

Notes on Chapter 4 of Newman's Grammar of Assent: Notional And Real Assent

by Guy Massamba

A. Concrete vs abstract

What is concrete makes a greater impression on the mind than what is abstract. The degree of apprehension is relative to the strength of the object apprehension. The depth of the impact of an object on the human mind also depends on the means through the object is apprehended. The distinction between sight and scent explains this difference in force. The more powerful the object apprehended the stronger the apprehension. By sight we are more impressed than we are by scents. The concrete has a greater impact on the human mind than the abstract.

Question A1: Is Newman espousing empiricism? Empiricism is a doctrine that presents sense experience as the source of knowledge.

Consequence of A: The human mind adheres more strongly and more fully to what has a great impact on it. The human mind adheres more openly to what is concrete than to what is abstract. The abstract can still leave room for doubt or questions while the concrete is undoubtedly the revelation of what is and leads to a certain degree of infatuation or fascination in the sense that the fate of the mind is sealed by its being impressed by the concrete object. Infatuation is possession, which is the result of the penetration of the object in the mind. I'd like to highlight some terminology that points to the importance of the invitational character of real apprehension. Such notions as affection and impression expound the attitude of the mind or the subject when it opens up and adheres to the reality by which it is affected.

B. Strong and weak assents

This distinction is built upon the distinction between inference and real assent. Inference pertains to notional apprehension while assent is related to real apprehension. The ground for the identification of inference as notional and assent as real is in the process of apprehension. In the notional apprehension, premisses are meant to mediate the relationship between the subject and the apprehended object. The relationship is not instant. In assent, real apprehension is direct, immediate and not mediated between the subject and the thesis which exposes the object of apprehension.

Question B1: Since propositions give a logical interpretation of reality, what does Newman mean when he states that propositions that lead to assent are apprehended as experiences and images, that is, which stand for things?

C. Notional assents

Within the class of notional assents, Newman distinguishes profession, credence, opinion, presumption, and speculation.

a. Profession: feeble and superficial. This includes assents made upon habit and without reflection. It also includes assents made without depth of commitment, for instance, an admiration of something or someone.

b. Credence: this is assent made when one has no doubt about propositions. "It is the sort of assent which we give to those opinions and professed facts which are ever presenting themselves to us without any effort of ours, and which we commonly take for granted, thereby obtaining a broad foundation of thought for ourselves, and a medium of intercourse between ourselves and others."

c. Opinion: this assent reflects what is often called conviction, for instance, when we speak of the "variety of religious opinions," or of being "persecuted for religious opinions," or of our having "no opinion on a particular point," or of another having "no religious opinions."

d. Presumption: this is assent that reflects the certainty with which we reason. to what constitutes the ground of our reasoning on any particular subject.

e. Speculation: the contemplation of mental operations and their results as opposed to experience, experiment,

D. Real Assents require existence of objects, even though they can be represented by images. The brilliancy of an image is not sufficient. Real assent depends on one's own personal experience, which is different from the experience of another. This implies that real assent is proper to the individual.

Some Additional Notes on the early parts of Newman's Chapter 4

by Peter Trahan

Review: Real apprehension is stronger than notional apprehension. (It is human nature to be more affected by the concrete than by the abstract)

Acts of Inferences and Acts of Assent

Of Assents, there are notional (ideas) and real (experiences) - *without experience assent is not real;*

Of Inferences, there are notional and real (real inference?)

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Notional Assent	Real Assent
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Notional Inference	Real Inference ?
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Notional assents and inferences share the quality of being notions (ideas and not experiences), but:

- * Notional assents are unconditional acceptance of a propositions, whereas
 - * Inferences are conditioned on the premises of the propositions
- also,
- * Inference most naturally apprehends propositions as notions, whereas
 - * Assent most naturally apprehends propositions as things.

Again, the real assent is the stronger assent, notional assent the weaker. Conversely, inference works best applied to notions and is weaker when applied to things.

5 Types of Notional (abstract) Assents

1. Profession: weak; little more than assertion; without reflection, thoughtless; example is formalism: asserting assent based, not on faith or understanding, but the *pretense* of understanding (to profess a belief in “liberality,” “progress, “civilization” etc.) people who subscribe to -isms, not due to comprehension, but to fashion.

Can a mystery be more than an assertion?

2. Credence: spontaneous acceptance of information; implicit assent to truth.
3. Opinion: conviction of information based on some reflection which falls short of inference
4. Presumption: an assent to first principles (causation, space, time, reason – what Kant referred to as “transcendental categories” ?)
5. Speculation: mental sight; not conjecture as in the vernacular, but firm, conscious acceptance of propositions (scientific, theological, mathematical)

When Notional Assents (abstract truths) Become Real Assents (practical expression)

When the Duke of Wellington's military claims succeed at Waterloo

When the iniquity of the slave trade is not merely accepted in the mind but operatively abolished.

When the lines of poetry are read in youth, but more fully appreciated after years of experience reveal their superiority over any rival.

When reading sacred texts becomes meditation to the point where history becomes experience, as in religious conversion, as in Job (I have heard Thee, but now mine eye seeth Thee)