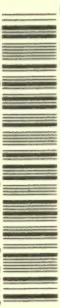
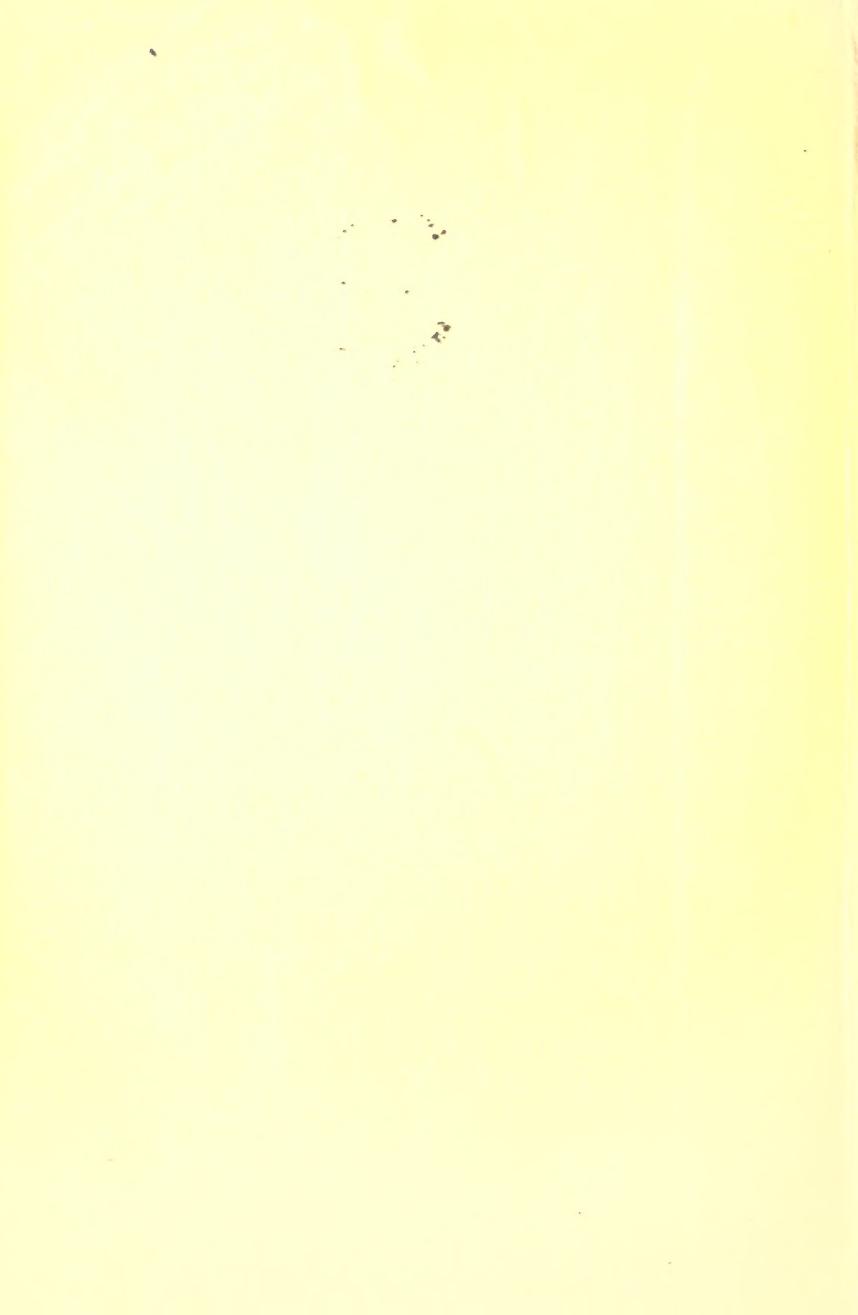


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Certitude

A STUDY IN PHILOSOPHY

BY

REV. ALOYSIUS ROTHER, S.J.

PROFESSOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN ST. LOUIS UNIVERSITY

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PREFACE

The following pages present an exposition of CERTITUDE according to the teaching of the Scholastics, and their purpose is to secure a greater esteem and love for the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas.

CERTITUDE

CHAPTER FIRST

INTRODUCTORY NOTIONS

Summary: States of mind falling short of certitude—Ignorance, complete and partial, privative and negative—Doubt, negative and positive—Opinion—Suspicion—Certitude—Certitude merely subjective and certitude both subjective and objective—Certitude, metaphysical, physical and moral—Moral certitude in a wider sense—Certitude, absolute and hypothetical—Certitude, natural and philosophical.

1. The inquiry into any new branch of knowledge should, according to Cicero's advice (*de Officiis*, l. 1. c. 2.), start out with a definition of the subject to be investigated, in order that we may clearly know what we are about to discuss.

2. **Definition of certitude.** What then is certitude? It is ordinarily described as the firm assent of the mind to a statement without any fear of error.

3. **States of mind falling short of certitude.** Before scrutinizing the above definition a little

more thoroughly, let us first note the various states of mind falling short of genuine certitude.

4. **Ignorance.** When man comes into the world, his mind may be compared to a virgin page, or—as philosophers put it—to a “*tabula rasa*,” that is, a smooth wax tablet upon which no inscription has as yet been made. This total absence of knowledge is *ignorance*. Little by little, impressions are made upon this tablet of the mind, becoming deeper and broader till frequently the knowledge acquired by the mind grows most varied and seemingly unlimited. However, finite intelligences, no matter how comprehensive in their breadth of thought, will always remain in ignorance of incomparably more than they know; for knowledge is infinite, and none but the Infinite can hold it all.

Hence, ignorance may either be *complete* or *partial*.

Again, ignorance is either a mere absence of knowledge, or it is the absence of such knowledge as a person, under given circumstances, is expected to have. The former is technically known as *negative* and the latter as *privative* ignorance. Thus if the physician is not acquainted with farming, we have an instance simply of ignorance: there is a mere negation—negative ignorance. But if he is not acquainted with matters the knowledge of which is called for by his profession, his ignorance is *privative*: there

is a privation of some knowledge that is due—privative ignorance.

5. The mind's activity in the pursuit of its object, truth, may be compared to a journey, of which ignorance is the starting point, and certainty the destination.

6. **State of doubt.** The first stage in the route of travel is the state of doubt. When we say this, we do not mean to assert that the mind always passes first from a condition of ignorance to that of doubt. No, very often it takes a straight leap from ignorance to certain knowledge. Frequently, however, it is compelled to reach its destination by this roundabout way of doubt.

Doubt is a state of intellectual suspense between some statement and its opposite due to lack of evidence. In this state of doubt, the intellect views two or more ideas and compares them, but discovers no signs of their mutual relation or merely such slight ones as justify no positive judgment. Hence it remains undecided.

Suppose a boy were to ask you whether the number of fish in the Mississippi River is odd or even, you would perhaps say to him, if you took him seriously at all, that as you had no reasons whatsoever for asserting either the one or the other, you could not tell. This kind of doubt, where there is a total absence of grounds for either side, is called *negative*. It is really

not doubt at all, but rather ignorance in regard to the relation between two terms. For to doubt means to refuse assent on account of the insufficiency of the motives advanced for a proposition and its opposite; now in negative doubt, no motives whatever are discernible.

If the reasons for both of the opposite statements are very weak, doubt is likewise regarded as negative.

It is termed *positive*, when there are, indeed, grounds for both alternatives worthy of some consideration, but none weighty enough to induce a man of ordinary prudence to give or refuse his assent.

7. Opinion. If, on the other hand, sufficient reasons present themselves to justify the mind in embracing one of the two opposite statements, without, however, precluding the possibility of error on its part, then, should it venture on a judgment, it is said to form an opinion. This is the second stage on the road to certitude.

Hence, opinion may be defined as an assent of the mind to one of two opposite views on grounds not altogether incompatible with error. It is wavering assent, synonymous with belief in one of its meanings. Thus Webster says, "Belief is used for persuasion or opinion, when evidence is not so clear as to leave no doubt."

The grounds which give rise to an opinion, are

called its probability. For an opinion to be rational, the reasons in its favor must be such as to move a prudent man to yield assent. It is not necessary that the grounds for the side embraced should preponderate. It is sufficient for them to be solid and sound, not light and delusive.

8. Suspicion. There is still another condition of mind on this side of certitude which might be regarded as a sort of bridge or transition between doubt and opinion, namely *suspicion*. Suspicion, as here understood, is not the same as a rash judgment formed on flimsy grounds; but as entering into philosophic investigation, it is regarded as a leaning or inclination of the mind to pronounce judgment for reasons insufficient in themselves, but which seem to point in the direction in which the truth lies. Suspicion, as thus taken, is really nothing else than a certain scenting or divining of the truth. It is but the struggling of the "ingenium curiosum" in man, and an evidence of its restlessness and eagerness to soar aloft on the wings of thought. It gives rise to all manner of guesses, conjectures, hypotheses and theories, and thus often proves the fruitful mother of startling inventions. Hence in the purely intellectual region, such surmises are laudable and to be encouraged, provided, of course, they do not run counter to any well established principle or

fact. But in the practical concerns of life, suspicions must be controlled by the dictates of a correct conscience.

9. **Certitude.** We have now arrived at the destination of our journey, namely certitude. We described it, at the opening of the treatise, as the firm assent of the mind to some statement, without any fear of error. This definition of certitude does not necessarily import that assent is given to truth. As a matter of fact, it is possible for the mind to adhere, without fear of error, not only to what is true but, even at times, to what is false. This seems puzzling and calls for an explanation; it will be better, however, to defer this question to another place (No. 34) where we shall treat of the requisites for genuine certitude.

The above definition of certitude then, is general, and applies to firm assent given to one of two contraries, whether the side adhered to, be true or false.

10. **First division of certitude.** This leads us at once to the division of certitude into that which is merely subjective, and that which is both subjective and objective.

Certitude regarded in itself, is, of course, subjective; for it is a state of mind. But this subjective state may have been caused by objective truth, or it may be wholly due to the action of the intellect, unduly influenced by the

will and deluded by the mere appearance of truth. If the origin of certitude is traceable to the former, i. e. to objective truth, certitude is called *formal*: if solely to the latter, i. e. to the subjective operation of the mind, it is styled *purely subjective*.

This *purely subjective* certitude may be defined as unyielding assent to a proposition on grounds which do not make it evident that the possibility of the opposite is excluded; whilst *formal* certitude, on the other hand, is described as firm assent to truth on grounds which show its opposite to be plainly absurd.

Formal certitude might not unsuitably be called *genuine* certitude, all the more so, as the ordinary meaning of our word "formal" suggests something quite different from the above technical signification.

We shall show further on, why this last kind of assent alone deserves to be dignified with the name of certitude properly so called.

Purely subjective and genuine certitude, it will be noticed, agree in this, that both are qualities of the thinking mind, but they differ from each other in that the former has its source in the mind exclusively, whilst the latter is the result of the mind determined by objective truth.

Objective certitude. Since we are allowed by metonymy to name the cause of a thing after the effect it produces, objective truth as giving

rise to subjective certitude, has been termed objective certitude.

This so called *objective certitude* may be defined as objective truth manifesting itself to the mind in such a way as to compel assent.

In this connection, let it be remarked that objective truth as productive of firm assent should, if we wish to be exact in expression, be simply called "certainty," whilst the word "certitude" ought to be reserved for the subjective condition of the mind. Cardinal Newman in his "Grammar of Assent," p. 331, says: "Certitude is a mental state, certainty is a quality of a proposition." Thus, we often hear people say, that such or such a thing is a certainty; or that they accept some fact as an inevitable certainty. But we say, "Skeptics will admit no certitude," or, "We have no certitude of the hour of our death."

However, this distinction is by no means always observed.

Let us illustrate the above definitions by a few examples.

It was the belief of men for ages that the earth was flat. This conviction of theirs was purely subjective certitude, as the reason for it, namely the mere sensible appearance of the earth, was not of a nature to exclude the possibility of the opposite, namely that the earth was not flat, but round. The form of the sun, moon and other heavenly bodies must have often created doubt

in the minds of the beholders, and should have set them to reconsider their hasty inference.

And now let us take an instance of genuine certitude.

We are firmly convinced that there is a Providence, lovingly caring for us and directing and controlling all that exists. Our belief in this divine guidance is unshakable and moreover rests on grounds, namely the wisdom, goodness and love of God, which are incompatible with the contrary statement that there is no Providence. Here we have a clear exemplification of the firm assent resting on objective truth, that is, of genuine certitude.

11. **Second division of certitude.** There is still another division of certitude, which by reason of its great importance claims our special attention. We defined (objective) certitude as truth manifesting itself to the mind in such a way as to compel assent. Now this manifestation of the truth takes place through certain objective grounds or reasons, which, however, are not all of the same general character; for there are essential differences amongst them. According to these differences both certainty and certitude are divided into three classes, namely, *metaphysical*, *physical* and *moral*.

12. **Metaphysical certainty.** A statement regarding some objective truth is said to be metaphysically certain, when it rests on grounds

drawn from the very essence of that truth and involved in its very idea; and since what is essential to a thing is altogether inseparable from it, it follows that the metaphysically certain implies absolute unchangeableness, such as is withdrawn from Almighty power itself. Thus, it is metaphysically certain that two and two are four, and not even God can bring about that they should not be four.

The adherence of the mind to such truths constitutes metaphysical (subjective) certitude. It may be defined as assent to a statement on grounds with which its opposite is absolutely incompatible.

When we say that a statement is absolutely incompatible with certain motives, we mean that the truth of this statement together with the existence of those motives would imply a contradiction, that is to say, an affirmation and negation of the same thing.

13. **Physical certainty.** Let us now pass on to physical certainty.

A statement is said to be physically certain when its unchangeableness or permanent character, rests on the physical laws of nature. These laws, however, are subject to the controlling action of the Almighty power of God, as v. g. the law that a stone thrown into the air, if unsupported, will fall again to the ground. Hence it follows that physical certainty is hypothetical,

being conditioned by the proviso, "if God does not interfere with the ordinary course of nature."

The adherence of the mind to a physical fact consequent upon the perception of nature's uniform mode of action is physical (subjective) certitude. It is defined as assent to a statement, on grounds with which its opposite is physically incompatible: that is to say, a statement made in opposition to nature's laws cannot become true, as long as these laws, which form the ground of assent, remain in force and are not suspended by the God of nature.

These laws of nature, as will have been gathered from the foregoing, are forces residing in nature, in virtue of which physical agents—that is, agents not endowed with freedom—always and of necessity produce the same effect. It is to these forces that the uniformity and constancy of nature are due.

Now let us throw a little more light on this subject by a few examples. It is contrary to the laws of nature, as known to us through legitimate induction, for a dead person to come back to life. These same inexorable laws make it impossible for a man to walk on the billows of the ocean without sinking, or to be shut up in a fiery furnace without being consumed. Hence any report that a dead man left the grave, or that some one walked on the water without being

submerged, or dwelt in the midst of flames untouched, must be refused credence, unless it appears clearly that it pleased God to suspend the laws of nature in some particular case for wise reasons of his own.

14. Moral certainty. We now come to our last division of certainty, namely, moral certainty.

A statement is said to be morally certain, when the so called "moral laws" form the basis of its fixedness and unchangeableness.

15. Meaning of moral laws. But before we go any further, we must first explain what is meant by moral laws.

Moral laws, as here understood, are certain tendencies or propensities of free beings which prompt them always to act in a certain definite manner. True, they do not deprive the agent of his freedom: they leave it in his power to act counter to them.

Yet, as these laws are not only most helpful but even indispensable to the well-being of the individual and the race, they are in such complete harmony with reason that no one can set them aside except by an extreme abuse of his free will and by doing violence to his rational self. They possess then a certain necessitating or compelling force, yet so that they can, absolutely speaking, be overruled by the will of man. But more about this further on.

They are called *moral* laws because they are impulses, guiding agents capable of *moral* actions, and strengthening them in the performance of good.

The name "law" as referred to these promptings of man's rational nature is somewhat misleading. For by a law in the domain of morality, we generally understand a precept or commandment. But the moral laws as the basis of moral certainty are not precepts as such; they are rather, as explained before, moral forces, tendencies, proclivities, planted by God in man's nature, to help him to perform certain very important operations more readily and securely. In fact, they are called laws only, as bearing an analogy to physical laws.

But as the phrase "moral laws" in the signification just given is very rare, and moreover not sanctioned by our standard dictionaries, we shall avoid it, and employ instead expressions in current usage having the same meaning, as "moral or human instincts," "natural bias," "tendency or inclination of free agents," and the like.

From the above explanation we infer, that, like physical certainty, moral certainty is hypothetical, being dependent on the condition, that the free agent will not go counter to his rational instincts.

We may then define moral (subjective) certitude as assent given to a statement, the opposite

of which is incompatible with man's moral instincts.

Let us, as before, illustrate our abstract definitions by a few concrete examples.

The love of life, as long as life is a source of enjoyment, is one of these moral instincts. No one who is in good health and held in honor, will take his own life, though he *can* do so.

Again, our correct natural inclinations urge us with irresistible power, not to maim or disfigure ourselves. Could you imagine a young man who is, moreover, rather vain of his appearance to slash himself with a razor? Yet, no one will deny that it is possible for him to do so. This love of keeping our bodies whole and intact, is another moral instinct, such as we described above.

"Nemo gratis mendax," that is, no one lies just for the sake of lying, is also an instinct of this sort, governing the rational activity of man. People do tell many lies, no doubt; so many in fact, as to make the Psalmist say in his excess, "Every man is a liar." But they do not lie unless some advantage accrues to them from this perversion of the truth. That the above dictum really embodies a human instinct, is also proven by the fact that every one considers it a great insult to be called a liar, and some resent it so much as to have recourse to violence. Yet there are found rare exceptions of moral depravity

who set at naught this sacred bias of human nature, by lying just for the sake of lying.

“Parents love their children,” is also accounted an instinct of the moral order. The love of parents for their offspring is planted in their hearts by the Almighty himself. Taking our stand upon this instinct, we consider ourselves justified in forecasting the actions of parents in regard to their children. True, there are unnatural parents; the very fact, however, that men call them *unnatural*, proves that they regard their conduct as opposed to *nature*. Thus the correctness of our assertion stands confirmed by common opinion.

16. It might be added here that not all the human tendencies are common to the entire race; but some of them are restricted to certain conditions and stages of man's life. We can hardly make our meaning clearer than by citing a passage from both Horace and Shakespeare, in which these great poets delineate the propensities and traits peculiar to certain states of human existence. Not all the characteristics set down by them as marking different periods of man's career, are moral instincts in the *strict* sense of the word; yet they bear at least a very striking resemblance to them, and thus serve as apt illustrations of the matter under discussion.

Thus Horace shows himself the keen observer and searching reader of the human heart that he

is, by the portrait which he gives in "Ars Poetica" of the tendencies, likings and habits of the beardless youth. He says:

"Imberbis juvenis, tandem custode remoto,
Gaudet equis canibusque, et aprici gramine campi;
Cereus in vitium flecti, monitoribus asper,
Utilium tardus provisor, prodigus æris,
Sublimis, cupidusque, et amata relinquere pernix."

Shakespeare sets forth the traits of the School-boy, the Soldier and the Justice very tellingly in the following lines:

"And then the whining School-boy, with his satchel,
And shining morning face, creeping like snail
Unwillingly to school
. Then a Soldier,
Full of strange oaths, and bearded like a pard,
Jealous in honor, sudden and quick in quarrel,
Seeking the bubble reputation
Even in the cannon's mouth. And then the Justice,
In fair round belly with good capon lined,
With eyes severe, and beard of formal cut,
Full of wise saws and modern instances."

It will have been seen from the examples above given, that to know the human instincts, (whether properly so called or in a looser sense) is to know human nature. A thorough acquaintance with them makes the good ruler who is to guide men, and the good poet and novelist who describe their manners.

To guard against misapprehension, let it be

remarked that by human instincts in the looser sense, we understand mere whims or humors common to certain classes of persons, national traits developed by local conditions and the like.

Bear also in mind that at present we are simply endeavoring to clear up our notions; later on, we shall examine whether physical and moral certitude are genuine certitude.

17. **Moral certitude in the wider sense.** The expression "moral certitude" is sometimes used in a somewhat different sense which we must notice, in order to avoid confusion. It often stands for what is highly probable, and may be defined, as assent to a proposition or statement on grounds which render its truth highly probable without excluding the possibility of the contrary. Thus, if you send a letter or a parcel through the mail in a civilized country, you feel *morally* certain that it will reach its destination. You are also *morally* convinced that in a book of fair proportions, some printing mistakes will be found.

This quasi-certitude is called "moral," because actions performed with such mental assurance as it can give us, are justifiable before the tribunal of conscience.

Certainty of this kind might not unsuitably be called "prudential," since any measure taken in pursuance of it, must be regarded as prudent, that is to say, befitting a prudent man.

18. **Third division of certitude into absolute and hypothetical.** There is still a further division of certitude to be noted, which is fundamental in the study of philosophy, and especially in this question of certainty, namely, into *absolute* and *hypothetical*.

Absolute certitude. A statement is said to be *absolutely* certain, when its truth is independent of any condition whatsoever. Certainty of this description is possessed by such propositions as the following: "God exists"; "Twice three are six"; "All the points of the circumference of a circle are equally distant from a point within called the centre."

When we postulate independence "of any condition whatsoever," we, of course, mean conditions which are possible and conceivable; for an impossible or inconceivable proposition must be regarded as non-existent. It might not be out of place to show by some examples how absolute propositions look, when yoked to an unthinkable condition. Here are two of them: "Three and three make six, provided three times three are not twelve;" or, "God is eternal, provided he did not begin to exist." It is plain that such senseless additions must be altogether set aside.

Hypothetical certitude. A statement is hypothetically certain when its truth depends upon the fulfilment of some condition. Under this head fall all statements which are grounded on

the physical laws and the moral instincts, as, "A stone dropped into the water will sink to the bottom," or "This witness, well known for his uprightness will tell the truth, when cited to testify in court." For the first example is conditioned upon God not suspending the ordinary course of nature, and the second, upon man making a proper use of his free will.

19. **Fourth division of certitude into natural and philosophical.** Another division of certitude is that into natural and philosophical.

Natural certitude is the mental assurance which every one of sound mind has in regard to many things, even without *full* advertence to the reasons why he is sure. The natural light of reason, even when unimproved by study and reflection, guides us safely in many things; if not interfered with from without, it never leads us astray within its own sphere.

Philosophical certitude is natural certitude perfected by an accurate scrutiny of the grounds of assent.

These two kinds of certitude do not differ essentially from one another. They are the same mental state in different stages of development; or, to express their dissimilarity in technical language, we might say that in natural certitude, the mind perceives the reasons for its firm conviction indirectly or by implication, whereas when in possession of philosophical certitude, it knows the same reasons directly and explicitly.

CHAPTER SECOND

REQUISITES FOR CERTITUDE

ARTICLE I

FIRST REQUISITE FOR CERTITUDE, ASSENT TO TRUTH

Summary: Thesis: first requisite for certitude, assent to truth—An objection met—Proof of thesis—Truth the proper object of the intellect—Close connection between skepticism and the denial that assent to truth is required for certitude.

20. After describing certitude and enumerating its divisions, we must now prove what certitude is; and this we shall do by showing that the definition of genuine certitude is not arbitrarily formed, but possessed of objective validity, or, in other words, that it is in agreement with reality.

21. **An objection met.** An apparently serious difficulty, however, confronts us at the outset of our philosophical investigations. For, according to the statement just made, we intend to *prove* what certitude is; but how is this possible without begging the question? For we beg

the question whenever we assume in the premises the very thing to be proved. Now the premises to be of any service in reasoning must be recognized as certain: hence to prove what certitude is, you must already know that it exists and what it is.

We can meet this objection in two ways. In the first place, we can reply that we do not intend to give a proof or demonstration in the strict sense of the word, that it is our purpose merely to analyze certitude, and that in doing so, we adopt the external garb of the syllogism simply for the sake of clearness and convenience.

But we have another answer in reserve: it is our aim here to give a philosophical definition of certitude, and we deduce this from what common sense tells us about certitude. In other words, we base our scientific and philosophical knowledge of certitude upon natural certitude, and thus we can demonstrate our definition to be correct without laying ourselves open to the charge especially odious to philosophers, of begging the question.

22. Let us now restate the definition of certitude and point out that the elements involved in it, are based upon accurate observation and correct analysis of the mental processes.

True or genuine certitude is unflinching assent to truth from motives which show its opposite to be evidently absurd.

A glance at this definition reveals at once that for certitude strictly so called three conditions must be fulfilled, namely, first, the mind's assent must be given to a statement which is true in itself; secondly, this statement must be accepted by the mind on grounds with which its opposite is incompatible; and thirdly, these grounds must manifest themselves to the intellect as evidently infallible. For the sake of clearness, let us embody each of these requirements in a separate thesis.

THESES I

In order to have certitude in the strict and highest sense of the word, the mind's assent must, in the first place, be given to a statement which is true in itself.

23. Note that we speak here of certitude in the "strict" and "highest" sense of the word, where, by the former, we mean "genuine" certitude and, by the latter, "metaphysical." For, as we shall see further on, there can be certitude strictly so called, (viz. physical and moral), which, however, is not certitude in the highest sense of the term.

24. We can derive the necessity of this essential condition for perfect intellectual assurance from the fact admitted on all hands, that certi-

tude constitutes the perfection of the human intellect. It is the culmination, the acme of human cognition. It is the full repose of the mind in the possession of truth. This, in fact, might be called the definition of certitude as given by common sense. For, a man of average intelligence will tell you, that he is certain when he has full assurance of something, and feels perfectly easy in mind in regard to its truth. Now it is impossible that the intellect should experience such complete repose in giving assent to what is in itself false. For, it would then be at rest without being in possession of its own peculiar object, truth; and to say that any faculty can rest altogether satisfied when exercising its activity on an object not its own, is a contradiction in terms.

The reason is this: Every faculty tends, of its very nature, towards its own object; as the will towards the good, the appetite towards food; for the object of a faculty is that to which its activity is directed.

Now if it were possible for a faculty to find perfect satisfaction in an object not its own, it would thereby show itself indifferent and unconcerned in regard to its own object, since by the very fact of being attracted and engrossed by an object not its own, it ceases to tend towards its own.

Hence a faculty of this sort would at once tend towards its own object—for otherwise it

would not be a faculty at all—and it would not tend towards it; for we assume it to be indifferent towards its own object, because we suppose it capable of finding full repose in something besides its own peculiar object; and this would imply a patent contradiction.

Let us corroborate this argument by a few well known facts of every-day experience, which go to show that the cravings of a faculty can never be appeased by an object not its own.

The will—one of the faculties of the soul—is ill at ease so long as it clings to what is evil; it never finds perfect satisfaction except in the good. For evil is not the proper object of the will.

Grating sounds and false notes offend the trained ear, because they are out of keeping with it.

Dreary surroundings, bleak fields, bare trees act depressingly on a person of fervid imagination: for the fancy has not the object on which it loves to feed.

Thus it is also with the intellect, since it, too, is one of man's faculties. It cannot feel at rest unless it possesses truth: for truth is its proper object.

Whence it follows that assent to what is false cannot be certain: for certitude is the full repose, the full assurance of the mind.

25. **A query answered.** But some one might

ask, perhaps, how do you know that the true is the proper object of the intellect, and the false is not? The answer to this question is given by self-consciousness, which takes notice of all the internal phenomena of our intellectual life. For our consciousness tells us, that we all love truth, that our reason devotes its energies to discovering it: whilst this same inner witness attests that we abhor falsity as an evil, that we fly from it, that we feel ashamed when caught blundering.

Now this love of truth on the one hand, and detestation of falsity on the other, clearly show that the one is, and the other is not the object of the intellect.

Moreover, it is evident a priori, that the false, which is a privation of a perfection, and hence an evil, cannot be the object of a faculty.

26. Close connection between universal skepticism and denial that assent to truth is required for perfect certitude. To strengthen our thesis still more, we invite attention to the great importance of allowing no assent to be certain, unless given to what is true; for were we to yield this point, we should place skepticism on a dangerous vantage ground in its attack on the existence of certain knowledge, and thus play into the hands of our enemies.

For if we could ever be *truly* certain of what is really a mistake, then certain and uncertain

assent would not differ from one another, as far as objective truth is concerned, since both the one and the other could stand with falsity.

Hence, certain assent would in reality be as uncertain as uncertain assent; and if so, how could we ever be sure of the truth? We should have to admit that we could not; we should have to surrender to the skeptics.

If then we do not hold steadfastly to this point, that what is certain is likewise true, the fabric of knowledge is built on sand, and cannot endure.

ARTICLE 2

SECOND REQUISITE FOR CERTITUDE, INFALLIBLE MOTIVES

Summary: Thesis: infallible motives required for certitude—Twofold character of grounds of assent—Proof of thesis.

27. We cannot then be certain, unless our assent is given to truth. However, this is not enough for certitude. For it often happens that what we mentally acquiesce in, is true as a matter of fact, yet we are not for that reason alone certain. Hence a further condition for the removal of all doubt is needed. Let us state this explicitly in the next thesis.

THESIS 2

For the intellect to be certain in the strict and highest sense of the word, it is not enough that the statement adhered to, be true; it must moreover be accepted on grounds with which its opposite is incompatible.

A few expressions in this thesis need clearing up, before we can pass on to the proof.

The grounds of a statement are, of course, the reasons that can be brought forward to show its truth. These reasons may be of a twofold character. They may either merely indicate that a statement is so without, however, excluding the possibility of the opposite; or, they may, in addition, make it appear that this possibility is excluded. It is reasons of the latter kind which we require for genuine certitude; those of the first description only give rise to assent more or less probable.

Let us illustrate our meaning by an example. Suppose you see a rabbit stretched out in the grass; you raise it up: it neither breathes nor stirs; you pass your hand over its body: it feels cold to the touch. You say, it is dead.

But are you justified in pronouncing this judgment? Are your grounds for your assertion such as to exclude its contradictory? I answer that they are not. For it is possible for an ani-

mal which neither breathes nor stirs, and feels cold to the touch, to be still alive. Perhaps it is merely stunned. But suppose you notice, that the rabbit has been shot through the head or the heart, or that it is beginning to decay, then the grounds for your judgment that the rabbit is dead would be incompatible with its contradictory, namely, that the animal is not dead.

In order to have genuine certitude, the reasons for assent must be of this kind.

Let us now pass to the proof of the thesis, namely, that a statement in order to be certain, must be accepted by the mind on grounds with which its opposite is incompatible. In other words, the reasons for certain assent to a proposition must exclude the possibility of error.

28. This second condition for certain assent is an immediate inference from the first requisite for perfect certitude, namely, that nothing short of truth can fully satisfy the mind. Now it is only a statement resting on motives incompatible with its contradictory that is necessarily true. Hence no other reasons except such as invalidate the opposite of the proposition for which they are advanced, can fully satisfy the intellect and thus produce certainty.

Thus when the view that the earth moved, was first advanced by Copernicus, the reasons given by him were not such as to exclude the opposite opinion, namely, that the earth was at

rest. It was a theory then; and it was by reason of the weakness of the arguments brought forward in its support that it was not generally accepted as at present, when we are furnished with several proofs which shut out altogether the old belief as embodied in the Ptolemaic system.

29. The argument just given may also be very briefly presented in a somewhat different guise thus:

In order that I may be certain in any particular case, my assent must be infallible. For to say that an affirmation is certain and to say that it is infallible, comes to the same thing. Now, infallibility is defined as entire exemption from liability to error; hence, assent that is infallible, must be traceable to reasons, which cannot under any circumstances co-exist with error.

ARTICLE 3

THIRD REQUISITE FOR CERTITUDE

THE INFALLIBILITY OF THE MOTIVES FOR ASSENT MUST BE EVIDENT

Summary: Thesis: the infallibility of the motives of assent must be evident—Brief explanation of the notion of evidence—Proof of the thesis—In what sense the mind can be said to adhere to what is false without fear of error.

30. But there is still a third condition required for perfect certitude.

THESIS 3

In order to possess certitude in the strict and highest sense of the word, it is not enough for the intellect to assent to a statement true in itself and based on infallible grounds; these grounds must, moreover, manifest themselves to the mind as evidently infallible, that is, as necessarily connected with the truth.

We assert then in this third thesis, that the reasons on account of which the mind yields certain assent must be evident to it. Although the discussion of the subject of evidence constitutes a special treatise of its own, the requirements of our thesis call for a brief exposition of the meaning of evidence as used here.

Evidence, in general, is anything that renders truth apparent to the intellect. It is either objective or subjective. Objective evidence, which is evidence properly so called, is nothing else than objective truth revealing itself to the mind so clearly as to compel assent. As we shall see later, whenever an object with the light of evidence shining upon it, is placed before the thinking agent, the mind must yield to this clear manifestation of the truth; whereas when such evidence is wanting, the surrender of the intel-

lect by pronouncing judgment on insufficient grounds, is due, in part, to the power of the will exercising its sway over the cognitive faculties. This objective evidence is figuratively called the light through which truth discloses itself to the mind.

Subjective evidence is the effect produced by objective evidence. It may be described as the perception of a statement with such clearness and distinctness, that all wavering of the intellect in regard to its certainty vanishes.

To have perfect certitude, then, the exclusion of the opposite of a statement must be evident. This in plain English means, that we cannot be sure of a statement, unless we clearly see the force of the reasons given in proof.

31. Our assertion may be established in the following manner. Certain assent is the perfection of the cognitive or knowing faculty. Now unshaken adherence of mind to a truth without the evident or clear perception of the infallibility of the grounds in its favor, is assent which cannot render to itself an account of its firmness; it is firm assent, the firmness of which does not proceed from knowledge. For if I do not know that the grounds for my unwavering adherence to a truth are infallible, that is, necessarily connected with the truth, I cannot know that I am not mistaken. Hence, such assent, in so far as it is fixed and unyielding, would not

be rational; it would resemble the blind instinct, by which the irrational animals are guided and pushed on. Now, it is plain that blind and unfounded acquiescence in a statement cannot possibly constitute the perfection of a seeing or knowing faculty, such as the intellect is.

Suppose some one brings forward the most incontestable arguments to prove to me the geometrical proposition that the square described upon the hypotenuse is equivalent to the sum of the squares described upon the other two sides. As long as I do not see their force, that is, as long as I do not clearly perceive the necessary connection between the arguments advanced and the truth of the proposition in question, I cannot give that firm assent, which rests on insight and is rational.

32. The same argument might also be proposed in a slightly different form thus: In order that the *infallible* grounds, which according to our second thesis are required for certitude, may produce fixity of assent, they must, of course, act upon the mind. But to this end, they must manifest themselves as infallible. For it is only through the knowledge of their infallibility, that these grounds appeal to the mind and become capable of influencing it in such a manner as to compel assent.

Let us add another argument in proof of our thesis.

33. An *intellectual* being by its very nature must know its own thoughts by reflection, and, hence, in attaining to certitude must become conscious of this certitude. To become conscious of this certitude, however, it must clearly see that the reasons for admitting the truth exclude all error.

34. **A difficulty answered.** This seems to be the most appropriate occasion to redeem our promise (No. 9) of showing how it is possible for the mind to adhere, without fear of error, not only to what is true, but sometimes also to what is false. How can this be? Is not this an admission that certitude is, as the skeptics say, impossible of attainment? For if false and genuine certitude resemble each other so closely, how can I tell one from the other? How can I know that what seems most solid, may not after all be only a soap bubble?

In unriddling this apparent paradox, we must distinguish between absence of fear in the will and quiet of mind. For although in assent both to what is true and to what is false, the *will* may experience no fear that the intellect is mistaken, yet the *quiet* of *mind* which is the characteristic mark of genuine certitude, is never complete when one adheres stanchly to an erroneous statement. For quiet of mind (which, unlike the absence of the fear of error, resides entirely in the intellect), is consequent upon the

presence of evidence, as explained before; and it is impossible for the false to be evident; for evidence is truth clearly manifesting itself to, and forcing its acceptance upon, the mind. Now the false—that which is not—cannot manifest itself clearly as real and true. Such manifestation is reserved to reality—to that which IS—to the true. Hence we maintain that false assent, no matter how persistent and firm according to all appearances, is always accompanied by a certain lack of evidence, by a certain haziness, by a certain want of lucidity or clearness, which warns the mind to halt and re-examine its grounds for assent.

CHAPTER THIRD

PROPERTIES OF CERTITUDE

ARTICLE I

METAPHYSICAL CERTITUDE ABSOLUTE CERTITUDE

Summary: Thesis: metaphysical certitude absolute certitude—Difference between metaphysical, physical and moral certitude on the one hand, and absolute and hypothetical on the other—Proof of thesis.

35. After thus analyzing the notion of certitude, let us now pass on to the consideration of some of its properties, a disquisition which will often stand us in good stead in our battle against false philosophy.

At the outset of this treatise, we divided certitude into three orders, namely metaphysical, physical and moral, and gave their respective definitions. The question now arises, whether the name *certitude* is rightly applied to each of these three divisions, or whether it is attributed to one alone in the strict sense of the word, and to the others in a wider sense.

We answer that the three assents, namely, metaphysical, physical and moral, have all of

them a just title to be called *certitude*, although they differ essentially in the degree of perfection, in which they share the common predicate, the metaphysical being absolute, and the physical and moral being conditional. We shall endeavor to solve the problems involved in this statement in the next four theses.

THESIS 4

Metaphysical certitude is rightly named absolute.

Before we prove this assertion, take notice of an important difference between metaphysical, physical and moral certitude on the one hand, and absolute and hypothetical on the other. Metaphysical, physical and moral certitude have regard to the grounds of assent, (v. g. the essences of things or the laws of nature) as considered in themselves; whereas absolute and hypothetical certitude view these same grounds as unconditioned or conditioned from without.

36. With these remarks premised, we prove the thesis thus: Metaphysical certitude is grounded on reasons drawn from the inward nature of things, and hence involved in the very idea of the truth affirmed. Thus, when I say, "The whole is greater than any of its parts," the essence of *whole* and of *part*, or the ideas representing them, afford me all the data for

my firm assent to the statement. Now (as will be shown in *Ontology*), the essences of things are unchangeable and indestructible: whatever goes to constitute them, belongs to them with absolute necessity, and hence independently of any condition possible or thinkable. For, essence in the strict sense of the word, is that without which a thing can neither exist nor be conceived; consequently, it is inseparably bound up with the object of which it is the essence. Since then mental adherence to truth is proportionate to the grounds which determine it, and upon which it rests for its stability, it follows that metaphysical assent, as being the result of motives which are absolute and unconditioned in their nature, is itself absolute and unconditioned.

ARTICLE 2

METAPHYSICAL CERTITUDE THE ONLY ABSOLUTE CERTITUDE

Summary: Thesis: metaphysical certitude the only absolute certitude—Ambiguous meaning of the expression “absolute and conditional assent”—Proof of the thesis.

37. It still remains for us to show that metaphysical certitude is the only absolute certitude; and this we shall do in the next thesis.

THESIS 5

No other assent except that which is given to a statement on metaphysical grounds possesses absolute firmness.

For the better understanding of this thesis, it might be well to direct attention to another way of phrasing the above assertion. We are sometimes told that assent resting on a metaphysical basis is "absolute"; whereas mental adherence for physical and moral considerations is conditional (hypothetical). This manner of stating the case is somewhat ambiguous. For when we say that our assent is absolute or conditional, our meaning may either be that it is absolutely or conditionally given, or that its firmness and unchangeableness is absolute or conditional. We do not intend to convey the former idea. For, assent is always absolutely *given*, since assent conditionally yielded would be assent withheld until the fulfilment of some condition is realized, and therefore would not be *actual* assent at all. Hence the words "absolute" and "conditional" have reference to the "firmness" of the mental concurrence in the truth affirmed.

Let us explain this by an analogous instance. It would not seem inappropriate to call matrimony an absolute, and betrothal a conditioned engagement; not in the sense that in the one

case consent is positively given, and in the other, it is not;—for both matrimony and betrothal suppose an actual, present agreement;—but in this sense that the one contract is absolutely unalterable, whereas the other is annullable under certain conditions.

38. Our thesis is really nothing else than an extension of the foregoing one. For, as we said there, assent possessing absolute firmness calls for motives of the same character, that is, motives subject to no implied condition; since assent and its motives stand to each other in the relation of effect and cause, and the effect cannot surpass the cause in perfection—in the present case, in firmness. Now there are no other motives which are altogether unconditional except those styled metaphysical. For the physical laws and the moral instincts are both dependent on certain contingencies, the former on possible Divine interference, and the latter, on the arbitrary use of man's free will. Hence, it follows that physical and moral certitude—if certitude at all, a question to be settled soon—are at best conditional; and consequently, metaphysical certitude alone is absolute.

39. We might note here in passing, what we shall explain explicitly further on in proving the genuineness of physical and moral certitude, that assent based on metaphysical grounds is certitude *by excellence*. For there can be nothing

more excellent than the absolute and the unconditioned; and metaphysical certitude is such in its own sphere. In fact, metaphysical truths are the centre, round which all our cognition revolves, they are the fulcrum, on which all our knowledge rests, they are the light within the mind, without which all would be darkness and chaos.

ARTICLE 3

PHYSICAL AND MORAL CERTITUDE, THOUGH HYPOTHETICAL, STILL TRUE CERTITUDE

Summary: Thesis: physical and moral certitude, though hypothetical, still true certitude—The force of hypothetical propositions—First argument of the thesis—Answer to the objection that no propositions can be certain unless the fear of error and the danger of a mistake is absolutely excluded—Second argument of the thesis—Answer to the objection that unless the possibility of a miracle is altogether excluded, assent is merely probable—How physical and moral certitude can become absolute—Chief objection to our doctrine unsound even from standpoint of Dialectics—Confirmation of our view by the verdict of common sense—Meaning of common sense here—Signs by which to recognize judgments of common sense—An objection answered.

40. We now leave the region of metaphysical certitude with these few remarks, and pass



on to a subject which is not so plain and has given rise to different views even amongst men who sincerely seek the truth and embrace it, as soon as it clearly manifests itself. It regards the nature of physical and moral certitude. Let us express our doctrine on this controverted point thus :

THESES 6

Intellectual assent, based on the physical laws and the moral instincts of men, is truly and genuinely certain, although, being conditioned, it is imperfect as compared with metaphysical.

41. This then, in brief, is the debated question which we are about to discuss; and as it would seem that much of the difficulty experienced in understanding the views of either side, is due to a loose use of certain terms, let us first of all clearly and distinctly mark out the boundaries of those most liable to breed confusion.

One of the chief sources of vagueness in this matter arises from the peculiar kind of certainty possessed by hypothetical (conditional) propositions.

To settle this question with precision, we must bear in mind that a hypothetical proposition consists of two parts, namely the antecedent or

condition, and the consequent or conditioned proposition. What we *properly* assert in a hypothetical proposition, is the relation between the antecedent and the consequent. Thus, when I say, "If there is a breeze, the leaves of the trees rustle," I do not assert either that there is a breeze, or that the leaves rustle; all I want to point out, is the relation between the two parts of the hypothetical sentence. This connection may be, and often is absolutely certain.

But it not unfrequently happens, that the consequent of a conditional sentence has a certain measure of certainty of its own, to which I may direct my attention. Certainty, in this case, is necessarily conditioned, that is, dependent on a certain contingency; yet it is certainty for all that, as we shall see hereafter. Let us illustrate our meaning by an example. Suppose a young man should say to you: "I shall win the prize in the contest I am about to enter, if the judges are not biased by prejudice." In this proposition, we may regard the relation between the antecedent and the consequent; or, we can, if we so choose, restrict ourselves to the consideration of the consequent, taken by itself, viz., "I shall win the prize in the contest," together with the grounds in its support, and see what degree of certainty, if any, it possesses. Perhaps the contestant judges so, because he knows his own powers and the weakness of his

opponent; and because he has come off victoriously under less favorable circumstances.

By reason of this double character of a hypothetical proposition then, we likewise meet with a twofold assent, one relating to the connection between the antecedent and the consequent, and the other regarding the conditioned consequent on its own merits. We must not lose sight of the above distinction in our later researches; for the proper understanding of our thesis hinges to a large extent upon it. When we say then, that assent based on physical and moral grounds is conditioned and imperfect, yet none the less certain—we speak of the conditioned proposition taken by itself and valued at its own worth, and not of the relation between antecedent and consequent. We might perhaps make this still plainer by choosing two concrete cases, the one founded on a physical law, and the other, on one of the moral instincts.

When the king in Schiller's ballad, "The Diver," said to the knights and squires standing about him:

"Is amongst ye a knight or squire so bold,
As to plunge into this abyss?
I cast in the vortex a goblet of gold,
The dark waves already surge around it and hiss;"

he knew, of course, that the goblet of gold would surely sink. It is the certitude in regard to this

statement, "The goblet of gold will surely sink," conditioned by the possibility of Divine interference, with which we are concerned now. But we have nothing to do here, at least directly, with the connection which exists between the two propositions, "The goblet of gold will sink" and "God will not interfere with the laws of nature in this case."

Now let us add an example drawn from the moral order.

Recall the return of the prodigal son to the home of his childhood, how kindly his old father received the young scapegrace in spite of his ungrateful behavior; how he fell upon the neck of his boy and kissed him, and then for joy ordered the fatted calf to be killed, even at the risk of wounding the feelings of his other son who had never wavered in his fidelity. Any one witnessing that scene would have cried out: "How that father loves his son!" Now it is this assertion as regarded in itself, which is the object of intellectual adherence. We might add this condition, "unless he acts a part and shamefully plays the hypocrite." But we are not now investigating the relation between, "This father loves his son," and "He is not acting a part."

We must make still another remark, in order to show exactly, just how much we affirm in this thesis. It is this—the conditioned member

of a hypothetical sentence may be absolutely affirmed, provided the condition to which it is conceived to be subject, has been verified. In this case, the consequent of the conditional proposition may become the conclusion of a sort of hypothetical syllogism, somewhat in this manner: "The goblet of gold flung into the sea, will sink unless God works a miracle. Now, I know that he will not work a miracle in this instance. Therefore I am *absolutely* certain, that the goblet of gold will sink." Whatever may be said of the propriety of calling this method of setting forth the premises and drawing the conclusion, a legitimate syllogism (of which more elsewhere), let it be borne in mind, that we do not at present suppose the condition to have been realized; yet we nevertheless maintain, that assent given on physical and moral grounds is truly certain.

42. We take this attitude in opposition to some philosophers who hold that unless the condition is known to be fulfilled, the mental adherence can never rise above the level of mere probability. We beg to differ from them in this particular, and, as we think, for good reasons. Let the proofs we are about to give speak for themselves.

43. **First argument based on the nature of certitude.** It has been stated before (thesis 1) that certain assent is assent necessarily linked

to truth. We also showed there that assent is such whenever the statement adhered to, rests on grounds which exclude the possibility of the opposite, or, in other words, are necessarily connected with the truth.

Now the physical laws and the moral instincts are necessarily connected with the truth of the statements made on account of them, because these laws and instincts are themselves necessary, i. e. necessarily productive of their respective effects. No doubt, this necessity is conditioned, yet it is necessity none the less, as we shall show presently. Hence, assent resting on the laws and instincts in question, must likewise be necessary, that is, necessarily connected with the truth, and so far forth certain.

The radical reason implied in the above argumentation is, that the physical laws and moral instincts render the assertion which they motive, *evident*; and evidence always begets certitude.

It now remains to show that the physical laws and the inborn propensities grafted by the Creator on our rational constitution are forces which coerce and necessitate in a true sense of the word.

And first, that such is the case, is acknowledged by the voice of mankind. For men often speak of the laws of nature as "inexorable," "relentless," and the like, thus implicitly avowing their constraining power, as in the following

proverb; "Death is deaf and hears no denial."
When a certain poet says:

"Consumption has no pity
For blue eyes and golden hair,"

he expresses the same truth after his own ideal fashion. The well-known adage, "The mills of the gods grind slow, but grind exceeding fine," is but another way of stating that Nature obtains certain ends unfailingly through her laws.

Many of our old sayings, which are in the mouth of everybody and are often nothing else than the concrete embodiment of certain moral instincts, frequently take a categorical and absolute form; and this shows that they are regarded by men as resting on necessary and unchangeable principles, as, "Deserve success, and you shall have it"; "Evil communications corrupt good manners"; "Pride shall have a fall"; and a host of others.

The philosophical reason for this necessity is given in the Treatise on "Induction," where it is shown that both the physical laws and the moral instincts have their ultimate root in the inner nature of the agents from which they proceed.

44. It will be seen from the above that for a statement to be really certain, the possibility of the opposite need not be excluded *absolutely*; all that is required is, that the motives of assent possess some sort of real necessity. In fact,

were it otherwise, almost all the statements founded upon the regularity of the physical forces (to say nothing of those based on moral grounds), would thereby sink to the level of mere probabilities; since it is very difficult to tell whether there is not some hidden reason locked up in the bosom of God whose "judgments are incomprehensible and whose ways are unsearchable," why it should please him to change the established order of things in any particular case.

45. An objection raised. But some one might ask, is not this assertion (namely, that a proposition may be certain, and yet not exclude the contradictory *absolutely*) opposed to the very definition of certitude, which requires that all fear of error be barred out and that all danger of going astray be removed?

We answer to this, that our doctrine is not at variance with the definition of certitude; for when we assert that certitude shuts out all doubt and obviates all danger of a mistake, we have reference to well-founded, prudent, rational doubts, and to the danger of error truly such; and not to unfounded, foolish, irrational misgivings, and merely fantastic, imaginary perils. These latter are to be scouted and disregarded, and hence cannot destroy our firm adherence to truth.

As regards the danger of error in particular,

which may need some further explanation, remember that *danger* signifies exposure to imminent or threatening evil; and I think, it will be conceded by all that no risk is run, no chances are taken, if in reliance on the physical laws and moral instincts, I rest assured, for instance, that the solid oaken boards of my room, on which I am standing, will not be suddenly turned into thin air, but will continue to support me; or that a gay young student, who whilst boating with some of his friends has fallen overboard, will not refuse to grasp the oar held out to him.

46. **Second argument based on the distinction between certain and probable assent.** Assent of whatever kind, is either certain or probable. For the other mental states besides certitude and opinion (or probable assent) are ignorance, suspicion and doubt, none of which can lay claim to the name of intellectual assent. Hence, if we can prove that the mental adherence given on the strength of the physical laws and the moral instincts is not probable, it follows that it is certain; and this we can do. For assent which is merely probable is not necessarily true, since it is yielded on debatable and undecisive grounds, on grounds which imply a "may," but not a "must," and which therefore involve no necessity of any sort. Suppose that you see your friend reclining very composedly on his couch with his eyes closed,

and that you form the judgment, "He is asleep": your reasons for arriving at this inference, as is obvious, carry no necessity with them; for they are of such a character, that the statement, "He is not asleep," is quite compatible with them; that is to say, they are merely probable.

But quite the contrary happens, when there is question of an enunciation based on the physical laws and the moral instincts of men. Then we are confronted not with a mere "may," but with a "must." We have no longer to do with variable and shifting grounds, but with grounds of an entirely fixed and peremptory description. If I see a quarter of mutton suspended on a spit over a blazing fire, I know that the meat will become roasted. My assent is unhesitating and unwavering.

Since then the motives of mental adherence drawn from the physical laws and the moral instincts, are of an essentially different nature from those brought forward for a mere probability, we infer that assent on account of these laws and instincts cannot be probable, and hence must be certain; for, as we stated above, there is no middle state between certain and probable assent.

47. A difficulty met. But here we are confronted with a difficulty. We said in our last proof, that the motive of assent for a physical fact differs essentially from a mere probability.

Such, however, our opponents argue, does not seem to be the case. For where the possibility of a miracle is not absolutely excluded—as we hold, it is not in mere physical certitude—the law of nature is thereby brought down to the level of a mere probable ground of assent, as happened, for instance, when our Blessed Lord had arrived at Bethania to summon Lazarus from the tomb. (N. B. We confine ourselves to the consideration of the physical laws for the sake of simplicity; but what holds true of them, applies *mutatis mutandis* to the moral instincts as well.)

We answer, in the first place, that the above objection rests on a false assumption. For it is taken for granted that the motive of assent for physical certitude is twofold, namely the law as well as the assurance that there will be no exception to its due operation. Now, this is a mistake. The motive for physical certitude is one, namely the *necessity* of the law. This always remains the same, even though there be some likelihood of nature swerving from its ordinary course in a particular instance. True, in order to have genuine physical certitude, we must be sure that no positive reasons of any sort exist for conjecturing a departure from the customary workings of the natural forces; in other words, that no indication whatever of probable Divine intervention appears. But such

knowledge is required, not as a *motive of assent*, but merely as an *indispensable condition* for us to perceive that the law—the true motive of assent—is applicable in a given case. The absence of every sign that God will exercise his right as Sovereign Lord of nature, does not move the mind to affirm the statement under consideration; it merely renders it possible for the physical laws duly to influence the intellect. In a similar manner, it is the flame of the match which lights the wick; yet, in order that it may do so, I must apply it: the immediate contact between the flame and the wick is merely required as a *condition* for the ignition to take place.

Bear in mind, however, we must suppose that the conditions for the effectiveness of the physical laws and the moral instincts—namely Divine non-interference and the due concurrence of the will of man—will be realized unless some reason to the contrary can be shown. For, as regards the physical laws, an infinitely wise Being, such as God is, never suspends the established order of things except for considerations of a most weighty character, and therefore extremely seldom. Hence, the fulfilment of the conditions in this case is guaranteed by Infinite Wisdom itself. And as to those propensities, which are called “*leges morales*” in Latin philosophical works, it must be remembered that they

have been implanted in man's breast by a loving Providence for the essential welfare of the noblest portion of visible creation, namely, rational beings. They are the safeguards of personal happiness and the secure defence of the stability of one of God's grandest works, human society. Consequently, they too possess such stability and fixity, that unless there are positive grounds for suspecting unnatural conduct, they must be regarded as sure to produce their intended effect. But we readily admit, as a legitimate inference from the principles laid down by us, that in the case of physical and moral certitude a mistake is *absolutely* possible; for were it not so, then both the one and the other would thereby become metaphysical certitude. But we refuse to grant, that the mere *absolute* possibility of a statement being erroneous prevents its being certain.

To avoid misapprehension, let us add that when we say, we may be *mistaken* in matters physical and moral, the word *mistaken* must be understood in a somewhat modified sense. For in order to be mistaken according to the full import of the word, the opposite of what we judged would take place must, in no way, be foreseen and allowed. This, however, cannot be claimed here; since we foresee and hence, after a fashion, allow the possibility of an exception to the physical laws and moral instincts,

Consequently, no mistake properly so called can be laid to our charge, if an assertion of ours, made on the strength of the physical laws and moral instincts, turns out false, since it was conditioned and not absolute. It would perhaps be more appropriate to say that the unexpected happened or the exception to the rule came true for once: just as a man who belongs to a party which he thought would win in a political campaign, will tell you that he was on the wrong side rather than that he was mistaken; for he, too, recognized and therefore admitted the possibility, and (in this case) also the probability of losing in the contest. This is sometimes expressed technically by saying, that such error is merely *material* and not *formal*.

48. **How physical and moral certitude can become absolute.** We hold then that conditional assent, as above described, is truly certain; yet, on the other hand, we readily admit that both physical and moral certitude can become *absolute*. For though intellectual adherence to a proposition may not be *absolutely* firm in itself, it may be rendered so by linking it to a metaphysical principle; and this is what is called *reducing* physical and moral certitude to metaphysical. Thus, I am metaphysically (or absolutely) certain that the course of nature will be very rarely interfered with by the Almighty. True, God, considering his absolute power alone,

can change it at any moment; yet knowing that he is both wise and holy, I have perfect assurance that he will not do so except for very momentous reasons, and therefore very seldom. I am also metaphysically certain that my friend, with whom I have associated for years on familiar terms exists and has the general appearance, I think he has. For it is utterly ridiculous to suppose that God would all this time conjure up a phantom before me and permit me to take it for a reality. I am likewise absolutely certain, that Christ the Lord has graced this earth of ours with his presence, that Pius X is now (1910) Sovereign Pontiff and William Taft President of the United States, that Rome exists, that Julius Caesar was a famous Roman general and statesman, etc. For if these and similar statements are false, we would have to admit that there could be an effect without a proportionate cause.

49. Chief objection against our view, unsound even from the standpoint of Dialectics. It might not be out of place here, to give the chief objection of our opponents in another form, under which it is sometimes proposed, and show that even from a purely dialectical standpoint, it is faulty; and this all the more so, as we have alluded to this manner of argumentation before (No. 41) and cast doubt on its legitimacy.

Let us for the sake of clearness present their counter-proof under the guise of a definite syllogism thus:

This old man will die soon unless God suspends the usual course of nature. Now God will not do so. Therefore he will die soon.

But, say our antagonists, the minor of this syllogism, being, as a rule, only probable, the conclusion likewise will possess no more than probability, since, as one of the rules of the syllogism has it, the conclusion always follows the character of the weaker premise. Hence it would seem that physical assent is never certain, unless I am absolutely sure that God will not change the regular course of events.

In answer we reply, in the first place, that our objectors suppose the minor of the above argumentation, viz. "God will not suspend the usual course of nature," to be one of the grounds of assent to the conclusion, "This old man will die soon"; which is erroneous. As we have, however, developed this point thoroughly before, we shall waive any further discussion of the difficulty regarded from this view-point.

But this is not the only weakness of the foregoing captious fallacy. There is a flaw in the very structure of the syllogism, since for a syllogism to be such in the true sense of the word, the minor must set forth something, not already

expressed in the major. This, however, is not so in the present case.

To perceive this the more clearly, let us restate the major and the minor more fully with all that they imply, and our contention, I think, will then be readily granted.

Our major read thus: "This old man will die soon, unless God suspends the usual course of nature." The subject, "This old man," must, of course, be taken in the concrete, such as it actually is. Suppose then, that our invalid is a nonagenarian, worn out with disease and old age, altogether helpless and useless, weary of life and very anxious to be dissolved. Hence our syllogism fully drawn out will run thus:

This old man, over ninety years of age, wasted by disease and enfeebled by the weight of years, a burden to himself and others, and longing to depart this life, will die in the near future, unless God suspends one or more of the laws of nature. Now God will not do so, just because the old man is so wasted and useless, in a word, because his course is run. Therefore he will die soon.

A mere inspection of the premises thus spread out, shows that the minor is already fully expressed in the major. The above argumentation has no more claim to the name of a syllogism in the *strict* sense of the word than the follow-

ing: "Every pigeon is an animal. Every animal is a living being. Therefore, every pigeon is a living being."

50. We have then demonstrated to conviction that intellectual assent based on the physical laws and the moral instincts, constitutes true certitude. In our thesis we added a qualifying clause to this statement, namely that physical and moral certitude are conditioned, and hence imperfect as compared with metaphysical. This follows so evidently from what goes before, and is again involved in what is about to follow, that there is no need of saying any more about this phase of our subject.

51. Let us now still further strengthen our position by an appeal to common sense. If the proof of the following thesis should not be altogether satisfactory, it will at least confirm our contention and put its reasonableness in a clearer light.

THESES 7

The verdict of common sense confirms the conclusion arrived at, that assent based on physical and moral motives is truly and genuinely certain.

But before proceeding to our argument, let us make a few general remarks on the force of

a demonstration which rests upon the testimony of "Common Sense."

52. **Meaning of "Common Sense."** What is here meant by common sense? In ordinary parlance, common sense is the same as sound *practical* judgment. But in philosophy, we may define it with Webster as "that power of the mind which by a kind of instinct or short process of reasoning perceives truth, the relation of things, cause and effect, etc." Common sense, then, in this connection is a certain ease or readiness wrought into the very fabric of our minds to judge correctly regarding matters closely connected with man's intellectual, moral and social welfare. The name *sense* is given to this supersensible faculty by analogy, because, like the senses in general, it perceives its object immediately (at least in very many cases), and like sight in particular, it acts (for the most part) by intuition. Common sense is a kind of intellectual *insight*.

Here are a few pronouncements which have their source in this common sense of mankind: "Our mental faculties are given us for the attainment of truth"; "What is evident is certain"; "To doubt about everything, is impossible and absurd"; "The external universe is not a mere illusion, but exists independently of our thoughts"; "An occurrence testified to by everybody, or at least by very many—for example,

the invasion of Russia by Napoleon Bonaparte—has certainly taken place.”

As will be seen, we have restricted ourselves in the choice of examples to such, as have some immediate bearing on Logic.

Nor is it difficult to account for the existence of this natural endowment, called “Common Sense.” For it stands to reason that the Author of nature should have laid such tendencies in man’s intellectual make-up, as would enable him to recognize, as it were, spontaneously, unbidden and without effort, those things, the knowledge of which is essentially bound up with his happiness. For, “*natura non deficit in necessariis*,” nature never fails in what is necessary.

Hence God has given us, what might be called an intellectual instinct, inclining and urging our minds to accept certain truths with readiness and full assurance.

But it must not be imagined that these truths are thus received through a “blind” instinct. No, they are each and all of them illumined by their own evidence, since the reasons for their admission, though not perhaps understood scientifically, yet present themselves to the mind with sufficient clearness for rational assent.

If then a judgment is prompted by this common sense, we are sure that it is true. The only hindrance which obstructs our path in this matter at times, is the difficulty of knowing whether

any given conviction is really a dictate of common sense. However, there are certain signs, which will serve us as safe guides to discern the genuine from the spurious in testing those beliefs of ours which seem to spring from this source of common sense.

If a judgment really proceeds from an inborn tendency of the human mind, it must be acknowledged as certain by practically everybody; there may be exceptions to this universality; for it is possible to stifle even the voice of nature.

Further, enunciations which are, so to speak, the birth-right of mankind, must have been received as true at all times. There can have been no epoch in the history of the race when their compelling and binding force was not recognized.

True—as in the previous case—the clearness of some of these truths has been dimmed at certain periods by the unaccountable and eccentric twists of thought on the part of a few singularly constituted intellects; yet always with the result, that these convictions have not only emerged victorious from the clash of opinions, but have taken still firmer hold on all rational minds, thus gaining strength even through opposition.

Besides these marks of common sense truths, namely their universality and continuity, which regard the entire race, there are others of a more

personal character, all of them deducible from the fact that these beliefs are supposed to spring from nature, and therefore to be natural to men.

Now what is natural to us (that is, what proceeds spontaneously from our common nature), is born with us, and puts forth its activity, as soon as it is sufficiently developed. Hence these truths of common sense must have been in our possession, ever since we can remember; they must be so familiar to us, that we cannot even recall how we acquired them.

Again, what is natural to us, is an object of our special affection and devotion; we cling to it most tenaciously. If then a conviction rests on an inborn tendency of our nature, we must hold it so dear that we will not surrender it at any cost.

Further, what is truly natural to a person, cannot be set aside or disregarded by him without a sense of shame and guilt. Hence one would expect that even a doubt about a truth of common sense seriously entertained, would be regarded by men as tantamount to a denial of reason and a stultification of the intellect.

Lastly, what is natural to us, bears the closest scrutiny: the more critically it is looked into, the more highly it will commend itself. If then there are persuasions which are the offspring of nature, it would seem, that the more accurately and

quietly they are examined, the more their force and reasonableness should appear.

These are some of the signs characteristic of the truths of Common Sense. Where they and similar ones are found, there, we may be sure, we have to deal with convictions that have their source in an inbred tendency of our intellect.

True, many objections have been urged against the existence of this criterion of Common Sense; as the once all but universal belief in the influence of the stars on the birth of men; or the widely diffused opinion that the earth was flat, that the sun moved, and that men could not live at the antipodes. But it might be shown easily enough, that these and similar erroneous notions, though once almost unanimously accepted, do not bear all the requisite hall-marks of judgments originating in an innate impulse of nature.

As, however, we are not now explaining this subject of "Common Sense" professedly, we shall postpone its fuller treatment to another place.

Let us now apply the above general remarks to the case in hand. We say then that common sense confirms what we have endeavored to prove, namely that assent on physical and moral grounds is true and genuine certitude.

53. For, in the first place, who will dare to question that the physical laws and moral instincts have from time immemorial been thought to possess a certain degree of real necessity; and that

not by a few persons, but by everybody. The very names *law* and *instinct* bear witness to this. Finally, if we turn to ourselves, we find that we accept, without hesitation, any assertion resting on the necessity inherent in these laws and instincts. We know that we have done so ever since we can remember, and that we do so now with even greater energy and force of intellect. Nor can it be said that we assent inconsiderately and rashly. For we are aware of the irresistible force of these truths, even when thinking most calmly and dispassionately: nay, we often feel constrained to give in to them against our very inclinations. So true is this, that terms and phrases have been borrowed from the realm of physical certitude to express the strength of metaphysical conclusions. Thus, when we say that some statement of ours is *palpable* or *tangible*, our meaning is, that it is as evident and certain as the existence of things which can be touched with the hands. We speak of *ocular* proof in the same sense; we say that something is as *clear as day-light*. In fact, the word *evidence* itself is derived from the Latin *videre*, to see. We regard an appeal to the senses as the strongest weapon of silencing a headstrong opponent. We think that we can put a stop to a quarrel at once by telling a disputant: "Why, I have seen it with my own eyes; I have heard it with these ears; I have touched it with my own

hands." It was thus that Christ overcame the incredulity of his disciple Thomas, when he said to him: "Put in thy finger hither, and see my hands; and bring hither thy hand, and put it into my side; and be not faithless, but believing."

This striking readiness and proneness of the human mind, peculiar to all men and dating back to the very cradle of rational existence, to yield assent to judgments resting on physical and moral grounds, shows conclusively that the Author of nature has, so to speak, attuned our intellects to accept them without the least hesitation, and that therefore they must be true. For the God of Truth himself is the voucher for them.

There is hardly any need of illustrating our teaching as far as the physical laws are concerned. The case is too plain. You feel perfectly sure that if you take up a red-hot coal, it will burn you, or that if a heavy shower pours down on the parched fields in summer, they will absorb the moisture and become drenched with rain. Who doubts it?

But it may be useful to add an instance or two to show the firmness and strength of convictions founded on the moral instincts (the "*leges morales*" of the Scholastics).

Take the case of a father and mother who are well known for the deep interest which they have always taken in the welfare of their children.

Suppose that one of their sons becomes seriously ill. Is not everybody acquainted with them perfectly *sure* that they will at once call in a physician and do all in their power to save their child? And why? because we are all well aware that the love of father and mother for their offspring is a sacred instinct implanted in nature.

Now follow the father to the physician and hear him plead in a voice choked with emotion: "Dear Sir, please, do come at once to my house; my son is very sick." Could you deem it possible for the physician to entertain the slightest doubt as to the truthfulness of the afflicted father and to say to himself: "That man is lying." No! For both the love of truth and love of honor, two other heaven-born instincts of human nature, tell him that there is no deception here; that it would be an insult to that good man to harbor so much as a breath of suspicion. To confirm this by a concrete example, recall the submissive request made by the woman of Canaan to Christ to heal her poor daughter, who was grievously troubled by the devil, and her insistence and importunity even after the humiliating and seemingly stinging rebuff of the great Wonder-worker. What more natural than such a request! For, love for her child, no matter how wretched that child may be, stirs in every mother's heart.

But are there not parents who grossly neglect

their children, expose them to danger and prove the cause of their ruin? Alas, it is but too true. This, however, argues nothing against our position. For we do not deny that the tendencies and promptings of our rational nature are sometimes deadened and even uprooted by the unnatural lives of certain individuals. But whenever this happens, there are always indications showing that in these rare cases the moral instincts of nature have been so blunted as to be unreliable.

For just as, in order to be certain in matters physical, there must not be apparent any reason pointing to divine interference, so also, to have moral certitude, there should be no reasonable misgivings that the natural propensities prompting conduct have been impaired or crushed out in any particular case, and therefore cannot assert themselves.

Take another example: Here are two men who have loved each other ever since they were boys together. They have always respected and esteemed one another; for their friendship is based on mutual appreciation both of heart and mind. They rejoiced with one another when fortune smiled, and they sorrowed with each other in times of trial. Their conduct attests all this. Suppose now that one of them is cast into prison on a false charge and that he can be rescued by his friend clearing him in court.

Who would hesitate even for a moment as to what his friend's course of action will be? For the love of friends is an instinct planted deep in man's nature, and can be relied upon even in times of dire need.

But what about St. Peter? Did he not deny his Master whom he loved so much? Judging of this apparent counter-proof of our doctrine on merely natural grounds and with all the reverence due to the Prince of the Apostles, we would say that his denial does not refute our view in this matter of certitude.

For, in the first place, moral certitude is not absolute, and hence there may be rare exceptions to the rule. Again, in order to have true moral certitude, there must be no indications suggesting that the natural promptings upon which we rely in a particular case will be obstructed or repressed. Were there none such in the present case? Christ, of course, foresaw Peter's fall; for he was the omniscient God, and hence his foreknowledge belongs to another, a higher order. But could not others, familiar with the impulsiveness of Peter, well-meaning and honest though he was, have surmised the probability of his defection under very trying circumstances? It would seem that they could.

Let us consider yet another of these tendencies inborn in man, and in this instance affecting more directly his intellectual life, namely the

desire to learn and find out the unknown. This eagerness for knowledge is generally called curiosity or inquisitiveness. Seneca describes this tendency in man very tersely when he says: "Natura curiosum nobis ingenium dedit."

We are all perfectly sure that men will be swayed by this propensity, at least, whenever there is question of something which interests them very much, and is of great importance to them. Thus, who entertains the least doubt but that the farmer will go out frequently into his orchard and fields to ascertain with his own eyes what the prospects for a fruitful year are? Or who ever knew a merchant that did not keep himself informed in regard to the state of the market?

It is related that Francis Borgia, the Duke of Gandia, was very fond of hawking, yet he would often close his eyes, just when the falcon was about to pounce upon its prey. Here our theory in regard to the compelling force of the human instincts does not seem to hold. Yet, it does. For what Francis denied himself, was not a matter of any importance to himself or to others. Moreover, any one who knew the sterling, rugged virtue of the man, would not be surprised at this proof of self-control.

54. An objection answered. But, it is urged, you concede there are philosophers who will not allow statements enunciating facts of

the physical and moral order to be *genuinely* certain, as long as the possibility of an exception is not absolutely excluded; consequently, you have no right to invoke the testimony of common sense in your favor.

To this we answer that our argument is not based on what some philosophers may have elaborated as *philosophers*, but on the plain utterance of the voice of nature. As regards this latter, these philosophers are at one with us; and as for their speculative opinion, they seem to be mistaken. For their attitude in this question arises from an arbitrary definition of certitude, as a condition of mind excluding *absolutely* the opposite of the judgment assented to. This is precisely what we challenge: they will find it hard to establish their definition without assuming the very point to be proved.

ARTICLE 4

ESSENTIAL GRADES OF CERTITUDE

SECTION I

METAPHYSICAL CERTITUDE GREATER THAN PHYSICAL OR MORAL; AND PHYSICAL GREATER THAN MORAL

Summary: Thesis and its proof.

55. There is still another question to be settled, which is very closely connected with the

previous discussion and may, in fact, be regarded as a corollary from it; namely the question touching the specific distinction of the three kinds of certitude. Are metaphysical, physical and moral certitude three different *species* of intellectual assent or not? We speak here of *subjective* certitude primarily, since it alone has given rise to divergencies of opinion amongst philosophers. *Objective* certainty shall, however, be considered indirectly as the basis, upon which the solution of this controverted point chiefly depends.

Let us cast our teaching on this subject into the form of a thesis.

THESIS 8

Metaphysical, physical and moral certitude differ essentially from one another, and form a descending scale of intellectual assents.

Our thesis implies two things; first, that metaphysical, physical and moral certitude differ in some essential element; and secondly, that one surpasses another in perfection.

In the proof it will be found convenient to take the two parts together. The proposition is shown thus: Certitude takes its character from its grounds of assent. For it is determined by them, and therefore depends upon them for its

firmness, just as the solidity of a bridge depends on the strength of the piers on which it rests. Such then will be the assent, as are the motives on which it is yielded. Hence if these motives are of three kinds, each differing from the other in something essential, the intellectual adherence produced by them will likewise differ essentially. That the motives of assent are essentially dissimilar, will be readily granted on a mere inspection of them: for metaphysical motives are drawn from the very nature or idea of the truth affirmed. Hence they are of an altogether absolute character and utterly unchangeable. The physical motives, on the other hand, are constituted by the laws of nature, and the moral, by certain tendencies governing free agents. Hence both are conditioned, and therefore essentially weaker than those of the metaphysical order. But there also exists an essential difference between the physical laws and the moral instincts, in so far as the former are controllable only by a power of infinite wisdom and goodness, whereas the latter are subject to the free will of finite beings. Consequently, as the will of God and that of man differ essentially, so do likewise the two kinds of certitude referred to these wills as conditions.

SECTION 2

THE THREE ORDERS OF CERTITUDE NOT SPECIES
PROPERLY SO CALLED

Summary: Thesis: certitude is an analogous, not a univocal term, the analogy being that of "intrinsic attribution"—Meaning of univocal, equivocal and analogous terms—Analogy of attribution and proportion—Proof of thesis—Argument of opponents that metaphysical, physical and moral certitude are true species and our comment.

56. There is then an essential difference between metaphysical, physical and moral certitude in such wise, that metaphysical certitude excels the other two, and physical takes precedence of moral. Whence it follows that these three kinds of assent may be called essentially different orders or grades of certitude; whether they may also be termed species in the strict sense of the word, we shall endeavor to settle in the next thesis.

THESIS 9

The name certitude is applied to assent given on metaphysical, physical and moral grounds, not univocally but analogically, the analogy in this case being that known as analogy of "intrinsic attribution." Whence it

follows that the three orders of certitude are not species in the technical sense of the word.

57. **Univocal, equivocal and analogous terms defined.** Before we prove our thesis, a regard for clearness obliges us to explain briefly, what is meant by univocal, equivocal and analogous terms, as well as to assign the various divisions of analogy.

A *univocal* term is one which signifies something common to several objects and predicable of all of them in exactly the same way. Thus "animal" is such a term in reference to men and brute beasts.

Equivocal terms, on the other hand, are those which are affirmed of various subjects in entirely different meanings. Such a term is the word "mass," as referred to a quantity of matter and to a religious service.

Analogous terms hold a middle place between the univocal and the equivocal; they are those which when predicated of divers subjects, express notions that are partly the same and partly different. The adjective "gloomy," as applied to a man's look and to the weather, is of this sort.

This capacity possessed by certain terms, of being ascribed to two or more objects with a meaning which is partly the same and partly different, is called *analogy*.

Analogy is divided into analogy of *attribution* and of *proportion*, according as the ground for attributing the same name to divers things is either a simple relation, or else a resemblance of relations. But as this latter kind of analogy does not concern us here, we shall restrict ourselves to the explanation of the former.

Analogy is said to be of attribution, when what is signified by the analogous term, is found in one of the subjects of predication (the principal) primarily and in its fulness, whilst in the others (the secondary) it is found only in so far as they bear some relation to the principal. This kind of analogy we find exemplified in the term "healthy," as applied to animals and food. For "healthy" is predicated primarily of animal organisms; it is attributed to food only secondarily, because it produces health in animals.

Analogy of attribution is again subdivided into *extrinsic* and *intrinsic*. It is extrinsic, when what is expressed by the analogous term, is intrinsic to the principal subject of predication only, but extrinsic to the others, to which it is ascribed on account of some relation to the principal. The adjective "healthy," as related to animals and food, will likewise serve to illustrate this definition.

Analogy is said to be of intrinsic attribution, when what is signified by the common term is, indeed, intrinsic to *all* the subjects of predica-

tion, but when the manner in which it exists in each of them is essentially different. Thus both God and creatures are truly "being"; but "being" as found in God, is independent, unconditioned and infinitely perfect, whereas, in creatures, it is dependent, conditioned and imperfect.

With these remarks premised, let us now proceed to the first of the three parts of our thesis, in which we state that the name certitude is applied to assent given on metaphysical, physical and moral grounds not univocally, but analogously.

58. The argument we give in proof of this part, is based on the nature of univocal and analogous concepts. It proceeds thus: In order that a concept may be univocal in the strict sense of the word, it must be applied to the objects of which predication is made, in entirely the same meaning. Such, however, is not the case in the matter under discussion. For although, what is objectively certain or true, always implies some sort of necessity, yet this necessity is by no means the same in every proposition; for metaphysical necessity is absolute, whereas physical and moral are conditioned, the condition in each case being essentially different. Hence necessity and certainty are not affirmed in altogether the same sense, of propositions enunciating metaphysical, physical and moral truths and therefore one of the elements of genuine

univocation is wanting. Thus, when I say, "It is certain that two and two are four"—"It is certain that this spark will burn me" and, "It is certain that this man will not tell a lie," the word "certain" varies in signification in each sentence. And since (objective) certainty and (subjective) certitude are correlatives, the latter being determined by the former, it follows that (subjective) certitude is referred to the various orders of intellectual assent, not univocally, but analogically, that is, in a sense partly the same and partly different.

59. We now come to the proof of the *second* part of the thesis, namely, that the analogy spoken of above, is analogy of "intrinsic attribution." For this kind of analogy, as just stated, we require first, that the analogous term express a concept, intrinsically constitutive of the two (or more) subjects to which it is attributed; and secondly, that the reality represented by this concept as found in one of the subjects, be essentially dependent on the same reality as realized in the other.

It is only this second requisite for intrinsic analogy of attribution which calls for a little further explanation here. To see how it applies in the present matter, call to mind that metaphysical certitude, within its own sphere of certitude, is absolute and independent, being altogether unconditioned; whereas physical and

moral certitude depend on metaphysical in more than one way. For, in the first place, as fully explained elsewhere, no certain judgment can be formed without the implicit assertion of the three so called fundamental truths, viz., the primary principle of all knowledge or the principle of contradiction, the first fact in all cognition or the existence of the thinking subject, and the primary condition of all knowledge or the capacity of the mind for knowing the truth, all of which belong to the metaphysical order.

Again, physical and moral certitude would lose all their meaning without the absolutely certain knowledge of the dependence of the physical and moral order upon a Creator, infinitely wise and holy, whose kind Providence extends even from end to end.

Hence it follows that physical and moral certitude, resting essentially upon metaphysical for their firmness, are certitude only by what is known as "analogy of intrinsic attribution," that is to say, in entire subordination to perfect or metaphysical certitude.

60. From what has been said hitherto, the *third* part of our thesis, viz., that the three orders of certitude cannot be termed *species properly so called*, follows as an immediate inference. For species properly so called suppose a genus properly so called. Now a genus in the strict sense is understood to be a univocal concept,

that is to say, a concept which is applicable to the things of which it is predicated, without any variation of meaning. But the concept *certitude* falls short of this requirement. Hence it is that we should speak of three *orders* or *grades* of certitude rather than of three *species* without any qualification. There would, however, be no objection to calling certitude a *quasi-genus* and the three orders included under it *quasi-species*.

For this reason we do not mean to quarrel with those who call the three kinds of certitude, species, all the more so, as they seem to use the term chiefly to indicate that there is an essential difference between metaphysical, physical and moral certitude, as against certain philosophers who discard any diversity in certain assents.

61. **A difficulty met.** It might not be out of place here, just to touch upon the chief argument given for three species of certitude, especially as we have made use of nearly the same process of reasoning for establishing our own position.

But before doing so, we must briefly explain an expression, which we often hear used in this connection, and which suggests nothing very definite in English, namely the expression "formal object of a faculty and its act." By this formal object, as here understood, is meant the object to which a faculty and its act are directed and which determines them, thus giving them

their peculiar character and form. It is, as it were, the form-giving object. Thus the formal object of sight is color; of hearing, sound; and of the intellect, the essences of things. Hence the formal object of certitude will be that to which certain assent is directed, and which determines it, namely the motives or grounds of intellectual adherence.

Let us now pass to the argument of those who uphold three species of certitude. They tell us, that just as an instrument, say a saw or a hatchet, takes the peculiar form or shape it may happen to have, from the use to which it is to be put; so, in a similar manner, the faculties and their acts receive their own peculiar and *specific* form or character, from the formal object for which they are destined. For the faculties and their acts are, so to speak, instruments for apprehending or seizing the object to which they relate. Since, then, the formal objects or grounds of certitude according to these philosophers are of three kinds and differ *specifically* from each other, it follows that there must be three species of certitude.

We admit this argument, with the exception that in our opinion, there seems to be an essential difference in the generic element of certitude itself which the other side either overlooks, or does not consider of sufficient importance to emphasize.

ARTICLE 5

ACCIDENTAL DEGREES OF CERTITUDE

Summary: Thesis: certitude does not admit degrees as regards its negative element, but admits degrees as regards the positive element—Proof of thesis—The exclusion of error admits degrees in its causes—The firmness of the exclusion of error admits of degrees in itself—A difficulty answered—Summing up.

62. The question now arises; are there any differences or variations of intellectual assent within the boundaries of each of the three orders of certitude? If there are, they will, of course, be merely accidental, just as the differences between two animals of the same kind, say, between two horses, are only accidental. We ask then—to take a definite example—is it possible for the same metaphysical truth, v. g. “Every effect must have a cause,” to be more certain to one mind than to another. We answer that it is. Let us first state our doctrine concisely in a thesis.

THESIS 10

Certain assent, if viewed negatively, that is, as excluding the fear of error, admits no accidental degrees; but if

regarded on its positive side, namely as the firm adherence to truth, it is subject to variations in each of the three orders of certitude.

The wording of this thesis supposes that certain assent can be considered from a twofold standpoint, a negative and a positive. To be convinced of this, it is enough, merely to glance at the definition of certitude as the firm adherence to one of two contradictory statements without any fear of the other being true.

The thesis then embraces two parts, in the first of which we shall prove that certitude considered negatively admits of no degrees or variations; and in the second, that if taken positively, it does.

Proof of the first part, that certitude in respect to its negative element admits of no degrees.

The negative element of certitude consists in this, that all doubt, hesitancy and dread of being mistaken has been banished. Certitude then, viewed on its negative side, is a negation pure and simple, a total absence of whatever is at variance with the firmness of mental adherence required by the order of certitude of which there is question. Now a negation which is *total*, and hence the complete and not the merely partial absence of something, does not admit of degrees.

Thus complete darkness implies the removal of even the slightest trace of light; a perfect vacuum supposes every, even the last, particle of air, to have been exhausted. Complete darkness or a perfect vacuum may be destroyed, but neither can be intensified. The same holds true as regards the exclusion of doubt in true and genuine certitude. It may cease altogether by the mind losing hold on the grounds shutting out doubt; but it cannot be increased.

The negative element of certitude is sometimes likened to an indivisible mathematical point: for such a point cannot be diminished or brought to greater perfection: any attempt to do so even in thought, would involve us in a contradiction. In the Schoolmen's dialect, this idea is often conveyed by saying, "Certitudo stat in (puncto) indivisibili," that is to say, "Certitude is like a mathematical point without extension."

Let us now take up the *second* part of our thesis, in which we inquire into the positive element of certitude, namely the firm adherence to truth. We wish to know then, whether this admits of degrees in each of the three orders of certitude, or whether it, too, like the negative element is comparable to an indivisible mathematical point. Is Shakespeare's dictum, "To make assurance doubly sure," to be taken metaphorically or literally? Is it possible for the certain assent of one man to some truth to be

more intense and firm than that of another to the same truth? or, can the same person be more certain of a statement at one time than at another, just as he can be more obliging, virtuous, accomplished at one period of his life than at another?

We answer that certitude viewed on its positive side can be intensified in each of its three essential grades. We show it thus:

Certitude on its positive side will admit of accidental degrees, if on the one hand, adherence to truth is capable of being intensified, and if on the other, there are causes at work in the acquisition of certitude, which can bring about variations in the intensity of intellectual assent.

Now that mental adherence can be intensified or perfected, cannot be doubted, since, on the one hand, it is something positive in its nature, and on the other, its perfectibility does not imply any contradiction in its concept, as does that of other positive notions, which have in themselves a superlative meaning, for instance, right, chief, extreme, universal, equal and the like. For where is there anything impossible in the idea of one thing adhering more or less closely to another?

There are, furthermore, causes to produce a variation in the intensity of the intellectual assent: namely the motives of assent and the pressure of the will, brought to bear upon the think-

ing agent. For both these motives and the will-pressure admit of more and less; hence also the effect, to which they give rise, namely the assent of the mind; since the effect varies as the cause whenever it is capable of gradations. Thus, the greater the conflagration is, the more intense will be the heat which it generates.

As to the motives of assent, it can be readily seen, that they may be both increased in number, and intensified from within by being rendered clearer and more distinct.

For the same truth can be shown by one, two, three or still more solid and unexceptional proofs. Thus, I can become assured v. g. that my friend has a high fever by what he tells me, or by what I see myself, or from the testimony of the physician, or perhaps in other ways.

Again, there may be many gradations and shades in the clearness and definiteness of the ideas which go to constitute the same certain judgment. Thus, my ideas may be clearer to-day than they were yesterday, because I am more attentive or less fatigued to-day, or because I have looked more closely into the matter since yesterday. I was certain yesterday as I am to-day; but to-day I cling more vigorously to the truth than I did yesterday. A youthful student may be perfectly certain of all the propositions in Euclid; but it is highly probable that in maturer life, when he is a professor of mathematics,

his knowledge of these same propositions will not only have been broadened, but also clarified. Again, the clearness and precision of our ideas depends upon each one's intellectual caliber. One man may be a genius, another a person of mediocre talent. The latter understands the arguments advanced for some assertion sufficiently to be truly certain; but the other, the eagle-eyed, has a much more lucid and discriminating insight into them, and hence he holds to the truth with a much tighter grasp.

As regards the stress of the will brought to bear upon intellectual assent, it is plain that it too can vary not only in different individuals in respect to the same statement; but one and the same person may be differently influenced by the same truth to-day and to-morrow according to the changing affections of the will.

That the will can act upon the intellect, there can be no doubt; it is a fact clearly attested by consciousness. True, the will cannot elicit intellectual assent; for it is a volitional, and hence a non-intellectual faculty. Yet, it can urge on the intellect to a more accurate scrutiny of the motives of assent, as it is likely to do, whenever a statement proposed for approval or rejection, is of great importance or very pleasing to the thinking subject. If the contrary happens, that is, if there is question of an unpalatable truth, the will is liable at times to weaken the intellectual

assent by inducing the mind to look away from the distasteful facts or arguments and close its eyes to their evidence. Thus suppose that your country is at war with another nation and that well authenticated dispatches announce a victory. You are sure; but because the news pleases you, you give yourself up to this delightful certainty with much greater intensity of assent, than you would have done, if the report resting on similar grounds had told of defeat.

All we have hitherto said, proves that certain assent admits of accidental degrees.

Let us now add a few remarks by way of corollaries in further elucidation of the previous thesis.

63. The exclusion of error admits of degrees in its causes. Since the same causes which determine the positive adherence of the mind, likewise exclude the fear of error, it follows, that the foundation to which the exclusion of error is due, is variable; and this is sometimes expressed by saying that the exclusion of error allows of more or less, if not in itself (formally), at least in its causes or fundamentally.

Let us illustrate this by a comparison. A bullet may be driven out of the barrel of a gun by a greater or less charge of powder. In either case, the negative result produced by the charge is the same, namely the *absence* of the bullet

from the barrel; but the cause of this removal, namely the larger or smaller quantity of the explosive, varies. The same example incidentally also shows, that the positive effects obtained in the case, as, the intensity of the report and the velocity of the projected ball, are in exact proportion to the propelling cause.

64. **The firmness of the exclusion of doubt admits degrees in itself.** If, however, we regard, not precisely the exclusion of doubt as such, but the firmness of this exclusion, then, we may rightly say, that this latter allows of more or less in itself (formally), and not merely in its causes. For, on the one hand, the firmness of the exclusion of doubt is perfectible, being something positive, and on the other, it owes its origin to varying causes, the same that produce the positive assent. Suppose that the firmness of the exclusion of doubt rests in some particular case on three grounds, such that each of them proves the statement in question to evidence. I may forget one of them altogether, and another may become hazy and uncertain; yet as I have still one motive left, my certitude in regard to that statement endures; whereas with the two reasons on which my mind has now lost its hold, I should again lapse into a state of doubt respecting the truth of which I possessed genuine certitude before. Thus we can see that the firmness of the exclusion of doubt is itself

capable of degrees; since an unsettled state of mind is more decidedly excluded by three motives of assent than by two or one.

65. A difficulty cleared up. In conclusion, let us answer an objection which is often brought up against this second part of the thesis.

It is claimed that the firmness of assent with which one holds to some statement cannot admit of any degrees, because it is determined by the perceived impossibility of the opposite of the statement under consideration. Now impossibility being negative in its nature, and hence not susceptible of variations, it follows (say our opponents), that the firmness of the assent corresponding to it, does not admit of more or less, and is consequently like an indivisible mathematical point. We reply to this exception taken to our doctrine that the impossibility of the opposite itself rests on the *necessity* of the perceived connection between the subject and the predicate. For it is only through this latter that the impossibility of the opposite becomes intelligible. Now this necessity, in its turn, is brought home to the mind through one or more grounds or motives of assent. Whence we infer that the firmness of the intellectual adherence to truth is based directly and immediately upon the motives of assent as showing forth the necessary connection between subject and predicate, and only secondarily and indirectly upon the im-

possibility of the opposite. Since then these motives for the mind's acceptance of a proposition admit of more or less, it follows that the positive assent, directly depending on them, does so in like manner.

It will be seen from the above that the impossibility of the opposite is not so much a motive of certain assent as a *test* of the genuineness of the necessity involved in every certain judgment, and an *aid* in grasping this necessity. Let us illustrate by a similitude what we have just said, viz., that assent can vary, although the necessity of the truth and the impossibility of its opposite are one and indivisible, and hence incapable of degrees.

All creation proclaims the Wisdom of God, a Divine attribute which in itself is simple and indivisible. The more of God's wonderful works we study, the more we admire his Wisdom, because, although entirely simple and indivisible in itself, yet this perfection manifests itself to us through various channels. In a similar manner, the necessity of a proposition and the impossibility of its contradictory, though likewise one and indivisible, yet can be manifested from various view-points and thus impress themselves more or less upon the mind.

But there is another flaw in the above difficulty, namely the unwarranted assumption, that the impossibility of the opposite is insusceptible

of variations under *any* aspect. True, reference to this additional weak spot is not needed for the solution of the difficulty just proposed: yet, it is good to call attention to it, on account of the close connection of the principle involved with other kindred questions.

As regards this assumption we say, in the first place, that it comes with a very bad grace from our opponents who admit that the objective necessity of the truth is threefold; viz., metaphysical, physical and moral. For if so, the impossibility of the opposite is likewise threefold, since necessity and impossibility, as here understood, are correlatives, and hence imply one another.

But, say our antagonists, is not the impossibility of the contrary a negation? How then can it have degrees?

To this rejoinder we answer that, when we say a negation allows of no degrees, we mean a negation which is *total* and *complete*. If it is not thus entire, it is susceptible of more or less, just as a vacuum—if taken to be space from which the air has been exhausted to a *very high degree*—can be more or less perfect.

Now, the impossibility of the contrary may be considered in a twofold relationship. It may be either referred to each of the orders of certainty in particular, and then it can have no variations; for the possibility of the opposite

corresponding to each of these orders is excluded totally: or it may relate to certainty in general viewed generically; then, I say, it does not denote complete and absolute negation or exclusion; but it prescind from the circumstance whether the possibility excluded be metaphysical, physical or moral, (i. e., absolute or conditional); and hence, like certainty itself, it can be subdivided into three essential orders.

66. Summing up. To conclude, the process by which certitude is engendered in the mind, seems to be the following: The mind holds two concepts (subject and predicate) before its intellectual gaze, in order to ascertain their agreement or disagreement, and then casts about for reasons to establish the relation between the two. It finds, let us suppose, one or more appropriate grounds showing forth the necessity or evidence of the looked for connection as well as the impossibility of the opposite. The evidence perceived impels the intellect to yield assent by adhering firmly to the truth, and at the same time expels all doubt or fear of error: thus the thinking being comes finally to rest satisfied in the full enjoyment of truth, and this is to possess perfect certitude.

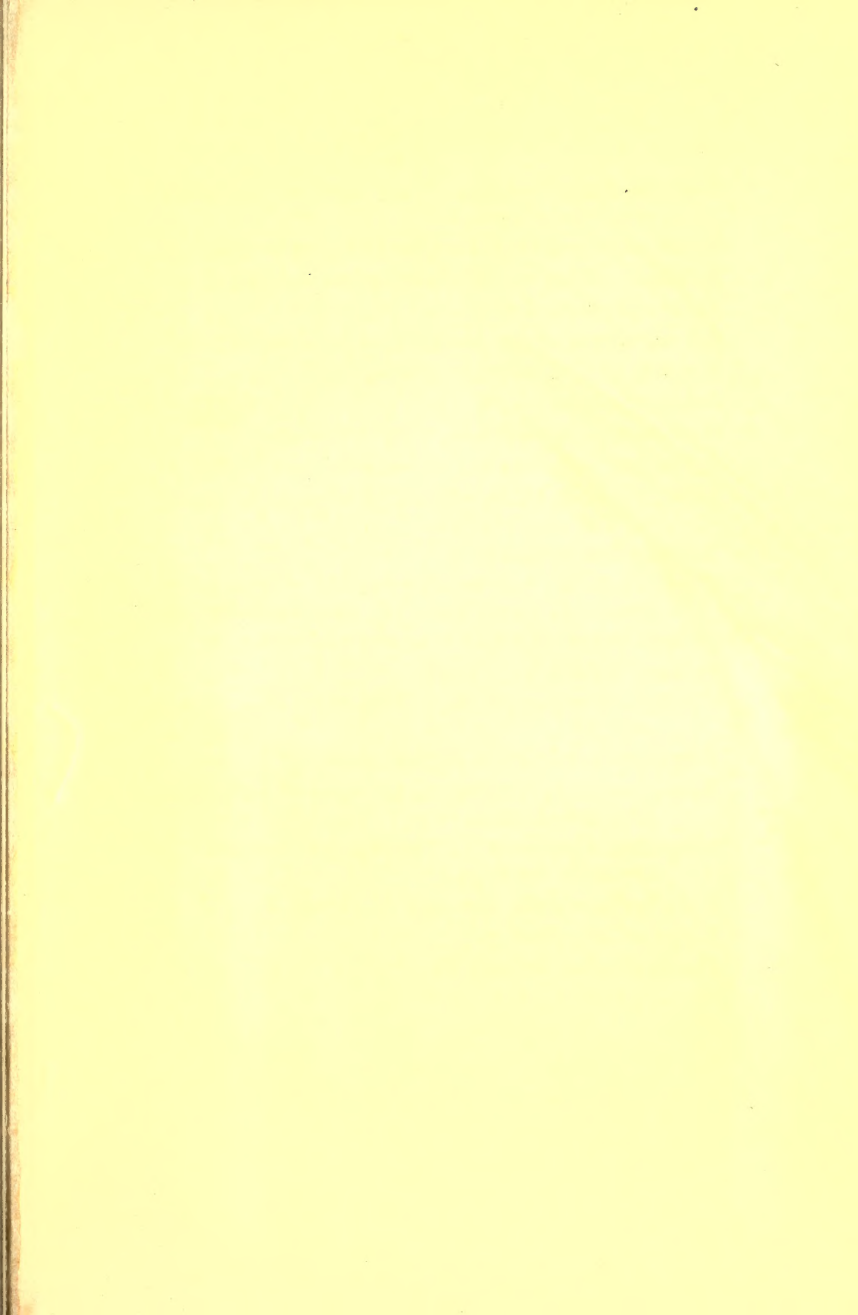
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