

UNIVERSITY EDUCATION,
THE UNITY OF KNOWLEDGE,
AND (NATURAL) THEOLOGY: JOHN HENRY
NEWMAN'S PROPHETIC PROVOCATION

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SUMMARY: 1. *Introduction: Newman and the Contemporary University.* 2. *University Education and Theology as a Science.* 3. *The Indispensability of Theology for University Education.* 4. *What Might it Mean to Take Newman's Prophetic Provocation Seriously?*

1. INTRODUCTION: NEWMAN AND THE CONTEMPORARY UNIVERSITY

IT seems to be only all too predictable that a Catholic theologian addressing the not quite uncontroversial topic of religion and university education must be up to one thing – to some form of special pleading for a place of Catholic theology in the secular university – if not at the table together with all the other hard core secular sciences then at least under the table feeding itself from the crumbs of the most astonishing knowledge-making that is the pride of the late-modern research university. The reader will have to forgive me if I happen to disappoint such an expectation. There will be no special pleading for Catholic theology. For it existed long before the university came into being;¹

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¹ One might think of Clement of Alexandria and Origen, the Cappadocian fathers (Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory Nazianzen), and John of Damascus in the Christian East, and Augustine, the monastic theology (Bernard of Clairvaux; the Victorines), and the theology taught at the cathedral schools in the Christian West. St. Bonaventure wrote many of his important theological works after he left the University of Paris and St. Thomas Aquinas wrote numerous of his works between and after his two regencies at the University of Paris. The structure of Dominican priory schools and provincial

it continues to exist and flourish outside of the university,² and it will continue to exist long after it will finally have been expelled from all late-modern research universities. If there is any special pleading at all, it will be – at least so I hope – for the idea of the university and for the ideal of liberal education as the very soul of every university education. The following considerations are not those of a Catholic theologian engaging in the discourse of sacred theology but of a long term university citizen (who happens to be indeed a Catholic theologian) reflecting in broad philosophical terms on the nature of the university and on the nature of a university education.

From the fall semester of 1979 onward I have studied and worked either in or in cooperation with a major university. I have been a student of theology, philosophy, literature, and linguistics at a research university in Franconia, now Northern Bavaria, Germany, founded as a typical early Enlightenment university in the middle of the eighteenth century by a Lutheran duke. I continued my studies at a research university in the Catholic Rhineland, founded by Protestant Prussia in the early nineteenth century to check Catholic dominance in the area. Then I studied at a university in the US-American South (hint: it has a famous basketball team), founded in the early twentieth century by and named after a tobacco billionaire as an imitation of Northern Ivy League universities. In subsequent years, I taught theology and ethics in the “windy city” at a large urban seminary (with its own PhD program) across the street from the most eminent mid-west private research university, and later when back as a Divinity School professor at the private Southern university with the famous basketball team, I had a one-semester stint as a guest professor at a German university located in former Communist East Germany and founded soon after the Reformation, a university where Fichte, Hegel, and Schelling taught at one time. Last year I occupied a guest chair at a Catholic liberal arts college in the American Northeast founded by the Dominican Order in 1917. And several years ago, I was the finalist for the presidency of the

schools of theology made possible a solid, consistent, and rather advanced theological education (based on priory schools for the humanities and on provincial schools of arts and philosophy) that was able to flourish and sustain theological education and inquiry across Europe independently of any university. Only the *studia generalia*, the general houses of studies, where a highly selective intellectual elite was educated were placed in closest proximity to the two universities of Paris and Oxford. For an account of this remarkable educational system of the early Dominican Order, see W.A. HINNEBUSCH, *The History of the Dominican Order*, Volume 2: *Intellectual and Cultural Life to 1500*, Alba House, New York 1973, pp. 19-36.

² Gregory Palamas, Denys the Carthusian, and Capreolus in the late middle Ages, Matthias Joseph Scheeben in the nineteenth century and Charles Journet in the twentieth century. The latter two were eminent theologians who taught exclusively at diocesan seminaries.

only Catholic university in Germany founded only in the 1980s. I have lived longer in the institution of the university than I have lived in the United States. For all of my adult life the university, with its academic rhythms and rituals, has been the water in which I swim in and the air I breathe.

But only in recent years, particularly in the course of my preparation as a candidate for a university presidency, did I turn my attention directly to the idea of the university as well as to the concrete institutional reality of universities in late modern democratic and capitalist societies. The following reflections, especially in their most critical moments, should be received as an expression of commitment to the *idea* of the university and of gratitude to all the moments I have encountered aspects of this idea embodied in the various *de facto* extant institutions that carry the name.

This side of the Enlightenment and the American and French revolutions, innumerable eminent philosophers, theologians, and scientists have written on the subject of the university, many in the context of the foundation of new universities or of the fundamental re-organization of major extant universities. Among these eminent modern thinkers, arguably, John Henry Newman is not only the most fascinating but also still the most relevant, a prophetic voice, a thorn in the flesh of all the twentieth-century programs of functionalizing the university and pressing it into the service of ends foreign to its nature, whether it be to those of the modern expansionist nation-state, the communist party program, the fascist state organization of the superior race and its will-to-power, the late modern national security state, or the desire-driven permissive consumer society. Despite their profoundly variant ideological trajectories, all of these distinctly modern socio-political configurations share a tacit conviction, as deep as it is unwarranted, that all problems we encounter are ultimately of a technical or a managerial nature for which the progress in scientific “know-how” will eventually offer a solution, be it for one or the other kind of state-configuration or for the individual consumer. The late modern research university forms the instrumental link between the problems and their solutions. Its efficiency as a sophisticated problem-solving institution justifies the university’s existence (and its considerable price-tag) and simultaneously holds it captive in the iron-cage of a comprehensive functionalization. Arguably, Newman’s “Idea of the University” offers nothing but the most significant modern argumentative strategy of resistance to and liberation from the university’s comprehensive functionalization.

And, as we will come to see, (natural) theology plays an indispensable role in sustaining such a strategy of resistance to and liberation from the university’s total instrumentalization.

John Henry Newman’s life spanned the nineteenth century, a time of tremendous social, political, cultural, scientific and technological change. He

was born in 1801, the age of carriages, front-loaded muskets, and sail-boats; he died in 1890, the age of the first trans-continental express trains, machine guns, and ocean-steamers. Marx, Darwin, and Nietzsche had begun to shape the intellectual world at that time, especially in the latter part of Newman's life. And still: Despite these tremendous changes during Newman's life-time – developments that still shape our intellectual, political, and social world – we are nonetheless separated from Newman by two world wars, the coming and going of Nazism and Communism, the world-changing events of decolonization and globalization, the atomic bomb, the computer chip, the internet and the knowledge explosion first and foremost in the bio-sciences and the consequent developments in medicine and bio-politics from eugenics to euthanasia. Nevertheless, I would suggest that Newman remains our contemporary in more than one sense, especially in matters that regard university education. For even the most superficial perusal of his classic set of discourses on the *Nature and Scope of University Education*³ delivered in the year 1852 to the Catholic intelligentsia in Dublin, make it abundantly plain that we share with Newman an ideological matrix called “secularism,” the ideological premises of which were honed philosophically in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, became politically and socially explicit in the eighteenth century, imperial in the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, and global in the second half of the twentieth and the early twenty-first century.⁴ Moreover, the “hyperpluralism”⁵ that characterizes American and European societies in

³ The edition I peruse, and to which all page numbers in the text refer, is J.H. NEWMAN, *The Idea of a University*, ed. with preface and introduction by C.F. Harrold, Longman, Green, and Co., New York/London/Toronto 1947. In order to facilitate the location of citations in other editions, I shall also list after the page number the section of the discourse in which the quote can be found.

⁴ For the currently magisterial account and analysis of this development, see Charles TAYLOR's *magnum opus*, *A Secular Age*, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 2007.

⁵ I happily adopt this term from Brad GREGORY's noteworthy study, *The Unintended Reformation: How A Religious Revolution Secularized Society*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 2012. Gregory astutely employs this term in order to characterize «the overwhelming pluralism of proffered religious and secular answers to [the Life Questions]» (*ibidem*, p. 74). Gregory understands as the Life Questions «‘What should I live for, and why?’ ‘What should I believe, and why should I believe it?’ ‘What is morality, and where does it come from?’ ‘What kind of person should I be?’ ‘What is meaningful in life, and what should I do in order to lead a fulfilling life?’» (*ibidem*, p. 74). I offer a longer passage from Gregory's analysis, not only because I think it accurate but also because it forms the very background in which I regard Newman's prophetic provocation to be of pressing relevance: «In Western society at large, the early twenty-first-century basis for most secular answers to the Life Questions seems to be some combination of personal preferences, inclinations, and desires: in principle truth is whatever is true to you, values are whatever you value, priorities are whatever you prioritize, and what you should live for is whatever

the early twenty-first century was then in its nascent stage and quite familiar to Newman, who describes the state of his society as one «in which authority, prescription, tradition, habit, moral instinct, and the divine influence go for nothing, in which patience of thought, and depth and consistency of view, are scorned as subtle and scholastic, in which free discussion and fallible judgment are prized as the birthright of each individual»⁶.

What does indeed separate us from Newman specifically in matters of university education are two factors: mass education and the total economization of the late-modern research university. Nowadays, university education and university sciences deliver goods that are seen as commodities, as purchasable means in order to satisfy individual desires and in order to solve collective problems. The commodification and the functionalization of the university are two sides of the same coin. This total economization by a market where demand and supply, competition and branding determine the life of universities and colleges to such a degree that an alternative is not even thinkable anymore makes us blind to the reality that all academic disciplines in the late-modern research university have become servile arts. The ideal of a liberal education that carries its end in its very practice has been supplanted by an efficiency-driven program of knowledge-making and a respective training preparing in the communicative, mathematical, and scientific skills of contributing to this knowledge-making and of applying it to ends dictated by individual and collective desires. But why should we care in the first place? If our late-modern society needs clerks, technicians, and experts to address the urgent social, political, and environmental problems it has created for itself – and the late-modern research university is quite able to deliver – what is the problem? We should not be held captive by the nostalgic image of a university education long gone, if it ever existed. Instead we should own up to the fact that the university has morphed into a polytechnicum with a functionalized, propaedeutic liberal arts appendix.

Two facts seem to be indisputable and irreversible. First, the research and the ensuing knowledge production of the late-modern research university is a thoroughly secular affair. As Brad Gregory aptly put it in his recent *The Unintended Reformation*: «Regardless of the academic discipline, knowledge in the Western world today is considered secular by definition. Its assumptions,

you decide you should live for. In short: whatever. All human values, meanings, priorities, and morality are contingent, constructed, and subjective. In principle you are your own basis, your own authority, in all these matters, within the boundaries established by the law. [...] You can change the basis for your answers, as well as their content, at any time, any number of times, and for any reason or without any reason. You are *free* – hence, whatever» (*ibidem*, p. 77).

⁶ J.H. NEWMAN, *Idea*, 33; *Discourse II*, 7.

methods, content, and truth claims are and can only be secular, framed not only by the logical demand of rational coherence, but also by the methodological postulate of naturalism and its epistemological correlate, evidentiary empiricism»⁷.

Second, the knowledge gained in the course of the research conducted in the late modern research university is indeed a production or making, a *technē* that is a means to an end extrinsic to it. The American Association of Universities (AAU), the exclusive club of the leading research universities in the United States of America, characterizes a research university as an institution that advances a great variety of expertises to be applied to real world problems. The research university combines cutting-edge research with an undergraduate training that functions as a propaedeutic for a graduate training that participates in the advanced knowledge-making of highly specialized research programs.⁸ Let me call this the Baconian university, named after its spiritus rector, Francis Bacon. Newman had this model very much on his mind when he delivered his university lectures: «I cannot deny [Bacon] has abundantly achieved what he proposed. His is simply a Method whereby bodily discomforts and temporal wants are to be most effectually removed from the greatest number»⁹.

When I describe the late modern research university as a polytechnicum with a functionalized propaedeutic liberal arts appendix (a community college on steroids), as an accidental agglomeration of advanced research competencies gathered in one facility for the sake of managerial and logistical convenience, I have in mind the Baconian university in its most advanced stage that indeed has achieved a global career to the point that «leading scientists and scholars at research universities are the societal and indeed the global arbiters of what counts as knowledge and what does not in the early twenty-first century»¹⁰.

But the very success of the Baconian university carries in itself the seed of its own undoing. For if the current trend should continue and come to its logical term, if indeed each of the advanced research competencies gathered

⁷ B. GREGORY, *The Unintended Reformation*, cit., p. 299.

⁸ The AAU's "White Paper" puts it thus: «The raison d'être of the American research university is to ask questions and solve problems. Together, the nation's research universities constitute an exceptional national resource, with unique capabilities:

- America's research universities are the forefront of innovation; they perform about half of the nation's basic research.

- The expert knowledge that is generated in our research universities is renowned worldwide; this expertise is being applied to real-world problems every day.

- By combining cutting-edge research with graduate and undergraduate education, America's research universities are also training new generations of leaders in all fields». (American Association of Universities, "White Paper," <http://www.aau.edu/research/article.aspx?id=4670>).

⁹ J.H. NEWMAN, *Idea*, 106; *Discourse* v, 9.

¹⁰ B. GREGORY, *The Unintended Reformation*, cit., p. 299.

in the late modern research university could be located elsewhere, that is, be directly linked to companies and state labs that undertake research in medicine and bio-engineering or to this or that branch of the military-industrial and medical-industrial complex, without any real loss, then the university in any substantive sense would have disappeared and to still call the transmutation by the name would simply be an equivocation, undoubtedly useful for reasons of branding and marketing, but hardly for reasons of substance.

The philosopher Benedict Ashley, educated in the early years of the University of Chicago's most remarkable undergraduate program, states in his *magnum opus*, *The Way toward Wisdom*:

«The very term “university” means many-looking-toward-one, and is related to the term “universe,” the whole of reality. Thus, the name no longer seems appropriate to such a fragmented modern institution whose unity is provided only by a financial administration and perhaps a sports team». ¹¹

Without using scholastic terminology, Ashley presents the alternative in a classical way. Is the university a *per se* unity that carries its end or purpose in its very practices of education and inquiry, or is the university a unity *per accidens*, a contingent conglomeration of means that serve changing extrinsic ends or purposes? The contrast is obvious. In light of the substantive notion of *university* as a *per se* unity rightly invoked by Ashley, the late-modern Baconian polytechnicum hiding behind the name “university” becomes visible as the knowledge corporation that it is, selling goods of “know-how” in service of ends determined by advanced techno-capitalist societies, not to mention the national security state.

In “Nature and Scope of University Education”, Newman holds up a mirror in front of all modern universities. In this mirror we come to see the Baconian polytechnicum not only as one way of adapting contemporary universities to the social, political, and cultural needs of the emerging global society of the twenty-first century, but also as the sad betrayal of the idea of the university as a unique institution that pursues something that is essentially valuable in and of itself and has its justification in its very exercise, the attainment of and the education in universal knowledge. In light of what we come to see in Newman's mirror we might also wonder why the Baconian polytechnicum does not give up the name “university” and acknowledge that universities in the proper sense have morphed into something else that should be called something else. In my more exasperated moments I am tempted to suggest a new denomination: “polytechnic utiliversity”. However, I do recognize that few if any of the leading research universities would want to entertain such a re-

¹¹ B. ASHLEY, *The Way toward Wisdom: An Interdisciplinary and Intercultural Introduction to Metaphysics*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, IN 2006, p. 20.

naming. I fear their financial specialists for endowment development would veto any such attempt. For, after all, the term “university” still names the gold standard that many colleges strive after – to be upgraded to a “university”. There might, of course, exist tangible pragmatic reasons for such an “upgrade”. Yet might not possibly the very idea for which the term “university” stands function as a normative ideal which at least as a memory still governs some of the expectations, hopes, standards, and norms of current research universities?

Newman’s prophetic provocation and ongoing relevance rests in the fact that he offers a compelling account of this gold standard and with it a most timely appeal to theology’s indispensability for the maintenance of this gold standard. Here is his prophetic provocation in the most condensed form I can muster: Newman holds university education to be essentially liberal education, that is, education that carries its end in itself. Liberal education is a potentially universal education. While not necessarily embracing all or even most fields of knowledge – an obvious impossibility for quite a while now – liberal education is essentially philosophical in the sense that it fosters reflection upon one’s knowledge in relationship to other fields of knowledge and in relationship to the whole. This makes liberal education a potentially universal education. But such universal education requires a horizon of transcendence in light of which universal knowledge can be conceived as a whole, a horizon that affords interconnectedness and coherence. Such a horizon of transcendence can only be attained, however, if theology bears upon university education. Here is Newman’s prophetic provocation in a nutshell: «Religious Truth is not only a portion, but a condition of general knowledge. To blot it out is nothing short [...] of unravelling the web of University Teaching. It is, according to the Greek proverb, to take the Spring from out of the year, it is to imitate the preposterous proceeding of those tragedians who represented a drama with the omission of its principal part».¹²

Newman’s proposal is as sharp a provocation for the current secular university as one can conceive. For, as James Turner put it bluntly, «the decidedly nontheistic, secular understanding of knowledge characteristic of modern universities will not accommodate belief in God as a working principle»¹³. And Alasdair MacIntyre observes, «the irrelevance of theology to the secular disciplines is a taken-for-granted dogma»¹⁴. At the same time, Newman’s proposal is prophetic, because to the degree that the transcendent horizon of

¹² J.H. NEWMAN, *Idea*, 62; *Discourse III*, 10.

¹³ J. TURNER, *Language, Religion, and Knowledge: Past and Present*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, IN 2003, p. 120.

¹⁴ A. MACINTYRE, *God, Philosophy, Universities: A Selective History of the Catholic Philosophical Tradition*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, MD 2009, p. 135.

a universal education afforded by theology has been banned from the heart of research universities, the web of university teaching has indeed been unravelled down to, on the one hand, the highly specialized and equally highly insulated graduate training and, on the other hand, the current undergraduate training that subdivides into a functionalized pre-med, pre-law, pre-engineering training and the “salad bar” consumer curriculum in the humanities for which Clark Kerr’s characterization of the contemporary university as a “multiversity,” “a city of infinite variety”¹⁵ is arguably the most apt description and for which the only reform in sight seems to be the European Bologna model of a comprehensively stratified bachelor education in explicit service to the polytechnicum of “know how” goods. As quaint as Newman’s concrete proposals might be, his prophetic provocation seems to hit home only all too close for our comfort.

I would like to take a closer look at Newman’s prophetic provocation by attending to three questions; first, what does Newman exactly mean by theology in the context of a university education? Second, why does he think theology to be indispensable for university education? And third, what might it mean to take Newman’s proposal seriously?

2. UNIVERSITY EDUCATION AND THEOLOGY AS A SCIENCE

Newman holds it as axiomatic that the idea and therefore also the term “university” is essentially related to “universe.” Consequently, he argues, «[a]s to the range of University teaching, certainly the very name of University is inconsistent with restrictions of any kind. [...] A University should teach universal knowledge»¹⁶. “University” is first and foremost an institution of teaching universal knowledge. Hence, no subject matter that conveys knowledge is to be excluded from university teaching. Newman is quite insistent and explicit about this point: «[...] if a University be, from the nature of the case, a place of instruction, where universal knowledge is professed, and if in a certain University, so called, the subject of Religion is excluded, one of two conclusions is inevitable, – either, on the one hand, that the province of Religion is very barren of real knowledge, or, on the other hand, that in such a University one special and important branch of knowledge is omitted. I say, the advocate of such an institution must say this, or he must say that; he must own, either that little or nothing is known about the Supreme Being, or that his seat of learning calls itself what it is not».¹⁷

The secular university by and large – that is, when it is consistent with its self-understanding – insists upon the first alternative, that little or nothing is

¹⁵ C. KERR, *The Uses of the University*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 2001², p. 31.

¹⁶ J.H. NEWMAN, *Idea*, 19; *Discourse II*, 1.

¹⁷ IDEM, *Idea*, 20; *Discourse II*, 1.

known about what Newman has called the “supreme being” – if such a supreme being exists at all. Hence, ideas and beliefs about such a supreme being might be studied, ideas that pertain to the anthropological phenomenon called “religion”, a knowledge-making that belongs to departments of religion. While Newman would not at all be opposed to an empirical, historical, literary, and cultural study of and university education in the world’s religions, he has something categorically different in mind when he speaks of “theology.” By “theology” he means «the Science of God, or the truths we know about God put into system; just as we have a science of the stars, and call it astronomy, or the crust of the earth, and call it geology».¹⁸ In short, when he invokes “theology” in the context of his university lectures he has in mind what classical Catholic theology calls the “preambles of faith,” a properly scientific knowledge of God that belongs to metaphysics, a discourse with its inquiries, arguments and proofs, schools, and disagreements, a knowledge of God that does not depend on revelation but that can be greatly enhanced by revelation.¹⁹ If we asked Newman to point out some contemporary practitioners of this science in the English-speaking world, he would most likely point us to Swinburne, Wolterstorff, Plantinga, Haldane, Braine, Geach, Kretzmann, Stump, Ashley, McInerny, Lonergan, and their students.²⁰

¹⁸ IDEM, *Idea*, 55; *Discourse III*, 7.

¹⁹ Newman is, of course, fully aware of the anti-metaphysical philosophical alternative of materialism, represented by the names of Epicurus and Hume: «If God is more than Nature, Theology claims a place among the sciences: but, on the other hand, if you are not sure of as much as this, how do you differ from Hume or Epicurus» (J.H. NEWMAN, *Idea*, 37; *Discourse II*, 8). While this rhetorical question would have had an unquestionable impact on the original, largely Catholic audience of Newman’s university lectures, in relationship to an audience reflective of the late-modern research university, it lacks any force. Hume and Epicurus would be placeholders of naturalist and materialist beliefs widely shared in the late-modern research university. But then, Newman would observe, to the degree that the late-modern research university is committed to Epicurean and Humean materialism it is unable to realize itself as a per se unity pursuing intrinsically meaningful practices of education and inquiry. Such an institution would simply cease to be a university in any meaningful sense of the term.

²⁰ While my tendency of Newman’s argumentation into the idiom of Aristotelian-Thomist philosophy betrays my intellectual pedigree and leanings, it would be a grave error to assume that Newman’s argument would hinge on the adoption or even imposition of a particular school of thought. Rather, what is at stake in Newman’s argument is the necessity of a unique scientific and simultaneously meta-scientific inquiry that allows the speculative contemplation of the whole in all its interconnections and in relationship to the First Cause, God. It is, however, indeed the case that there are not many coherent traditions of philosophical inquiry that have the conceptual resources to envision, let alone to sustain, such an inquiry over a long period of time. Aristotelian-Thomism is, arguably, one of these few candidates, and is, also arguably, fully compatible with Newman’s prescriptive vision. Alasdair MacIntyre (in his *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, The University of

Quite aware that his position was already controversial in the English-speaking university world (outside of Oxford and Cambridge) in the 1850s, he makes it most explicit that «[u]niversity Teaching without Theology is simply unphilosophical. Theology has at least as good a right to claim a place there as Astronomy».²¹ In this telling statement Newman gives us a key for understanding his overall – and I would submit, ever pertinent – understanding of what the *proprium* of a university education is. If university teaching without theology is simply unphilosophical, what then would it mean for a university education to be philosophical? Does the simple addition of natural theology alone make it philosophical? Newman gives us a clue in his sixth discourse, where he states: «[T]he true and adequate end of intellectual training and of a University is not Learning or Acquirement, but rather, is Thought and Reason exercised upon Knowledge, or what may be called Philosophy».²² What differentiates a proper university education for Newman from the “know-how” training in a polytechnicum is thought exercised upon knowledge and upon the interrelationship of all the sciences. It is not unlike what Aristotle undertakes in his *Posterior Analytics*. Newman states as much quite explicitly: «[T]he comprehension of the bearings of one science upon another, and the use of each to each, and the location and limitation and adjustment and due appreciation of them all, one with another, this belongs, I conceive, to a sort of science distinct from all of them, and in some sense a science of sciences, which is my own conception of what is meant by Philosophy, in the true sense of the

Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, IN 1990) has offered what I take to be a compelling argument for the superiority of Aristotelian-Thomism as a tradition of inquiry in comparison with Enlightenment philosophy and with postmodern deconstruction. His argument is not only fully compatible with Newman’s, but indeed corroborates and strengthens Newman’s case. Benedict Ashley, in his *The Way Toward Wisdom*, has advanced a compelling vision of the whole – fully conversant with contemporary natural science and with the humanities – a vision funded by the Aristotelian-Thomist tradition. Jacques Maritain’s classic *Distinguish To Unite or The Degrees of Knowledge* (newly trans. from the fourth French edition under the supervision of Gerald B. Phelan (Charles Scribner’s Sons, New York 1959) demonstrates how the Aristotelian-Thomist tradition can offer a coherent account of the whole of human knowing from the most basic act of intellectual cognition by way of scientific knowledge to infused mystical knowledge. While the book needs some updating in regard to the recent developments in the philosophy of mind and in neuroscience, its overall scope remains unsurpassed by any contemporary epistemology. A continuation of this tradition of inquiry can be found in two recent works of note: P.A. MACDONALD JR., *Knowledge & the Transcendent: An Inquiry into the Mind’s Relationship to God*, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington, D.C., 2009] and J.D. MADDEN, *Mind, Matter, and Nature: A Thomistic Proposal for the Philosophy of Mind*, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington, D.C. 2013.

²¹ J.H. NEWMAN, *Idea*, 38; *Discourse II*, 9.

²² IDEM, *Idea*, 123; *Discourse VI*, 7.

word, and of a philosophical habit of mind, and which in these Discourses I shall call by that name». ²³

Excluding theology from the university would be unphilosophical in that if such a decision be a proper philosophical one it would require a metaphysical warrant, that is, of course, made impossible, since metaphysics itself becomes excluded together with natural theology, since the two are of one cloth. By establishing secularism as a normative criterion for admittance to the university, Newman observes, the university decapitates itself and becomes unable to reflect philosophically on its secularist commitments. Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Hegel and as their modern disciples, as well as twentieth-century scientists like the physicist Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker and the chemist Michael Polanyi knew that any truly philosophical form of critical reflection presupposes a horizon that genuinely transcends and thereby enables such critical reflection. ²⁴ But Newman, together with all who are engaged in natural theology, knew that there are significant and even profound disagreements inside this discipline and that it faces challenges and limitations of a kind no other science faces because it deals with a subject-matter that transcends all possible genera of academic subject-matters. However, why should these circumstances, Newman would ask, disqualify first philosophy, and its acme, natural theology, as a science? The fact that palaeo-anthropology lives more by hypotheses than by evidences, that neuroscience cannot fully account for human volition and free choice, that there is no cogent ontogenesis so far for the unique reality of “life,” and that contemporary physics cannot reconcile quantum mechanics with the general theory of relativity does not prove that these inquiries lack the characteristics of a proper science and must therefore be excluded from the secular university’s curriculum and research program. Newman holds that the science of first philosophy, with its acme, natural theology, is analogous to such sciences with one important difference: its subject matter is related to the whole cosmos and the totality of all facts and relations as cause to effect. ²⁵

²³ IDEM, *Idea*, 46; *Discourse III*, 4.

²⁴ See C.F. VON WEIZSÄCKER, *Unity of Nature*, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, New York 1981 and IDEM, *Der Garten des Menschlichen: Beiträge zur geschichtlichen Anthropologie*, Hanser, Munich 1984, and M. POLANYI, *Personal Knowledge: Toward a Post-Critical Philosophy*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1974.

²⁵ At the very least, a robust and visible presence of metaphysics, including its acme, natural theology, in the core of the undergraduate curriculum of contemporary universities would complicate – to say the least – the rather uncritical reception among students of the overall remarkably superficial and in many regards ignorant claims advanced by R. DAWSON, *The God Delusion*, Mariner Books, Boston/New York 2008, D. DENNETT, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*, Penguin, New York 2006, and C. HITCHENS, *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*, Twelve, New York 2007. For a somewhat rhetorically heated, but lucid metaphysical reponse, see E. FESER, *The Last Superstition: A Refutation of the New Atheism*, St. Augustine’s Press, South Bend, IN 2008; for a brilliant theo-

3. THE INDISPENSABILITY OF THEOLOGY FOR UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

Let me now turn to Newman's argument for the indispensability of theology for a proper university education, an argument with which he moves beyond the observation that by excluding theology from its curriculum the secular modern university simply betrays how unphilosophical it is – something most secular universities by now could not care less about.

Newman rightly assumes religious truth to surpass the knowledge of the natural theology of first philosophy. For, after all, the divine perfection natural theology inquires into entails also the perfection that intentional, personal agency represents. But the only way to grasp fully this divine perfection – the providence of the Creator – is by way of the surplus of religious truth embedded in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam:

logical deconstruction, see D. BENTLEY HART, *Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and Its Fashionable Enemies*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT 2010, and for the precise clarification at which a logician is best, see A. PLANTINGA, *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism*, Oxford University Press, New York 2011. Furthermore, it is left to the medical historian Jacalyn Duffin to bring again before modern thought an undeniable fact that modern philosophy after Hume seems to be largely unable, or better, unwilling, to account for – miracles. (J. DUFFIN, *Medical Miracles: Doctors, Saints, and Healing in the Modern World*, Oxford University Press, New York 2007). The case against miracles seemed to have been made irrefutably by David Hume. However, not only miracles themselves do not seem to be all too impressed with Hume's argument about their putative impossibility, but also, noteworthy, some contemporary philosophers have begun systematically to question Hume's case against miracles: J. HOUSTON, *Reported Miracles: A Critique of Hume*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1994; D. JOHNSON, *Hume, Holism, and Miracles*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY 1999; and J. EARMAN, *Hume's Abject Failure: The Argument Against Miracles*, Oxford University Press, New York 2000. For a most comprehensive recent study in two volumes by a New Testament scholar and former atheist who steps into the fray and exposes Hume's argumentation as nothing but operating in a "deductive circle," see C.S. KEENER, *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts*, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids 2011. Again, the discipline of first philosophy, with natural theology as its acme, would be equipped to advance these initial and incipient discussions on the threshold of first philosophy into a metaphysical inquiry that could demonstrate the compatibility between the *methodological* naturalism of the natural sciences in regard to the order of comprehensive secondary causality and the possibility of miracles that is entailed in the nature of transcendent divine causality. It should not go unmentioned that John Henry Newman himself argued for most of his career explicitly and implicitly against the epistemological positions held by Locke and Hume on the matter of miracles. He did it less so as a metaphysician and more as a logician within a broadly empirical framework, thus anticipating argumentative strategies developed much later in similar ways by Alvin Plantinga. For Newman's early, Anglican work on miracles, see his *Two Essays on Biblical and on Ecclesiastical Miracles*, Basil Montague Pickering, London 1870², and for his later, mature theoretical account of the logic of assent, see his *magnum opus*, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, IN 1979.

«Admit a God, and you introduce among the subjects of your knowledge, a fact encompassing, closing in upon, absorbing, every other fact conceivable. How can we investigate any part of any order of Knowledge, and stop short of that which enters into every order? All true principles run over with it, all phenomena converge to it; it is truly the First and the Last. ... Granting that divine truth differs in kind from human, so do human truths differ in kind from one another. If the knowledge of the Creator is in a different order from knowledge of the creature, so, in like manner, metaphysical science is in a different order from physical, physics from history, history from ethics. You will soon break up into fragments the whole circle of secular knowledge, if you begin the mutilation with the divine».²⁶

But Newman goes further and makes the bold claim that «Religious Truth is not only a portion, but a condition of general knowledge. To blot it out is nothing short ... of unravelling the web of University Teaching»²⁷. How does Newman make good on this claim? He does so by constructing a *reductio ad absurdum* argument by way of an *a fortiori* analogy.

First, Newman establishes the fundamental relationship between objective truth and scientific inquiry. He does so by insisting upon a version of epistemological realism that still informs much of contemporary natural science: «Truth is the object of knowledge of whatever kind; and when we inquire what is meant by Truth, I suppose it is right to answer that Truth means facts and their relations. ... All that exists, as contemplated by the human mind, forms one large system or complex fact».²⁸ «Viewed altogether, [the sciences] approximate to a representation or subjective reflection of the objective truth, as nearly as possible to the human mind».²⁹ The subject matter of theology allows the understanding of the rest of reality as a whole, as a universe and consequently all knowledge that can be gained as essentially interrelated, as an integral component of universal knowledge.

In a second step, Newman develops the first part of an analogy that in an uncanny way anticipates powerful current initiatives in research universities to re-cast the curriculum in light of a normative evolutionary naturalism

²⁶ J.H. NEWMAN, *Idea*, 32f; *Discourse II*, 7.

²⁷ IDEM, *Idea*, 62; *Discourse III*, 10.

²⁸ IDEM, *Idea*, 40f; *Discourse III*, 2.

²⁹ IDEM, *Idea*, 43; *Discourse III*, 2. «[...] All knowledge forms one whole, because its subject-matter is one; for the university in its length and breadth is as intimately knit together, that we cannot separate off portion from portion, and operation from operation, except by a mental abstraction; and then again, as to its Creator, though He of course in His own Being is infinitely separate from it, and Theology has its departments towards which human knowledge has no relations, yet He has so implicated Himself with it, and taken it into His very bosom, by His presence in it, His providence over it, His impressions upon it, and His influence through it, that we cannot truly or fully contemplate it without in some main aspects contemplating Him» (IDEM, *Idea*, 45f; *Discourse III*, 4).

– though not necessarily materialism: reason, volition, freedom, and spirit (*Geist*) must be studied as at best aspects of the phenomenon of “consciousness” that emerges from (or is a mere epiphenomenon to) physical and biochemical processes in light of which they must ultimately be accountable, and possibly predictable: «Physical and mechanical causes are exclusively to be treated of; volition is a forbidden subject. A prospectus is put out, with a list of sciences, we will say Astronomy, Optics, Hydrostatics, Galvanism, Pneumatics, Statics, Dynamics, Pure Mathematics, Geology, Botany, Physiology, Anatomy, and so forth; but not a word about the mind and its powers, except what is said in explanation of the omission». ³⁰ History, Political Science, Economics, Literature and Language, Art History, Musical Theory, and last but not least, philosophy (with the exception of logical positivism, formal logic, and the philosophy of mathematics and of the natural sciences) can happily be eliminated from the University curriculum. «Henceforth man is to be as if he were not, in the general course of Education; the moral and mental sciences are to have no professional chairs, and the treatment of them is to be simply left as a matter of private judgment, which each individual may carry out as he will». ³¹

Replace the physical-mechanistic framework with a biological-evolutionary one in Newman’s illustration and matters sound only all too familiar, especially in light of the fact that a noted philosopher of science at my Southern university has repeatedly argued that the humanities are a waste of time and that a future undergraduate training should be centered exclusively on the natural sciences and on the methodological reflections of a materialist philosophy of science. Newman anticipates all of this in his example:

«[O]ur professor ... after speaking with the highest admiration of the human intellect, limits its independent action to the region of speculation, and denies that it can be a motive principle, or can exercise a special interference, in the material world. He ascribes every work, every external act of man, to the innate force or soul of the physical universe. ... Human exploits, human devices, human deeds, human productions, all that comes under the scholastic terms of ‘genius’ and ‘art,’ and the metaphysical ideas of ‘duty,’ ‘right,’ and ‘heroism,’ it is his office to contemplate all these merely in their place in the eternal system of physical cause and effect. At length he shows how the whole fabric of material civilization has arisen from the constructive powers of physical elements and physical laws». ³²

In the third part of his *reductio ad absurdum* argument, Newman completes his analogy with an *a fortiori* conclusion. While not falsifying this professor’s «definitions, principles, and laws» ignoring the reality of human reason and volition as proper motive causes would still issue into «a radically false view

³⁰ IDEM, *Idea*, 49; *Discourse III*, 5.

³¹ IDEM, *Idea*, 49; *Discourse III*, 5.

³² IDEM, *Idea*, 51; *Discourse III*, 5.

of the things which he discussed» this erroneous view being «his considering his own study to be the key of everything that takes place on the face of the earth». If this is true, *a fortiori*, the ignoring and consequent dismissal from university subjects of a reality infinitely superior to human reason and volition as motive causes would have much graver distortive consequences. «Worse incomparably, for the idea of God, if there be a God, is infinitely higher than the idea of man, if there be man. If to blot out man's agency is to deface the book of knowledge, on the supposition of that agency existing, what must it be, supposing it exists, to blot out the agency of God?». ³³ «If the creature is ever setting in motion an endless series of physical causes and effects, much more is the Creator; and as our excluding volition from our range of ideas is a denial of the soul, so our ignoring Divine Agency is a virtual denial of God. Moreover, supposing man can will and act by himself in spite of physics, to shut up this great truth, though one, is to put our whole encyclopaedia of knowledge out of joint; and supposing God can will and act of Himself in the world which He has made, and we deny or slur it over, then we are throwing the circle of universal science into a like, or a far worse confusion». ³⁴

How would Newman's *reductio ad absurdum* argument fare in the current situation? While it would hardly find a serious hearing in the present secular research university and hence fail in its rhetorical appeal, it still has an objective force. Let me explain. As far as I can see, one could make a case that the faculties of the contemporary secular universities are roughly but discernibly divided along the lines of the Kantian antinomy between determinism and freedom. Predictably, the defenders of determinism are by and large at home in the hard science, the defenders of freedom in the humanities. The defenders of determinism are typically (though with noteworthy exceptions) embracing a posthumanist outlook (especially in the bio-sciences) in that they see the human being as a highly developed animal bent on maximizing the success of its species (of which the natural sciences and their technical application are currently the most decisive factor). The most articulate defenders of a radical notion of human freedom are increasingly (though with noteworthy exceptions) embracing a transhumanist outlook by epitomizing freedom in the existentialist sense as freely designing – or at least individually enhancing – one's own essence with the assistance of bio-technology. ³⁵ Thus, human

³³ IDEM, *Idea*, 53; *Discourse III*, 6.

³⁴ IDEM, *Idea*, 53; *Discourse III*, 6.

³⁵ One of the first to point out the transhumanist dynamic as an incipient cultural reality in Western late modern societies was P. SLOTERDIJK, *Regeln für den Menschenpark: Ein Antwortschreiben zu Heideggers Brief über den Humanismus*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt 1999. Since then, the transhumanist perspective has not only become explicit but also prescriptive. See, first and foremost, S. YOUNG, *Designer Evolution: A Transhumanist Manifesto*, Prometheus, New York 2006, but also G. STOCK, *Redesigning Humans: Our Inevitable Genetic Future*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, Boston, MA 2002; R. KURZWEIL, *The Singularity Is Near: When Humans*

beings become their own designer choices or the result of designer choices made by others who have the political power and legal legitimization to do so. And so the extremes meet. For transhumanism is nothing but the most consistent instantiation of posthumanism, especially when the design will eventually be socially or politically enforced and collectively applied.³⁶ Welcomed at first as a liberation from the corruptibility and fallibility of human nature, as an exercise of radical, promethean freedom, and thus as the final flowering of the Enlightenment project, eugenic bio-engineering will eventually result in a radical subjugation of human nature to *technē*, to willful production.³⁷

If there is only a grain of truth in this dire picture – one which famously

Transcend Biology, Penguin, New York 2005; R. NAAM, *More Than Human: Embracing the Promise of Biological Enhancement*, Broadway, New York 2005; J. GARREAU, *Radical Evolution: The Promise and Peril of Enhancing Our Minds, Our Bodies – and What It Means to Be Human*, Broadway Books, New York 2005; and N. ROSE, *The Politics of Life Itself: Biomedicine, Power, and Subjectivity in the Twenty-First Century*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ 2007.

³⁶ My own university calls no less than three genome centers its own, in addition to one institute, and the driving force behind them, including the financing, is not of a Platonic, but of a Baconian nature: Duke Center for Humane Genome Variation, Duke Center for Genome Technology, Duke Center for Public Genomics, and Duke Institute for Genome Sciences and Policy.

³⁷ The proponents of a liberal eugenics who are naïve enough to assume that the biotechnological dynamics can be politically “managed” by the benign intentions of enlightened individuals and an equally benign and enlightened political process in equally benign and enlightened democratic regimes display historical amnesia (among other things about the history of eugenics in the United States and Europe) and a conceited optimism grounded in the utterly unwarranted Enlightenment dogma that unencumbered technological application of scientific knowledge is identical with human progress. They still have the lesson of the dialectic of the Enlightenment ahead of them spelled out in precise terms in a classic that deserves a careful relecture: M. HORKHEIMER – T. ADORNO, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Stanford University Press, Palo Alto, CA 2007. Inebriated by the vistas of new frontiers to be conquered, the late-modern polytechnic university rushes along, banning to the margins of its liberal arts appendix what it most desperately needs – a critical examination of its own unexamined operative beliefs and a vision of the whole. But neither hyper-specialized research experts nor university administrators, nor the board of trustees have the time or the intellectual preparation to engage in critical thought, let alone in the kind of philosophical inquiry that would lead to a vision of the whole. Where is the head that steers the body of the late-modern research university? Pointing to the numerous centers of ethics and especially bioethics all too quickly instituted by the leading research universities will hardly be convincing. For the largely utilitarian and consistently post-metaphysical bent of most contemporary philosophical ethics offers these centers little if any conceptual tools to resist the powerful pressures to deliver strategies of legitimization for procedures that are individually and collectively willed on grounds that for much contemporary moral philosophy are arbitrary, that is, subject to preference. Where would such centers of bioethics find the intellectual resources that would offer a yardstick for critical thought and a vision of the whole and consequently allow them to escape the logic of being simply part of managerial strategies meant to create legitimacy and facilitate consensus?

Aldous Huxley painted some time ago in *A Brave New World* and Hans Jonas warned against in *The Imperative of Responsibility*³⁸ and, more recently, Jürgen Habermas in his *The Future of Human Nature*³⁹ and Leon R. Kass in his *Life, Liberty, and the Defense of Dignity*⁴⁰ (not to forget, of course, Pope John Paul II in his 1995 encyclical letter *Evangelium Vitae*) – Newman’s analogy is still pertinent. For in the case of the posthumanist program as well as in the case of the transhumanist program university education loses its character as liberal education and turns into something completely different, into a training in the servile arts; that is, in the kinds of expertise required for technical or managerial collective species optimization or for individually desired, technical, operative, or genetic design-features. Friedrich Nietzsche, in his very late note-books, seems to have anticipated both the posthumanist and the transhumanist implications of a purely secular utilitarian knowledge production:

«There exists neither “spirit,” nor reason, nor thinking, nor consciousness, nor soul, nor will, nor truth: all are fictions that are of no use. There is no question of the “subject and the object,” but of a particular species of animal that can prosper only through a certain relative rightness; above all, regularity of its perceptions (so that it can accumulate experience). Knowledge works as a tool of power. Hence it is plain that it increases with every increase of power. The meaning of “knowledge”: here, as in the case of “good” or “beautiful,” the concept is to be regarded in a strict and narrow anthropocentric and biological sense. In order for a particular species to maintain itself and increase its power, its conception of reality must comprehend enough of the calculable and constant for it to base a scheme of behavior on it. The utility of preservation – not some abstract-theoretical need to be deceived – stands as the motive behind the development of the organs of knowledge – they develop in such a way that their observations suffice for our preservation. In other words: the measure of the desire for knowledge depends upon the measure to which the will to power grows in a species: a species grasps a certain amount of reality in order to become master of it, in order to press it into service».⁴¹

If Nietzsche is right, the university as a humanist enterprise of education in universal knowledge is obviously passé. What Nietzsche predicts is the species-relevant polytechnicum: «a species grasps a certain amount of reality in

³⁸ H. JONAS, *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1984. For a thoughtful and instructive interpretation and application of Jonas’s thought to the contemporary bio-engineering, see S. KAMPOWSKI, *A Greater Freedom: Biotechnology, Love, and Human Destiny*, Pickwick Publications, Eugene, OR 2012.

³⁹ J. HABERMAS, *The Future of Human Nature*, Polity Press, Cambridge 2003.

⁴⁰ L.R. KASS, *Life, Liberty, and the Defense of Dignity: The Challenge for Bioethics*, Encounter Books, San Francisco 2002.

⁴¹ F. NIETZSCHE, *The Will to Power*, trans. W. Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale, Vintage Books, New York 1968, Aphorism 480.

order to become master of it, in order to press it into service». This is the posthumanist program. And when we include into the reality to be mastered human nature itself, we have the trans-humanist program. Consequently, Newman's analogy has lost nothing of its relevance. Rather, Newman very ably perceived the radical implications hidden in the Baconian university that Nietzsche eventually would lay bare. While we are busy ushering Newman, the all too uncomfortable prophet, out the front door of our secular research universities, assuring him in most cordial terms of the indubitable humanistic value of his proposal, which presently is – most regrettably – utterly unfeasible, Francis Bacon, a long time university tenant, quietly opens the back-door and beckons Friedrich Nietzsche to enter in.

Newman's analogy does nothing but indicate a fundamental alternative: *Either*: the university is nothing but a species-relevant polytechnicum, be it as the tool of mastering nature by pressing it more and more into the service of the human species, or be it as the launching pad for mastering human nature itself, the technical and genetic optimization of the human being into some cyborg super- or trans-humanity. *Or*: university education presupposes the possibility of universal knowledge and aspires to universal education as an end in itself, as a contribution to a more perfect form of existence – and in this case theological knowledge unavoidably bears upon other knowledge. Rightly understood, Newman's prophetic provocation links the question of the nature of the university and of university education to the question of the nature and end of the human being, to the question of the nature of human flourishing, and to the ways of realizing a more perfect form of human existence. There is only one kind of university that can meaningfully inquire into these questions of a fundamentally philosophical and theological nature and regard them as integral to university education itself. This is Newman's university. The Baconian university in its most advanced state, the "polytechnic utiliversity," will brush questions of this kind aside as unscientific and as a waste of time; for an inquiry guided by such philosophical questions does not contribute to any tangible, that is, measurable knowledge-making. Such an answer will, of course, convict the late-modern research university only of its tacit Baconian ideological commitments that it is unable to make explicit and reflect upon critically. Newman would regard such a university as decapitated, as unable to reflect philosophically upon the ideology that drives its judgments and its operations.

4. WHAT MIGHT IT MEAN TO TAKE NEWMAN'S PROPHETIC PROVOCATION SERIOUSLY?

Newman's prophetic provocation is to the same degree utopian as the idea of the university itself is utopian. It might best be received as a norm, an ideal that serves as a criterion against which to assess critically, that is, philosophi-

cally, the operative beliefs of late modern research universities and their feeder institutions, the colleges. If Newman is right, an all too facile rejection of the critical norm his "Idea of a University" advances might come with a high price: namely, to be eventually forced to drink the bitter cup to its last dregs by having to live out the dystopian future of the comprehensive functionalization and commodification of the university and of university education.

If Newman indeed is right, the university resembles an arch: its capstone stabilizes the whole edifice; remove it and the arch collapses. All stones are still there in their distinct integrity, but now lie in an indistinct heap. On the undergraduate level, the current "multiversity" absent the center stone resembles such a heap, an ever growing heap indeed, and while each stone has its integrity, the relationship between all of them is utterly unclear (excepting, of course, sub-coherences between mathematics and the natural sciences and among the natural sciences). In this situation of a curricular and disciplinary heterogeneity and even confusion, several disciplines are advancing themselves as capstones or as a multi-disciplinary capstone-configuration for the construction of a new arch. The strongest contender is presently probably an evolutionary materialism, or at least naturalism, that would stretch from astrophysics via biochemistry to neuroscience and a sociobiology extending itself into the humanities, to a naturalist philosophy of science. With such a capstone-configuration, the size of the arch would change considerably. Indeed, many of the stones of the former arch could not be integrated. And the new structure would be haunted by the specter of Nietzsche. Instead of a proper *methodological* naturalism, now an unwarranted *metaphysical* naturalism would define the scope of this new arch. The knowledge-making of the advanced tool-using animal *homo sapiens* would then turn out to be nothing but a most advanced form of tool-making and tool-using. And consequently, in light of the newly imposed horizon of metaphysical naturalism the most advanced university training would be nothing but a training in the servile arts, in a highly advanced "tool-knowledge" of a technical or managerial sort in order to fix those kinds of things that can be fixed with the help of tools. Newman's prophetic provocation consists simply in the reminder that the only thing that can save the university from the reductive distortions of metaphysical naturalism is the discipline that allows for the widest possible scope of truth. Only with theology as the capstone of the arch would the arch achieve this widest possible scope, would the university remain open to a maximum of interrelated and complementary sciences, would a university education remain in all areas of knowledge essentially philosophical, and would the intelligibility and desirability of universal knowledge as an end in and of itself be secured.

Pace Nietzsche, human beings desire to know, not because they desire to master, but because knowledge is the proper perfection of the intellect which is a more perfect form of existence. Theology affirms the intimation that the

human intellect operates in a horizon of transcendence and that the pursuit of knowledge is a created reflection of the divine perfection of knowledge. Theology allows the university to understand its teaching and inquiry as intrinsically meaningful.

Newman reminds us today that – as unlikely and outlandish as it might seem – theology (and the speculative contemplation to which it gives rise) is about the only thing that can save the university from its total functionalization and commodification. For theology reminds all the other disciplines that the greatest freedom comes with the contemplation and communication of the transcendent truth of God. Theology might in the end also turn out to be about the only reliable guarantor of genuine academic freedom. *Nota bene*: academic freedom has its origin in the “uselessness,” the intrinsic value of an education in the *artes liberales*. Hence, academic freedom, in its core, is nothing but the freedom to inquire into, to contemplate, and to communicate the truth for its own sake – an activity that carries its *telos* in its very practice.

In the end, I fear, we are faced with having to choose one of two prophets, one proposing an all too unlikely utopia, the other announcing an all too likely dystopia. We may either struggle with Newman up-stream toward the “idea” of a university or we may drift with Nietzsche down-stream, allow ourselves to be carried away by the dominant jet-stream and resign ourselves to the “polytechnic utiliversity.” One thing is clear beyond doubt though – wherever theology, natural and revealed, is permitted to make its distinct contribution to universal education, it will without fail help us grasp the intrinsic value of the arduous journey up-stream so that we may contemplate the source of all things. For, after all, «when God is forgotten the creature itself grows unintelligible»⁴²

It is precisely the very uselessness of the contemplation of the whole and its First Cause that forms the very heart of the education envisioned in Newman’s “Idea of a University”, that is most vehemently denounced and most desperately needed in our late-modern, techno-capitalist societies. It is, after all, Newman who almost singularly among the moderns articulates compellingly the contemporary relevance of the classical wisdom, that «‘[i]t is requisite for the good of the human community that there should be persons who devote themselves to the life of contemplation.’ For it is contemplation which preserves in the midst of human society the truth which is at one and the same time useless and the yardstick of every possible use; so it is also contemplation which keeps the true end in sight, gives meaning to every practical act of life».⁴³

⁴² Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 36.

⁴³ J. PIEPER, *Happiness & Contemplation*, trans. R. and C. Winston, St. Augustine’s Press, South Bend, IN 1998. The internal citation is from THOMAS AQUINAS, *In Sent.* 4, d. 26, q. 1, a. 2: «[A]d perfectionem humanae multitudinis sit necessarium aliquos contemplativae vitae inservire».

*ABSTRACT: Among modern thinkers, Newman is among the very few who marshal compelling intellectual resistance to the university's comprehensive functionalization and its eventual transformation into a polytechnical "utiliversity." Newman's prophetic provocation in his classic *The Idea of University* consists in the reminder that metaphysics, perfected by natural theology, and the speculative contemplation to which it gives rise, is about the only thing that can save the university from its total functionalization and commodification. The discipline that inquires into the interrelationship of all sciences and hence into the unity of truth is metaphysics. Its acme is natural theology, the inquiry into the source and perfection of all truth. Metaphysics, perfected by natural theology, has its end in the very practice of finding the truth. It constitutes the capstone of the arch of sciences, advances the unity of knowledge, and thereby facilitates the inner coherence of a university education. Furthermore, metaphysics, perfected by natural theology, might turn out to be about the only reliable guarantor of genuine academic freedom. For academic freedom has its origin in the "uselessness," the intrinsic value of a liberal education, an education in the artes liberales. Liberal education is a potentially universal education. While it is impossible to embrace all or even most fields of contemporary knowledge, liberal education fosters reflection upon one's knowledge in relationship to other fields of knowledge and in relationship to the whole. And the latter is what a university education – in order to remain true to the nature of the university – must be about.*

KEYWORDS: philosophy of education, John Henry Newman, University.