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ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Apo</i>	<i>Apologia Pro Vita Sua</i>
<i>Ari</i>	<i>Arians of the Fourth Century</i>
<i>Ath i, ii</i>	<i>Select Treatises of St. Athanasius in Controversy with the Arians</i>
<i>AW</i>	<i>Autobiographical Writings</i>
<i>Call</i>	<i>Callista: A Tale of the Third Century</i>
<i>Cons</i>	<i>On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine</i>
<i>DA</i>	<i>Discussions and Arguments on Various Subjects</i>
<i>Dev</i>	<i>An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine</i>
<i>Diff i, ii</i>	<i>Certain Difficulties Felt by Anglicans in Catholic Teaching</i>
<i>Duke</i>	<i>Letter to His Grace the Duke of Norfolk</i>
<i>Ess i, ii</i>	<i>Essays Critical and Historical</i>
<i>GA</i>	<i>An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent</i>
<i>HS i–iii</i>	<i>Historical Sketches</i>
<i>Idea</i>	<i>The Idea of a University</i>
<i>Jfc</i>	<i>Lectures on the Doctrine of Justification</i>
<i>PN</i>	<i>Philosophical Notebooks of John Henry Newman</i>
<i>Pro</i>	<i>Lectures on the Prophetic Office of the Church</i>
<i>LD i–xxxii</i>	<i>The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman</i> , ed. Charles Stephen Dessain, et. al. (Oxford and London, 1978–2008).
<i>LG</i>	<i>Loss and Gain: The Story of a Convert</i>
<i>MD</i>	<i>Meditations and Devotions of the Late Cardinal Newman</i>
<i>Mir</i>	<i>Two Essays on Biblical and Ecclesiastical Miracles</i>
<i>Mix</i>	<i>Discourses Addressed to Mixed Congregations</i>
<i>OS</i>	<i>Sermons Preached on Various Occasions</i>
<i>PS i–viii</i>	<i>Parochial and Plain Sermons</i>
<i>SD</i>	<i>Sermons Bearing on Subjects of the Day</i>
<i>SN</i>	<i>Sermon Notes of John Henry Cardinal Newman</i>
<i>Tracts i–vi</i>	<i>Tracts for the Times</i>
<i>TP</i>	<i>The Theological Papers of John Henry Newman on Faith and Certainty</i>
<i>TT</i>	<i>Tracts Theological and Ecclesiastical</i>
<i>US</i>	<i>Fifteen Sermons Preached Before the University of Oxford</i>
<i>VM i, ii</i>	<i>The Via Media</i>
<i>VV</i>	<i>Verses on Various Occasions</i>

The Use of the Empirical Method by John Henry Newman and Arthur Conan Doyle

BY JEFFREY DIRK WILSON*

SIR ARTHUR IGNATIUS CONAN DOYLE (1859–1930) and Saint John Henry Cardinal Newman (1801–1890) lived at a time when it seemed that science could answer all of life’s questions. Empiricism—the philosophy of basing all conclusions on experience, of which the experimental method is an obvious scientific expression—not only provided the intellectual background for both men, but they both embraced it with opposite outcomes. Empiricism led Doyle out of the Catholic Church and Newman into it. Perhaps contrary to expectation, Newman in the Catholic Church was at peace with empiricism, while Doyle out of the Catholic Church was restless about empiricism to the point of rupture, leading him to embrace occult spiritualism. In short, Newman was more thoroughly Holmesian in his deployment of the empirical method than was the creator of Sherlock Holmes. Thus, Newman concludes empirically that the foundational claims of Christianity and the truth of the Catholic Church are warranted. By comparison with Newman’s empiricism, the limits of Doyle’s deployment of the empirical method become clear. This essay arises primarily from a juxtaposition of texts by Doyle and Newman. In the case of Doyle, the texts considered are from the Sherlock Holmes corpus and his autobiographical writings. In Newman’s case, the text considered is his *Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*. While secondary material is occasionally referenced, the aim here is to guide the reader in a consideration of how the empirical method plays out in the thought of Doyle and Newman when their texts are read together.¹

* Jeffrey Dirk Wilson is Collegiate Associate Professor of Philosophy at The Catholic University of America. He specializes in classical metaphysics and political philosophy. He is the editor of *Mystery and Intelligibility: History of Philosophy as Pursuit of Wisdom* (2021, The Catholic University of America Press). Author note: Thanks to Dr. Trevor Lipscombe, Director of The Catholic University of America Press, at whose suggestion this essay was first written and to the peer reviewers whose criticism and suggestions made this a much better paper.

¹ On Newman as working within the British empirical tradition, there is extensive secondary literature. See, for example, J. M. Cameron, “The Night Battle: Newman and Empiricism,” *Victorian Studies* 4, no. 2 (1960): (99–117). Cameron writes, “Much of what he [Newman] writes consists of variations, often beautiful and ingenious, on philosophical themes that are commonplaces of British empiricism” (101). On the point that Newman built on Hume’s insights to transcend Hume, Cameron writes: “Newman at certain points deepened the empiricist position to show that the logical issues were more complex than Hume, for example, had supposed, and that here the strongest currents in his thought make against

Doyle created two competing exemplars of the experimental method in the characters of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. John Watson, both men of science but in two sharply different ways. Holmes is embodied logic, rigorously submitting every twinge of passion and appetite to the dictates of reason. He is the perfect Cartesian man for whom “I” is the “thinking thing,” and whatever does not think is not essentially part of “me.” When Holmes has no grist for his mill of thinking, he is at a loss. Bored at the beginning of *The Sign of Four*, he descends to the seven-percent solution of cocaine, self-administered intravenously. When the case is solved, he reaches for the cocaine once again.² Even if the most benign view of cocaine in the nineteenth century is assumed (i.e., that it was a useful medicine) for what illness was Holmes treating himself but *ennui*?

We find this exchange at the end of “The Red-Headed League,” Watson addressing Holmes:

“You reasoned it out beautifully,” I exclaimed in unfeigned admiration. “It is so long a chain, and yet every link rings true.”

“It saved me from ennui,” he answered yawning. “Alas! I already feel it closing upon me. My life is spent in one long effort to escape from commonplaces of existence.” These little problems help me to do so.”

“And you are a benefactor of the race,” said I.

He shrugged his shoulders. “Well, perhaps, after all, it is of some use,” he remarked. “‘*L’homme c’est rien—l’oeuvre c’est tout*,’ as Gustave Flaubert wrote to George Sand.”³

scepticism” (102). See also, M. Jamie Ferreira, *Scepticism and Reasonable Doubt: Wilkins, Hume, Reid and Newman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986). Ryan Vilbig, “John Henry Newman and Empiricism,” *Newman Studies Journal* 9, no. 2 (2012): 13–25. Vilbig quotes Newman as acknowledging Hume as the “Scotch philosopher, whose depth and subtlety all must acknowledge” (Newman, *US*, sermon 10, “Faith and Reason, Contrasted as Habits of Mind.”) Ieuan Williams, “Faith and Scepticism: Newman and the Naturalist Tradition,” *Philosophical Investigations* 15, no. 1 (1992): 51–66.

² Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Sign of Four*, intro. Peter Ackroyd, notes Ed Glinert (London: Penguin Books, 2002), 5 and 118.

³ Arthur Conan Doyle, *A Treasury of Sherlock Holmes*, selected with intro. Adrian Conan Doyle (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1955), 239. In this passage, Doyle has Watson express a core principle of empiricism. David Hume, one of the pre-eminent philosophers of this method, writes, “A philosopher, who purposes only to represent the common sense of mankind in more beautiful and engaging colors, if by accident he falls into error, goes no farther; but renewing his appeal to common sense, and natural sentiments of the mind, returns to the right path, and secures himself from any dangerous illusions.” David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding: with Hume’s Abstract of A Treatise of Human Nature and A Letter from a Gentleman to His Friend in Edinburgh*, ed. and intro. Eric Steinberg (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publications, 1977), 2.

Therein is the problem: in the empiricist model, “the work” does not point outside itself. The discovery, the conclusion, in and of itself, has nothing to say about the meaning of life. For the human as scientist, there is no difference between walking a little old lady across the street and shoving her under a bus. For science, they are naked facts, devoid of value. It is instructive that Doyle was increasingly drawn to occult spiritualism during and after World War I with forty million people dead, both military and civilian. The scientific method had nothing to say to a world in anguish. In those years, Doyle—unlike Holmes—realizes the limits of materialism, so why was Doyle unable to reclaim the heritage of his youth? Why could Doyle as author not rescue Sherlock Holmes from *ennui*?

By contrast with Holmes, Watson was a man of science in a substantially different way. He was a successful medical doctor, but his success was at least as much art as science. The good doctor would likely have failed a logic exam. He consistently took the same evidence as was available to Holmes and arrived at the wrong conclusion. On the other hand, he knew what it was not only to fall in love, but to love, to marry, to have a successful family life. Sherlock Holmes solved one mystery after another, failing only ever to solve the mystery of life, and that last mystery was one Dr. Watson did manage to solve. The tragic case of Sherlock Holmes arises from his failure to follow his method to its logical conclusion in every instance, in fact, in the one instance that truly matters, the living of life itself.

Holmes summed up his method in *The Sign of Four*: “How often have I said to you that when you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, *however improbable*, must be the truth?”⁴ This is not a chance observation, as indicated by Holmes’s own set-up for the oft-quoted line: “How often have I said to you that.” What escaped Holmes—and what Newman discovered—with the same empirical method is the impossibility of accounting for human life on materialist, scientific, and analytic grounds alone. The tragic case of Conan Doyle is that in his occult spiritualism, he did transcend the limits of materialism, but that did not lead him to reconsider the claims of the Catholic Church, which he had rejected in his youth.

In one sense, the twin contrasts of Doyle/Newman and Holmes/Newman seem to pursue different lines of observation and argument except that at one level, Doyle was Holmes. This was the view of Sir Arthur’s son, Adrian Conan Doyle. In support of his opinion, he cites the authority of Dickson Carr’s biography of his father: “In that fine book we find ourselves face to face with the first great truth—that Holmes was to a large extent Conan Doyle himself.”⁵ It has often been said that Sir Arthur took his medical professor in Edinburgh, Dr. Joseph Bell, as model for Holmes. Adrian Conan Doyle acknowledges that Bell was the physical

⁴ Doyle, *The Sign of Four*, 42.

⁵ Adrian Conan Doyle, “Introduction,” in Doyle, *A Treasury of Sherlock Holmes*, x.

model of Holmes but insists that his father manufactured clues to prevent identification of Holmes with Doyle. He quotes Bell himself addressing Sir Arthur: "You are yourself Sherlock Holmes."⁶ In any event, both creator and character were committed empiricists who found no answers to the questions of life in their empiricism. In that regard, the tragedy of Sherlock Holmes is also the tragedy of Conan Doyle. To understand the created character, one must—in the case of Holmes and Doyle—understand his creator.

DOYLE ON HIS OWN LIFE

In 1924, Doyle published *Memories and Adventures*, his autobiography.⁷ There he speaks about his studies in Edinburgh: "I entered as a student in October 1876, and I emerged as a Bachelor of Medicine in August 1881,"⁸ thus from his seventeenth to his twenty-second year. In that period, after his adolescent restiveness with the Catholic faith of his family and school, he came to make a clear, conscientious break with not only Catholicism, but with Christianity altogether. To be fair, he acknowledged a certain admiration for the Catholic Church. In those words of praise, however, there is a gap in his consideration: "Thus viewed there was much to attract—its traditions, its unbroken and solemn ritual, the beauty and truth of many of its observances, its poetical appeal to the emotions, the sensual charm of music, light and incense, its power as an instrument of law and order."⁹ Those virtues were for him but window-dressing of what was destructive of human values in its substance.

Doyle tells his readers: "It is to be remembered that these were the years when Huxley, Tyndall, Darwin, Herbert Spencer and John Stuart Mill were our chief philosophers, and . . . to the young student, eager and impressionable, it was overwhelming."¹⁰ It is interesting that he does not also name Newman. It was during his student years (1876–1881) that Newman was at the height of his fame. Newman's controversy with Charles Kingsley, which resulted in his publication of the *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* in 1864, ensured that Newman was a household name to literate Englishmen.¹¹ He published *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* in 1870, as the First Vatican Council was concluding. In 1879, Pope Leo XIII elevated Newman

⁶ Doyle, "Introduction," xiv.

⁷ Arthur Conan Doyle, *Memories and Adventures and Western Wanderings* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009).

⁸ Doyle, *Memories and Adventures and Western Wanderings*, 14 (ch. 3).

⁹ Doyle, *Memories and Adventures and Western Wanderings*, 19 (ch. 3).

¹⁰ Doyle, *Memories and Adventures and Western Wanderings*, 19 (ch. 3).

¹¹ The controversial correspondence is published in Newman, *Apo* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2017), 271–313.

as a non-episcopal, non-curial cardinal. It seems unlikely to the point of impossibility that Doyle would not have known something about Newman and his work.¹² Newman's influence held no sway in the intellectual world Doyle chose to inhabit.

Doyle begins the final chapter of his autobiography, entitled "Psychic Quest": "I have not obtruded the psychic question upon the reader, though it has grown in importance with the years, and has now come to absorb the whole energy of my life."¹³ There is a doubleness in Doyle's embrace of occult spiritualism. On the one hand, he rejects the notion that the world—all that is—consists in material realities alone. On the other hand, he attempts to apply the experimental method to "psychical research," to take a phrase from the name of a society of which he was a member. What Doyle does not do is to examine Catholic claims by the same standards of empiricism that he sought to apply to psychical research. He writes:

People ask me, not unnaturally, what is it which makes me so perfectly certain that this thing is true. . . .

I may say briefly that there is no physical sense which I possess which has not been separately assured, and that there is no conceivable method by which a spirit could show its presence which I have not on many occasions experienced. In the presence of Miss Besinnet as medium and of several witnesses I have seen my mother and my nephew, young Oscar Hornung, as plainly as ever I saw them in life—so plainly that I could almost have counted the wrinkles of the one and the freckles of the other.¹⁴

For the sake of argument, let us accept these assurances uncritically! One might well ask, how would Doyle distinguish his claims from those of St. Thomas as recorded in St. John's Gospel (20:24–29)? There is evidence that he would not distinguish them. He writes:

¹² By contrast, Mathew Arnold—remembering Newman from his years as minister of the Oxford University Church of St. Mary the Virgin—wrote regarding the "charm of that spiritual apparition, gliding in the dim afternoon light through the aisles of St. Mary's, rising into the pulpit, and then, in the most entrancing of voices, breaking the silence with words and thoughts which were a religious music—subtle, sweet, mournful. . . . [He] seemed about to renew what was for us the most national and natural institution in the world, the Church of England. . . . [He] adopted, for the doubts and difficulties which beset men's minds today, a solution which, to speak frankly is impossible." Quoted in W. D. White, "Review of Dissent and Dogma by Matthew Arnold," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 37, no. 2 (1969): 194.

¹³ Doyle, *Memories and Adventures and Western Wanderings*, 281 (ch. 32).

¹⁴ Doyle, *Memories and Adventures and Western Wanderings*, 285 (ch. 32). Ada Besinnet (1890–1936) was an American spiritualist. Doyle's friendship with Harry Houdini ended over this because Houdini thought she was a fraud while Doyle did not. Hornung was killed at the second battle of Ypres in 1915. His father (Conan Doyle's brother-in-law) wrote the Raffles mysteries—the criminal never caught was inspired by Holmes, the detective who never fails.

If in the greatest of all séances, that of the upper room on the day of Pentecost, an aggressive sceptic had insisted upon test conditions of his own foolish devising, where would the rushing wind and the tongues of fire have been? "All with one accord," says the writer of the Acts of the Apostles, and that is the essential condition. I have sat with saintly people, and I too have felt the rushing wind, seen the flickering tongues and heard the great voice, but how could such results come where harmony did not reign?¹⁵

Doyle asks his readers to give credence to what he and others experienced based upon giving credence to biblical claims regarding Pentecost. I suggest that the comparison of Pentecost is not as apt as comparison of appearances of the risen Christ to the disciples, but let us allow that, too. The risen Jesus appeared to his disciples. Conan Doyle's mother and nephew appeared to him. On one level, the claim is that there is life after death. On another level, however, the claims are not commensurate. Even Doyle in his devotion to his mother and nephew did not claim that their appearances to him signified anything beyond their continuing existence after death. The claims of Christianity are that not only did Jesus of Nazareth return from death for himself, but that his death signified the possibility of life everlasting for all human beings.

Why? As has often been observed, Jesus was either a mentally ill self-delusionary or he was God as well as human. He says to his accusers, "*Egō eimi*," the construction of "I am" in Greek that equals the tetragrammaton, the four letters of God's name, "YHWH," implicitly claiming for himself the revelation of God's name in Exodus 3:14. That is indicated also in St. Mark's Gospel by the high priest's declaration of blasphemy in response (Mk 16:61–64). It is further indicated by the unwilling worship of those who came to arrest Jesus in St. John's Gospel (Jn 18:4–6). They fall to the ground in response to his statement, "*Egō eimi*." Doyle says, "Never will I accept anything which cannot be proved to me. The evils of religion have all come from accepting things which cannot be proved."¹⁶

He does not test the Christian claims fairly. The evidence presented in the Gospels for the resurrection of Jesus is at least as strong as the evidence he cites for believing that he had seen his mother and nephew. He rejects the first while insisting upon the latter. Doyle does see rightly when he identifies the essential interconnectedness of the Christian religion, which he calls "the whole wonderful interdependent scheme."¹⁷ Once the resurrection of Jesus is accepted, it is only a few logical steps to the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

¹⁵ Doyle, *Memories and Adventures and Western Wanderings*, 287 (ch. 32).

¹⁶ Doyle, *Memories and Adventures and Western Wanderings*, 20 (ch. 3).

¹⁷ Doyle, *Memories and Adventures and Western Wanderings*, 19 (ch. 3).

For Doyle, once the Immaculate Conception is rejected, then the resurrection must be rejected as well. That is a clean logical conclusion, but it ignores exactly the parallels between what Doyle insisted was true in his own life and what he rejected in the claims regarding the resurrection of Jesus. It is a conclusion that Doyle himself rejects when he writes in defense of spiritualism against scientific opponents: "I think always of Christ's words when He thanked God that He had revealed these things to babes and withheld them from the wise and prudent."¹⁸ Doyle uses the words of Christ as justification for his own beliefs and yet he himself does not accept the claims of Christ. Doyle prided himself on his logic, and yet on his own terms is trying to justify a contradiction.

THE METHOD OF SHERLOCK HOLMES: ABDUCTION

At the outset of "The Adventure of the Dancing Men" Doyle juxtaposes the work of the experimental method of the laboratory with Holmes's work of solving crimes:

"You see, my dear Watson"—he propped his test-tube in the rack, and began to lecture with the air of a professor addressing his class—"it is not really difficult to construct a series of inferences, each dependent upon its predecessor and simple in itself. If, after doing so, one simply knocks out all the central inferences and presents one's audience with the starting point and the conclusion, one may produce a startling, though possibly a meretricious effect."¹⁹

Holmes is explaining why he seems like a magician at times when he announces the conclusion of a series of what he calls "deductions." He himself has worked out steps one through ten, but he only tells his hearer about steps one and ten, and, therefore, the hearer is astonished. In fact, as Holmes explains to Watson, the inferences are but series of ordinary steps that lead logically to the conclusion. Both Holmes and his creator do seem to derive pleasure from the "meretricious effect." Still, the logical steps are there, but as shall be shown below, the argument is always from one particular to another without reference to any universal principle.

Sometimes the structure of the argument becomes more obvious in a failure. In "The Adventure of the Speckled Band," Doyle, in the voice of Watson, sets up Holmes not for a fall, but for a slight stumble:

I had no keener pleasure than in following Holmes in his professional investigations, and in admiring the rapid deductions, as swift as intuitions, and

¹⁸ Doyle, *Memories and Adventures and Western Wanderings*, 284 (ch. 32).

¹⁹ Doyle, *A Treasury of Sherlock Holmes*, 286.

yet always founded on a logical basis, with which he unraveled the problems which were submitted to him. I rapidly threw on my clothes and was ready in a few minutes to accompany my friend down to the sitting room. A lady dressed in black and heavily veiled, who had been sitting in the window, rose as we entered.²⁰

Holmes urges the woman to sit near the fire and offers her coffee, supposing her to be cold because he observed that she shivered. She was shivering not from cold, but rather from terror. In the following paragraphs, Holmes concludes correctly that his visitor has travelled early that morning first “in a dogcart along heavy roads” and then by train. How could Holmes have mistaken terror for cold? Yes, the woman was heavily veiled, but still Holmes made a mistake. He reasoned from the particular of shivering in the context of another particular, a cold day, and arrived at the conclusion of “shivering from cold.” Whatever the literary reasons were for Doyle to set up Holmes for his error, the incident nicely illustrates the limits and genius of Holmes’s method. The limit is clear: Holmes made a mistake while following his method. The genius is the genius of the experimental method, which, as Hume argues, is infallible because it is open-ended and self-correcting. Hume summarizes his method:

And tho’ we must endeavor to render all our principles as universal as possible, by tracing up our experiments to the utmost, and explaining all effects from the simplest and fewest causes, ‘tis still certain we cannot go beyond experience; and any hypothesis, that pretends to discover the ultimate original qualities of human nature, ought at first to be rejected as presumptuous and chimerical.²¹

The preponderance of evidence leads to a working hypothesis. Every piece of evidence tells the inquirer something to be evaluated in the context of all the other pieces of evidence. There is neither proof, nor disproof, but only a degree of hypothetical probability.²² Based upon evidence already gathered, one reasons to the likeliest conclusion, subject to further tests made possible by additional evidence.

Holmes applies these Humean principles in his evidence gathering. He uses the word “deduction” for his method, but his inferences are all examples of another logical form—derived from Hume’s thought, namely abduction—to be discussed below. Only when the crime has been solved does Holmes actually come to a conclusion. Along the way, he forms a hypothesis to be tested and modified on

²⁰ Doyle, *A Treasury of Sherlock Holmes*, 416.

²¹ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, eds. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 5.8.

²² See Section 6, “Of Probability,” in David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*.

the basis of new data. In “The Adventure of the Speckled Band,” Holmes forms a preliminary hypothesis of breaking and entering, but on examining the window hardware he realizes that no entry could have been made through the window: “‘Hum!’ said he, scratching his chin in some perplexity, ‘my theory certainly presents some difficulties.’”²³ He had not reached a dead end, but rather he only discovered a new piece of evidence to be considered with all the other pieces of evidence. As shall be seen, Newman takes these same Humean principles and builds upon them and—goes beyond what Hume was willing to allow—to arrive at certainty.²⁴

INDUCTION, DEDUCTION, AND ABDUCTION

Watson and Holmes both use the term, “deduction,” throughout the novels and stories. In a loose, popular understanding of the word, Holmes does deduce. As the term is more strictly understood, however, Holmes does not deduce at all, rather he abduces. “Induction” is the reasoning from a particular event or thing to a universal principle. As Aristotle understood this principle, one only needs to be burned by fire once in order to arrive at the universal, “Fire burns.” “Deduction” is reasoning from a universal principle to a particular thing or event. I know that “fire burns,” which is the universal principle. On seeing another fire, say that of a lit candle, I reason, “Fire burns. That is a fire. Therefore, that will burn.” Induction reasons from an experience to some universal first principle. Deduction reasons from some universal first principle to the next experience. In both forms of reasoning, the universal first principle is essential.

It may seem strange or ironic to use a word, “abduction,” which has a particular meaning as a crime, namely, “kidnapping someone,” as a form of logical argument. That is the way of language: one word must often do double, or even triple duty, e.g., “ball”: a (usually) spherical object with which to play a game, a dance, and a good time. Here, “abduction” is a logical category in contrast to induction and deduction, both of which relate to a universal first principle. Abduction is a form of reasoning that dispenses altogether with the first principle. Having been burned by the fire of my gas stove, when I see the fire of the lit candle, I reason, “The fire of the gas range burned me, and, therefore, the fire of the lit candle will also burn me.” That reasoning entirely leaves out the universal first principle altogether, “Fire burns.”²⁵ Abduction is reasoning from a particular thing or ex-

²³ Doyle, *A Treasury of Sherlock Holmes*, 427.

²⁴ Newman began reading the Hume’s works when he was fourteen. He writes, “I read some of Hume’s Essays; and perhaps that on Miracles. So at least I gave my father to understand; but perhaps it was a brag.” Newman, *Apo*, 55.

²⁵ There is an extensive philosophical literature on induction, deduction, and abduction. As is the case in such scholarly discussions, the various authors do not all agree. Gerhard

perience to another particular thing or experience, e.g., from the fire of the gas stove to the fire of the candle.

Adrian Conan Doyle comments on an easy and characteristic example of abduction in "The Adventure of the Priory School," where much of Holmes's reasoning rests on his ability to read the tracks of bicycle tires.²⁶ Adrian tells how that account in the story recalls to him an experience as a boy with his father looking at bicycle tracks. Adrian opined, "Osmond has been out on his cycle." Sir Arthur "reproved" his son "kindly": "Do try to be more observant, my dear lad. Osmond uses Palmer tyres. There are the marks of Dunlops."²⁷ That all seems straightforward, but even if the tires had been Palmers, there could have been someone other than Osmond who had passed that way. Not only is abduction when one reasons from one particular to another particular, but it also is reasoning to the likeliest conclusion, which—in the end—may or not be correct. Abductive reasoning accounts for a great deal of what we, humans, in language careless of philosophical distinctions, deem deductions or arguments, or sound reasoning. Abduction is an effective method of reasoning as long as the reasoner recognizes that new data could dislodge the temporary hypothesis.

Near the beginning of "The Five Orange Pips," there is a trivial exchange between Holmes and Watson that shows abduction to good effect. The evening was characterized by winds that "screamed" and rain that "had beaten against the windows."

"Why," said I, glancing up at my companion, "that was surely the bell. Who could come tonight? Some friend of yours perhaps."

"Except yourself I have none," he answered. "I do not encourage visitors."

"If so, it is a serious case. Nothing less would bring a man out on such a day

Schurz gives a definition in the sense that I use the word here: "The crucial function of a pattern of abduction . . . consists in its function as a search strategy which leads us, for a given reason of a scenario, in a reasonable time to the most promising explanatory conjecture which is then subject to further test." Gerhard Schurz, "Patterns of Abduction," *Synthese* 164, no. 2 (2008): 208, as quoted in Igor Douven, "Peirce on Abduction" (Supplement to "Abduction" in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/abduction/peirce.html>>.) For a summary account of the broader scholarly discussion, see Douven's article. David Carson adapts Holmesian abduction to a methodology, which, he argues, can improve "the work, and training, of police officers." David Carson, "The Abduction of Sherlock Holmes," *International Journal of Police Science and Management* 11, no. 2 (2009): 193–202. The distinctions I make between induction and deduction are understood on one hand, as relating to a universal principle and abduction, and on the other hand, as a form of argument independent of a universal first principle is my own, based on my reading of Aristotle; thereby, I accept responsibility on the point without claiming originality.

²⁶ Doyle, *A Treasury of Sherlock Holmes*, 643–47.

²⁷ Doyle, "Introduction," ix.

and at such an hour. But I take it that it is more likely to be some crony of the landlady's."

Sherlock Holmes was wrong in his conjecture, however, for there came a step in the passage and a tapping at the door.²⁸

For clues there were four: the doorbell ringing; the fierceness and lateness of the evening; and Sherlock Holmes having only one friend, who was already present. Based upon those clues, one could conclude that the person at the door was not a friend nor a mere visitor, therefore, the person was either a client come on serious business or, alternatively—and this was Holmes's tentative conclusion—someone having nothing to do with him, rather with his landlady, Mrs. Hudson. The person calling was not A, not B, not C, nor D, and, therefore, either E or F. It was not F, and, therefore, was E, i.e., a client with a serious case. Holmes reasoned to the likeliest conclusion, which proved incorrect, but the alternative possibility was, in fact, what had happened. All this is worked out without resorting to universal first principles. Holmes reasoned from particular clues to a particular hypothesis to be tested by new data.

This method is laid bare even further in the same story. A list has been discovered, a data set regarding an ocean-going ship. From that Holmes infers, "There is at least a presumption that the vessel in which the man or men are is a sailing ship."²⁹ There one notices the differing gaps of time between where the ship docked and then when someone receives a letter threatening death. There is less time from Dundee, Scotland than from Pondicherry, India, and, therefore, the difference in time is accounted for by the length of time that a mail-ship could make its way to England. Watson admits, "It is possible." Holmes corrects him, "More than that. It is probable." The evidence does not point to a certainty, but does point to more than a possibility, that is to say, the evidence points to a probability. There are, in turn, many degrees of probability. This is how abduction works, through a process of elimination until whatever possibility remains is almost certainly what happened.

The following are a series of instances, some shorter, some longer, where the principles of abduction are set forth in the Sherlock Holmes stories themselves.

In "The Adventure of the Second Stain," Holmes affirms, "It is a capital mistake to theorize in advance of the facts."

In "The Adventure of the Dancing Men," Holmes says, after setting forth his theory of how the stick figures represented various letters in the alphabet: "I accepted this as a hypothesis."³⁰

²⁸ Doyle, *A Treasury of Sherlock Holmes*, 272.

²⁹ Doyle, *A Treasury of Sherlock Holmes*, 281.

³⁰ Doyle, *A Treasury of Sherlock Holmes*, 300. Holmes makes a similar declaration in "The Adventure of the Devil's Foot": "At least we may accept it as a working hypothesis." *A Treasury*

In "The Adventure of the Empty House," Holmes, previously presumed dead, reappears. Before that happens, however, Watson begins an investigation of the death of the Honorable Ronald Adair. Watson makes a mess of this, of course, but he does the reader the happy service of stating one of Holmes's methodological tools. He tells the reader, "I turned those facts over in my mind, endeavoring to hit upon some theory which could reconcile them all, and to find that line of least resistance which my poor friend declared to be the starting point of every investigation."³¹ Again, the word "theory" is used, but it is not theory in the sense of a universal principle or constellation of universal principles. The theories of gravity and special relativity are theories in that sense. By "theory," Watson, following Holmes, means a hypothetical explanation of greatest likelihood based upon the evidence thus far, but the explanation has to do with the particular crime at hand, not crimes in general. As the story unfolds, Holmes reveals himself to Watson and explains to him what had really happened at Reichenbach Falls. Watson had concluded from the facts, literally on the ground, that Holmes had died, but he was, as it turned out, wrong. As Holmes recounts his deadly encounter with Professor Moriarty, he describes Watson's regard of the clues as his "inevitable and totally erroneous conclusions."³² Watson often comes across as a well-meaning booby, but in this instance, Holmes implies that Watson had drawn the conclusion that he, Holmes himself, would have drawn had their roles been reversed. Conclusions, made in the system of abduction, can be equally inevitable and erroneous. That points to the limits of abduction. The conclusion can be perfectly logical and wrong. Abduction is to argue from one particular piece of evidence to another as the likeliest conclusion, but what is likely is not what necessarily happened.

In "The Adventure of the Devil's Foot," one of the characters insists that there can only be a supernatural explanation for the events under consideration. This adventure—published in 1910—appeared in time closest to Doyle's assertions regarding supernatural phenomena. "I fear," said Holmes, "that if the matter is beyond humanity it is certainly beyond me. Yet we must exhaust all natural explanations before we fall back on such a theory as this."³³ This declaration by Holmes is all the more remarkable considering Doyle's turn to the supernatural at about the same time. Doyle began to diverge from the method his hero consistently deploys.

A few pages on, Holmes makes a fine distinction in his exchange with Watson. Watson begins: "You speak of danger. You have evidently seen more in these rooms than was visible to me." "No, but I fancy that I may have deduced a little more. I imagine that you saw all that I did." Towards the end of the story, Holmes explains

of *Sherlock Holmes*, 594.

³¹ Doyle, *A Treasury of Sherlock Holmes*, 659.

³² Doyle, *A Treasury of Sherlock Holmes*, 663.

³³ Doyle, *A Treasury of Sherlock Holmes*, 586.

himself: "'I had,' said he, 'come to an entirely erroneous conclusion which shows, my dear Watson, how dangerous it always is to reason from insufficient data.'" Here we can see the beauty of the empirical method as worked out in abduction: it is infallible because it is open-ended and self-correcting. We can also see its limitations because the data available is always—by definition—insufficient; there is always something more to know. For that reason, the scientist does not come to a conclusion like a logician, rather only to a working hypothesis.

Hume teaches us to say that a conclusion only approaches one hundred percent certainty; what are called "conclusions" are, in fact, only hypotheses. Newman observes, by contrast, that there is a tipping point in practical matters when we can say that things are certain. We are accustomed to such abductive conclusions in everyday life, for nutrition claims, pharmaceutical trials, or murder convictions, as examples. Still, there ever remains the possibility of being wrong. Butter may be good for us after all; OxyContin, bad for us; the innocent, sentenced to death. Still, there is that tipping point—what Newman calls, "the accumulation of probabilities"—when the free human agent in the world moves from inference to assent, from supposition to conviction, and conviction in life as in law is "beyond a reasonable doubt," not "beyond any doubt whatsoever."³⁴

ST. JOHN HENRY CARDINAL NEWMAN AND HIS "ILLATIVE SENSE"

Abduction—as I have defined it—lays the foundation for the reasoning that Newman calls the "the Illative Sense" in his *Grammar of Assent* when humans reason "from concrete to concrete."³⁵ Newman calls this power, "natural and spontaneous ratiocination," which is "sometimes approaching to a gift, sometimes an acquired habit and second nature. . . . hitting or missing . . . but with enough success on the whole sufficient to show that there is method in it."³⁶ Had he been describing the method of Sherlock Holmes, he could hardly have said better. Newman describes the same reasoning from particular to particular to the degree of greatest likelihood. Newman gives examples of the "weather-wise" peasant and "physicians who excel in the *diagnosis* of complaints." Alike, "they are guided by natural acuteness and varied experience."³⁷ He observes that in like fashion—in the adventure and

³⁴ Newman seems to acknowledge the distinction between a "reasonable doubt" and "any doubt whatsoever," though without discussing it. For example, he writes, "All my certitudes before and after are henceforth destroyed by the introduction of a reasonable doubt, underlying them all." Newman, *GA* (USA: Assumption Press, 2013), 150 (7.2.2).

³⁵ Newman, *GA*, 217 and 222 (8.3).

³⁶ Newman, *GA*, 217 (8.3).

³⁷ Newman, *GA*, 217 (8.3).

mystery of life—that the concrete evidence points clearly to the existence of God: “The structure of the universe speaks to us of Him who made it.”³⁸ One sees on the ridgeline of a building a cardinal sitting alone, iridescent in the slant light of the setting sun. All is perfect stillness except the call of the cardinal to his mate and hers to him. One says, “There is a god, and he made the world good.” There is other evidence too: a pandemic, an earthquake, racial strife, a mass shooting, a war. One concludes, “There is evil in the world.” And one puzzles over these two truths, both so obvious. In that puzzling, religion is born—only natural religion at first, but that, as Newman also points out, is no small thing.³⁹ Those two truths frame the great drama of both natural and revealed religion. No religious word worth saying forgets either of them.

Why is it that Arthur Conan Doyle was not able to recover the faith of his youth? Why did his experiments in psychical research not lead him to the biblical claims about Jesus of Nazareth? Or, if the well of Christianity had been so poisoned by others that he could not drink from it, why did it not, at very least, lead him to the two great truths of creation made good by God, and of evil in that creation? Newman observes that there are no irresistible truths. It is one of the great points of division between Catholicism and Calvinism. The latter holds that for the elect of God, the truth of Christ is irresistible. Catholicism maintains the human freedom to refuse the truth in every case. Newman does not distinguish these partisan stances within Christianity at this juncture, but he does explicate the Catholic position (which, as is often the case, is also the Aristotelian position):

There is a vast distance between what it [revelation] is in itself, and what it is to us. Light is a quality of matter, as truth is of Christianity; but light is not recognized by the blind, and there are those who do not recognize truth, from the fault, not of truth, but of themselves. I cannot convert men, when I ask for assumptions which they refuse to grant to me; and without assumptions no one can prove anything about anything.⁴⁰

Whatever the circumstance may have been before Descartes, it is certainly the case since Hume’s answer to Descartes that nothing can be proved except that I have a long series of mental events that I call my “life.” That there really exists a world outside that series of mental events requires an assumption, namely that things exist. Indeed, Newman calls this assumption, “a first principle.”⁴¹ It seems an obvious assumption for most of us, but even that perhaps most obvious of as-

³⁸ Newman, *GA*, 230 (9.1).

³⁹ Newman, *GA*, 254–56 (10.1).

⁴⁰ Newman, *GA*, 267 (10.2).

⁴¹ Newman, *GA*, 43 (4.1.4.2).

sumptions is not irresistible. Newman advocates a method set forth by one of the great resisters of obvious assumptions, the Scottish philosopher, David Hume.⁴² That is, the method of probability. Newman attributes this method to Eusebius Amort (1692–1775),⁴³ a German Catholic theologian. For Newman, Hume’s method is good as far as it goes, but what Hume does not notice is that probabilities converge. In the thought of Amort, Newman finds a way beyond mere probability. Advancing Amort’s argument, Newman writes: “I prefer to rely on that of an *accumulation* of various probabilities; but we both hold (that is, I hold with him), that from probabilities we may construct legitimate proof, sufficient for certitude.”⁴⁴ Hume would have agreed with Amort and Newman to the point of accumulating probabilities, but he have balked at the notion of “legitimate proof” for matters of fact.

Newman’s “accumulation of probabilities” is easily related to Doyle’s stories. As an example, for Dr. Watson, the evidence he found above Reichenbach Falls was sufficient for certitude, though, as he later discovered—in Newman’s terms—it was not certitude because it was not true. By “certitude,” Newman means, 1) an unshakable sureness 2) the sureness is durable, and that about which I am sure is true. There are, then, three conditions which must be met for certitude to abstain. The first two are internal to “me”: (it is *my* unshakable sureness, and my sureness endures). The third condition is external to me (the truth of the thing).⁴⁵ When Watson believed Holmes to be dead, based upon the evidence at Reichenbach Falls, the first condition was satisfied, but not the second and certainly not the third. When he discovers Holmes to be alive in “The Empty House,” he is equally sure that Holmes is alive, but this time, what he believes to be true is, in fact, true and his sureness is durable. In that second instance, Watson has certitude. In other words, what Newman asserts concerning how one can come to certitude about the claims of Christianity, is essentially how Watson came to certitude that Holmes was, in fact, alive and how Holmes comes to certitude regarding who committed a crime and how it was done. There is an accumulation of probabilities until all impossibilities are eliminated and whatever remains, no matter how improbable, is what happened.

⁴² Hume writes, “We suppose external objects to resemble internal perceptions. I have already shown, that the relation of cause and effect can never afford us any just conclusion from the existence or qualities of our perceptions to the existence of external continu’d objects; . . . We can never conceive any thing but perceptions.” Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 143. Throughout this article, I juxtapose the thought of Hume and Newman. This is not to suggest that Newman was limited to responding to Hume or that the juxtapositions I propose are explicit in Newman. It is clear, for example, that Newman acknowledged a great debt to Locke whom he references and whose thought he challenges; that is especially the case with respect to probability.

⁴³ Newman, *GA*, 268 (10.2).

⁴⁴ Newman, *GA*, 268 (10.2).

⁴⁵ Newman, *GA*, 146.

Let us go back to that moment in the "Orange Pips" case when Watson says that something is possible, but Holmes insists that it is probable. What if, contrary to fact, Watson had refused to follow Holmes on to that next stage, moving from mere possibility to probability? Or, worse, what if Watson had argued that Holmes's claim at that point was actually impossible? Holmes could have proceeded, but Watson would have been left behind. The probability asserted by Holmes was not irresistible. That is the circumstance with Doyle regarding the claims of the resurrection and ascension, etc., of Jesus called the Christ, the Messiah.

The use of Newman's thought as a counterpoint and defeat of Doyle's rejection of Christian claims is constructed, but Newman did criticize another member of the British empirical tradition for his misuse of reason, namely Edward Gibbon. Gibbon, in his *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1.15), argues that there were five historical causes—having little or nothing to do with the inherent claims of Christianity—for the widespread acceptance of Christianity in the Roman Empire.⁴⁶ In the *Grammar*, Newman challenges the way Gibbon deploys the empirical method. Newman writes:

[A]re these historical characteristics of Christianity, also in matter of fact, historical causes of Christianity? Has Gibbon given proof that they are? Has he brought evidence of their operation, or does he simply conjecture in his private judgement that they operated? Whether they were adapted to accomplish a certain work, is a matter of opinion; whether they did accomplish it is a question of fact. He ought to adduce instances of their efficiency before he has a right to say that they are efficient.⁴⁷

Newman accuses Gibbon of sloppiness in representing as fact what was only his opinion. Gibbon uses intellectual sleight of hand to claim that because one event followed another, the preceding event caused the subsequent one. This is the *post hoc ergo propter hoc* fallacy. Newman's move against Gibbon's argument is reminiscent of Hume's challenge to the notion of causation altogether. Hume held that there is only probable conjunction of events, of greater or lesser probability. Newman, at one and the same time, affirms the principles of Hume's empiricism and insists that based upon them, one can go beyond Hume's claim that there is no causation whatsoever. For Newman, it is the accumulation of probabilities that leads to proof, to the state of certitude, namely "I am sure of a certainty." Newman challenges Gibbon on the basis that the historian had made a bald assertion regarding historical causes without having provided sufficient evidence—without presenting the accumulation of probabilities—to warrant the claim of "cause."

⁴⁶ Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, vol. 1 (New York: Modern Library, n.d.), 382–444 (summarized, 383).

⁴⁷ Newman, GA, 298 (10.9).

In parallel to Newman's actual challenge to Gibbon, one can imagine a dialogue between Newman and Doyle.

Newman: You claim to have seen your mother well after her death.

Doyle: Yes, as clearly as I saw her in life.

Newman: The Gospels make a like claim, namely that disciples of Jesus—the ones called apostles, as well as others—saw Jesus on the third day after he had died and numerous other times as well. It is the same kind of claim on the same kind of evidence.

Doyle: I cannot believe it because the claims are preposterous and contrary to science.

Newman: But scientists regard your own views as preposterous and contrary to science.

Doyle: They are blinded by their materialism.

Newman: So, what is it that makes you sure that you saw your mother after she had died, but Peter did not see Jesus after he had died? Further, was Jesus deluded or was he in fact in some unique way God on earth? If deluded, then how is it that we should not regard you as deluded? And, if Jesus was not deluded, how can you not believe in him as God on earth? You accept Huxley's arguments against Christianity as definitive, but how are his arguments not just as definitive against your beliefs?

That will suffice.

Doyle found evidence to go beyond what his character, Sherlock Holmes, was prepared to believe, namely that there are supernatural causes as well as natural ones. Doyle's acceptance of that conclusion did not lead him to accept Christian claims or—it would seem—even to reconsider his rejection of Christian claims. Why? The answer is simple: truth is not irresistible, no matter how luminous.

Some readers may feel uneasy about my willingness to credit Conan Doyle's claims of supernatural appearances. First, those claims are admitted for the sake of argument. Second, though one may think that Doyle was the victim of fraud, nothing in the events he claims to have experienced is inherently contrary to the claims of Christianity. Defeat of Doyle's spiritualism can be left to scientific materialists.

For Newman, ample evidence points to the existence of God. I am hungry, and I am satisfied in eating. I am thirsty, and I am satisfied in drinking. I am tired, and I am satisfied in sleeping. I am sexually desirous, and I am satisfied in having sex. I long for meaning, and I am satisfied in faith in God. The argument is from concrete to concrete in each instance. Holmes and his maker refuse the last step:

Doyle gave himself to séances and occult spiritualism; Holmes becomes listless and resorts to cocaine.

However unlikely it is that God exists, given not only human evil, but also the natural evil of illness, natural disaster, and indeed of death itself, it is the only possibility left standing after eliminating the impossible. Newman not only argues thus for the existence of God, but even for the truth of the Catholic Church:

He [Christ] opens on us the prospect of ambition and rivalry in its [the Church's] leading members, when He warns His disciples against desiring the first places in His kingdom; nay, of grosser sins, in His description of the Ruler, who "began to strike his fellow-servants, and to eat and drink and be drunken,"—passages which have an awful significance considering what kind of men have before now been His chosen representatives, and have sat in the chair of His Apostles.

If then it be objected that Christianity does not, as the old prophets seem to promise, abolish sin and irreligion within its pale, we may answer, not only that it did not engage to do so, but that actually in a prophetic spirit it warned its followers against the expectation of its so doing.⁴⁸

Newman makes use here of the same principle that Holmes sets forth in *The Sign of Four*: "When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth."⁴⁹ However unlikely it is that that very same God would entrust his message of truth to a church led by popes over two millennia, who have often enough been cowardly, disloyal, duplicitous, rapacious, lascivious, and even plain stupid, nevertheless when the impossible has been eliminated, it must be the case that the Catholic Church stands as a beacon of divine truth in a dark world.

⁴⁸ Newman, *GA*, 297 (10.8.2.).

⁴⁹ Doyle, *The Sign of Four*, 42.

The Fire "Once Kindled on Moriah": Wojtyła and Newman on the Conditions for the Proposal of Christ¹

BY STEPHEN MORGAN*

THE TURN TO THE SUBJECT MAKES DEMANDS upon the transmission of the Christian faith that prior, largely objectivist approaches do not meet. In the personalism encountered in the work of John Henry Newman (1801–1890) and Karol Wojtyła (1920–2005) a balance between objective truth and personal experience can be found, which answers present need. This article considers two short texts from these eminent thinkers that indicate their views of this balance; each man would work out and develop more fully these views in later works. In particular, this article identifies within these shorter works a basis for the church's foundational task of evangelization.

First, this article will briefly consider the effects of the subjective turn in Western thought to the task of proposing Jesus Christ in the present age, before suggesting that some of the difficulties this turn has presented can be resolved by looking at the work of John Henry Newman and Karol Wojtyła/Pope John Paul II. It will consider two shorter works, one by each theologian: first, John Henry Newman's fifth *Oxford University Sermon*, "Personal Influence, the Means of Propagating the Faith,"² and, secondly, Karol Wojtyła's final published essay before his election to the papacy as Pope John Paul II, "Subjectivity and the Irreducible in Man."³ The limitations of dealing with these two works—and their suitability to

* Stephen Morgan is Rector of the University of Saint Joseph Macao, China's only Catholic University, where he is also Associate Professor of Historical Theology in the Faculty of Religious Studies and Philosophy. He is a Permanent Deacon of the Diocese of Portsmouth, England. His *John Henry Newman and the Development of Doctrine: Encountering Change, Looking for Continuity* was published by CUA Press in November 2021.

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² Newman, "Personal Influence, the Means of Propagating the Truth" (1832), *US*, sermon 5 (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1909), 75–98.

³ Karol Wojtyła, "Subjectivity and the Irreducible in Man," in *The Human Being in Action—The Irreducible Element in Man: Part II—Investigations at the Intersection of Philosophy and Psychiatry*, ed. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka, vol. VII, *Analecta Husserliana* (Dordrecht/Boston, MA: D. Reidel Pub. Co, 1978), 107–14. This essay is reproduced, substantially unaltered, along-