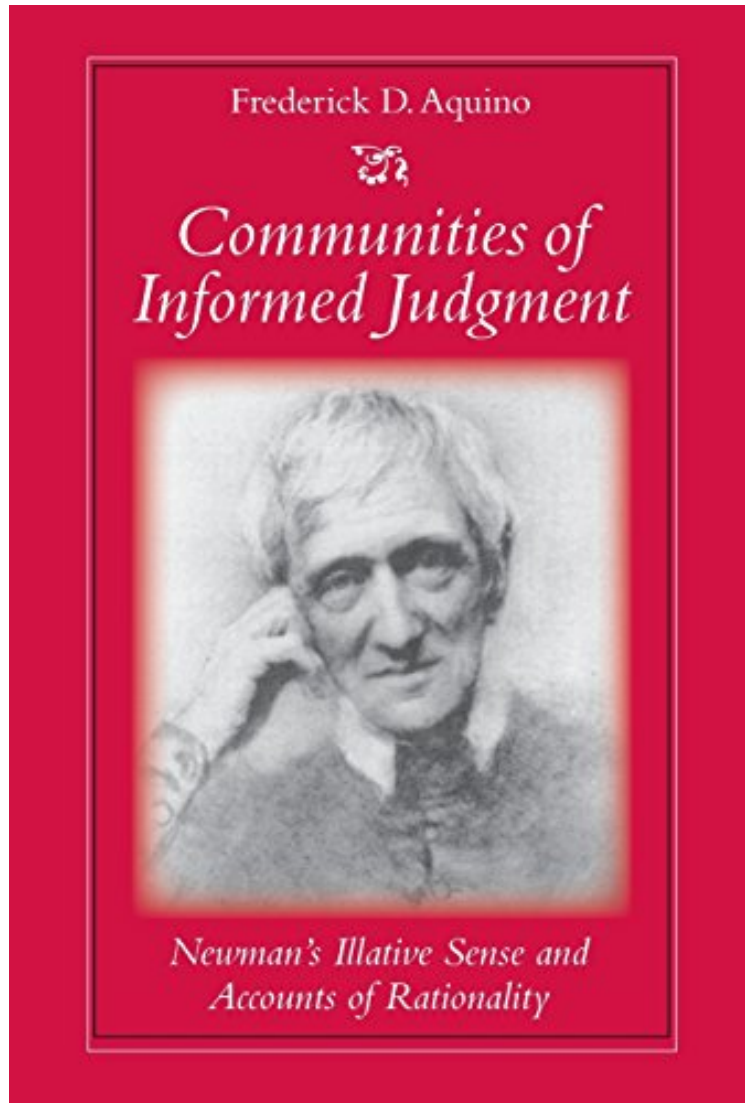


## Communities of Informed Judgment: Newman's Illative Sense and Accounts of Rationality

Frederick D. Aquino

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**Frederick D. Aquino : Communities of Informed Judgment: Newman's Illative Sense and Accounts of Rationality** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Communities of Informed Judgment: Newman's Illative Sense and Accounts of Rationality:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Very Interesting WorkBy Ansen PlopbundleI bought this book on a whim, not really knowing what it was going to be about. I enjoy philosophical and apologetic topics and thought it just

might end up being interesting. Although I had only heard the name of John Henry Newman, I figured I would learn quite a bit about him as I read through the book. Of course I did, though it was slow going. I felt as if I had jumped into a world I wasn't ready to digest, not in terms of difficulty of ideas, but rather as if I had jumped into a conversation that was already partially done. I had to go very slowly and digest every bit of information. But it was worth it I enjoyed this work. Ultimately, CoIJ is a couple of things. First, it's a picking up of where Frederick Aquino believes Newman left off in regards to forming communities of informed judgment. Aquino takes Newman's work, updates it a bit, adds where Newman remained silent, and tries to form a quasi-Christian apologetic for how communities form and sustain beliefs, particularly in a Christian theological context, though his arguments are applicable in other fields or communities (cf. 7). Second, Aquino's work is a type of Christian apologetic for epistemic justification both individually and collectively. The biggest takeaway from Newman as it directly concerns this work is his idea of the illative sense. This is a lynchpin for how Aquino ties all of his thought together. And if you're not familiar with this, I'd recommend reading up a bit on this instead of letting this work be an introductory tool on the illative sense. It took me a bit to really try and understand what it was, and even after finishing the book, I'm still not sure I fully grasp what it is. I'll try and let Aquino speak as to what it is. The illative sense (IS) is a faculty of the mind that does a tremendous amount of work concerning belief formation, evidence processing and argumentation. It's not a static thing it's living so to speak i.e. if you don't use it you lose it type of deal. The IS speaks directly to epistemology and justification. Aquino challenges the traditional notion of knowledge as justified true belief by keeping an epistemology that focuses on its everyday, descriptive content and on its social context, which is the rather popular thing to do at the moment (at least in a lot of fields of academia). The average person simply doesn't have time to weigh out all of his beliefs on some type of epistemological scale. Epistemology, for Aquino, is often more descriptive than prescriptive, a topic which I might hit upon later. In other words, beliefs are formed in different ways and most of them aren't subject to the type of scrutiny that we subject other types of beliefs. This would be reminiscent of such modern analytical philosophers as William Alston or Alvin Plantinga. Aquino, along with those thinkers, argues that both implicit (everyday occurrences of trusting people) and explicit ways people receive knowledge are both justifiable until we have certain defeaters. The IS is supposed to kind of fill in the gaps between the explicit and implicit ways people understand knowledge or beliefs. It gives the average person certainty when there are beliefs for which they don't have demonstrable proof. Its non-rule governed which I suppose means that it's a merely descriptive process rather than a prescriptive process? It pulls together different strands or lines of evidence and lets the person render an appropriate judgment (but contrast this with the rule governance of the IS on page 72-73). However, I'm not sure that's entirely true because there is a teleological aspect to the IS (cf. 65-66). This is sort of a theological truth, assuming the mind to be shaped and formed by God and designed to perceive truth. However, as I noted above, it is malleable and needs to be honed and used in a community. Hence, the communal aspect of the book an iron sharpens iron type of thing (cf. 67). So, the IS transcends the reasoning process, putting together various strands of data to make sense of all the mind digests. The trouble of speaking to people from other communities is that they may not be on the same level of IS-development, if you will or vice versa. Yes, there is a teleological aspect to it and if it's not honed, this explains the difficulty of communication across different communities. Theologically speaking, the IS is ultimately governed by the Holy Spirit and there is a dynamic relationship between this individual aspect and the larger body of Christ in a local church. The book, then, works to flesh out where Newman left off in his discussions of the IS and how it functions in differing communities, with a Christian specific focus of how the individual justifies his or her beliefs and how this relates to others in the same community. The first part of the book deals with basic epistemological issues, especially in relation to how knowledge is perceived, mainly from a Christian perspective, how these things must be kept at a quasi-descriptive level (i.e. - *how* do people reason, rather than how *should* people reason), and how presuppositions play an important role in thought and thinking even given Newman's empiricist bent towards knowledge. The latter half of the book is Aquino's development of some of Newman's thought and how it might work in modern communities of informed judgment (cf. the title). One change Aquino seeks to develop is that of shifting emphasis on the IS from some type of personal faculty to a more communal setting (cf. 91). Again, one needs to put oneself in a communal setting to properly exercise the IS. One need for this shift in emphasis is what Aquino calls epistemic dependence (cf. 100). Again, not all people are proficient in all areas of thought. A community of informed judgment (CIJ) must have individuals that rely on one another intellectually. Epistemic dependence happens on two levels the everyday way people form beliefs and a more specialized area people with academic credentials or high levels of study in an area, etc. A second factor in developing a CIJ is praiseworthy dispositions. Dispositions cannot be developed merely individually. They must be fostered in a communal context. These dispositions are basically preferring truth over falsehood the ability to look at arguments, experiences, etc. to determine whether or not they're sound or to be accepted by a community. This improves communal maturation and an ability to interact with other communities. In other words, the more virtue, the more truth seeking. The third necessity for developing a CIJ Aquino labels indispensability of evidence (cf. 134). A community that is to be informed must handle evidence properly. Because not everyone has the same level of knowledge or the same knowledge of the same things (as mentioned earlier) this must be a project for the every person in the community. And the last one is necessity of wisdom. Wisdom is (from what I can tell)

similar to the IS in that it helps people grasp certain issues and is an ability to weave together different strands of data into a comprehensive worldview. The last chapter offers a small glimpse into how the IS might function in a real community and its implications for current theology and theological dialogue. A theology of informed judgment will see the necessity of wisdom for its community and the importance of the community itself for telling and re-telling the Christian faith and ensuring its own care. Aquino is quick to assert that he doesn't want to hold a theological community captive to any form of epistemology he wants to balance specificity and comprehensiveness (cf. 158). He believes this will avoid strife or sectarianism. He also seems to hint at a balance between biblical studies and other academic disciplines (cf. 160). All in all, I enjoyed this work. I'm not sure who I could recommend it to perhaps someone who's interested in both epistemological and apologetic issues. Other than that, its rather narrow topic may not pull in a lot of people. But it is scholarly and thought out well and Aquino does an excellent job at presenting his argument. Because of my unfamiliarity with Newman and the IS, I don't offer much in the way of a challenge as to what Aquino suggests. Virtually all of it is extremely thoughtful. I am left with a few questions, however (and maybe a critique or two). Perhaps the main complaint I have can't be really labelled a complaint I'm not sure. I struggle with Aquino's tentativeness on some issues. I think his writing shows he is a very intelligent and thoughtful man and these characteristics may lead one to become tentative in their conclusions not wanting to lean too far one or the other on any given issue. Most of the other questions or complaints I may have here deal with this seeming tentativeness. The very first question that I had in reading this book remained mostly throughout, though I did get some type of basic answers to it. If one is writing from a Christian perspective on epistemology, one of the premier questions that must be addressed is whether or not rationality should merely be a descriptive or prescriptive process. In other words, is there a right *way* to reason? Or do we ignore that normative aspect and focus on the *way* different people or communities reason? Due to Newman's bend towards empiricism, he doesn't seem to think that one can propose any normative sense of rationality (cf. 59). Now, this is due to what Newman believed was a correction for empiricists like John Locke but Aquino does say that a close analysis of Newman shows there is a normative enquiry to reasoning (cf. 60). However, I didn't glean this much but this may just be due to my unfamiliarity with Newman. The problem becomes one of human nature, its fallenness and the noetic effects of sin (which will deal with another small complaint of mine). If the mind is teleological and shows design by God, then mustn't there be a normative way to reason? Indeed, it seems so. But, then, what of the empirical nature of epistemology? The focus on *how* people reason can't be the standard of how people *should* reason and I don't see how the problem can be solved by appealing to a larger community where the IS is improved and honed. Aquino does argue for both normative and descriptive accounts, but he seems to me to lean towards some type of communal normative standard which I don't think is a theological option for the Christian. Probably the biggest weakness of the book was a theological reflection of man and how it lacked any substantive account of the nature of sin and the noetic effects of sin. To be sure, these things are mentioned, but not to the degree I think they should be in a book written on epistemology and reasoning in a theological setting especially when one is dealing with other communities that are not Christian! There was virtually no discussion of how reasoning will change or be different between communities based on these descriptors even though the renewing of the mind is something that begins to take place at redemption. The question has to be addressed as to how someone can even begin to cultivate their IS in a non-Christian community. To be sure, Aquino does argue that some of these noetic effects are potentially solved at regeneration (cf. 119) and through our desire to be virtuous, but there's still quite a bit of nuancing that needs to be done on this subject. This is especially true when Aquino reasons that love of truth can only be ultimately had by someone whose IS has been regenerated. That seems a very important point to not further mention in detail. And a second but related question forces us to ask if non-Christian communities, then, are ultimately looking for truth? And if so, to what degree? I'm not sure Paul would say so. A related question comes in when Aquino mentions that virtue is necessary for a CIJ. Since a person has to have a working IS in a community, honed and sharpened by personal virtue, how can this be done by any non-Christian community if at all? How would we evaluate communal standards in light of cults or other new religious movements? A further question of mine might be to ask about the necessity of the IS as a whole. Is Newman just postulating unnecessary entities? Upon reading descriptions of the IS I kept replacing the words IS with mind and found that most of them translated very easily. In other words, why doesn't the mind (in general) just do the things of the IS? I'm still not sure what the problem is that the postulation of the existence of an IS solves. So, that was still perpetually unclear to me as a whole, but that's not really the purpose of the book and likely highlights my unfamiliarity with these subjects. There are some other things that I'd question. I'm unsure and potentially troubled at the language on pp. 88-89 of the IS enabling the church to define doctrine. Does he mean this historically or via each particular present community? This is similar to the question about whether or not there's a proper way to develop the IS. At times Aquino seems to say no cf. 98 because of the communal nature of the IS but at other times he seems to say yes. I'm still not sure exactly what to say other than I don't see how there can't be a normative way to reason that transcends the community. Aquino seems to agree but at other times seems to me to suggest that the community is the final arbiter on judgment, theology, etc (cf. 148). If we're going to say all theology is contextual, how do we deal with communities that argue that all theology isn't contextual? Haven't you just de-contextualized their own beliefs by arguing that each community must have contextualized beliefs?

Doesn't there have to be some non-contextual rules by which to adjudicate these claims? Again, all in all, no huge complaints. If this sounds like something you'd be interested in reading, give it a shot!

Is Christian belief rationally acceptable? Must every Christian defend his or her beliefs with exhaustively logical arguments, or is belief solely a matter of faith rather than logical argument? In *Communities of Informed Judgment*, Frederick D. Aquino offers an alternative route, showing how John Henry Newman's notion of the illative sense of reasoning paves a way for constructing a fresh account of the rationality of Christian belief. Moving beyond both modern and postmodern accounts of rationality, Aquino constructs a proposal of informed judgment, blending Newman's notion of the illative sense of reasoning with recent work in social and virtue epistemology. The first part of the book focuses primarily on Newman's treatment of the illative sense in the *Grammar of Assent*, with the *University Sermons* as a backdrop. The second part addresses the problem of securing a common standard of justification. Though Newman acknowledges the social and communal facets of judgment, his focus is primarily on the personal dimension. Aquino develops Newman's insights into a social epistemology of informed judgment, transposing the problem of common measure into a problem of trusting the illative sense as a reliable belief-forming process in communities of informed judgment. An original contribution to Newman studies, the book has an interdisciplinary focus, drawing from recent work in social epistemology, virtue epistemology, and cognitive science. It also takes up issues relevant to the philosophy of religion, epistemology of religious belief, systematic theology, ecumenical dialogue, and studies in John Henry Newman.

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**PRAISE FOR THE BOOK:** "An important contribution to Newman studies and to the systematic theological investigation of belief formation by merging 'Newman's account of the illative sense with insights from recent work in social and virtue epistemology.'" Michael C. Martin, *Anglican Theological Review* "[A] well-executed retrieval and expansion of Newman's concept of the illative sense using the resources of contemporary epistemology in the analytic philosophical tradition." J.A. Colombo, *Theological Studies* "Aquino offers invaluable insights into Newman's argument concerning how the formative experiences encountered by an individual within these larger communities contribute to his or her understanding of the relationship shared by faith and reason."- Todd C. Ream, *Catholic Books Review* "This is a significant work that seeks to encourage a fuller understanding of Newman's thought and the coming to faith. It is highly recommended for serious students of theology."- Lucien J. Richard, *OMI Catholic Library World* "Frederick D. Aquino has done justice to the complexity of Newman's thought and demonstrated its continuing relevance for theology, epistemology and ethics. He moves confidently between Newman's most important writings on the nature of truth, and the work of contemporary theorists, especially in the field of virtue ethics. His study illuminates aspects of Newman's thought that have often gone unnoticed and gives him a voice in the ongoing debate about the way in which individuals and communities ascertain the truth. By augmenting and challenging Newman's insights with the results of contemporary research, Aquino opens up new perspectives for both Newman studies and theological epistemology." Prof. Terrence Merrigan, Faculty of Theology, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium "By drawing out the communal notions found just beneath the surface of Newman's thou

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