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Scepticism and Credulity

Victorian Critiques of John Henry Newman's Religious Apologetic

Abstract: The present article uncovers a pervasive strand of Victorian critique of John Henry Newman's religious apologetic. The exponents of this critique maintained that Newman defended a credulous adherence to Catholic doctrine on the basis of a sceptical approach to knowledge. The origins of this critical tradition are to be located in Tractarian Oxford, most notably in the disputes on religious epistemology between Newman and the Oriel Noetics, and the controversy over Newman's *Essay on Development* (1845). Later Victorian intellectuals continued this critical interpretation of Newman's apologetic. The present paper discusses its development among its most prominent religiously liberal and agnostic exponents, namely, James Anthony Froude, Charles Kingsley, James Fitzjames Stephen, his brother Leslie Stephen, and Thomas Henry Huxley. All of these critics were committed to epistemological standards that ultimately derived from John Locke and which they charged Newman with subverting. Accordingly, they regarded Newman's apologetic as fundamentally dishonest. In addition, they argued that Newman's sceptical rhetorical strategy was a major cause of the Victorian crisis of faith rather than a persuasive to belief.

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In 1974, James Livingston published an innovative but much-neglected study on the Victorian religious conscience entitled *The Ethics of Belief*. In the preface, Livingston observed that John Henry Newman (1801–1890) was “a constant presence” in Victorian discussions on the ethics of religious conviction.¹ The Victorian era was marked by “a scrupulous intellectual honesty” and Newman's

¹ James C. Livingston, *The Ethics of Belief: An Essay on the Victorian Religious Conscience*, AAR Studies in Religion 9 (Tallahassee: American Academy of Religion, 1974), unpagged preface.

defence of religious belief was widely regarded as falling short of that mark.² Yet, Livingston also noted the “striking absence of anything but a superficial treatment of these vigorous criticisms of Newman in the host of sympathetic studies of his life and thought”.³ This absence is symptomatic of a wider lack of scholarly work relating Newman’s apologetic to its immediate Victorian context.⁴ In fact, careful historical inquiry has fared none too well in Newman research, as Oxford historian Simon Skinner has stressed recently.⁵ As a result, there is no comprehensive scholarly analysis – or even identification – of the most pervasive strand of Victorian critique of Newman’s apologetic, viz., that it was a defence of credulity by means of scepticism.⁶

As Frank Turner has rightly observed, Newman spent his long career primarily as “a brilliant, engaged ecclesiastical polemicist” rather than as “a professional or academic theologian”.⁷ His various apologetic ventures, first as an Anglican and, from 1845 onwards, as a Roman Catholic, elicited a characteristic response from many of his contemporaries – predominantly from liberal Anglicans and agnostics. Newman, so their critique goes, employs sceptical arguments to challenge the capacity of reason to arrive at religious truth. His alternative is to appeal to non-rational considerations such as conscience and religious experience to justify intellectual submission to the dogmatic claims of the (Roman) Catholic Church. In doing so, Newman sets up a false dilemma, claiming that (Roman) Catholicism is the only intellectually viable alternative to unbelief. In short, according to his critics, Newman sceptically undermines rational belief in order to promote credulity and superstition. The present paper

² Livingston, *Ethics of Belief*, 1.

³ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁴ Recent exceptions are Frank Turner’s revisionist Newman biography *John Henry Newman: The Challenge to Evangelical Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002) and Erik Sidenvall’s *After Anti-Catholicism? John Henry Newman and Protestant Britain, 1845–c.1890* (London: T&T Clark, 2005).

⁵ Simon Skinner, “History versus Hagiography: The Reception of Turner’s *Newman*”. *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 61 (October 2010), 764–781. See also Eamon Duffy’s reply and Skinner’s rejoinder: Eamon Duffy, “The Reception of Turner’s *Newman*: A Reply to Simon Skinner”. *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 63 (July 2012), 534–548; Simon Skinner, “A Response to Eamon Duffy”. *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 63 (July 2012), 549–567.

⁶ Recently, however, John Griffin has made important steps in this direction in an article on Charles Kingsley and James Anthony Froude as critics of Newman’s thought. The present paper is indebted to Griffin’s helpful study. Cf. John Griffin, “Cardinal Newman and the Origins of Victorian Scepticism”. *Heythrop Journal* 49 (2008), 980–994.

⁷ Frank Turner, “Newman”. In *The Blackwell Companion to Nineteenth-Century Theology*, ed. David Fergusson (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 119–138, 119.

traces and analyses this critique from its religious origins in Tractarian Oxford to its agnostic culmination towards the end of the nineteenth century.

1 Setting the Stage: Newman's Apologetic and its First Critics

Like most modern defences of Christianity, Newman's apologetic consists of two interrelated theoretical components: (i) a religious epistemology, i. e., an analysis and defence of the specific rationality involved in religious belief, and (ii) a religious apologetic proper, i. e., a set of arguments defending the reasonableness of a particular religious position – in Newman's case (Roman) Catholicism.⁸ Newman developed both of these components in response to an apologetic tradition often designated as 'rational supernaturalism', which was rooted in the empiricist philosophy of John Locke (1632–1704) and had been further developed by Anglican apologists such as William Paley (1743–1804).⁹ Locke's religious epistemology was marked by a radical distinction between the natural and the supernatural – the first the domain of reason, the second that of faith. Although the content of faith – God's supernatural communications in Scripture – is above reason, reason must establish the credentials of a purported revelation for faith to be rationally justified.¹⁰ Accordingly, Locke, and Paley in his wake, developed an elaborate series of 'evidences', mostly historical arguments for the reliability of the Scriptural testimony to miracles and the fulfilment of prophecy, to prove the supernatural character of the New Testament message.¹¹

During Newman's time at Oxford, this line of apologetics was strongly advocated by the Oriel Noetics, a loose-knit group of prominent liberal Anglican

8 All unqualified references to Newman's religious apologetic in this paper comprise both components.

9 Cf. James Livingston, *Modern Christian Thought*, vol. 1, *The Enlightenment and the Nineteenth Century* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 18–21. The term 'rational supernaturalism' was already used in this sense in the Victorian era. Cf. e. g., Robert William Mackay's *The Tübingen School and its Antecedents* (London – Edinburgh: Williams and Norgate, 1863), which speaks of "rational supernaturalism which implicitly accepted the message after testing the credentials of the messenger" (173).

10 Cf. John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), IV, xix, 1.

11 Cf. John Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity: With A Discourse of Miracles and Part of A Third Letter Concerning Toleration*, ed. I. T. Ramsey (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967); William Paley, *A View of the Evidences of Christianity* (London: R. Faulder, 1794).

intellectuals connected to Newman's own Oriel College.¹² The Noetics drew a fundamental theological conclusion from Locke's epistemological framework: since Scripture describes *divine* realities that are above reason, deductions from Scripture, such as creeds and doctrines, are a matter of merely *human* opinion and have no supernatural authority.¹³ This latitude with regard to doctrine made Noetic theology congenial to successive Whig governments' reform programs for the Church and the University in the 1830s. When the Whigs pressed the University of Oxford to allow Dissenters to matriculate in the early 1830s, Noetics such as Renn Dickson Hampden, Professor of Moral Philosophy at Oxford, supported them on theological grounds: doctrinal differences, even with Unitarians, are ultimately only matters of human opinion and should not bar people from access to the university.¹⁴ Between 1834 and 1836, Newman vehemently opposed this Noetic argument, maintaining that the doctrinal latitude championed by the Noetics would inevitably lead the established church into Unitarianism.¹⁵ In the context of his controversy with the Oriel Noetics, Newman began to develop the two features of his apologetic that would draw the opprobrium of his Victorian critics, (i) a strongly informal religious epistemology with low evidential requirements, and (ii) an *ad hominem* either-or argumentative strategy in defence of (Roman) Catholicism.

¹² Cf. Richard Brent, *Liberal Anglican Politics: Whiggery, Religion, and Reform: 1830–1841* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), esp. 151–163.

¹³ Cf. Renn Dickson Hampden, *The Scholastic Philosophy Considered in its Relation to Christian Theology*, Bampton Lectures for 1832 (Oxford: J. H. Parker, 1833), e. g. 351–354; Richard Whately, *An Essay on the Omission of Creeds, Liturgies and Codes of Ecclesiastical Canons, in the New Testament* (London: B. Fellowes, 1831); Pietro Corsi, *Science and Religion: Baden Powell and the Anglican Debate, 1800–1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 100–102. This is not to say the Noetics thought doctrine unimportant; they merely believed that its mode of expression should not be regarded as divinely sanctioned.

¹⁴ Cf. Renn Dickson Hampden, *Observations on Religious Dissent* (Oxford: J. H. Parker, 1834). Another Noetic, Thomas Arnold, applied this reasoning to the Church of England at large in his controversial *Principles of Church Reform* (London: B. Fellowes, 1833).

¹⁵ Cf. Henry Wilberforce [ghost-written by Newman], *The Foundation of the Faith Assailed in Oxford* (London: J. G. & F. Rivington, 1835); John Henry Newman, *Elucidations of Dr. Hampden's Theological Statements* (Oxford: J. H. Parker, 1836); Peter B. Nockles, “‘Lost Causes and ... Impossible Loyalties’: The Oxford Movement and the University”. In *The History of the University of Oxford*, vol. 6, *Nineteenth-Century Oxford*, ed. M. G. Brock and M. C. Curthoys (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 195–267, esp. 214–232.

i The Oriel Noetics and Newman's Religious Epistemology

Instead of the historical, inductive approach to Scripture advanced by the Noetics, Newman and his fellow Tractarians proposed to read Scripture under the guidance of the early Church. The Tractarian defence of revelation was likewise based on the authority of early Christianity, rather than on what many Tractarians regarded as rationalistic appeals to evidence. The Tractarian position worried Noetics such as Richard Whately, Newman's one-time mentor and the Anglican Archbishop of Dublin, and Baden Powell, Oxford's Savillian Professor of Geometry. Both regarded it, in the words of Pietro Corsi, as "the most serious threat to the preservation of revealed religion among the British masses and sections of the British intelligentsia".¹⁶

For Whately and Powell, the Tractarian appeal to the constitutive role of tradition in identifying and defending revealed truth undermined the clear Lockean distinction between the natural and the supernatural, and therefore between reason and faith. As Whately argued in his popular *Easy Lessons on Christian Evidences* (1838), Christian faith was distinguished both from the beliefs of other religions and from credulity by "its resting on evidence; – by its offering a reason, – and requiring Christians to be able to give a reason, for believing it".¹⁷ The Tractarian apologetic reduced Christianity to the level of pagan superstitions, Whately maintained, thereby provoking the rise of infidelity among an increasingly educated populace.¹⁸ In his *Tradition Unveiled* (1839), Baden Powell summed up the Noetic position: "Religion to us *exists* only so far as it is *clearly revealed*; the acknowledgement of this upon its proper evidence is faith".¹⁹ Since such evidence of the supernatural was only available for Scripture, the Tractarian appeal to tradition dangerously blurred the human and the divine. It tended to reduce either the supernatural to the natural – what Powell called "scepticism" – or to elevate the natural to the supernatural – for Powell, "the very essence of superstition".²⁰

¹⁶ Corsi, *Science and Religion*, 145.

¹⁷ Richard Whately, *Easy Lessons on Christian Evidences* (London: John W. Parker, 1838), 18.

¹⁸ Cf. Richard Whately, *Remarks on Some Causes of Hostility to the Christian Religion* (Dublin: Milliken, 1838).

¹⁹ Powell, *Tradition Unveiled* (London: John W. Parker, 1839), 74–75.

²⁰ Powell, *Tradition Unveiled*, 45. Powell repeated this charge in his review of Newman's *Essay on Development*, where he designated the two alternatives as mysticism and scepticism. Cf. Baden Powell, "Mysticism and Scepticism". *Edinburgh Review* 84 (July 1846), 195–223.

Newman responded to these Noetic charges in a course of university sermons on faith and reason, preached between 1839 and 1841.²¹ Newman challenged the Noetics' rigid distinction between faith and reason, and their reduction of reason to explicit evidential procedures. He argued that when reason is properly understood as simply the act of inference, faith appears as a kind of reasoning too. The model for such reasoning, however, is not the explicit, syllogistic exposition of evidences, but a more subtle and recondite process of presumptive reasoning informed by estimates of antecedent probability. The reasoning of faith, Newman maintained, is "influenced by previous notices, prepossessions, and (in a good sense of the word) prejudices".²² Accordingly, people's response to the Gospel does not depend on the technical evidences developed by Paley, but on their predisposition to religion as responsible, moral beings: "religious minds embrace the Gospel mainly on the great antecedent probability of a Revelation, and the suitableness of the Gospel to their needs"; on "irreligious minds Evidences are thrown away".²³

This was a radical argument in view of the apologetic tradition that stemmed from Locke. By undermining Locke's rigid distinction between faith and reason (and thus between the natural and the supernatural), Newman destabilized the underlying concept of revelation as a clearly identifiable and easily provable set of divine communications. Moreover, on Newman's theory, religious belief appeared to lose its evidential support. Accordingly, Whately and Powell maintained that the upshot of Newman's argument was no different than David Hume's claim that "Christians rest their faith not on *evidence*, but, in fact, on *faith*, that is, on itself".²⁴ Daniel Macmillan, then beginning his career as a publisher, agreed, and regarded the *University Sermons* as "a very curious specimen of the sceptical turn of [Newman's] mind".²⁵ "He greatly reminds me of our great Scotch sceptic, David Hume",

²¹ For a detailed analysis of these sermons as both a response to Noetic evidentialism and a creative appropriation of Whately's work on logic and rhetoric, cf. Geertjan Zuijdwegt, "Richard Whately's Influence on John Henry Newman's *Oxford University Sermons* on Faith and Reason, 1839–1841". *Newman Studies Journal* 10.1 (Spring 2013) forthcoming.

²² John Henry Newman, *Sermons, Chiefly on the Theory of Religious Belief* (London: Rivington, 1843), 179.

²³ Newman, *Sermons*, 189.

²⁴ Baden Powell, *A Supplement to Tradition Unveiled* (London: John W. Parker, 1840), 9. Powell backed up the initial charge by Whately in his *Essays on Some of the Dangers to Christian Faith* (London: B. Fellowes, 1839), 109. In fact, Newman (*Sermons*, 45) had boldly made Hume's satirical assertion that "our most holy Religion [...] is founded on *Faith*, not on Reason," his own, by replying that although "This is said in irony [...] it is true as far as every important question in Revelation is concerned."

²⁵ "Daniel Macmillan to Rev. D. Watt, 29 April 1843". In Thomas Hughes, *Memoir of Daniel Macmillan* (London: Macmillan, 1882), 109.

Macmillan wrote, “[t]he same analytical power, the same carelessness about consequences [...] he makes the solid earth shake beneath you”.²⁶ Newman’s *ad hominem* attack on the sources of Anglican theology after his conversion to Rome offered additional grounds for this charge of scepticism.

ii A ‘Kill or Cure’ Argument for Roman Catholicism

When Newman converted to Roman Catholicism in 1845 he did not leave the Church of England in silence; he published *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* as his theological justification. Reactions abounded. Most Anglican reviewers angrily imputed some form of dishonesty to Newman, a charge that was rooted in the controversy over *Tract 90* in 1841.²⁷ One feature of Newman’s argument in the *Essay on Development* drew particular criticism, however. As Robert Willmott worded it in *Fraser’s Magazine*, “Mr. Newman does not hesitate to confess, that between Popery and infidelity is the only choice”.²⁸ This either-or argumentative strategy had its roots in *Tract 85* (1838), Newman’s attack on the Evangelical and Noetic approaches to Scripture.

Tract 85 dealt with the alleged “want of *adequate* Scripture evidence for the Church doctrines”.²⁹ Newman applied “an *argumentum ad hominem*” to the issue, meant to demonstrate that Noetics and Evangelicals who objected to Tractarian doctrine on Scriptural grounds were inconsistent, “for they cannot consistently object against a person who believes more than they do, unless they cease to believe so much as they do believe”.³⁰ A person, for instance, “who denies the Apostolical Succession of the Ministry, because it is not clearly taught in Scripture, ought”, Newman argued, “if consistent, to deny the Godhead of the HOLY GHOST, which is nowhere literally stated in Scripture”.³¹ Newman fittingly labelled his line of argument “a kill or cure remedy” and realized that it might as easily lead to full-blown error as to full-blown truth.³² In the *Essay on Development* – which he

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 109–110.

²⁷ Cf. Geertjan Zuidwegt, “Newman’s Disputed Honesty: A Case Study in Victorian Religious Controversy”. *Louvain Studies* 34 (2010), 361–384.

²⁸ Robert A. Willmott, “Mr. Newman; His Theories and Character”. *Fraser’s Magazine* 195 (March 1846), 253–268, 255.

²⁹ John Henry Newman, *Lectures on the Scripture Proof of the Doctrines of the Church*, Tracts for the Times No. 85 (London: Rivington, 1838), 3.

³⁰ Newman, *Scripture Proof*, 3.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

³² *Ibid.*, 3.

intended to be read in continuity with *Tract 85* – Newman employed the same argumentative strategy, now to convince his fellow Tractarians that they could not consistently blame Rome for having developed the Nicene Creed into the Tridentine, because the Nicene Creed was itself a development of Apostolic teaching.³³ Either both were legitimate developments, or neither was. This argument naturally led to Newman's suggestion that people "may pass from infidelity to Rome, and from Rome to infidelity, from a conviction in both courses that there is no tangible intellectual position between the two".³⁴

Whilst *Tract 85* was hardly noticed at the time of its publication, the *Essay on Development* occasioned a torrent of predominantly Anglican reviews critical of Newman's 'kill or cure' mode of arguing.³⁵ The Tractarian James Mozley, Newman's brother-in-law, recognized that for Newman "we have no standing ground between Rome and Infidelity", and tried to meet the challenge head on by showing that the Nicene Creed was no development in Newman's sense of the term.³⁶ Other critics of the *Essay on Development* explained Newman's radical alternative by means of the earlier charge of scepticism. William Butler maintained that Newman's argument suggested that his "Intellect was diseased with a radical tendency to Scepticism, while his better Heart owned the nobler necessity of Belief".³⁷ Samuel Wilberforce, the newly installed Bishop of Oxford, more bluntly suggested that Newman had flown "on the wings of unbounded scepticism into the bosom of an unfathomed superstition".³⁸ Many, moreover, predicted that Newman's argument would have unwanted repercussions.³⁹ Broad Church theologian Frederick Denison Maurice

33 In his preparatory papers for the *Essay on Development* Newman noted that "This work must be looked at in connection with *Tract 85* – that delivered from Liberalism, this persuades to Rome." Cited in Owen Chadwick, *From Bossuet to Newman: The Idea of Doctrinal Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), 232.

34 John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (London: James Toovey, 1845), 73.

35 *Tract 85* did feature, however, in the Evangelical William Goode's two-volume attack on Tractarianism, *The Divine Rule of Faith and Practice* (London: J. Hatchard, 1842).

36 James B. Mozley, "Newman on Development". *Christian Remembrancer* 13 (January 1847), 117–265, 211.

37 William A. Butler, *Letters on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, ed. T. Woodward (Dublin: Hodges and Smith, 1850), 204. Originally published between 1845 and 1847 in the *Irish Ecclesiastical Journal*.

38 Samuel Wilberforce, *A Charge, Delivered to the Candidates for Ordination* (London: Rivington, 1847³), 20.

39 Cf. Erik Sidenvall, "Dealing with Development: The Protestant Reviews of John Henry Newman's *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, 1845–7". In *The Church and the Book*, ed. R. N. Swanson, *Studies in Church History* 38 (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2005), 357–364, 362.

feared that Newman's counsel – “Fly to the Pope – for to whom else can you fly” – would drive the “young men of his day [...] into a hopeless infidelity”.⁴⁰

As Erik Sidenvall has noted in *After Anti-Catholicism?*, his seminal monograph on the development of the British Protestant response to Newman's secession between 1845 and 1890, critiques of Newman's either-or argumentative strategy surfaced repeatedly in the decades after Newman's conversion.⁴¹ In 1881, Dean Stanley could still refer to the idea that “Cardinal Newman's conversion to the Roman Church was a rebound from the distractions of a mind torn by the critical doubts of the age” as “a common impression”.⁴² Rather than detailing every instance of this critique – a more than daunting task – the remainder of this paper is devoted to presenting and analysing its development among its most prominent advocates: James Anthony Froude, Charles Kingsley, Fitzjames and Leslie Stephen, and Thomas Henry Huxley. All of these critics were leading Victorian intellectuals who either belonged to the established church or had an Anglican background. All of these thinkers, moreover, critiqued both Newman's religious epistemology and the either-or argumentative strategy of his apologetic proper.

2 Unintended Consequences: James Anthony Froude's Crisis of Faith

James Anthony Froude (1818–1894), the younger brother of Newman's close friend and fellow Tractarian Richard Hurrell Froude, was a paradigmatic instance of Maurice's fears with regard to Newman's apologetic. Although Froude had a lifelong personal affection for Newman, he consistently attributed his crisis of faith in the 1840s to Newman's Tractarian defence of religious belief.⁴³ In 1849, Froude published a highly controversial, melodramatic semi-autobiography, *The*

⁴⁰ Frederick Denison Maurice, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (London: John W. Parker, 1846), lxxx. Cf. also e. g., Henry Hart Milman, “Newman on the Development of Christian Doctrine”. *Quarterly Review* 77 (1846), 404–465, 435–436; George Moberly, *The Sayings of the Great Forty Days* (London: Francis & John Rivington, 1846), lv–lix.

⁴¹ Cf. Sidenvall, *After Anti-Catholicism?*, 98–99, 138. Cf. also e. g., Francis Close, *The Footsteps of Error Traced Through a Period of Twenty-Five Years; or, Superstition the Parent of Modern Doubt* (London: Hatchard, 1863); James Martineau, “Personal Influences on our Present Theology: Newman–Coleridge–Carlyle”. *The National Review* 6 (October 1856), 449–494.

⁴² Arthur P. Stanley, “The Oxford School”. *Edinburgh Review* 153 (April 1881), 305–335, 314. Stanley himself did not share this view.

⁴³ Cf. e. g. “James Anthony Froude to Mrs. Fanny Kingsley, 30 December 1880”. In Waldo Hilary Dunn, *James Anthony Froude: A Biography*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961 & 1963), 504.

Nemesis of Faith. Its combination of religious scepticism with a plot line involving a platonic love affair between the hero and a married woman earned it such epithets as “a manual for infidelity” and “An Apology for Adultery”.⁴⁴ William Sewell, sub-rector of Froude’s own Exeter College, even publically burned the book in Hall. *The Nemesis* was primarily a complex and ambiguous attack on Tractarianism, however. “Never mind, if the Puseyites hate it”, Froude wrote to the poet Arthur Hugh Clough, “they must fear it and it *will* work in the minds *they* have made sick”.⁴⁵ In fact, Froude’s was one of those ‘sick’ minds.

As Daniel Cook has pointed out, *The Nemesis* is unique in that it does not portray the gradual or ‘evenly’ loss of faith so common in Victorian literature.⁴⁶ For “more robust Liberals”, Froude later observed, “resistance was a healthy and exhilarating process”.⁴⁷ For him, however, the struggle with Christianity was confusing and painful.⁴⁸ This tragic struggle was intimately tied up with Froude’s relation to Newman. Froude’s alter ego and the protagonist of *The Nemesis*, Markham Sutherland, finds himself caught between his religious feelings, which incline him to Newman’s saintly heroics and spiritual genius, and his reason, which remains unsatisfied by Newman’s apologetic. In the most straightforwardly autobiographical section of *The Nemesis*, Sutherland charges Newman with sapping the foundations of his childhood faith: Newman’s “subtle reasonings [...] drew away from under us the supports on which Protestant Christianity had been content to rest its weight”.⁴⁹ Newman led the Oxford undergraduates of his day to acknowledge “the logical strength of the arguments of Hume”, and to see

⁴⁴ *Morning Herald*, 10 March 1849. In Dunn, *Froude*, 233; “Mr. Froude and ‘The Nemesis of Faith’”. *Bentley’s Miscellany* 25 (January 1849), 443–446, 443.

⁴⁵ “James Anthony Froude to Arthur Hugh Clough, 6 March 1849”. In *The Correspondence of Arthur Hugh Clough*, vol. 1, ed. Frederick L. Mulhauser (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), 250–251, 251. Froude’s intention was not lost on his contemporaries. Hampden wrote that the “speculative infidelity,” “atheism” and “worst of immorality” that pervaded *The Nemesis* were “just, indeed, what might be augured from the spread of Tractarianism.” Maurice and his fellow Christian Socialist John Malcolm Ludlow shared Hampden’s view. Cf. “Renn Dickson Hampden to Hayward Cox”. In Henrietta Hampden, *Some Memorials of Renn Dickson Hampden, Bishop of Hereford* (London: Longmans, 1871), 177; “Frederick Denison Maurice to Charles Kingsley, 9 March 1849”. In Frederick Maurice, *The Life of Frederick Denison Maurice*, vol. 1 (London: Macmillan, 1884), 516; John Malcolm Ludlow, “Froude’s *Nemesis of Faith*”. *Fraser’s Magazine* 39 (1849), 545–559.

⁴⁶ Cf. Daniel Cook, “Froude’s Post-Christian Apostate and the Uneven Development of Unbelief”. *Religion & Literature* 38.2 (2006), 49–71.

⁴⁷ “Froude’s Autobiographical Fragment”. In Dunn, *Froude*, 149.

⁴⁸ Cf. Owen Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, vol. 1 (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1970²), 534.

⁴⁹ James Anthony Froude, *The Nemesis of Faith* (London: John Chapman, 1849³), 126.

that “the evidences of Paley, were futile” as answers to Hume’s objections.⁵⁰ Newman carried “the surrender of reason” in favour of adherence to Church authority to extremes. In his last university sermon, he sceptically solved the contradiction between Scripture, which “says the earth is stationary and the sun moves” and science, which holds “that the sun is stationary, and that the earth moves”, by concluding that, “we never shall know which is true till we know what *motion* is”.⁵¹ For Sutherland, this was “[d]eepst credulity and deepest scepticism” at the same time”.⁵² If there was no other way to save Scripture than this”, Sutherland comments, “then, in the name of plain sense and honesty, let Scripture go”.⁵³

Yet, in the book’s dramatic finale, Sutherland finds himself caught once again between his affection for Newman and his doubting intellect. With Christianity’s moral guidance gone, Sutherland has made a hash of his life, and we meet him in despair and on the brink of suicide. In the nick of time – the poison phial already raised to his lips – he is saved by (a literarily disguised) Newman, who appeals to his feelings of guilt to convert him to Roman Catholicism.⁵⁴ Sutherland converts, but his “new faith fabric had been reared upon the clouds of sudden and violent feeling”. “Doubt soon sapped it”, and Sutherland dies “amidst the wasted ruins of his life, where the bare bleak soil was strewn with wrecked purposes and shattered creeds”.⁵⁵ Even more than witnessing to Froude’s failure to find a way out of his religious crisis, as Basil Willey argues, this dramatic ending represents Froude’s ingenious subversion of Newman’s either-or apologetic strategy to drive home the tragic point of *The Nemesis*: for those caught between a desire to believe and the impossibility to do so in an intellectually honest way, faith becomes an agent of destruction.⁵⁶ Sutherland, caught between scepticism and credulity, finds no relief. As Froude wrote in the preface to the second edition of *The Nemesis*, “Faith ought to have been Sutherland’s salvation – it was his Nemesis – it destroyed him”.⁵⁷

⁵⁰ Froude, *Nemesis*, 126.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 157. Cf. Newman, *Sermons*, 350.

⁵² Froude, *Nemesis*, 158, 159.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 159.

⁵⁴ Cf. Basil Willey, *More Nineteenth Century Studies: A Group of Honest Doubters* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969²), 129–130. Willey’s entire section on Froude is helpful (*ibid.*, 106–136).

⁵⁵ Froude, *Nemesis*, 226.

⁵⁶ Cf. Willey, *More Nineteenth Century Studies*, 130.

⁵⁷ Froude, *Nemesis*, xiv.

The composition of *The Nemesis* allowed Froude to regain his mental composure. He then set out on a career that would make him one of the most prolific and best known of Victorian historians. In 1881, a mature Froude returned to the history of his Oxford years in a series of letters in *Good Words Magazine*, later republished under the telling title *The Oxford Counter-Reformation*.⁵⁸ Froude's critique is still substantially that of *The Nemesis*, but is now applied with sweeping generality.⁵⁹ Newman's apologetic, Froude argued, disturbed the established church's tranquil religious and moral condition, and turned it into a battlefield for controversialists. Although Newman's endorsement of Hume's argument against miracles – that it is more likely that witnesses are wrong than that the laws of nature are broken – was intended to facilitate the substitution of the authority of the Church for that of the Bible, it caused many to abandon their faith altogether. “But for the Oxford movement”, Froude maintained, “scepticism might have continued a harmless speculation of a few philosophers. By their perverse alternative, either the Church or nothing, they forced honest man to say, Let it be nothing, then, rather than what we know to be a lie”.⁶⁰

The Oxford Counter-Reformation also sheds light on a more personal aspect of Froude's religious crisis. In 1843, Newman invited him to contribute a biography of St. Neot to the *Lives of the English Saints*, a series of hagiographies under Newman's editorship intended to foster the Tractarian devotional ideal. Froude's modern historical sensibilities proved completely at odds with those of his medieval sources. “I really despair of making out a HISTORICAL case either for St Neot or any of the Alfred legends connected with him”, Froude told Newman in 1843.⁶¹ Newman soothingly replied that it was “desirable to keep up the *religious* effect, and without pledging oneself to the truth of this or that fact, to imply that one does not know *how much* truth there may be in it”.⁶² Froude, however, became convinced that the fantastical miracle stories were “nonsense”.⁶³ To promote the credibility of the miraculous lives of the saints, moreover, Newman once again resorted to his ‘kill or

58 James Anthony Froude, “The Oxford Counter-Reformation”. In *Short Studies on Great Subjects*, vol. 4 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1883), 151–235.

59 As John Griffin (“Cardinal Newman”, 989) points out, *The Oxford Counter-Reformation* “suggests that Newman was responsible for the loss of faith of a whole generation.”

60 Froude, “Oxford Counter-Reformation”, 164. Cf. also Froude's “Father Newman on ‘The Grammar of Assent’”. *Fraser's Magazine* 1 (May 1870), 561–580, 561.

61 “James Anthony Froude to Newman, 9 November [1843]”. In *The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman*, vol. 10, ed. Francis J. McGrath (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 394. The letter has to be attributed to 1843 rather than to 1844, since Froude's *A Legend of St. Neot* was already published in early 1844.

62 “Newman to James Anthony Froude, 28 November 1843”. In *ibid.*, 35–36.

63 Froude, “Oxford Counter-Reformation”, 212.

cure' rhetoric, arguing "that there was no distinction in kind between the saints' miracles and the miracles in the Bible".⁶⁴ Rather than believing both, "the alternative possibility" suggested itself to Froude, viz., "that all supernatural stories were legendary wherever we found them".⁶⁵ The crisis Froude experienced because of the *Lives of the English Saints* later resonated in the charges of the most renowned of Newman's critics, the liberal Anglican clergyman, novelist and social activist Charles Kingsley (1819–1875).

3 Froude, Kingsley, and the Making of the *Apologia*

Kingsley's wholesale attack on Newman's intellectual and personal honesty is chiefly remembered for the reply it provoked, Newman's *Apologia pro Vita Sua* (1864). Nevertheless, Kingsley's charge is interesting in its own right, not least because of its continuation of Froude's critique of Newman's apologetic.⁶⁶ The occasion for the controversy between Kingsley and Newman was Kingsley's wanton charge – in a review for *Macmillan's Magazine* of one of Froude's historical volumes – that Newman did not regard "[t]ruth, for its own sake", as a virtue.⁶⁷ Newman remonstrated via the Macmillan family, but Kingsley offered him only a half-hearted apology. Unsatisfied, Newman published the correspondence that had ensued and appended a satirical postscript mocking Kingsley's replies. Kingsley was goaded into responding and dashed off a bombastic and viciously anti-Catholic pamphlet, *What, Then, Does Dr. Newman Mean?* Newman eagerly grasped the opportunity to publicly vindicate the integrity of his religious career, and began to publish the *Apologia* in biweekly instalments.

Kingsley had a long history of antagonism to Newman. "I have a score of more than twenty years to pay", Kingsley wrote while preparing his pamphlet, "and this is an instalment of it".⁶⁸ One of the debts incurred concerned Froude.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 216. The (implicit) reference is to Newman's *An Essay on the Miracles Recorded in the Ecclesiastical History of the Early Ages* (Oxford: J.H. Parker, 1843), originally published in 1842 as the introduction to a translated volume of Claude Fleury's *Histoire ecclésiastique*.

⁶⁵ Froude, "Oxford Counter-Reformation", 216.

⁶⁶ Cf. Griffin, "Cardinal Newman", 986.

⁶⁷ Charles Kingsley, "Froude's History of England, Vols. VII. & VIII". *Macmillan's Magazine* 9 (January 1864), 211–224, 217.

⁶⁸ Charles Kingsley, "Letter of Mar. 9, 1864". In Martin Svaglic, "Editor's Introduction". In John Henry Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, ed. Martin J. Svaglic (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990²), vii–lx, xxiv.

“Old passages about Froude and others have left a bitter flavour in his thoughts and feelings about the great pervert”, Alexander Macmillan wrote in January 1864.⁶⁹ In fact, when the public outrage against *The Nemesis* had driven Froude out of Oxford, he had taken shelter at the Kingsley’s – an act of hospitality for which Kingsley was harshly criticized.⁷⁰ The effects of Froude’s stay can be gleaned from Kingsley’s 1851 re-edition of his serial novel *Yeast*, which contained a new anti-Catholic plot line along with unflattering allusions to Newman’s defence of Roman Catholicism.⁷¹ In 1864, Froude enthusiastically urged Kingsley to respond to Newman’s satirical postscript, and highly approved of the resulting pamphlet.⁷² In fact, Kingsley’s pamphlet shows Froude’s guiding hand throughout.

For his response to Kingsley’s many accusations, Newman selected the one that Kingsley had tried studiously, albeit unconvincingly, to avoid in his pamphlet: that of personal dishonesty.⁷³ Froude had told Kingsley that Newman was “a man of most perfect personal truthfulness”.⁷⁴ In his pamphlet, Kingsley proved to be at least partly persuaded. He admitted that “for years past” he thought Newman had lost “his own sense of honesty – i. e. conscious truthfulness”.⁷⁵ He now recognized, however, that Newman had destroyed “his common sense – i. e. unconscious truthfulness, and [had] become the slave and puppet seemingly of his own logic, really of his own fancy, ready to believe anything, however preposterous, into which he could, for the moment, argue himself”.⁷⁶ This, of course, is an uncharitably worded variant of Froude’s

69 Cited in Una Pope-Hennessy, *Canon Charles Kingsley: A Biography* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1948), 214, who omits “and others” which is supplied by Robert Bernard Martin, *The Dust of Combat: A Life of Charles Kingsley* (London: Faber and Faber, 1959), 241–242.

70 Cf. Martin, *Dust of Combat*, 102–106; J. M. I. Klaver, *The Apostle of the Flesh: A Critical Life of Charles Kingsley* (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2006), 175–182.

71 Cf. Charles Kingsley, *Yeast: A Problem* (London: John W. Parker, 1851); Larry K. Uffelman and P. G. Scott, “Kingsley’s Serial Novel ‘Yeast’”. *Victorian Periodicals Newsletter* 9 (1976), 111–119, 115–117. Klaver (*Apostle of the Flesh*, 255–257) offers interesting observations on the relation between *Yeast* and Newman’s 1848 novel *Loss and Gain*.

72 Cf. Martin, *Dust of Combat*, 247.

73 While preparing his pamphlet, Kingsley wrote: “of course I give up the charge of conscious dishonesty” (Kingsley, “Letter of Mar. 9, 1864”. In Svaglic, “Editor’s Introduction”, xxiv).

74 “James Anthony Froude to Charles Kingsley, 3 June 1864”. In Dunn, *Froude*, 306.

75 Charles Kingsley, “What, Then, Does Dr. Newman Mean?” *A Reply to a Pamphlet Lately Published by Dr. Newman* (London: Macmillan, 1864), 20.

76 Kingsley, “What, Then, Does Dr. Newman Mean?”, 20.

critique of Newman in *The Nemesis*. Kingsley's substantiation of his charge shows Froude's influence as well.⁷⁷ Kingsley adduces a series of examples of "childish miracles" from the *Lives of the English Saints* to show that Newman, as editor, did not care for "historic truth and the law of evidence"; that, "like the sophists of old, he has used reason to destroy reason".⁷⁸ Almost certainly on Froude's advice, Kingsley concluded his charge by appealing to Newman's final university sermon, which he "had overlooked till lately", to show that it tried "to undermine the grounds of all rational belief for the purpose of substituting blind superstition".⁷⁹ To argue his case, Kingsley adduced the same passage that cost Sutherland his faith in *The Nemesis*. In line with Froude, Kingsley maintained that the purpose of Newman's "seemingly sceptical method [is] to tell us that we can know nothing certainly, and therefore must take blindly what 'The Church' shall choose to teach us".⁸⁰

While almost everyone acknowledged that Newman had gloriously vindicated his personal honesty in the *Apologia*, some perceived that this was not the only issue at stake. Early on, Alexander Macmillan had deplored the attempt by Newman and his supporters to make the issue personal, rather than "a question of the ethical elements of popery".⁸¹ When the publication of the *Apologia* was well underway, Froude advised Kingsley to retract nothing concerning "the absurdities which Catholicism requires men to believe".⁸² In fact, in *The Oxford Counter-Reformation*, Froude made a point of vindicating Kingsley's attack on the *Lives of the English Saints*. Although Froude admitted that Kingsley had "entirely misunderstood Newman's character", he argued that Kingsley justly "believed that Newman's methods of reasoning confounded his perceptions of truth, disregarding principles which alone led to conclusions that could be trusted in other subjects", these principles being "the strict rules of inductive science and courts of justice".⁸³ Another of Froude's close friends, the journalist, lawyer and later judge of the High Court, James Fitzjames Stephen (1829–1894) attacked Newman's apologetic on similar grounds.

⁷⁷ Cf. Griffin, "Cardinal Newman", 984.

⁷⁸ Kingsley, "What, Then, Does Dr. Newman Mean?", 21, 22, 26.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁸¹ "Alexander Macmillan to Frederick Denison Maurice, 30 March 1864". In Alan Hertz, "The Broad Church Militant and Newman's Humiliation of Charles Kingsley". *Victorian Periodicals Review* 20 (1987), 141–149, 144.

⁸² "James Anthony Froude to Charles Kingsley, 3 June 1864". In Dunn, *Froude*, 306–307.

⁸³ Froude, "Oxford Counter-Reformation", 214–215.

4 James Fitzjames Stephen's Critique of Newman's Apologetic

As James Livingston has noted, Fitzjames Stephen “was among the foremost religious critics of the mid- and late-Victorian period”.⁸⁴ Raised in an Evangelical home, Stephen gradually lost his faith until he became convinced, in old age, “that it is not true at all”.⁸⁵ Yet, intellectually, Stephen remained firmly rooted in the Lockean apologetic tradition with its dichotomy between faith and reason.⁸⁶ Unlike Noetics such as Whately, however, who defined reason along deductive, Aristotelian lines, Stephen understood reason inductively, in close adherence to John Stuart Mill’s 1843 systematization of inductive logic.⁸⁷ As a result, Stephen believed that both God’s existence and any purported revelation ought to be proven by inductive arguments that met the strict requirements of the scientific method outlined by Mill. Newman’s apologetic proved completely at odds with such standards, and Stephen criticized it accordingly. His comprehensive attack on Newman’s apologetic systematically integrated the two core charges of the earlier critique. As early as 1856, Stephen had criticized Newman’s either-or apologetic strategy, arguing that Newman intended “to prove that no resting-place is possible between Romanism and Atheism”.⁸⁸ In his 1864 review of the *Apologia*, Stephen sought to succeed where Kingsley had failed, and criticized both Newman’s religious epistemology and his apologetic proper.

Besides challenging Newman’s understanding of the nature of probability, Stephen attacked the *Apologia*’s argument for God’s existence, which was based on conscience, rather than on external evidence. Newman frankly admitted that he saw no signs of God’s existence in the appalling state of the world: without God’s “voice, speaking so clearly in my conscience and my heart, I should be an atheist, or a pantheist, or a polytheist when I looked into the world”.⁸⁹ For

⁸⁴ James C. Livingston, “The Religious Creed and Criticism of Sir James Fitzjames Stephen”. *Victorian Studies* 17.3 (1974), 279–300, 280.

⁸⁵ “Stephen’s Autobiographic Fragment”. In K. J. M. Smith, *James Fitzjames Stephen: Portrait of a Victorian Rationalist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 243.

⁸⁶ Cf. Livingston, “Religious Creed”, 282–283 for Stephen’s commendation of evidential apologetics as late as 1862.

⁸⁷ Cf. Richard Whately, *Elements of Logic* (London: J. Mawman, 1827); John Stuart Mill, *A System of Logic, Ratiocinative and Inductive*, 2 vols. (London: John W. Parker, 1843).

⁸⁸ James Fitzjames Stephen, “Dr. Newman on Universities”. *Saturday Review* (13 December 1856), 733–734, 734.

⁸⁹ Newman, *Apologia*, 377. Cf. Stephen, “Dr. Newman’s ‘Apologia’”, 275.

Stephen, the implication was clear: “if Dr. Newman was thoroughly honest he would be an atheist”.⁹⁰ Newman’s defence of the role of mystery in theology suggested a similar conclusion. In a Catholic sermon entitled *Mysteries of Nature and Grace*, Newman used his ‘kill or cure’ argumentative strategy to show that it was inconsistent to object to Catholic doctrines such as transubstantiation on the ground that they were mysterious, while at the same time believing in God’s existence – a doctrine just as mysterious. “If I must submit my reason to mysteries”, Newman concluded, “it is not much matter whether it is a mystery more or a mystery less”.⁹¹ Stephen thought this was “reckless scepticism taking the form of the wildest superstition” – an honest inquirer would draw the opposite conclusion.⁹² Newman’s understanding of mystery, Stephen maintained in a paper read before the Metaphysical Society, was a mere “confession of ignorance, an admission that we have got into a region of which we know nothing, and therefore ought to say nothing”.⁹³

In 1870, Newman published *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, his magnum opus on religious epistemology. This work was at least partially intended to counter Stephen’s critique of the *Apologia*, which William Froude, an older brother of Anthony Froude, had explicitly made his own in correspondence with Newman.⁹⁴ In the *Grammar*, Newman challenged the foundational epistemological principle of both the Noetics and empiricist thinkers like Stephen and William Froude: John Locke’s contention that a “lover of truth” should not hold “any proposition with greater assurance than the proofs it is built upon will warrant”.⁹⁵ Newman denounced Locke’s maxim as “theoretical and unreal”, and based his reply on a rigid distinction between inference and assent.⁹⁶ Whereas inference is conditional, assent, resulting in certitude, is unconditional and absolute; it is not the product of explicit evidential analysis and does not admit of degrees. Rather than a Lockean proportioning of one’s degree of conviction to the amount of available evidence, assent to any given non-necessary proposition is a reasoned

⁹⁰ J. F. Stephen, “Dr. Newman’s ‘Apologia’”, 280.

⁹¹ John Henry Newman, *Discourses Addressed to Mixed Congregations* (London: Longman, 1849), 290.

⁹² J. F. Stephen, “Dr. Newman’s ‘Apologia’”, 285.

⁹³ James Fitzjames Stephen, *On a Theory of Dr. Newman’s as to Believing in Miracles*, Paper read before the Metaphysical Society (London: Privately printed, 1875), 8.

⁹⁴ “William Froude to Newman, 29 September 1864”. In Gordon H. Harper, *Cardinal Newman and William Froude, F. R. S.: A Correspondence* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1933), 177.

⁹⁵ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, IV, xix, 1. Cf. John Henry Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (London: Burns, Oates, & Co., 1870), 156.

⁹⁶ Newman, *Grammar*, 157.

judgment as to the truth of that proposition, based on a host of implicit considerations of a personal and probabilistic nature. The faculty that arrives at such judgments is the *illative sense*, which determines “the limits of converging probabilities, and the reasons sufficient for a proof”.⁹⁷

Stephen strongly opposed the *Grammar*’s religious epistemology, regarding it as an attempt to “increase the bulk and the weight of evidence by heating it with love”.⁹⁸ For Stephen, the illative sense was merely a way “to draw positive conclusions from insufficient premises”.⁹⁹ In response to William George Ward’s defence of the *Grammar*, Stephen countered Newman’s contention that assent is absolute by arguing that beliefs admit of “degrees of stability” – there is always a certain amount of contrary evidence that will topple even our most cherished certitudes.¹⁰⁰ To Newman’s notion of the illative sense, Stephen objected that the only “connection between belief and the truth of the matter believed” is its explicit evidential support.¹⁰¹ Neither the fact that we have certitudes nor the implicit character of the process by which we acquire them justifies regarding our certitudes as true.

Stephen’s reading of the *Apologia* and the *Grammar* strongly impacted his assessment of Newman’s personal honesty. To his confidante Emily Cunningham, Stephen wrote that Newman seemed to be “one of those people who pass their lives in a passionate effort to work out a result which at the bottom of their hearts they know is not true”.¹⁰² Newman believed simply because he *wanted* to believe:

His reason goes one way – & his feelings the other, & he forces his reason to follow his feelings, instead of regulating his feelings by his reason. I do not call this honest, though perhaps it is a question of words.¹⁰³

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 346. It must be noted that this is a marked departure from Newman’s position in the *University Sermons*, where assent and the inferences which lead to it are not so clearly distinguished.

⁹⁸ James Fitzjames Stephen, *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity* (New York: Holt & Williams, 1873), 324.

⁹⁹ James Fitzjames Stephen, “On Certitude in Religious Assent”. *Fraser’s Magazine* 5 (January 1872), 23–42, 36.

¹⁰⁰ J. F. Stephen, “On Certitude”, 28. Cf. William George Ward, “Certitude in Religious Assent”. *Dublin Review* 17 (April 1871), 253–274.

¹⁰¹ J. F. Stephen, “On Certitude”, 29.

¹⁰² “James Fitzjames Stephen to Emily Cunningham, 23 September 1874”. Cambridge University Library Add. MSS. 7349/8, 25. Electronic file available at <http://www.bu.edu/av/editinst/JFS%20Correspondence/Cambridge%20U.%20Lib.%20Papers/Stephen7349-8cont5.pdf> [last accessed 12 September 2012].

¹⁰³ “James Fitzjames Stephen to Emily Cunningham, 23 September 1874”, 25.

“[I]t all comes to this”, Stephen maintained, “that ignorance is our appointed lot in this life, & that honesty consists in fully acknowledging the ignorance & uncertainty in which we live”.¹⁰⁴ This theme was central to the agnostic critique of Newman’s apologetic.

5 The Agnostic Critique of Newman’s Apologetic: Leslie Stephen and Thomas Henry Huxley

Victorian agnosticism drew on Hume’s scepticism and Kant’s critical philosophy (as mediated by the Scottish philosopher William Hamilton) to argue that, as Leslie Stephen put it, “there are limits to the sphere of human intelligence” and that knowledge of God lies beyond those limits.¹⁰⁵ Thomas Henry Huxley added that agnosticism “expresses absolute belief” in the principle “that it is wrong for a man to say that he is certain of the objective truth of any proposition unless he can produce evidence which logically justifies that certainty”.¹⁰⁶ Leslie Stephen, Fitzjames’ younger brother and the father of Virginia Woolf, was the leading spokesperson for Victorian unbelief in the last part of the nineteenth century.¹⁰⁷ Stephen’s critique of Newman’s apologetic was innovative in two important ways. First, in his article *An Agnostic’s Apology* (1876), Stephen reiterated his brother’s analysis of Newman’s apologetic but used it to bolster the agnostic religious position. Newman, Stephen maintained, vindicated the “fundamental principles” of agnosticism, but refused “to draw the legitimate inferences”.¹⁰⁸ Newman’s distrust of reason, appeal to conscience, and admission that atheism was a viable intellectual alternative to Roman Catholicism confirmed the agnostic emphasis on the limits of knowledge. Secondly, Leslie Stephen brought Newman’s *Essay on Development* back to the centre of discussion in what is perhaps the most

104 *Ibid.*, 21.

105 Leslie Stephen, “An Agnostic’s Apology”. *Fortnightly Review* 19 (June 1876), 840–860, 840. Cf. Bernard Lightman, *The Origins of Agnosticism: Victorian Unbelief and the Limits of Knowledge* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1987).

106 Thomas Henry Huxley, “Agnosticism and Christianity”. *Nineteenth Century* 25 (June 1889), 937–964, 937–938. See also William Clifford’s famous *The Ethics of Belief*, which was first read as a paper for the Metaphysical Society (London: Privately printed, 1876), and later published in an extended version in *Contemporary Review* 29 (1877), 289–309.

107 Cf. Noel Annan, *Leslie Stephen: The Godless Victorian* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1984), 254.

108 L. Stephen, “Agnostic’s Apology”, 846. Cf. Anthony Kenny, “Leslie Stephen and the Mountains of Truth”. In *The Unknown God: Agnostic Essays* (London: Continuum, 2004), 155–178.

systematic and rigorous of all critiques of Newman's apologetic, namely, Stephen's two-part article *Dr. Newman's Theory of Belief* (1877).¹⁰⁹

Stephen's essay is surprisingly comprehensive, drawing on all of Newman's major works, though most fundamentally on the *Essay on Development* and the *Grammar*, in order to uncover "the logic by which, in the last resort, Newman would justify his conclusions".¹¹⁰ Stephen appealed to the *Essay on Development* to argue that Newman's "scepticism is of the historical variety".¹¹¹ Rather than proving the fact of revelation directly, with "an earlier school of apologists", Newman turned to history to find true Christianity.¹¹² Stephen interpreted Newman's theory of development as analogous "to the development of a species under natural selection".¹¹³ Historical evidence of vitality, coherence, and permanence are indications of the truth of a creed. Accordingly, Newman could conclude, as Stephen put it, that "the Catholic faith differs from the doctrine of Anglicanism as a living organism from a dead mechanism".¹¹⁴ As an agnostic, Stephen had no qualms with Newman's contention that the Protestantism of the Church of England was a "half-way house to infidelity" between the logically coherent alternatives of atheism and Roman Catholicism.¹¹⁵ Yet – and this was distinctive of the agnostic critique of Newman's apologetic – Stephen did "not shrink from the rationalist solution".¹¹⁶

Stephen argued that Newman's theory of development offered "a physiology of faith in a society", which explained the natural development of belief, rather than demonstrate its supernatural truth.¹¹⁷ Inspired by Auguste Comte's positivist sociology, Stephen could argue that Catholicism had lost its vitality in "civilised" society; it had proven to be "incompatible with intellectual and social progress beyond a certain stage".¹¹⁸ Accordingly, on Newman's own theory, it could no longer claim to be true. Hence, for Stephen, the net result of Newman's teaching

109 Even Newman was impressed by the first part of Stephen's article. Cf. "Newman to John Morley, [20 November 1877]". In *Letters and Diaries*, vol. 28, ed. C. S. Dessain and T. Gornall (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 270; "Newman to Mrs. William Froude, 23 December 1877". In *ibid.*, 288–289, 289.

110 Leslie Stephen, "Dr. Newman's Theory of Belief". *Fortnightly Review* 22 (November & December 1877), 680–697 & 792–810, 684–685.

111 L. Stephen, "Dr. Newman's Theory of Belief", 687.

112 *Ibid.*, 689.

113 *Ibid.*, 690.

114 *Ibid.*, 693.

115 *Ibid.*, 695.

116 *Ibid.*

117 *Ibid.*, 793; cf. 695–696.

118 *Ibid.*, 697.

was “a genuine theory of development in the scientific sense, omitting the doctrine of the survival of the fittest”.¹¹⁹ The *Grammar*, which investigated “the physiology of belief in the individual”, suffered from the same weakness: “Newman fully explains the genealogy of faith, but the explanation is often the very contrary of a justification”.¹²⁰ By dismissing Locke’s explicit evidential standards for rational belief in favour of an appeal to an implicit belief-producing mechanism like the illative sense, Newman gave up “any attempt at a common measure of truth as an ‘objective test’ [...] and thus we are once more landed in complete scepticism”.¹²¹ “The *depositum* of faith which we must accept”, Stephen countered, “is that body of scientific truth [...] which develops by the labour of truth-loving men, and under the remorseless pressure of hard facts”.¹²²

One of these ‘truth-loving’ scientists was Stephen’s agnostic friend, the biologist and leading Darwinist Thomas Henry Huxley, who coined the term agnosticism in 1869. Twenty years later, Huxley was involved in a controversy with Henry Wace in the pages of the *Nineteenth Century*, in which he contested the historicity of the miracles related in the Gospels.¹²³ After reading his article, Stephen informed Huxley that he had just “come across a paper which falls in with it so oddly that I think it worthwhile to call your attention to it”. It was “No 85 of the Tracts for the Times [...] a very well written essay for the confusion of the Protestants”.¹²⁴ In his article *Agnosticism and Christianity*, Huxley happily availed himself of Stephen’s suggestion that “it would perhaps be worthwhile to show that you have a cardinal to back you”.¹²⁵ In addition to *Tract 85*, Huxley appealed to the *Essay on Ecclesiastical Miracles* as another instance of Newman’s ‘kill or cure’ strategy. As noted in the section on Froude, Newman argued that one could not consistently dismiss the miracles of ecclesiastical history while believing the miracles of Scripture, because both have the same degree of evidential support.¹²⁶

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 809.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 793, 802.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 808. One of Leslie Stephen’s papers for the Metaphysical Society, *Belief and Evidence* (London: Privately printed, 1877), deals in depth with Newman’s dismissal of Locke’s contention that “our belief in any proposition should be proportioned to the evidence upon which it rests” (*Belief*, 1); it forms, in fact, the basis for *Dr. Newman’s Theory of Belief*.

¹²² L. Stephen, “Dr. Newman’s Theory of Belief”, 810. For Stephen’s take on Newman’s relation to the scientific culture of the time, see also his *The English Utilitarians*, vol. 3, *John Stuart Mill* (London: Duckworth, 1900), 477–507.

¹²³ Cf. Thomas Henry Huxley, “Agnosticism”. *Nineteenth Century* 25 (February 1889), 169–194.

¹²⁴ “Leslie Stephen to Thomas Henry Huxley, 8 April 1889”. In *Selected Letters of Leslie Stephen*, vol. 2, ed. John W. Bicknell (London: Macmillan, 1996), 367–368, 367.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 368.

¹²⁶ Cf. Huxley, “Agnosticism and Christianity”, 948.

Huxley, like Stephen, wittily turned the argument on its head, famously noting that he could “compile a Primer of ‘Infidelity’” from Newman’s work on ecclesiastical miracles, his *Tract 85* and the *Essay on Development*.¹²⁷ Newman “believed that his arguments led either Romeward, or to what ecclesiastics call ‘Infidelity’, and I call Agnosticism”, Huxley commented. “I believe he was quite right in his conviction”, Huxley added, “but while he chooses the one alternative, I choose the other”.¹²⁸ To a friend Huxley gleefully confided, “[M]y satisfaction in making Newman my accomplice has been unutterable. That man is the slipperiest sophist I have ever met with. Kingsley was entirely right about him”.¹²⁹

Leslie Stephen nonetheless believed that more ought to be made of Newman’s *Tract 85*. In 1891, amidst the torrent of eulogies that flooded the periodical press after Newman’s death in 1890, he published *Cardinal Newman’s Scepticism*, a passionate attack on Newman’s “Believe everything or nothing” apologetic, as displayed in *Tract 85*, the *Essay on Development* and the *Grammar*.¹³⁰ Newman, Stephen argued, set up a sceptical dilemma from which he could only escape by appealing to the authority of the Church – an authority not of reason, but of “coercion”.¹³¹ Accordingly, Stephen concluded that Newman’s apologetic “is simply scepticism afraid of itself. It orders us to believe because, if we don’t believe, we shall doubt”.¹³² Although these words are strongly reminiscent of the 1845 assessments of Newman’s conversion to Rome, Stephen’s critique also indicates how times had changed. Where the Noetics and the first critics of the *Essay on Development* feared the *Essay’s* sceptical outcome, agnostics like Stephen and Huxley cheerfully embraced the sceptical features of Newman’s argument to vindicate their own position.

6 Conclusion

Erik Sidenvall has argued that one of the reasons for the gradual abatement of anti-Catholic sentiments with regard to Newman’s secession is that, by the 1860s, several of his Anglican contemporaries “had discovered that the appeal of the

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 948.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 954.

¹²⁹ “Thomas Henry Huxley to J. Hooker, 30 May 1889”. In Leonard Huxley, *Life and Letters of Thomas Henry Huxley* (New York: D. Appleton, 1900), 240.

¹³⁰ Leslie Stephen, “Cardinal Newman’s Scepticism”. *Nineteenth Century* 29 (February 1891), 179–201, 185.

¹³¹ L. Stephen, “Cardinal Newman’s Scepticism”, 188, 196.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 201.

Papal Church was somehow related to the intellectual difficulties and perplexities traditional Protestantism experienced at the time”, most notably, of course, the *Essays and Reviews* crisis in 1860.¹³³ “They realized”, Sidenvall maintains, “that Newman’s course anticipated what was happening around them”.¹³⁴ The critics discussed in this paper took the opposite view. For them, Newman had – at least partly – *caused*, rather than anticipated, the Victorian crisis of faith. Newman was, in the words of John Griffin, “the mid-wife of Victorian skepticism”.¹³⁵ The Oriel Noetics were the first to attack Newman’s sceptical subversion of the Lockean apologetic tradition – a critique shared by Newman’s liberal Anglican and agnostic critics. Newman’s contention, both in the *Essay on Development* and in the *Apologia*, that Roman Catholicism presented the only logically consistent alternative to unbelief provided a closely related ground for the charge of credulity based on scepticism.

All of the major critics discussed in this paper shared a commitment to the basic features of Locke’s religious epistemology: (i) a rigid distinction between natural and supernatural and, concomitantly, between reason and faith, (ii) the identification of revelation with a set of distinct supernatural communications, (iii) the exclusive role of reason in establishing the credentials of any purported revelation, and (iv) the moral requirement to proportion one’s degree of belief to the evidence available for such a purported revelation. All of the critics agreed that Newman’s apologetic undermined these four constituents. Yet, they diverged in their assessment of whether the Lockean apologetic tradition was successful as a defence of the Christian revelation, and, hence, in their evaluation of the sceptical results of Newman’s apologetic.

The Noetics and even Kingsley believed the Lockean apologetic tradition was a stable ground for rationally justified religious belief. Froude, the Stephen brothers and Huxley, on the other hand, did not believe that traditional Christianity could meet Locke’s evidential standards. Accordingly, the Noetics, the critics of the *Essay on Development*, and Kingsley deplored the adverse effects of Newman’s apologetic on Christian faith. Froude agreed with them, but for different reasons. “I grieve for the time when our beliefs were ruled by custom and we were not driven to look into the grounds of them”, Froude wrote to Newman in 1881.¹³⁶ Leslie Stephen and Huxley, by contrast, welcomed the

133 Sidenvall, *After Anti-Catholicism?*, 97–98.

134 *Ibid.*, 98.

135 Griffin, “Cardinal Newman”, 981.

136 “James Anthony Froude to John Henry Newman, 4 March 1881”. In *Letters and Diaries*, vol. 29, ed. C. S. Dessain and T. Gornall (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 344.

sceptical outcome of Newman's arguments as a proof of the untenable nature of Christian beliefs.¹³⁷ All of these critics agreed, however, that Newman viciously subverted Locke's ethics of belief, and that his apologetic – however its consequences were to be evaluated – was fundamentally dishonest.

As indicated earlier, the preceding exposition of Victorian critics of Newman's apologetic is not exhaustive. In a rather idiosyncratic fashion, the influential Congregationalist theologian Andrew Martin Fairbairn developed his own view of Newman's scepticism in an article on Catholic apologetics in the *Nineteenth Century* (1885), which even elicited a response from the old Cardinal.¹³⁸ In 1891, the mathematician and exegete Edwin Abbott published a voluminous critique of Newman's *Essay on Ecclesiastical Miracles*.¹³⁹ Fairbairn, and Abbott certainly need to be taken into account in any comprehensive survey of this line of critique on Newman's apologetic. Although almost forgotten today, this critical interpretation was important in the early Catholic reception of Newman's thought. The critiques by Abbott, Huxley, and Leslie Stephen shaped Henri Brémont's *Newman: essai de biographie psychologique*, while the leading Modernist George Tyrrell could echo Fitzjames Stephen, and claim that "Newman did as much for belief as unbelief".¹⁴⁰ The strong reaction in later Catholic Newman studies against Modernist interpretations of Newman's thought meant that this critical tradition fell into oblivion. There is good reason to think that has been to our loss.

137 Fitzjames Stephen appears not to have been concerned with this question.

138 Cf. Andrew Martin Fairbairn, "Catholicism and Religious Thought". *Contemporary Review* 47 (May 1885), 652–674; John Henry Newman, "The Development of Religious Error". *Contemporary Review* 48 (October 1885), 457–469; Andrew Martin Fairbairn, "Reason and Religion: A Reply to Cardinal Newman". *Contemporary Review* 48 (December 1885), 842–861; John Henry Newman, "Revelation in its Relation to Faith". In *Stray Essays on Controversial Points* (Birmingham: M. Billing, 1890 [privately printed]), 69–107, reprinted in *The Theological Papers of John Henry Newman on Faith and Certainty*, ed. H.M. de Achaval, S. J., J. D. Holmes and C. S. Dessain (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 140–157; A. Stewart, "John Henry Newman and Andrew Martin Fairbairn: Philosophical Scepticism and the Efficacy of Reason in *The Contemporary Review* Exchange". *Newman Studies Journal* 7.2 (2010), 6–17.

139 Cf. Edwin A. Abbott, *Philomythus: An Antidote against Credulity* (London: Macmillan, 1891); Jonathan Smith, Lawrence I. Berkove and Gerald A. Baker, "A Grammar of Dissent: 'Flatland,' Newman and the Theology of Probability". *Victorian Studies* 39.2 (1996), 129–150.

140 George Tyrrell, *Christianity at the Cross-roads* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1910), 34. Cf. James Fitzjames Stephen, "Old Creeds and New". *St. James's Gazette* (18 November 1880), 11–12.