectual, moral, and spiritual formation

⁶² RP, 79–81; 85–85. See also GA, 255. Newman's portrait draws upon Aristotle's magnanimous man, Anthony Ashley Cooper's (3rd Earl of Shaftesbury) *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (1711), and James Forrester's *The Polite Philosopher: Or, an Essay on that Art which Makes a Man Happy in Himself, and Agreeable to Others* (1734). See "Editor's Notes," *Idea*, 616; Dwight Culler, *The Imperial Intellect: A Study of Newman's Educational Ideal*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), 239–40; Mary Katherine Tillman, *John Henry Newman*, 240–41.

⁶³ *Idea*, 172–73. See Hughes, "Conscience," in *The Cambridge Companion to John Henry Newman*, 206.

⁶⁴ *Idea*, 111.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 184–4. For more on the contrast between the Christian and the secular "gentleman," see Newman, "The Early Chapter Addresses of 1848: The Third Address," in Murray, *Newman the Oratorian: His Unpublished Oratory Papers*, edited Placid Murray. Leominster, UK: Gracewing, 2004), 188–91; Mary Katherine Tillman, "A Rhetoric in Conduct," in *John Henry Newman*.

⁶⁶ RP, 228.

⁶⁷ RP, 214.

⁶⁸ RP, 189–90.

through the bond of personal relationships.⁶⁹ Newman regarded his work at the school to be ‘the nearest return to my Oxford life’.⁷⁰

In Newman’s ideal, personal relationship with a tutor formed the core of the educational experience and was essential for the cultivation of moral and intellectual prudence. Without this personal relation between academic apprentice and skilled practitioner, Newman warns that an academic institution becomes ‘an arctic winter’, an ‘ice-bound, petrified, cast-iron University’.⁷¹ Newman primarily has in mind his experience at Oriel College, Oxford, where he took up the post of Public Tutor in 1826. However, between 1830 and 1832, the Provost of Oriel, Edward Hawkins, refused to assign students to Newman because the Provost denied tutors should have the formational role upon which Newman insisted. Whereas Newman strongly believed the tutor’s role to be a mentoring and generally pastoral one that also attended to the moral and spiritual formation of students, even if primarily to their intellectual formation, Hawkins strongly thought it should focus on the intellect alone. Newman was attempting to reform an academic culture not entirely dissimilar from some contemporary academic institutions. He refused to accept an institution in which, in his characterization, privileged youths muddled their way through degrees, meandering between drunken parties, mediocre academic performance, religious sacrilege, and whatever was then considered ‘profligate carousing’, with very little moral or spiritual direction or intellectual engagement with their academic seniors.⁷²

Moreover, Newman believed that without the personal relationship between teacher and student, the academic community becomes a mechanised system characterized by routine and bureaucracy rather than intellectual and moral formation and “earnestness.” Instead of two persons entering into a multi-faceted relationship whose centre was knowledge, but whose periphery included the wholistic personal and moral formation of the student, Newman claims that in Hawkins’ model—replicated in many contemporary university classrooms and ‘distance education’ programs—teachers are ‘cut off’ from students such that neither ‘entered into the thoughts of the other’. Their only point of contact is that they simply occupy the same room at the same time each week. ‘I have known places’, such as Oriel College of the 1830s, ‘where a stiff manner, a pompous voice, coldness and condescension, were the teacher’s attributes, and where he neither knew, nor wished to know, and avowed he did not wish to know, the private irregularities of the youths committed to his charge.’⁷³

Just as Newman protested that information in easily accessible books could not replace engaging a living professor, so here he protests that merely having access to a professor is also insufficient for intellectual and moral formation.⁷⁴ Instead, these require some degree of mutual personal commitment. Part of the ‘serious’ but ‘really interesting nature’ of the tutor’s role was to know their students, set their readings, guide their study habits, examine them, and hear their

⁶⁹ Unlike the Catholic University of Ireland, Newman’s Oratory School, the first lay Catholic school in England, still operates. Hillaire Belloc was a pupil, and Gerard Manley Hopkins a teacher. See Paul Shrimpton, *A Catholic Eton? Newman’s Oratory School* (Leominster, UK: Gracewing, 2005).

⁷⁰ See Ker, *John Henry Newman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 538; Newman, LD XXI, 51.

⁷¹ LD XXI, 74.

⁷² See Tillman, “Pedagogy as Care of the Soul,” in *John Henry Newman*; Ian Ker, *John Henry Newman*, 27–41; Maisie Ward, *Young Mr. Newman* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1948), 113–15.

⁷³ Newman, *RP*, 74–5.

⁷⁴ This relational concern is reflected in Newman’s personal motto, which the Oratory School adopted: *cor ad cor loquitur*, ‘heart speaking to heart’.

compelling questions and honest concerns. Tutors should combine ‘good-humour’ with ‘the steadiness of a superior.’ They should take ‘an interest in the things which are at the moment nearest to [his student’s] heart’ as they enter into ‘conversation, speculation, discussion’ during their ‘intercourse of mind with mind.’ In this way, ‘obscurity of thought, difficulties in philosophy, perplexities of faith, are confidently brought out, sifted, and solved; and a pagan poet or theorist may thus become the occasion’ of moral or Christian advancement. In Newman’s ideal scenario, the tutor thus becomes teacher, mentor, guide, and moral director. Once again, we can hear in the background Aristotle’s counsel that the ‘sayings and opinions of the experienced and aged’ should be allowed to guide one’s prudential moral formation. In the student-tutor relationship, Newman wants to hold together the ‘union of intellectual and moral formation’, the separation of which he considered an ‘evil of the age.’⁷⁵

‘Christian Moral Reasoning’, University of Oxford

Though many things are different between Newman’s Oxford and the current University of Oxford, which has embraced the research model beginning to gain ground in Newman’s day, one feature that endures is the weekly tutorial system in which tutors meet with an individual or pairs of students to discuss a set reading and the student’s weekly essay. Over the course of their three-year degree, students will participate in eight eight-week tutorial courses, not only learning new material, but more importantly, learning how to think.

One of these courses, Christian Moral Reasoning, largely illustrates and embodies Newman’s ideas concerning the formation of intellectual and moral practical reasoning. As its title makes clear, the goal of the course is to help students learn virtuous forms of practical reasoning, that is, to aid the development of *phronesis*. Over the course of the eight weeks, students and tutor together consider the sources of the moral principles or moral framework with which practical reason begins. In this course, these include Christian Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. Along with these, students and tutor consider significant moral concepts like love, compassion, virtue, freedom, sin, community, justice, flourishing, and others. Most importantly, students practice deliberating, moving from these sources and concepts to practical issues and questions related to money, patriotism, voting, IVF, armed conflict, sex, lying, healthcare, friendship, and other issues related to both ‘everyday ethics’ and typical ‘hard cases’. Along the way, tutor and student enter into their own and each other’s thinking, testing reasons, probing objections, and evaluating implications. Though students do not by any means always agree with the outcomes of their tutor’s theoretical and practical reasoning, they are at least able to see how one skilled practitioner thinks, reasons, and deliberates about a host of moral questions. In this way, students are able to ‘consult the living man,’ as Newman described above, and to catch ‘the life which makes [the discipline] live in us.’⁷⁶

Though an academic course in theological ethics, the tutorial system means this course rarely remains aloof from the individual student, who must consider how his or her own presuppositions and experiences inform, colour, and possibly prejudice his or her practical reasoning. This is especially the case when two students, who have read the same materials and considered the same arguments, arrive at significantly different conclusions on the basis of their individual intellectual and moral reasoning, which may or may not approximate the ideals of the Illative Sense and moral *phronesis*. Furthermore, even many of the typical hard cases considered in the course—euthanasia, armed conflict, abortion, same-sex marriage—are hardly remote from students. In the last four

⁷⁵ On the tutor’s role, see *My Campaign in Ireland: Catholic University Reports and Other Papers*, edited by William Neville (Aberdeen: A. King, 1896), 117–20.

⁷⁶ RP, “What is a University?”, 8–9.

tutorials, students are able to select between medical, political, and sexual topics, and many students offer some personal anecdote for why they choose one practical issue over another. Even if they do not have personal experience with an issue, many of them have friends or family for whom a given issue represents a personal or professional challenge. I noted that this last term, given recent political developments in the United States and Europe, I had more students choose to consider the theoretical and practical reasoning associated with ‘nationalism and patriotism’ than in the previous four terms combined. In some student–tutor relationships, the conversations also extend to the personal questions and challenges faced by students regarding future plans, desires, griefs, personal difficulties, religious questions, and so forth. Though not a professional counselor, the wise tutor not only responds to the particular issue, sometimes in and sometimes outside of the tutorial hours, but helps the student reason—intellectually and morally—through the issue at hand, seeing it as one more opportunity to cultivate intellectual and moral prudence.

Between the reading, essay writing, and tutorial conversations students are forming their practical reasoning, testing it out, having it challenged, learning to defend and concede, engaging in respectful conversation, and learning a method for and gaining experience in practical reasoning under the tutelage of a skilled practitioner. Though the reading, writing, and conversation of the tutorial occur in an academic setting, they are far removed from the large classroom and laboratory which Newman rightly thinks ill-suited to moral formation. Even though the Christian Moral Reasoning course is complemented by two eight-week sets of lectures on similar themes, it is largely only as a result of the weekly encounter with the tutor that the students moves from ‘notional’ apprehension and assent to the kind of ‘real’ apprehension and assent that hopefully nurtures the formation of their intellectual and moral reasoning, or *phronesis*.

In addition, the tutorials potentially nurture *phronesis* much quicker than were students left to their own reflection on experiences gained over many years. Aristotle suggests that paucity of experience makes virtue acquisition difficult for the young.⁷⁷ The Christian Moral Reasoning tutorials partially help overcome the experience-deficit by giving students the opportunity to consider multiple particular moral challenges at some depth and to reason their way through them under the apprenticeship of a more experienced reasoner. Even if they did not take the course, students may, over the course of their lives, face similar questions to those considered in the course, and may find helpful resources and trustworthy guides, but they may not. The tutorial course draws these challenges and resources forward to their second or third year in university and attempts to help them develop the subtle virtues of intellectual and practical reason that will serve them well regardless of what morally significant questions and challenges they face.

Conclusion

As we have seen, John Henry Newman helps us appreciate the flexible utility of *phronesis* across multiple domains of knowledge and provides an illuminating comparison between the functions, formation, and virtuous forms of intellectual and moral *phronesis*. By offering a grammar to describe the constituent elements of the Illative Sense, he helps us understand the similar complexity of moral *phronesis*. Further, he offers us a way to describe moral disagreement between persons even when they are intellectually and morally virtuous. Each person’s Illative Sense and moral *phronesis* may read a situation differently, placing greater and lesser emphasis on a unique set of particulars.

⁷⁷ See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* VI.8 1142a12–17; I.3 1095a3–14; VI.11 1143b6–16; *Metaphysics* I.1 980–981. Thomas Albert Howard, “Seeing with all Three Eyes: The Virtue of Prudence and Undergraduate Education” in David. S. Cunningham, ed., *At this Time and Place: Vocation and Higher Education* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 226–27.

Newman also reminds us that the subtle intellectual and moral judgements by which we come to a decision are often opaque even to ourselves, let alone to others. This should lead us to exercise humility with respect to our own conclusions and the opposing conclusions of others, but should also encourage us to reflect more rigorously on the sources, concepts, and experiences on which our moral reasoning draws. For Newman, the formation of virtue, including especially *phronesis*, best occurs when we are embedded in a small moral community and closely associated with an intellectually and morally virtuous teacher and exemplar. In this community and with this person, we can observe how subtle moral and intellectual judgments are made and reflect critically upon our own practical reasoning. The Oxford college and tutorial system, both of Newman's day and our own, offer this close relationship, even if neither in Newman's day nor especially our own do they reach the ideal, and even if Christian Moral Reasoning is the only course specifically focused on helping students cultivate *phronesis*. Newman's analysis and example challenge us to consider not only the complexity of moral *phronesis* but also its cultivation in contexts similar to but also utterly distinct from his own.