

**Newman's Epistemology of Religious Belief: His  
Approach to the Justification of Belief in the Existence of  
God**

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## **Declaration**

**I declare that the material of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree.**

**I also declare that, to the best of my knowledge, all sources used and any help received in preparing this thesis have been acknowledged in this thesis.**

**Yawei Huang**

**April 20, 2005**



## **Acknowledgement**

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**To those who have guided me on my voyage  
of searching for truth, virtue and wisdom.**

## Preface

A British mountain climber, Bear Grylls, reached the Summit of Mount Everest in 1998 at the age of twenty-three.<sup>1</sup> This event has inspired me to continue my journey to the philosophical summit—its sublimity has attracted me for many years.

I started my PhD project on Newman in 1989. At that time there were only two articles published on Newman which drew the similarities between Newman and Plantinga (Basil Mitchell, 1990 and Anthony Kenny, 1990, and I wasn't aware of these two articles until Stephen R. Grimm's "Cardinal Newman, Reformed Epistemologist?" was published in 2001) and I felt that there was an urgent need to consider the relevance and significance of Newman's epistemology of religious belief in the contemporary epistemological discussions. This was the major reason why I chose Newman's epistemology of religious belief as my PhD topic. Recently, a number of articles have been published on the similarities between Newman and Plantinga (see: J. R. T. Lamont, 1996 and Stephen R. Grimm, 2001) and these articles have further confirmed the significance of Newman's epistemology of religious belief in the contemporary epistemological discussions.

I suspended my PhD project in 1993 due to family reasons. I resumed it in 2003, submitted it in April 2005 and revised it in 2006.<sup>2</sup>

The present version of my thesis is the result of revision based on the comments made by Examiner A, Examiner B and Examiner C. I sincerely thank the examiners for their favourable comments, which have made my 8 years effort on the project worthwhile and have given me courage and hope to reach my goal, and for their constructive criticisms, which have broadened and deepened my philosophical understanding and guided me to the

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<sup>1</sup>See his *Facing Up*. Macmillan. 2000.

<sup>2</sup>It has taken me nearly 8 years to complete the project. During these years I have endured many sufferings—my beloved mother passed away, marriage broken, children were not looked after properly, financial difficulties, depression, etc. ... but I have never thought to give up my study because it has brought a lot of strength and hope to my life.

path of truth. I have tried my best to revise the thesis according to each of the Examiners' comments and hope it can meet their satisfaction.

Finally, my deep gratitude goes to Professor Peter Forrest for his encouragement, support and invaluable approach of supervision, which have fostered not only my philosophical ability but also my positive attitude towards life.

## **Abstract**

Newman's epistemology of religious belief generates a great philosophical interest due to its relevance to contemporary discussion of the epistemology of religious belief, especially, its relevance to reformed epistemology. In this thesis, I attempt to re-examine Newman's epistemology of religious belief, especially his argument from conscience to belief in God, and try to bring out its significance to the contemporary discussion on the epistemology of religious belief and to show the advantages of Newman's approach over the reformed epistemologists' approach through an analytical and comparative study.

There are three main parts in this thesis: (1) The sources of Newman's philosophical ideas. In this part, I argue that Newman's philosophical ideas were greatly influenced by Thomas Reid, exhibiting the close similarities between them with respect to their views on perception, the foundation of knowledge, the role of probable reasoning, their anti-sceptical approaches and naturalized epistemology; (2) Newman's approach to the justification of belief in God is based on the phenomenon of conscience. In this part, I first clarify Newman's conception of conscience, then analyse his approach as involving two arguments: (a) an argument from the analogy of conscience with perception; (b) an inference to the best explanation of the phenomena of conscience. I argue that even if the argument as an analogy is not promising the argument as an inference to the best explanation is successful; and (3) A comparison between Newman's approach to the justification of belief in God and that of the reformed epistemologists. In this part, I examine Plantinga's approach and exhibit some close similarities between his approach and Newman's. I also show that Newman's approach to the justification of belief in God has advantages over Plantinga's.

## Table of Contents

Introduction		1
Chapter 1	The Philosophical Sources of Newman	11
Chapter 2	The Etymology and Varicus Conceptions of Conscience	87
Chapter 3	Newman’s Conception of Conscience	121
Chapter 4	Newman’s Approach to the Justification of Belief in the Existence of God—An Analogical Argument between Sensory Phenomena and the Phenomena of Conscience	144
Chapter 5	Newman’s Approach to the Justification of Belief in the Existence of God—An Inference to the Best Explanation	179
Chapter 6	A Comparison and Contrast between Newman’s Approach to the Justification of Belief in the Existence of God and that of the Reformed Epistemologists	208
Appendix I	A Chronology of John Henry Newman’s Life	272
Appendix II	My Responses to Examiners’ Comments	276
Appendix III	My Responses to Examiners’ Further Comments	365
Bibliography		392