

University Education, the Unity of Knowledge— and (Natural) Theology: John Henry Newman’s Provocative Vision

REINHARD HÜTTER
Duke University Divinity School
Durham, NC

In memoriam Benedict M. Ashley, O.P. (1915–2013)

Such great beauty even creatures have,
reason is well able to contemplate the Source
from which these perfections came.

—*Wisdom* 13:5; trans. Ronald Knox

The owl of Minerva spreads its wings
only with the falling of the dusk.

—G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, Preface

Introduction: Newman and the Contemporary University

SINCE THE Enlightenment, numerous 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 reorganization of major extant universities.¹ Revisionist programs recast

¹ The following reflections were originally delivered in a much briefer and more rudimentary form on February 4, 2013, at New York University as part of the symposium “Newman and the University: What positive contribution can religion make to the ongoing life of the contemporary university?” Earlier and briefer versions of this essay were published in *Acta Philosophica: Rivista internazionale di filosofia* and in *First Things*. In this essay, I develop a line of thought first articulated in “The University’s Cutting Edge—Source of Its Flatness, Or: Reclaiming the University’s Third Dimension,” *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 15/4 (Fall 2012): 36–56, and in “‘Seeking Truth on Dry Soil and under Thornbushes’—God, the University, and the Missing Link: Wisdom,”

the nature of university education according to the Enlightenment program of the material betterment of the human condition. After the French Revolution, guided by the spirit of various versions of the modern state, these revisionist programs developed ever more rapidly. The post-Revolutionary romantic nation state, the techno-industrial nation state of colonial expansion, or the racist nation state and its will-to-power all played important roles in forming the modern university.²

in *Dust Bound for Heaven: Explorations in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 387–419, a chapter inspired to a large degree by the thought of Benedict Ashley, O.P., to whose memory this essay is dedicated. While he would have disagreed with Newman over numerous metaphysical and epistemological issues, his *magnum opus*, *The Way toward Wisdom: An Interdisciplinary and Intercultural Introduction to Metaphysics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006) and especially the last two pages of his autobiographical sketch, “How the Liberal Arts Opened My American Mind,” *Nova et Vetera* 9/4 [2011]: 883–92, make me confident that he would have supported in unequivocal terms the broad outlines of Newman’s provocative vision.

For thoughtful and constructive responses to earlier versions of this essay, my thanks go to the Faculty of the Honors Program at Providence College and to colleagues at Providence College, Duke University, and other institutions of higher learning, especially to Nicanor Austriaco, O.P. (molecular biology), Guiseppe Butera (philosophy), Thomas Pfau (English and German Literature), Philip Rolnick (theology and ethics), Richard Schenk, O.P. (university president), and Thomas Joseph White, O.P. (theology).

- ² It is far from accidental that for the late eighteenth century and for the nineteenth, primarily German authors come to mind: Johann David Michaelis, *Raisonnement über die protestantischen Universitäten in Deutschland*, 4 vols. (Frankfurt/Leipzig, 1768–76) (since there does not exist an English translation, the interested reader might turn for a helpful summary and discussion of major aspects of Michaelis’ opus to Michael Legaspi, *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2010], 33–37); Immanuel Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties* [1798], trans. Mary J. Gregory (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1992); Johann G. Fichte, *The Purpose of Higher Education: Also Known as the Vocation of the Scholar* [1794], trans. John K. Bramann (Mt. Savage, MD: Nightsun Books, 1988); F.W.J. von Schelling, *On University Studies* [1803], trans. E. S. Morgan, ed. Norbert Guterman (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1966); Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Occasional Thoughts on Universities in the German Sense. With an Appendix Regarding a University Soon to Be Established* [1808], trans. Terrence N. Tice and Edwina G. Lawler (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1991); Max Weber, “Science as Vocation” [1919], in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans., ed., and with introduction by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 129–56; and the infamous inaugural Rectorial Address at the University of Freiburg by Martin Heidegger, “The Self-Assertion of the German University” [1933]. English version trans. by Karsten Harries, *Review of Metaphysics* 38 (1985): 467–502. For a lonely and unheeded voice critical of all these more or less subtle forms of

Among eminent modern thinkers, John Henry Newman is arguably the most astutely contrarian. His is a prescient critique of all the quintessentially modern strategies of functionalizing the university and pressing it into the service of ideological ends foreign to its idea. These pseudo ends have haunted and distorted the modern university, whether those ends were imposed by the modern expansionist nation state, the communist party program, the fascist state organization of the superior race, the late modern national security state, or the desire-driven permissive consumer society. Despite their differences, all of these tacitly share a deep but unwarranted conviction: 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. This is the case ever more so today. 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.

Newman is among the very few modern thinkers whose intellectual vision offers a desperately needed alternative to the comprehensive functionalization of the contemporary university. The power of Newman’s vision rests on his conviction that the unity of truth accounts for the unity of knowledge and hence for the unity of a university education properly speaking. 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. As the science of sciences, metaphysics is without obvious use. It fails as a candidate for the servile arts and hence remains untouched by all modern strategies of instrumentalizing the knowledge it yields. The purpose of metaphysics is inquiring into and finding truth—comprehensive and ultimate truth. Metaphysics constitutes the capstone of the arch of sciences, advances the unity of knowledge, and thereby facilitates the inner coherence of a university education.

subjecting the university to purposes extrinsic to its idea, see Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Future of Our Educational Institutions* [1872], trans. J. M. Kennedy (Edinburgh: T. N. Foulis, 1909). By transforming strategically and organizationally the Baconian university of utility into a consistent research university, the German university of the nineteenth century became the paradigm of the modern university. Legaspi puts it well: “In the nineteenth century, there were two kinds of universities: German universities and those that wanted to be German” (*The Death of Scripture*, 28). For an excellent study of the German university in the nineteenth century, see Thomas Albert Howard, *Protestant Theology and the Making of the Modern German University* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

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 sailboats; he died in 1890, the age of the first transcontinental express trains, machine guns, and ocean steamers. Nevertheless, Newman remains our contemporary in more than one sense, especially in matters pertaining to university education. For even the most superficial perusal of his classic *The Idea of a University*³ makes abundantly plain that we, as Newman did, live in the midst of—and in spite of ourselves are heavily influenced by—the ideology of secularism. The ideological premises of secularism were honed 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 In American and European consumer societies of the twenty-first century, secularism presents itself typically as “hyperpluralism.”⁵ In its nascent stage, hyperpluralism was already quite familiar to

³ Invited by Archbishop Cullen, Newman became founding rector of the planned Catholic University of Ireland. In 1852, he delivered nine discourses to the Catholic clergy and intelligentsia of Dublin under the title “Discourses on the Scope and Nature of University Education addressed to the Catholics of Dublin.” Only the altered and expanded 1873 edition received the well-known title “The Idea of a University.” (On the fascinating details of the historical context, see Colin Barr, *Paul Cullen, John Henry Newman, and the Catholic University of Ireland, 1854–1864* [Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011].) The edition I peruse, and to which all page numbers in the text refer, is John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University*, ed. with preface and introduction by Charles Frederick Harrold (New York: Longman, Green, and Co., 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 quoted passage can be found.

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

⁵ In his noteworthy study, *The Unintended Reformation: How A Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012), Brad Gregory employs this term in order to characterize “the overwhelming pluralism of proffered religious and secular answers to [the Life Questions]” (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?’” (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

Newman. He 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” (*Idea*, 33; Discourse II, 7). Newman’s nineteenth-century England and our twenty-first-century Western societies are haunted by the pervasive presence of hyperpluralism’s central protagonist—the sovereign self.

However, two contemporary conditions separate us from Newman: 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 that can be purchased in order to satisfy individual desires. The commodification and the functionalization of the university are two sides of the same coin, where supply and demand, competition and branding, determine the life of universities and colleges. Commodification and functionalization have become so dominant that an alternative is not even thinkable, blinding us 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 by the preparation in the communicative, mathematical, and scientific skills of this knowledge-making, so that it can ever more effectively serve as means to achieve ends dictated by individual and collective desires.

Furthermore, two seemingly irreversible facts make Newman’s vision look distinctly antiquated and passé. First, the research and knowledge production of the late modern research university is a thoroughly secular affair. As Brad Gregory aptly put it:

Regardless of the academic discipline, knowledge in the Western world today is considered secular by definition. Its assumptions, 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.⁶

to you, values are whatever you value, priorities are whatever you prioritize, and what you should live for is whatever 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” (77).

⁶ Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation*, 299.

Taking evidentiary empiricism normatively, most contemporary natural scientists will regard metaphysical inquiry as a meaningless form of pseudo science, something akin to parapsychology or Freudian analysis.

Second, the knowledge gained 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 expertise to be applied to real world problems. Cutting-edge research is combined with undergraduate training for such research, often in highly specialized programs.⁷ This research university could be called the Baconian university, named after its *spiritus rector*, Francis Bacon. Newman had this model in 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” (*Idea*, 106; Discourse V, 9). Indeed, being able to fulfill a wide range of material and social desires makes the Baconian university almost irresistible. Questioning the Baconian university puts the critic immediately under the suspicion of being an enemy of material and social progress.

The late modern research university is the Baconian university in its most advanced stage. It has had a stunning global career, so 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.”⁸ The late modern research university is an accidental agglomeration of advanced research competencies, gathered in one facility for the sake of managerial and logistical convenience. If this state of affairs is an evident fact and amounts to a global success, why

⁷ 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,” www.aau.edu/research/article.aspx?id=4670)

⁸ Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation*, 299.

should we be held captive by the nostalgic image of a university education long gone, if it ever existed? Should we not simply own up to the fact that the university has irreversibly morphed into a polytechnicum beautified with the veneer of a functionalized liberal arts propaedeutic?

The problem is, as Newman presciently pointed out, that the very success of the Baconian polytechnicum carries the seed of its own undoing. Imagine the current trend to continue to its logical term. In such a scenario, each of the advanced research competencies of the late modern research university could be relocated without any real loss in closest proximity to the locations of private and state labs for bio-engineering, or to the various branches of the military-industrial and medical-industrial complex. At that point, the university would have disappeared. As a purely accidental and convenient agglomeration of advanced research competencies, the Baconian polytechnicum has unknowingly abolished its claim to be a university. To still call itself a university is undoubtedly useful for reasons of branding and marketing but at the same time profoundly deceptive. With good reasons, the late Benedict Ashley, O.P., educated in the great early years of the University of Chicago's undergraduate program, states:

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.⁹

Ashley presses the crucial question: 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 agglomeration of means that serve changing extrinsic ends or purposes? In light of the substantive notion of university as a *per se* unity, the Baconian polytechnicum can no longer rightfully claim the title "university."

In *The Idea of a University*, Newman holds up a mirror in front of all late modern research universities. In this mirror the Baconian polytechnicum is seen bowing to social, political, and cultural needs and functions. Diverted by concerns extrinsic to the nature of the university, the late modern research university has betrayed the pursuit of education in universal knowledge as an end meaningful and valuable in itself. The idea of the university has morphed into something else that could better be called "polytechnic utiliversity." However, few if any of the leading research

⁹ Benedict M. Ashley, O.P., *The Way toward Wisdom*, 20.

universities would want to entertain such a renaming. Undoubtedly, their endowment specialists would veto any such attempt. After all, many colleges, for tangible, pragmatic reasons, are still striving to be upgraded to a “university.”¹⁰ In spite of the current trend of comprehensive instrumentalization of university education, the hope remains that “university” might reclaim continuity with its past and thus be a normative ideal, a “gold standard,” that could govern some of the expectations, hopes, standards, and norms of current research universities.

Newman’s provocative vision is of ongoing relevance. For in it he advances a compelling argument for why theology is indispensable for the university’s integrity: Liberal education carries its end in itself. 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 relation to other fields and to the whole. This interrelatedness makes liberal education a potentially universal education. Such universal education requires a horizon of transcendence, a horizon that affords interconnectedness and coherence. But such a horizon of transcendence can be attained only if theology is central in university education. As Newman states:

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. (*Idea*, 62; Discourse III, 10)

According to Newman, the greatest danger to the inner coherence of the university is a self-imposed normative ideological secularism. Such a secularism undermines the inner unity of knowledge and furthermore, by submitting the university to ends extrinsic to the truth it pursues, destroys the very notion of an education in the liberal arts.

To the great detriment of the modern university, Newman’s proposal has been mostly ignored. As James Turner put it, “the decidedly nontheistic, secular understanding of knowledge characteristic of modern univer-

¹⁰ In many colleges the Business School’s MBA program is the primary motivation and legitimization for the “upgrade” to the status of university. Quite often, the Business School’s dominance transforms the liberal arts education into a propaedeutic of orthographic, grammatical, literary, and rhetorical skills as a preparatory means for producing and managing exchange value. Thus functionalized by a superior servile art, an art that serves an end extrinsic to itself, the liberal arts themselves turn into inferior servile arts.

sities will not accommodate belief in God as a working principle.”¹¹ And as Alasdair MacIntyre observes, “the irrelevance of theology to the secular disciplines is a taken-for-granted dogma.”¹² Newman names and unmasks this pervasive but unexamined prejudice of the secular disciplines. He argues that to the degree that theology has been excluded, the connecting thread of university teaching has been unraveled. On the one side, there is the highly specialized and equally highly insulated graduate training. On the other side, there is the current undergraduate training that subdivides into a functionalized pre-med, pre-law, pre-engineering training on the one hand and, on the other, the “salad bar” consumer curriculum in the humanities, which Clark Kerr characterizes as a “multiversity,” “a city of infinite variety.”¹³ The only reform in sight seems to be the European Bologna model, a comprehensively stratified bachelor education, which amounts to nothing else than the briefest possible training the Baconian polytechnicum can offer in marketable linguistic, managerial, and technical skills of “know how.”

Examining Newman’s thought on the university raises three questions: First, in the context of speaking about university education, what does Newman mean by ‘theology’? Second, why does he think theology is indispensable for university education? And third, what might it mean to take Newman’s proposal seriously? As quaint as Newman’s concrete proposals might appear to be, his prescient provocation seems to drive home the blade.¹⁴

¹¹ James Turner, *Language, Religion, and Knowledge: Past and Present* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), 120.

¹² Alasdair MacIntyre, *God, Philosophy, Universities: A Selective History of the Catholic Philosophical Tradition* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), 135.

¹³ Clark Kerr, *The Uses of the University*, 5th ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 5, 31.

¹⁴ These considerations come from a long-term university citizen reflecting for many years on the nature of university education. Since Fall 1979 I have in various ways been involved with a major university. I was a student of theology, philosophy, German philology, literature, and linguistics at a research university in Franconia (now Northern Bavaria), Germany, founded as a typical Enlightenment university in the middle of the eighteenth century by a Lutheran margrave. I continued my studies at a research university in the Catholic Rhineland that was founded by Protestant Prussia in the early nineteenth century to check Catholic dominance in the area. Then I studied at a private university in the US-American South (it has a famous basketball team), founded in the early twentieth century 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 Ph.D. program) across the street from the most eminent Midwest private research university. Later returning as a Divinity School professor at the private

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” (*Idea*, 19; Discourse II, 1). “University” is first and foremost an institution for 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:

[I]f 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 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. (*Idea*, 20; Discourse II, 1)

The secular university by and large—that is, when it is consistent with its self-understanding—insists upon the first alternative: Little or nothing is known, or ever can be, 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

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, Schelling, and Hegel taught in the early years of the nineteenth century. During the 2012–13 academic year, I held 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 only Catholic university in Germany, a university 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 academic rhythms and rituals of the university have been the water in which I swim and the air I breathe. But only in recent years, particularly in the course of my preparation to be a candidate for a university presidency, did I turn my attention directly to the idea of the university. I am deeply committed to the idea of the university and very grateful for the moments when extant universities strive to embody aspects of this idea. My commitment is simultaneously the source of my love for John Henry Newman’s *The Idea of a University* and of my criticisms of the late modern research university.

belongs to departments of religion. Newman would not be opposed at all to an empirical, historical, literary, and cultural study of, and university education in, the world's religions. For he could regard such study and education as integral components of a liberal education. He has, however, 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" (*Idea*, 55; Discourse III, 7).¹⁵ 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,"¹⁶ a properly scientific knowledge of God that is the intrinsic goal of metaphysics, or first philosophy. Though this knowledge of God does not depend on divine revelation, it is greatly enhanced, deepened, and indeed perfected by divine revelation. If we could ask Newman to point out some recent and contemporary practitioners of this science in the English-speaking world, he would most likely point us to Ashley, Braine, Burrell, Clarke, Davies, Dewan, Farrer, Geach, Haldane, Klima, Kretzmann, Lonergan, Mascall, McCabe, McInerney, Plantinga, Stump, Swinburne, Turner, Wippel, Wolterstorff, and their students.¹⁷

¹⁵ See the Appendix to this essay for a longer treatment of some complexities entailed in Newman's understanding of the "Science of God."

¹⁶ Thomas Aquinas puts the matter tersely in *Summa theologiae* [ST] I, q. 2, a. 2, ad 1: "The existence of God and other like truths about God, which can be known by natural reason, are not articles of faith, but are preambles to the articles; for faith presupposes natural knowledge, even as grace presupposes nature, and perfection supposes something that can be perfected. Nevertheless, there is nothing to prevent a [person], who cannot grasp a proof, accepting, as a matter of faith, something which in itself is capable of being scientifically known and demonstrated." Vatican I's Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith *Dei Filius*, in chapter 2, *De revelatione*, declares authoritatively as being *de fide* that the natural range of reason encompasses the following capacity: "The same holy mother church holds and teaches that God, the source and end of all things, can be known with certainty from the consideration of created things, by the natural power of human reason." ("Eadem sancta mater ecclesia tenet et docet, Deum, rerum omnium principium et finem, naturali humanae rationis lumine e rebus creatis certo cognosci posse.") *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils. Vol. II: Trent–Vatican II*, ed. Norman P. Tanner, S.J. (London: Sheed & Ward/Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 806.

¹⁷ While my tendency of rendering Newman's argument broadly in the idiom of Aristotelian-Thomist philosophy betrays my own intellectual pedigree and leanings, it would be erroneous to assume that Newman's argument tacitly presupposes a specific philosophical *position* to be true, in short, that it presupposes what it pretends to demonstrate. Rather, what Newman's argument does indeed presuppose is a certain way of understanding philosophy itself as a distinct scientific and

Quite aware that his position was already controversial in the English-speaking university world (outside of Oxford and Cambridge) in the 1850s, Newman makes it most explicit that “University Teaching without Theology is simply unphilosophical. Theology has at least as good a right to claim a place there as Astronomy” (*Idea*, 38; Discourse II, 9).¹⁸ In

simultaneously meta-scientific inquiry that allows the speculative contemplation of the whole in all its interconnections and in relationship to the transcendent First Cause, God, a coherent inquiry that develops over generations and comprises various schools of thought. This understanding of philosophy has traditionally been called *philosophia perennis*. It is indeed the case that there do not exist many, if any, coherent traditions of philosophical inquiry other than the *philosophia perennis* that have the conceptual resources to envision, let alone to sustain, such an inquiry over a long period of time. (Some would want to argue that phenomenology might be such an alternative philosophical tradition, or even, as Husserl would think, the very renewal of the *philosophia perennis*. See Edmund Husserl, *Erste Philosophie*, Vol. 1: *Kritische Ideengeschichte* [*Husserliana*, Vol. VII], ed. R. Boehm [The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1956].) I regard Aristotelian-Thomism to be the most compelling instantiation of the *philosophia perennis*, and moreover an instantiation that is fully compatible with Newman’s prescriptive vision. Alasdair MacIntyre, in his *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 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 *Distinguish to Unite or The Degrees of Knowledge* (trans. from the fourth French edition under the supervision of Gerald B. Phelan [New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 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, through scientific knowledge, to infused mystical knowledge. Although Maritain’s account stands in need some updating in regard to the recent developments in the philosophy of mind and in neuroscience, the overall scope remains unsurpassed by any contemporary epistemology. (A continuation of this tradition of inquiry can be found in two recent works of note: Paul A. MacDonald Jr., *Knowledge & the Transcendent: An Inquiry into the Mind’s Relationship to God* [Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2009], and James D. Madden, *Mind, Matter, and Nature: A Thomistic Proposal for the Philosophy of Mind* [Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2013]).

¹⁸ Newman is, of course, fully aware of materialism as a competing philosophical position, 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?” (*Idea*, 37; Discourse II, 8). While this rhetorical question would have had a considerable impact on the original, largely Catholic audience of Newman’s university lectures, in relationship to an audience reflective of the late modern

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 an answer 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 or Reason exercised upon Knowledge, or what may be called Philosophy” (*Idea*, 123; Discourse VI, 7). 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 on 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 word, and of a philosophical habit of mind, and which in these Discourses I shall call by that name. (*Idea*, 46; Discourse III, 4)

research university, this question carries no force whatsoever. Hume and Epicurus would be placeholders of 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. If one wants, however, to move beyond a purely defensive strategy of argumentation of this kind, one would have to revisit Aristotle’s proof in his *Physics* that the first mover is immaterial (*Physics* VIII, 10) and the proof in his *De Anima* that the intellect of the human soul is immaterial (*De Anima* III, 4 and 5). These proofs demonstrate that “being” extends beyond physical objects and that therefore materialism is untenable as a comprehensive philosophical theory. For a lucid presentation of Aristotle’s arguments, see Benedict Ashley, *The Way toward Wisdom*, 92–124. For a compelling reformulation of the argument for the immateriality of the human intellect—an argument based on Aristotle but one that also draws on recent analytic philosophy (Kripke, Quine, Goodman)—see James F. Ross, *Thought and World: The Hidden Necessities* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 115–27, and for its able defense against recent critics, see Edward Feser, “Kripke, Ross, and the Immaterial Aspect of Thought,” in *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 87/1 (2013): 1–32.

The science of sciences is metaphysics, first philosophy, and its intrinsic goal and completion is theology.

Excluding theology from the university would be unphilosophical in that, for such a decision to be a proper philosophical one, a metaphysical warrant would be required. Such a warrant is, however, made impossible, since first philosophy itself becomes excluded together with natural theology. 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, and 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.¹⁹

Together with all engaged in first philosophy, Newman knew perfectly well 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. For first philosophy, after all, 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 as a science? The fact that palaeo-anthropology lives more by hypotheses than by evidences; that neuroscience, instead of investing in the labor of explaining human volition and free choice, is bent upon the strategy of simply dissolving the “explanandum”; that biochemistry so far has provided no cogent ontogenesis for the unique reality of “life”; and that contemporary physics can neither reconcile quantum mechanics with the general theory of relativity nor move from postulating the existence of “dark matter” to an account of it—none of this proves 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 is analogous to such sciences with one important difference: its subject

¹⁹ See Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker, *Unity of Nature* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1981), and idem, *Der Garten des Menschlichen: Beiträge zur geschichtlichen Anthropologie* (Munich: Hanser, 1984), and Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Toward a Post-Critical Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974). For a trenchant critique of central aspects of modern science—the attempt at the comprehensive mathematization of nature, the bankruptcy of Hume’s fictionist epistemology, and the preemptive constriction of what can be known according to the absolutized norm of the scientific method—see Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans. David Carr (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970).

matter is related to the whole cosmos and the totality of all facts and relations as cause to effect.

The speculative labor of first philosophy is arduous and time consuming, and its proper scientific knowledge can be mastered by only a few, after a long time of considerable intellectual effort, and with intermingling of error. This is at least what the Fathers of the First Vatican Council seem to imply at the beginning of chapter two, *De revelatione*, of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith, *Dei Filius*.²⁰ Their teaching seems to correspond to the facts and simply points out that first philosophy is nothing but a proper science in the way Newman insists it is. For we would rightly expect nothing less from physics or biochemistry—that these sciences are arduous and time consuming, and that their proper scientific knowledge can be mastered by only a few, after a long time of considerable research, and with an intermingling of error, that is, in openness to falsification and to the formation of new hypotheses and explanatory models.²¹ What makes first philosophy, according to tacitly operative Baconian criteria, radically different from physics and biochemistry, is the following: Even modest competency in physics and biochemistry creates expertise in the order of production and consumption and consequently leads to useful

²⁰ They state the matter explicitly, only the other way around: “It is indeed thanks to this divine revelation, that those matters concerning God which are not of themselves beyond the scope of human reason, can, even in the present state of the human race, be known by everyone without difficulty, with firm certitude and with no intermingling of error.” (“Huic divinae revelationi tribuendum quidem est, ut ea, quae in rebus divinis humanae rationi per se impervia non sunt, in praesenti quoque generis humani conditione ab omnibus expedite, firma certitudine et nullo admixto errore cognosci possint.”) *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils. Vol. II*, ed. Tanner, 806. The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council, in the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum* I, 6, explicitly affirm the teaching of Vatican I. In *Metaphysics* I, 2 (982a23–25), Aristotle observes that the things most difficult to understand are those that are most universal because they are the furthest removed from the senses. And Thomas Aquinas, in his commentary on the *Metaphysics*, states that the most difficult for human beings to know are those things entirely separate from matter in being, that is, immaterial substances. Consequently, “even though this science which is called wisdom is the first in dignity, it is still the last to be learned” (St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics*, trans. and introduced by John P. Rowan [Notre Dame, IN: Dumb Ox Books, 1995], 16).

²¹ First philosophy’s unique character as science that is simultaneously meta-science in relation to all other sciences accounts for the fact that, unlike the natural sciences, it does not proceed by empirical falsification and the formulation of new hypotheses and explanatory models. One way to think about development in first philosophy as a discursive tradition can be found in Alasdair MacIntyre’s *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*.

employment. According to the same Baconian criteria, not even advanced, let alone modest, competency in first philosophy does create expertise in the order of production and consumption. Consequently, first philosophy is nothing but a waste of time—time lost for production and consumption.

Now, with Newmanian criteria in place of the Baconian ones, the concomitant robust and visible presence of first philosophy in the core of the undergraduate curriculum of contemporary universities would at least complicate the rather uncritical reception of the overall remarkably superficial and in many regards ignorant claims advanced by the so-called “new atheism.”²² Furthermore, through the absence of first philosophy, it has been left to medical historians to bring again before modern thought an undeniable fact that modern philosophy since Hume seems to have been largely unable, or better, unwilling, to account for—miracles.²³ According to modern intellectual folklore, the case against miracles was made irrefutably by David Hume.²⁴ However, not only do miracles themselves since Hume’s day seem to have been not too impressed with Hume’s argument about

²² See Richard Dawson, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2008); Daniel Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* (New York: Penguin, 2006); and Christopher Hitchens, *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York: Twelve, 2007). For a somewhat rhetorically heated, but lucid metaphysical reposte, see Edward Feser, *The Last Superstition: A Refutation of the New Atheism* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 2008); for a brilliant theological deconstruction, see David Bentley Hart, *Atheist Delusions: The Christian Revolution and Its Fashionable Enemies* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010); for the precise clarification at which a logician is best, see Alvin Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); and for an incisive critique of atheist scientism by a foremost mathematician and philosopher, see David Berlinsky, *The Devil’s Delusion: Atheism and its Scientific Pretensions* (New York: Basic Books, 2009).

²³ Jacalyn Duffin, *Medical Miracles: Doctors, Saints, and Healing in the Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

²⁴ David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* [1748], ed. Stephen Buckle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), section 10, “Of Miracles,” 96–116. For a brief but lucid meta-critique of Hume’s argument against miracles, see Brad S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation*, 60–64: “Hume rightly asserted, in a manner consistent with traditional Christian beliefs, that ‘it is a miracle, that a dead man should come to life,’ but followed this by claiming that ‘that has never been observed in any age or country.’ This latter assertion begs the question about whether natural regularities are exceptionless, just as it implicitly begs the question about whether the God of traditional Christianity is real. It implies nothing more than that Hume did not believe the testimony in question. Standing squarely in the univocal metaphysical tradition and yet apparently oblivious of the tendentiousness of his beliefs, Hume did not base his argument against miracles on a careful, case-by-case evaluation of the evidentiary testimony pertaining to discrete, alleged miracles. . . . Hume . . . dogmatically rejected all

their putative impossibility, but also, noteworthy, some contemporary philosophers have begun systematically to question Hume's case against miracles.²⁵ The discipline of first philosophy would be equipped to advance these initial and incipient discussions from the threshold of metaphysics into a fully fledged metaphysical inquiry. Such an inquiry could demonstrate the compatibility between the *methodological* naturalism of the natural sciences in regard to the comprehensive order of secondary causality and the possibility, and hence conceivability, of miracles that is entailed in the nature of the First Cause's genuinely transcendent causality.²⁶

The Indispensability of Theology for University Education

With his argument for the indispensability of theology for a proper university education, Newman moves beyond the striking observation that by excluding theology from its curriculum the modern university simply betrays how unphilosophical it is. For, according to Newman, religious truth surpasses the indirect knowledge of the natural theology that is the goal of metaphysics. The reason is the following: A natural theology that rightly considers all of the divine perfections or attributes will also have to consider divine personhood and agency, that is, divine providence and the governance of the universe. While natural theology is able to inquire into the principles of the perfections of divine personhood and

alleged miracles based on his own beliefs. His scornful repudiation of Christianity was a premise of his argument against miracles" (61).

²⁵ J. Houston, *Reported Miracles: A Critique of Hume* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); David Johnson, *Hume, Holism, and Miracles* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999); and John Earman, *Hume's Abject Failure: The Argument against Miracles* (New York: Oxford University Press, 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 operating in a nothing but "deductive circle," see Craig S. Keener, *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011). For Benedict Ashley's critique of Hume's dismissal of the principle of causality, see *The Way toward Wisdom*, chapter 3, and on the testimony of miracles, where he discusses Hume and Newman, see 316–17.

²⁶ It should not go unmentioned that 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 as a metaphysician than as a logician within a broadly realist epistemological framework, thus anticipating argumentative strategies developed much later in somewhat similar ways by Alvin Plantinga and others. For Newman's early, Anglican work on miracles, see his *Two Essays on Biblical and on Ecclesiastical Miracles*, 2d ed. (London: Basil Montague Pickering, 1870), 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* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979).

agency, these perfections become a concrete and living reality only in the theology that the word “God” contains “[w]ith us Catholics, as with the first race of Protestants, as with Mahometans, and all Theists”:

[A]ccording to the teaching of Monotheism, God is an Individual, Self-dependent, All-perfect, Unchangeable Being; intelligent, living, personal, and present; almighty, all-seeing, all-remembering; between whom and His creatures there is an infinite gulf; who has no origin, who is all-sufficient for Himself; who created and upholds the universe; who will judge every one of us, sooner or later, according to the Law of right and wrong which He has written on our hearts. He is One who is sovereign over, operative amidst, independent of, the appointments which He has made; One in whose hands are all things, who has a purpose in every event, and a standard for every deed, and thus has relations of His own towards the subject-matter of each particular science which the book of knowledge unfolds; who has with an adorable, never-ceasing energy implicated Himself in all the history of creation, the constitution of nature, the course of the world, the origin of society, the fortunes of nations, the action of the human mind; and who thereby necessarily becomes the subject-matter of a science, far wider and more noble than any of those which are included in the circle of secular Education. (*Idea*, 32f; Discourse II, 7)²⁷

This doctrine of God is not only corroborated to some extent by natural theology but *de facto* alive as religious truth in the minds and the lives of Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Considered maximally, the divine perfections of personhood and agency give rise to the question of revelation and revealed truth and call for a theology of history.²⁸ In turn, the concrete

²⁷ In this remarkable passage, Newman offers not a digest of natural theology (as it were with the particular accent of Scotism) but rather a living image of the doctrine of God the creator, governor, and judge, all merciful and all just that is at play when Christians, Jews, and Muslims speak of God. Contemporaneously put, Newman summarizes here the religious truth that Christians, Jews, and Muslims hold together over against alternative beliefs, new and old: Epicurean and Humean atheist materialism, Spinozist pantheistic naturalism—and Buddhism.

²⁸ The only form of Christian theology capable of elevating, complementing, and perfecting natural theology is the kind that Pope John Paul II prescribed in his 1998 encyclical letter *Fides et Ratio*: speculative dogmatic theology. “*Dogmatic theology* must be able to articulate the universal meaning of the mystery of the One and Triune God and of the economy of salvation, both as a narrative and, above all, in the form of argument. It must do so, in other words, through concepts formulated in a critical and universally communicable way. Without philosophy’s contribution, it would in fact be impossible to discuss theological issues such as, for example, the use of language to speak about God, the personal relations within the Trinity, God’s creative activity in the world, the relationship

facts of divine revelation in history demand the deepest speculative contemplation of divine personhood and agency—the task of speculative dogmatic theology. Even if considered only minimally, this religious truth, alive in the minds of Jews, Christians, and Muslims, must have a significant impact upon any education that claims to be potentially universal:

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

between God and man, or Christ's identity as true God and true man. This is no less true of the different themes of moral theology, which employ concepts such as the moral law, conscience, freedom, personal responsibility and guilt, which are in part defined by philosophical ethics. . . . Speculative dogmatic theology thus presupposes and implies a philosophy of the human being, the world and, more radically, of being, which has objective truth as its foundation" (§66). Post-metaphysical or anti-metaphysical programs of Christian theology and programs reduced to exegetical and historical positivism, doctrinal traditionalism, pastoral pragmatism, socio-political or eco-political transformationism, or postmodern apocalypticism will be inherently unfit for this task. Such programs will rather intensify the intellectual self-isolation of Christian theology or—in a desperate attempt to break out of the isolation and to gain immediate relevance in a secular age—will end up embracing sundry intellectual trends that happen to be momentarily in vogue. (I pursue this matter in greater detail in the chapter “‘A Forgotten Truth?’—Theological Faith, Source and Guarantee of Theology's Inner Unity,” in *Dust Bound for Heaven*, 313–47.) Sacred theology (with its acme, speculative dogmatic theology) differs in kind from the theology that is the acme of first philosophy. The difference in the formal character (*ratio*) of how something is known accounts for the difference between sciences. The “formal object” or “ratio” of sacred theology is whatever is revealable by God (Thomas Aquinas, *ST* I, q. 1, a. 1, ad 2; a. 3c and a. 7c; see also his *Expositio super librum Boethii De trinitate*, q. 5, a. 4). In the following, I will distinguish between “natural theology” and “revealed theology” (the latter being a condensation of “theology arising from and relying upon divine revelation”). Newman has no interest in establishing or defending this distinction in his university discourses. He rather assumes this distinction as a given and as a presupposition he and his audience share. He regards the former, the theology of first philosophy, to be indispensable for the unity of knowledge (a unity *per se*) characteristic of the university, and he regards (as every Catholic does or should do) the latter, the theology of sacred doctrine (with the exception of the *praeambula fidei*), as transcending all possible knowledge this side of the beatific vision. Consequently, the theology of sacred doctrine is the gratuitous *donum superadditum* that presupposes the gift of divine faith and crowns every Catholic university *simpliciter*. It is of this divine science that Bonaventure rightly says: “All modes of knowledge serve theology” “Omnes cogitationes famulantur theologiae” (*De reductione artium ad theologiam*, c. 26). It is this divine science that corrects, complements, perfects, and utterly transcends natural theology.

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 one from 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 divine. (*Idea*, 24; Discourse II, 3)

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.” (*Idea*, 62; Discourse III, 10). Bracketing religious truth is suicidal for university teaching. Normative ideological secularism is ultimately nothing but the university’s undertaker.

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, which stand toward each other pretty much as subjects and predicates in logic. All that exists, as contemplated by the human mind, forms one large system or complex fact. (*Idea*, 40f; Discourse III, 2)

Viewed altogether, [the sciences] approximate to a representation or subjective reflection of the objective truth, as nearly as is possible to the human mind. (*Idea*, 43; Discourse III, 2)²⁹

The subject matter of theology—God—makes it possible to understand the rest of reality as an intentionally and intelligently created whole and hence

²⁹ “[A]ll knowledge forms one whole, because its subject-matter is one; for the university in its length and breadth is so 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 influences through it, that we cannot truly or fully contemplate it without in some main aspects contemplating Him” (*Idea*, 45f.; Discourse III, 4).

as an intelligible universe. Consequently, one can reasonably expect that all knowledge to be gained about the world we live in (including ourselves) is essentially interrelated and an integral part 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 contemporary research universities: to recast the curriculum in light of a normative evolutionary naturalism. 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. (*Idea*, 49; Discourse III, 5)

History, political science, economics, literary studies and linguistics, 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. (*Idea*, 49; Discourse III, 5)

Replace the physical-mechanistic framework with a biological-evolutionary one in Newman’s illustration and matters sound only too familiar. At my own university, a noted philosopher of science has repeatedly argued that the humanities are a waste of time and that a future undergraduate training should focus exclusively on the natural sciences and on the methodological reflections of a materialist philosophy of science. Newman anticipates such a proposal in his own 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 undertakes to show how the whole fabric of material civilization has arisen from the constructive powers of physical elements and physical laws. (*Idea*, 50f.; Discourse III, 5)

Newman's prescience is impressive. Reductionism, whether that of a mechanistic physicalism or that of an evolutionary materialism, is an all too simplistic principle.

In the third part of his *reductio ad absurdum* argument, Newman completes his analogy with an *a fortiori* conclusion. Although he does not show this professor's "definitions, principles, and laws" to be false, he does show that ignoring the reality of human reason and volition as proper motive causes would still issue in "a radically false view 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 distorting consequences. And finally Newman drives home the blade:

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 of 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 this 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. 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? (*Idea*, 53; Discourse III, 6)

On the supposition that God exists, the exclusion of this all-important fact from the circle of universal science can only result in omission and distortion of truth. The supposition that God does not exist is a philosophical tenet that cannot be proven conclusively—nor is it a self-evident truth—and hence can constitute neither a first principle nor a conclusion

of any of the academic disciplines that belong to the secular university's circle of sciences. Ideological atheism is as unphilosophical as it is unscientific.

How would Newman's *reductio ad absurdum* argument fare in the present secular research university? It would hardly find a serious hearing and hence would fail in its rhetorical appeal. The argument nevertheless still carries objective force. For one can make a reasonably strong 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 sciences, 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). They regard 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. They epitomize freedom in a new existentialist sense: the freedom of design, that is, the freedom of enhancing, or simply changing properties of, one's own nature (intelligence, gender, emotions, body features, etc.) with the assistance of bio-technology.³⁰ Thus, human beings become their own designer choices—or, worse, the result of designer choices made by others (parents, governments, lawmakers, silent majorities) who have gained 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

³⁰ One of the first to point out the transhumanist dynamic as an incipient cultural reality in Western late modern societies was Peter Sloterdijk, *Regeln für den Menschenpark: Ein Antwortschreiben zu Heideggers Brief über den Humanismus* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1999). Since then, the transhumanist perspective has become not only explicit but also prescriptive. See, first and foremost, Simon Young, *Designer Evolution: A Transhumanist Manifesto* (New York: Prometheus, 2006), but also Gregory Stock, *Redesigning Humans: Our Inevitable Genetic Future* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2002); Ray Kurzweil, *The Singularity Is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology* (New York: Penguin, 2005); Ramez Naam, *More Than Human: Embracing the Promise of Biological Enhancement* (New York: Broadway, 2005); Joel Garreau, *Radical Evolution: The Promise and Peril of Enhancing Our Minds, Our Bodies—and What It Means to Be Human* (New York: Broadway Books, 2005); and Nikolas Rose, *The Politics of Life Itself: Biomedicine, Power, and Subjectivity in the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

collectively applied.³¹ Welcomed at first as a liberation from the contingency, 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.

The proponents of a liberal eugenics are naïve enough to assume that the ensuing combination of bio-technological and socio-political dynamics can be “managed” by the benign intentions of enlightened individuals and an equally benign and enlightened political process in equally benign and enlightened democratic regimes. Despite their frequent rhetorical gestures to the contrary, they display a deplorable 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. Inebriated by the vistas of new frontiers to be conquered and obsessed with the fear of being left behind by the dynamic of bio-technological research, the polytechnic utiliversity rushes along and banishes 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.³² 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 that have all too quickly been instituted by the leading research universities will hardly be convincing. For the largely utilitarian and consistently postmetaphysical orientation of most of what passes for philosophical ethics offers these centers few 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 of contemporary philosophical ethics are arbitrary, that is, subject to preference. Where would

³¹ My own university calls no fewer 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.

³² The proponents of a liberal eugenics 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: Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007).

such centers of bioethics find the intellectual resources that would offer a yardstick for critical thought and a vision of the whole? How would such centers of bioethics escape the logic of being simply part of managerial strategies meant to create a semblance of legitimacy and the required minimum of legality and to facilitate operative consensus?³³

If there is only a grain of truth in this dire picture—a picture that Aldous Huxley painted with great prescience in *A Brave New World* and C. S. Lewis satirized inimitably in *That Hideous Strength*, a picture against which Hans Jonas warned in *The Imperative of Responsibility*,³⁴ as did, more recently, Jürgen Habermas in his *The Future of Human Nature*³⁵ and Leon R. Kass in his *Life, Liberty, and the Defense of Dignity*³⁶ (and, of course, we must not forget Pope John Paul II's 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 the optimization of individually desired, technical, operative, or genetic design features.

In his very late notebooks, Friedrich Nietzsche 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—

³³ For an approach to bioethics that escapes this problematic altogether and opens up a vista that transcends the theoretical as well as the political conundrum of contemporary secular bioethics, see Nicanor Pier Giorgio Austriaco, O.P., *Biomedicine and Beatitude: An Introduction to Catholic Bioethics* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011).

³⁴ Hans Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984). See Stephan Kampowski, *A Greater Freedom: Biotechnology, Love, and Human Destiny* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012), for an instructive interpretation of Jonas's thought and for a helpful application of it to the pressing contemporary questions of bio-engineering.

³⁵ Jürgen Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003).

³⁶ Leon R. Kass, *Life, Liberty, and the Defense of Dignity: The Challenge for Bioethics* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2002).

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.³⁷

If Nietzsche is right, the university as a humanist enterprise of education in universal knowledge is quite passé. What Nietzsche predicts is the species-relevant polytechnicum: “a species grasps a certain amount of reality in order to become master of it, in order to press it into service.” This is the posthumanist program. And when we include human nature itself in the reality to be mastered, we have the transhumanist program. Consequently, Newman’s analogy has lost nothing of its relevance. Rather, with uncanny prescience and precision, Newman perceived the radical implications hidden in the Baconian university that Nietzsche eventually would lay bare. While we are busy ushering Newman, the all too discomfiting visionary, out the front door of our late modern research universities, assuring him in most cordial terms of the indubitable humanistic value of his *The Idea of a University*, 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.

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.³⁸ In this latter case, theological knowledge

³⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), Aphorism 480.

³⁸ Might transhumanists not retort that genetic optimization brings about a more perfect form of existence and that the above alternative is therefore spurious? At a first glance, it might seem plausible that transhumanism has a case. However, this case must rest either on an objective hierarchy of goods and an underlying order

unavoidably bears upon other knowledge. Newman's vision 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, brushes aside questions of this kind as being unscientific and 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. Newman would regard such a university as decapitated, as unable to reflect philosophically upon the ideology that drives its judgments and its operations.

What Might It Mean to Take Newman's Provocative Vision Seriously?

Newman's vision of a university education and of the unity of knowledge is as much, or as little, utopian as his *The Idea of a University* as a whole. His vision might best be received as an ideal that serves as a criterion against which to assess critically—that is, philosophically—the operative beliefs of late modern research universities. If Newman is right, an easy dismissal of

of proximate ends subordinated to a final end or it has to rest on subjective judgments antecedent to and consequent upon genetic optimization of those who wish to be themselves or to have their progeny subjected to such genetic optimization. The first alternative does not work, because the very kind of metaphysical inquiry and argumentation that transhumanism rejects would be required for carrying through and ascertaining the necessary objective hierarchy of goods and of proximate ends ordered to a final end. The second alternative does not work either, because antecedent subjective judgments about genetic optimization will be at variance with differing antecedent subjective judgments regarding kinds, scope, and extent of optimization, and might, in addition, be based on transient desires and specious hopes. (In short, the private judgments of individual consumers of genetic optimization will always diverge from each other regarding the kind, scope, and extent of optimization and hence about its nature.) The consequent judgments (post-optimization) might contradict the antecedent judgments in that the recipients of optimization do not experience the optimization they hoped for, or more importantly, do not experience the happiness they hoped was integral to the genetic optimization, let alone the joy that accompanies genuine happiness. Consequently, the concept of "optimization" becomes vacuous. In short, the transhumanist claim that genetic optimization brings about a more perfect form of existence is empty.

the ideal he proposes in *The Idea of a University* might come with a high price for faculty as well as students in late modern research universities and their feeder institutions, the colleges—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.

According to Newman's vision, the university disciplines form an arch: its capstone stabilizes the whole edifice; remove it and the arch collapses. All stones are still there in their distinct integrity. But the relationship among the individual stones has become completely arbitrary—characteristic of a heap in distinction from an arch. On the undergraduate level, the current “multiversity” absent the capstone resembles such a heap, an ever-growing heap indeed. While each stone has its integrity, the relationships among all of them are 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 for such a multi-disciplinary capstone-configuration is presently an evolutionary naturalism. This emerging capstone-configuration stretches from astrophysics via biochemistry to neuroscience, extends itself into the humanities, and even affords its own naturalist philosophy of science. With this capstone-configuration, the size of the arch changes considerably. Indeed, many of the stones of the former arch can no longer be integrated, and the ones that are still to be integrated have to change their form in order to accommodate to the reduced scope imposed by evolutionary naturalism. Such a naturalist reconstitution of the remaining university disciplines for the sake of the new unity of knowledge would undoubtedly affect most deeply the remainder of the humanities, but it would leave deep traces also on the other remaining disciplines. In short, the ideological imposition of a naturalist immanence would force the sciences to accommodate themselves in the proverbial Procrustean bed.

And that would not be the end of the trouble. Rather, the new naturalist structure of the arch of university disciplines would be haunted by the specter of Nietzsche. For philosophical naturalism remains inherently vulnerable to the destructive acids of genealogical skepticism. Despite the realist intuitions at work in the natural sciences, the superimposed philosophical naturalism invites its own genealogical deconstruction: among tool-making and tool-using animals of the species *homo sapiens*, “truth” is nothing but a cover for domination. Or, more radically and naturalistically conceived, the will-to-power is the only “truth” there is. Conse-

quently, as Hobbes already understood, “homo homini lupus.”³⁹ There is nothing more threatening than another’s “truth” imposed upon us in order to subdue or crush our own will of self-assertion. Such a genealogical deconstruction of the reigning philosophical naturalism would, of course, issue in the very termination of the university in any, even the remotest and most equivocal, sense. Being historically oblivious, the contenders of philosophical naturalism are all too forgetful of one fact: The specter of Nietzsche has arisen with, and in response to, the ascendancy of modern philosophical naturalism; that specter will erode naturalism from the inside out until it collapses or until it is simply abandoned as just another false image that held us captive for too long.

In the meanwhile, however, as the “novus ordo” of a consistently naturalist research university is emerging, an historically unselfconscious but ideologically self-confident *philosophical* naturalism will increasingly define the scope and consistency of a new arch of university disciplines. In this “novus ordo scientiarum,” the knowledge-making of the tool-using animal *homo sapiens* will turn out to be nothing but the most advanced form of tool-making and tool-using. And consequently, in light of the newly imposed ideological horizon of naturalism, the most advanced university training will be nothing but a training in the servile arts—in highly advanced “tool knowledge” of a technical or managerial sort—for the purpose of being able to fix those kinds of things that can be fixed with the help of tools.

If nothing else, Newman’s vision serves at least as a provocative reminder that the only thing that can save the university from the reductive and, in the end, detrimental distortions of philosophical naturalism—and from its Nietzschean genealogical deconstruction—is the discipline that allows for the widest possible scope of truth. Only with theology as the capstone of the arch of university disciplines will the arch achieve the widest possible scope, will the university remain open to a maximum of interrelated and complementary sciences, will a university education remain in all areas of knowledge essentially philosophical, and will universal knowledge as an end in and of itself be intelligible and desirable.⁴⁰

³⁹ “The human being is a wolf to [his or her fellow] human being.” Hobbes’s famous saying is to be found in the *Epistola dedicatoria* of his treatise *De cive: On the Citizen*, ed. Richard Tuck and Michael Silverthorne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 3.

⁴⁰ This most extensive scope of the arch is enabled by understanding the universe as creation. The difference between First Being and participated being, and the use of analogy, allow for a surpassingly comprehensive vision of the whole of created reality without suppressing the unique kinds of knowledge to which its different parts give rise. Pope Benedict XVI, in his last address to the members of

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.⁴¹ Natural theology and, a

the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, put this crucial matter in broadly Thomistic terms: “It is precisely this inbuilt ‘logical’ and ‘analogical’ organization of nature that encourages scientific research and draws the human mind to discover the horizontal co-participation between beings and the transcendental participation by the First Being. The universe is not chaos or the result of chaos, rather, it appears ever more clearly as an ordered complexity which allows us to rise, through comparative analysis and analogy, from specialization towards a more universalizing viewpoint and vice versa. While the very first moments of the cosmos and life still elude scientific observation, science nonetheless finds itself pondering a vast set of processes which reveals an order of evident constants and correspondences and serves as essential components of permanent creation” (“Address of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI to Members of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences on the Occasion of the Plenary Assembly,” November 8, 2012; available on the Vatican website). The scope of the arch envisioned by Pope Benedict allows the full, non-reductive integration of the natural sciences with all of the humanities in a universal horizon of maximum order and complexity. Nothing less than the scope of this arch is what Newman had in mind in *The Idea of a University*.

- ⁴¹ It remains a simple fact that skepticism is unable to quench genuine philosophical inquiry that is teleologically ordered to the ultimate truth—the Sophists are superseded by Plato and Aristotle; Montaigne is superseded by Descartes; Hume is superseded by Kant, Fichte, Hegel, and Schelling; Nietzsche and Dilthey are superseded by Bergson and Husserl. But skepticism always seems to return, someone might rightly observe. Husserl offers a suggestive philosophical reason for the ongoing return of skepticism. According to Husserl, the philosophical inability definitively to overcome skepticism has its roots in a hitherto unacknowledged truth that skepticism again and again attests to—the dependence of all knowledge on the subjective consciousness. Husserl’s theory of transcendental, phenomenological, and apodictic reduction is his attempt to acknowledge this moment of truth in skepticism and thereby once and for all to overcome skepticism and thus definitively to establish a true and lasting first philosophy. (See Edmund Husserl, *Erste Philosophie*, Vol. 1: *Kritische Ideengeschichte* [Husserliana, Vol. VII]; Vol. 2: *Theorie der phänomenologischen Reduktion* [Husserliana, Vol. VIII].) Alas, despite Husserl’s most rigorous effort at re-establishing first philosophy in the post-skeptical form of a transcendental phenomenology, skepticism returned anyway in form of Richard Rorty’s pragmatism and Jacques Derrida’s “différance.” *Pace* Husserl, I would want to suggest that what might be conceived as the moment of truth in skepticism (the dependence of knowledge on subjective consciousness) is consequent upon the preceding failure to recognize the principle of non-contradiction as a metaphysical first principle (that is, the principle of non-contradiction is true first and foremost of things themselves, without qualification—in short, of being in general—and therefore is true also of things as they appear to us and as we conceive them). Hence, arguably, since Aristotle’s successful defense of the principle of non-contradiction as a metaphysical principle in book IV of his *Metaphysics* against the Sophists, the Aristotelian-Thomist instantiation of the *philosophia perennis* can be understood as the ongoing

fortiori, revealed theology affirm the intimation that the human intellect operates in a horizon of transcendent truth, indeed, of subsistent truth, First Truth, and that the pursuit of knowledge is a created participation in the divine perfection of knowledge.⁴² Theology, natural and revealed, as capstone allows the university to understand and to appreciate its teaching and inquiry as intrinsically meaningful. Theology, natural and revealed, as capstone guarantees a genuinely liberal education.

Newman's vision reminds us all too moderns that 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, natural and revealed, constantly 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. For 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.⁴³

In the end, 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 upstream toward the "idea" of a university. Or we may drift with Nietzsche downstream, allow ourselves to be carried away by the dominant jet stream, and eventually resign ourselves to the polytechnic utiliversity, that is, to the tacit betrayal of the idea of the university. One thing is clear beyond doubt

supersession of all forms of skepticism *a radice* up to and including the twentieth century. In short, the rock of realism on which all forms of skepticism shatter is the principle of non-contradiction as a metaphysical first principle. Instead of overcoming skepticism, all forms of transcendental idealism ever so subtly enshrine it by making the *res cogitans*, the transcendental ego, or the reflexive self the starting point of epistemic certitude. Skepticism does return, not because of some hitherto unacknowledged moment of truth it points to, but rather because of the failure to recognize the principle of non-contradiction as a metaphysical first principle. Arguably, this recognition is so exceedingly difficult, not because the principle of non-contradiction as a *metaphysical* first principle might be so remote, but on the contrary, precisely because this principle obtains with such surpassing obviousness and because it is so utterly fundamental to the constitution of things and hence also to our thinking and speaking about them.

⁴² See Thomas Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 1, a. 7 and a. 8, and *ST I*, q. 16.

⁴³ See Josef Pieper, *Leisure, The Basis of Culture*, trans. Gerald Malsbary (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 1998) for what is still the best account available of this crucial insight.

though—wherever theology, natural and revealed, is permitted to make its distinct contribution to universal education, it will without fail foster a keen awareness of the intrinsic value of the arduous journey upstream so that one may contemplate the source of all things. For, after all, “when God is forgotten the creature itself grows unintelligible.”⁴⁴

Precisely the uselessness of the contemplation of the whole and its First Cause that constitutes the very center of the education envisioned in Newman’s *The Idea of a University*, is most vehemently denounced and most desperately needed in our late modern, techno-capitalist societies. Almost singularly among the moderns, Newman articulates 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.”⁴⁵

Is There a Way to Escape the Alternative of Newman or Nietzsche?

There might be numerous academicians at home in the humanities department of contemporary liberal arts colleges and even research universities who feel keenly the force of Newman’s provocative vision but who find the prescribed medicine at the same time too bitter tasting and the journey upstream too arduous for their students and possibly also for themselves. They might wonder whether there might not be a compromise, a solution that would allow one to stay in place midstream, to gain enough energy to fight the pull downstream but forego the too radical journey upstream. The proposed method for such a limited defense of a “status quo humanism” would most likely consist in an intensified education of the imagination by way of an increased “literacy,” of a literary, cultural, historical, and artistic kind. Such an imagination-focused approach will, however, fail to produce sufficient energy to stem the pull downstream. First and foremost, there exist insurmountable disagreements between the proponents of classical, Enlightenment, and genealogical approaches over the exact scope and content of the canon of texts that is supposed to serve this purpose. But more importantly, even if such disagreements could be over-

⁴⁴ Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes* §36.

⁴⁵ Josef Pieper, *Happiness & Contemplation*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 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.”

come, such a halfway solution will ultimately have to fail simply because of its exclusive or at least privileged focus on educating the imagination at the expense of the schooling in metaphysical inquiry and contemplation.

In 1946, an Irish contemplative of note, that is, a person without any philosophical or academic agenda of his own, made a keen observation about an emerging intellectual problem that has only escalated since:

[T]he source of all the evils and errors in the intellectual life of today—the disease that makes much of its utterances, the mere wanderings of a feverish imagination—is the loss of metaphysics and of the ability for abstract thought. . . . The human intellect draws its food for thought from the working of the senses, and when it represents to itself the *idea* of any object, that internal sense which is called the imagination, tries to form some corresponding picture or phantasm of the same object in terms of sensation or sense experience. . . . Now, one of the first things one has to learn in metaphysical thought, is to think with *ideas* and not with *phantasms*. One can imagine contradictions, but one cannot *think* them. . . . Obviously failure to abstract completely from the particular accidents of the phantasm may lead to error, and when one argues from phantasms instead of ideas—doing one's thinking with the imagination instead of with the intellect—confusion and obscurity are inevitable. Metaphysics is the science of being—that is, of anything that exists or can exist—as being, and is, therefore, at the root of all other sciences, which indeed presuppose it. It has been abandoned by the modern mind, which seems to be unable to think otherwise than with its imagination. What cannot be imagined is—according to it—impossible; what can be imagined is, therefore, capable of being and existence. From this disease of the mind, we get sentiment for principle in morals, the particular for the general in argument, metaphor in place of reality, opinion for certainty, prejudice for judgment, quantity for quality, matter for the ultimate reality, and all the whole host of false coins that are current in the intellectual commerce of today. Curiously enough, it is often the trained mind that shows the greatest tendency to errors of this sort. The mathematician tends to think in terms of symbols and graphs, or at least in terms of quantity; the scientist, when he is not a mathematician, tends to be a mechanic.⁴⁶

The Irish contemplative is right in denouncing the detrimental effects brought about by the loss of metaphysical inquiry and the confinement of thought to the limits of the imagination alone. At the same time, his

⁴⁶ Dom Eugene Boylan, O.C.S.O., *This Tremendous Lover* (Allen, TX: Christian Classics, 1987; originally published 1947), 117–18. For a more exacting formal consideration of the same issue as it pertains to the division of sciences, see Thomas Aquinas, *Expositio super librum Boethii De trinitate*, q. 5, a. 3 and q. 6, a. 2 (Thomas Aquinas, *The Divisions and Methods of the Sciences*, trans. Armand Maurer, 4th rev. ed. [Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1986], 32–46 and 74–80).

somewhat unnuanced bemoaning of the “mere wanderings of a feverish imagination,” though not inaccurate, makes his critique lopsided. It seems that thought comes completely into its own only as abstract thought, that is, at the very moment when the intellect severs itself once and for all from the imagination. The *philosophia perennis*, however, has always acknowledged that for the *animal rationale*, due to our hylomorphic constitution, there obtains an intimate connection between the imagination (*phantasia*), the faculty of representation, and the intellect (*nous*), the faculty of simple and complex thought.⁴⁷ As faculty of representation, the imagination remains the permanent foundation for the intellect’s operation. Hence, while always depending on the imagination for representational content, the intellect’s proper operation requires it to be essentially different from the imagination. Scientific knowledge, universal intelligibility, depends upon the ability of human thought to abstract degrees of intelligibility (*noemata*) from the deliveries of the senses and from the particular representations of the imagination (*phantasmata*).⁴⁸

To put this complex epistemological matter into the more proximate context of higher education and into the received idiom of the Aristotelian-Thomist tradition of discourse: Many college and university students are trained well to study objects of the first degree of abstraction, a process that abstracts physical, sensible nature from the accidental aspects and conditions of individual matter. The first degree of abstraction characterizes the objects of the natural sciences. Many students are also trained well to study objects of the second degree of abstraction, a process that attends to the intelligible matter of quantities, magnitudes, numbers, figures, and forms in separation from any accidental aspects of individual

⁴⁷ See Aristotle, *De Anima* III, 7 and 8; Thomas Aquinas, *In Aristotelis Librum de Anima Commentarium*, liber III, lectio XII and XIII; and George P. Klubertanz, S.J., *The Philosophy of Human Nature* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1953), 191–95. For a helpful elucidation of Aristotle’s subtle and dense discussion in the *De anima*, see the extensive commentary by Ronald Polansky, *Aristotle’s De anima* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 489–93; 497–500.

⁴⁸ Aristotle establishes this absolutely crucial point in book III, 4 of his *De Anima*. I will offer only the most pertinent section (430a2–9): “Thought is itself thinkable in exactly the same way as its objects are. For in the case of objects which involve no matter, what thinks and what is thought are identical; for speculative knowledge and its object are identical. . . . In the case of those which contain matter each of the objects of thought is only potentially present. It follows that while they will not have thought in them (for thought is a potentiality of them only in so far as they are capable of being disengaged from matter) thought may yet be thinkable.” (I have cited the translation from J. A. Smith that can be found in *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. by Jonathan Barnes, Vol. 1 [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984], 683).

matter, from physical, sensible nature, and from essential configurations of things. The second degree of abstraction characterizes the objects of mathematics. Only few students are introduced, however, to study objects of the third degree of abstraction, a process that completely transcends the condition of what is sensible and quantifiable, and therefore characteristic of material objects. The third degree of abstraction characterizes the purely intelligible objects of logic and metaphysics.⁴⁹

What the Irish contemplative is rightly concerned with, if not alarmed about, is the almost comprehensive eclipse of the third degree of abstraction from higher education. What he does not emphasize sufficiently, however, is the indispensable role the imagination plays in preparing and accompanying intellectual inquiry and learning pertaining to all three degrees of abstraction. The imagination as the representational faculty can never be left behind like a ladder that one can dispense with after having reached the higher level. Furthermore, the productive associations of the imagination are central to narrative and symbolic thinking and hence crucial for the production, reception, and interpretation of poetry, literature, art, and music.

The humanities' halfway solution that proposes a privileged if not exclusive formation of the imagination (at the expense of thought and inquiry pertaining especially to the third degree of abstraction) will undoubtedly increase textual, cultural, and historical literacy, will very likely contribute to aesthetic and possibly also to character formation (*Bildung*), and if well done, will raise and consider 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?"⁵⁰ But if students are not introduced simultaneously or subsequently into the kind of philosophical inquiry that might enable them to pursue these questions in a rigorous and sustained metaphysical way, such an education of the imagination stands in danger of producing an incommensurable array of views. Neglecting inquiries into the first principles of the theoretical and practical intellect, inquiries that would entail discriminations between true and false, good and evil, students will find themselves unprepared, if not

⁴⁹ The three degrees of abstraction are not to be misunderstood as successive rungs of a ladder, one degree leading to the next—one above the other in the same generic line; rather, they answer to *essentially* different types of intellectual operation. See Benedict Ashley, *The Way toward Wisdom*, 138, and Thomas Aquinas, *Expositio super librum Boethii De trinitate*, q. 5, a. 3, and idem, *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics*, nos. 1156; 1160–61; 1162–65.

⁵⁰ Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation*, 74.

unable, to think on the level of principles. They will, consequently, rely on the transient deliveries of their imagination, emotions, and what they regard as personal experiences. The very lack of understanding first principles of thought and action will give rise to a pervasive skepticism, to the embrace of the intellectually lazy and indifferent pluralism of the “kingdom of whatever” (Brad Gregory), and eventually to the joyful or resigned journey downstream into the Nietzschean dystopia. In short, when undertaken *without* the schooling in metaphysical inquiry and contemplation, the *per se* laudable education of the imagination will not generate sufficient energy to stem the pull downstream. On the contrary, when prepared and accompanied by a substantive education of the imagination, a rigorous schooling in metaphysical inquiry and contemplation will undoubtedly go much further than without such a preparatory education of the imagination. For a student with such a schooling of intellect and imagination will eventually become, as Newman felicitously put it, a “master of the twofold Logos, the thought and the word, distinct, but inseparable from each other.”⁵¹

A Pragmatic Postscript

On a very mundane but very concrete level, it is all too obvious that the increasing use of technological tools in the college and university classroom—hailed as “aids of the imagination”—will only intensify the inability and the unwillingness of students to engage in thought and inquiry pertaining to the third degree of abstraction. Instead of liberating students from being tyrannized by the constant titillation of their imagination, and hence from “the wanderings of the feverish imagination,” the use of these tools will only intensify the students’ captivity to the imagination and will consequently make them unable to sustain the rigor of genuinely abstract thought and, therefore, of intellectual contemplation. Within the limits of the imagination alone, thought becomes at best the transient acme of the productive imagination. Because the operation of the imagination depends on being fed (next to sense memory) by the senses, and especially the visual sense, students who think first and fore-

⁵¹ Newman, *The Idea of a University*, 254; University Subjects II: “Literature,” section 9. The schooling of the imagination does entail another dimension, one largely ignored or repressed in a modernity shaped by Protestant iconoclasm: the contemplation of the image and the central truth to which such contemplation gives rise, the antithesis of immanence and transcendence. For a philosophically and theologically instructive and historically saturated reflection on the centrality of the image/icon for the education of the imagination, see Thomas Pfau, “Rethinking the Image, With Some Reflections on G. M. Hopkins,” *The Yearbook of Comparative Literature* 57 (2011): 30–60.

most, if not exclusively, within the limits of the imagination alone, depend for their thinking on the ongoing stimulation of their senses, especially of their visual sense. They tend to satisfy this need primarily by way of visual entertainment offered by a multitude of media outlets and electronic gadgets. For students whose thinking is in such a profound way bound to and bounded by the imagination, metaphysical inquiry and contemplation become exceedingly difficult if not outright impossible.

It is, furthermore, not surprising at all that college and university students increasingly expect their education to appeal to their imagination and hence to take on the characteristics of the visual entertainment they rely on in order to keep their imagination stimulated in a way that is—fun. On the contemporary market of higher education in the United States, ruled by the consumer and consequently by a stiff competition between colleges and universities, the prospective student is lured with promises of existential excitement, physical comfort, visual entertainment, and comprehensively—fun (not to mention, of course, the promise of social and economic advancement, that is, utility). What chance of success would a program of universal education stand that promised to students—who have been left largely unprepared by most American high schools to read competently texts of a mildly demanding nature or to write coherently structured and compellingly argued papers—neither entertainment nor utility, but rather the arduous inquiry into and contemplation of truth and, indeed, the imperfect albeit profound happiness that is a property of such contemplation and the transient albeit deep joy that is an accompaniment of such contemplation? If heeded today, would not Newman's vision fall victim to his own famous verdict of being "unreal," that is, while theoretically compelling, nevertheless being out of touch with the concrete exigencies of real life?—The remedy needed most is often hated most by those who need it most desperately for their cure.⁵² The remedy needed most entails a transvaluation of values such that the distinct community of teachers and students that originally constituted the Academy of Plato and the Lyceum of Aristotle and much later the medieval university would once again in some future, genuinely renewed or newly constituted university be able to affirm unequivocally the final end of what is truly "academic": "The least

⁵² It was only after I had penned it that I became aware that this last sentence echoes a memorable phrase of Livy to be found in his preface to book I of *The History of Rome from Its Foundation*, where he invites the reader to observe "the dark dawning of our modern day when we can neither endure our vices nor face the remedies needed to cure them" (Livy, *The Early History of Rome*, trans. Aubrey de Sélingcourt [London: Penguin Classics, 2002], 30).

knowledge that one can attain of the highest things is more desirable than the most certain knowledge one can attain of the lowest things.”⁵³

Appendix

Natural theology faces unique conceptual difficulties, conflicts, and intrinsic limitations. Practitioners of natural theology have to be constantly alert to the danger of ever so subtly turning God conceptually into an instantiation, albeit the most perfect one, of infinite being, or worse, of identifying God and world. The critique of such errors is integral to the metaphysical efforts of the *philosophia perennis*. According to the principle “*abusus non tollit usum*,” recurring instantiations of “onto-theology” or, worse, pantheism, do not require the abandonment of natural theology as such. Ironically, Newman’s way of characterizing natural theology seems to make him vulnerable to Heidegger’s famous charge of onto-theology. For in Newman’s way of putting the matter, God as infinite Being seems to fall conceptually under a comprehensive univocal concept of being (hence “onto-theology”), a conceptual move that putatively obscures or even obliterates the absolute difference between God and creature. This view was allegedly held by Scotus, Suárez, and their students. According to Scotus, understood on his own metaphysical terms, however, being as such (*ens inquantum ens*) is the primary object of the intellect and hence the simplest of all concepts, which consequently cannot be defined. Considered in abstraction from the distinction between infinite and finite being (being now signifying only opposition to nothing), Scotus arrives at a common or univocal concept of being. This logico-semantic concept of being comprises infinite being, which can be conceived in virtue of the common concept of being in its imperfect mode (the finite being of the creature) or in its intrinsic perfect mode (God). The concept of being is univocally applied to God and creature because the utterly diverse realities of infinite being in its intrinsic perfect mode (God) and in its imperfect mode (finite being) are conceived in the common concept of being *both* in an imperfect way. The difficulty at the core of Scotus’s conception seems to be the following: On the one hand Scotus seems to hold that being is a univocal predicate, but simultaneously he seems to deny its univocal predication of all things. This is indeed a problem, but not the problem of “onto-theology.”

Thomas Aquinas’s ontology is fundamentally different. In contrast to the ontology that arises with Henry of Ghent and Duns Scotus, who conceive

⁵³ ST I, q. 1, a. 5, ad 1: “[M]inimum quod potest haberi de cognitione rerum altissimarum, desiderabilius est quam certissima cognitio quae habetur de minimis rebus.” Thomas paraphrases here a thought from Aristotle’s *Parts of Animals* I, 5 (644b31).

being as a real quiddity, a fixed being or thing (*res*), Thomas conceives being fundamentally as actuality (*esse*) and understands God (*ipsum esse subsistens*) to be the transcendent cause and principle of being in general (*ens commune*). Consequently, he regards the knowledge of the First Cause as the goal of metaphysical inquiry and not as its proper subject. (See Benedict Ashley, *The Way toward Wisdom*, 139–44, for a succinct presentation of this complex matter.) In comparison with Scotus, Suárez, and their schools, Thomists are considerably more reserved about the scope and the conceptual precision metaphysical inquiry permits; for, according to the Thomist School, metaphysical reasoning has to proceed by causality, negation, and eminence, and is always expressed in analogical terms. Hence, Thomists are keenly aware that any natural knowledge of God that metaphysical inquiry does attain, is—even at its best—indirect, negative, and imperfect. The intricate issue under dispute (which forms the background for the question of the precise status of natural theology in relation to the proper subject matter of metaphysical inquiry) is the question of the analogy or univocity of being. By offering a pithy summary of the central thesis of Étienne Gilson’s great opus on Duns Scotus (*Duns Scot: Introduction à ses positions fondamentales* [Paris: Vrin, 1952]), Jean-François Courtine names the central problematic: “Thomist analogy and Scotist univocity do not treat of the same being, and it is therefore impossible, on the part of Scotus, in order to be at variance with or to refute the former, to pretend to retrieve the authentic thought of Aquinas” (*Inventio analogiae: Métaphysique et ontothéologie* [Paris: Vrin, 2005], 283, fn 3; my translation). For presentations of the Scotist position, see Timotheus A. Barth, “Being, Univocity, and Analogy according to Duns Scotus,” in *John Duns Scotus, 1265–1965*, ed. J. K. Ryan and B. M. Bonansea (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1965), 210–62, and Ludger Honnefelder, *Ens in quantum ens: Der Begriff des Seienden als solchen als Gegenstand der Metaphysik nach der Lehre des Johannes Duns Scotus* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1979). For a more accessible defense of Scotus’s semantic (instead of metaphysical) claims about the concept of being as univocal for God and creatures and the misplaced charge of onto-theology against him (and by implication against Newman), see Richard Cross, “‘Where Angels Fear to Tread’: Duns Scotus and Radical Orthodoxy,” *Antonionum* 76 (2001): 7–41. For a presentation of the Thomist position as represented by John Capreolus and Sylvester of Ferrara, see Lawrence Dewan, O.P., *Form and Being: Studies in Thomistic Metaphysics* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 81–95, and Bernard Montagnes, O.P., *The Doctrine of the Analogy of Being according to Thomas Aquinas*, trans. E. M. Macierowsky (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2004); for a presentation of the Thomist position as represented by Cajetan, see James F.

Anderson, *The Bond of Being: An Essay on Analogy and Existence* (St. Louis: Herder, 1949), Ralph McInerny, *Aquinas and Analogy* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996), and Steven A. Long, *Analogia Entis, Metaphysics, and the Act of Faith* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011). For a brilliant reassessment along logical semantic lines of Cajetan's doctrine of analogy, see Joshua P. Hochschild, *The Semantics of Analogy: Rereading Cajetan's De Nominum Analogia* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010). For a recent critical as well as constructive engagement of the Protestant theological dismissal of the analogy of being, see *The Analogy of Being: Invention of the Antichrist or the Wisdom of God*, ed. Thomas Joseph White, O.P. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010). N.V.