Angelo Campodonico - University of Genoa - The Idea of University in John Henry Newman[1]

Introduction

John Henry Newman has been interested in education since his studies at the University of Oxford. In general all his work is animated by an educational and apologetic interest, very much attentive towards times and interlocutors. In fact he finds this kind of intellectual attitude in the Fathers of the Church and particularly in Augustine whom has studied all along his life. But his interest on the topic of education and university learning is particularly evident in his *The Idea of University*, which has been written in occasion of the foundation of the University of Dublin, and also in other minor works.

We have to remind that in the first decades of the Nineteenth century there have been important changes in English Universities. In particular: in London has been founded the University College, the first University without a Faculty of Theology. Against it, the King's college has been founded by the partisans of the traditional idea of University education. But what happened in Ireland during the same period? It had been the original intention of the English Protestant rulers of Ireland, after their final conquest of the island in 1691, to deprive the Catholic and Gaelic population of education in order to reduce them to dependence. Catholics were barred from universities. No Catholic could found or maintain a school. The rulers of Ireland were to be Protestant and English speaking. As Alasdair Macintyre writes

> if Gaelic culture continued to flourish as it did, it was in key part because of the teaching of itinerant schoolmasters, who in their hedge schools sustained a tradition of teaching in the Irish language and of communicating knowledge of Latin—more rarely of Greek—and of mathematics to pupils who would otherwise have been deprived. Catholic bishops had been banished from Ireland and only a small number of priests were al-lowed: the penalty for a bishop or an unregistered priest who was discovered in Ireland was to be hanged, drawn, and quartered. But as the laws directed against the Catholic faith were first relaxed in practice and then repealed, not only did the Church flourish, but as early as 1750 there was some kind of school in every Catholic parish. In 1795 the British government, by then hoping to find in the Catholic bishops an ally against Revolutionary France, not only allowed, but encouraged and subsidized the founding of St. Patrick's College, Maynooth. By 1850 there was a growing Catholic urban middle class and thirty-one Catholic secondary schools. Catholic emancipation opened up the possibility of professional careers for educated young Catholics and demands for new institutions of higher education were pressed upon the bishops by students and parents.[2]

The British government was well aware of this pressure and in 1845 it established by law three Queen's Colleges in Belfast, Cork, and Galway. These were to be secular colleges, open to

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[1] Cf., in particular, J.H. Newman, *The idea of a University defined and illustrated in nine discourses delivered to the catholics of Dublin II in occasional lectures and essays addressed to the members of the catholic University by John Henry Cardinal Newman* in *The Works of Cardinal John Henry Newman*, Longmans, Green and co., London 1907, 9th edition. See http.//www.newmanreader.org. The first edition is *The Idea of University Defined and Illustrated I. In Nine Discourses Delivered to the Catholics of Dublin*. II in *Occasional Lectures and Essays Addressed to the Members of the Catholic University,* Basil Montagu Pickering, London 1873. See also in the same *Works*, *Rise and Progress of Universities*, Basil Montague Pickering, London 1872 in *Historical Sketches* with the essays *Northmen and Normans in England and Ireland, Medieval Oxford e Convocation of Canterbury*.

[2] A. MacIntyre, *God, philosophy, universities. A Selective History of the Catholic Philosophical Tradition,* Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, inc, Lanham 2009, p. 138.

Catholics and Protestants, both as teachers and as students. No theology would be taught and degrees would be awarded by a separate examining body, the Queen's University of Ireland, founded in 1850. The model that was followed was that provided by University College, London, founded in 1826 as no theology was taught. The response of the Irish bishops to the founding of the Queen's Colleges varied. Some were prepared to welcome any increase in educational opportunity for young Catholics. But the more acute understood that secular universities would inevitably become agents of secularization and that in higher education it is likely that, if an institution is professedly non-Catholic it will in practice and effect be anti-Catholic. The bishops, assembled at the Synod of Thurles, therefore condemned the Queen's Colleges and prepared to found a Catholic university that would be under their own authority. But what would it be to found such a university in the 1850s? The bishops themselves were far from clear. It was left to Newman, whom they had invited to become the first rector of their new university, to provide an answer to their question in the lectures he delivered in Dublin, at the invitation of the bishops, in 1852.

That answer has an importance that has long outlasted the university the bishops founded, the Catholic University of Ireland. Both during Newman's tenure as rector from 1854 to 1858 and thereafter those who led that university had to wrestle with almost insuperable difficulties of various kinds, until it was re-established, in effect refounded, as a Jesuit institution, University College Dublin. As Macintyre holds "Newman's legacy as a university administrator had provided all too little for his successors to build on. With the philosophy that informed his Dublin lectures it was quite otherwise".[3]

1) Newman's idea of University

Which are the main points of Newman's idea of University? In the first pages of the *Idea of a University* he writes that University

> is a place of teaching universal knowledge. This implies that its object is, in the one hand, intellectual, not moral: and on the other, that is the diffusion and extension of knowledge rather than the advancement. If its object were scientific and psychological discovery, I do not see why a University should have students; if religious training, I do not see how it can be the seat of literature and sciente. [4]

Therefore Newman stresses primarily that University is not a mere research centre, as there have been many **along** history. In University teaching, learning and the presence of students are fundamental since its origins in the middle Ages. We have to think of research in strict synergy with teaching and vice versa. In the University milieu research tends to communicate itself in teaching and, inversely, teaching encourages research.

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[3] A. MacIntyre, *God, philosophy, universities. A Selective History of the Catholic Philosophical Tradition,* Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, inc, Lanham 2009, p. 139.

[4] Newman, *The idea of a University,* p. 9.

Secondarily Newman finds out in University an intrinsic polarity between person and structure. On the one hand University grows up and develops thank to some persons that are leaders and generate other people: the teachers. Without the role of teachers University inevitably decades in a kind of arid formalism. On the other hand University requires a structure which gives order and stability in time and in which the abilities and skills of teachers are saved. As he holds, universities

> begin in Influence, they end in System. At first, whatever good they may have done, has been the work of persons, of personal exertions; of faith in persons, of personal attachments. Their professors have been a sort of preachers and missionaries, and have not only taught, but have won over or inflamed their hearers. As time has go on, it has been found out that personal influence does not last for ever; that individuals get past their work, that they die, that they cannot always be depended on , that they change…Accordingly, system has of necessity been superadded to individual action; a University has been embodied in a constitution, it has exerted authority, it has been protected by rights and privileges, it has enforced discipline, it has developed itself into College…[5]

Newman values retrospectively his personal university experience:

> An academical system without the personal influence of teachers upon pupils, it is an arctic winter; it will create an ice-bound, petrified, cast-iron University, and nothing else…I have known a time in a great School of Letters, when things went on for the most part by mere routine, and form took the place of earnestness. I have experienced a state of things, in which teachers were caught off from the taught as by an insurmountable barrier…[6]

In sum: Newman strongly stresses that education and instruction presuppose a concept of human being not as a "buffered self", as in modern liberal worldview, but as a person naturally in relation with others, therefore able and interested in being educated by reality and by other people. [7]

Thirdly, primary task of university education an instruction is not utility, as Locke and the utilitarians thought, but knowledge as knowledge, that means the formation of mind. But this ideal of education, called liberal, because disinterested, in the long term shows to be extremely useful. The student of the University learns to learn, to expand his knowledge. This ability to learn from everything and from everyone can be applied to every field of knowledge:

> This then I show I should solve the fallacy, for so I must call it, by which Locke and his disciples would frighten us from cultivating the intellect, under the notion that no education is useful which does not teach us some temporal calling, or some mechanical art, or some physical secret. I say that a cultivated intellect, because it is a good in itself, brings with it a power and a grace to every work and occupation which it undertakes, and enables us to be more useful, and to a greater number.[8]

The difference between Universities and schools whose task is primarily practical usefulness is grounded, according to Newman, and here we come back again to the second point, on the role that teachers play in the first:

> This then, is the point in which the institutions I am speaking of fail; here, on the contrary, is the advantage of such lectures as you are attending, Gentlemen, in our University. You have come, not merely to be taught, but to learn. You have come to exert your minds. You have come to make what you hear your own, by putting out your hand, as it were, to grasp it and to appropriate it. You do not come merely to hear a lecture, or to read a book, but you come for that catechetical instruction, which consists in sort of conversation between your lecturer and you. He tells you a thing and, and he asks you to repeat it after him. He questions you, he examines you, he will not let you go till he has proof, not only that you have heard, but that you know.[9]

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[5] Newman, *Rise and Progress of Universities*, p. 77
[6] Ibi, pp. 74-75.
[7] Cf. C. Taylor, *A Secular Age,* Harvard University Press, Harvard 2007, p. 38.
[8] *The idea of a University,* p. 167.
[9] Ibi*,* p. 489.

To sum up: Newman supports education as cultivating mind, which means "learn to learn" under the guide of persons who do not limit themselves to communicate contents, but who aim to acquire wisdom and to educate minds:

> The principle of real dignity in Knowledge, its worth, its desirableness, considered irrespectively of its results, is its germ within it of a scientific or a philosophical process. This is how it comes to be an end in itself; this is why it admits of being called Liberal. Not to know the relative disposition of things is the state of slaves or children; to have mapped out the Universe is the boast, or at least the ambition, of Philosophy. Moreover, such knowledge is not a mere extrinsic or accidental advantage, which is ours today and another's tomorrow, which may be got up from a book, and easily forgotten again, which we can command or communicate at our pleasure, which we can borrow for the occasion, carry about in our hand, and take into the market; it is an acquired illumination, it is a habit, a personal possession, and an inward endowment. And this is the reason, why it is more correct, as well as more usual, to speak of a University as a place of education, than of instruction, though, when knowledge is concerned, instruction would at first sight have seemed the more appropriate word. We are instructed, for instance, in manual exercises, in the fine and useful arts, in trades, and in ways of business; for these are methods, which have little or no effect upon the mind itself, are contained in rules committed to memory, to tradition, or to use, and bear upon an end external to themselves. But education is a higher word; it implies an action upon our mental nature, and the formation of a character; it is something individual and permanent, and is commonly spoken of in connexion with religion and virtue. [10]

Since the role of teachers is vital in University, it cannot be replaced by mere information, as that we find in magazines:

> …no book can convey the special spirit and delicate peculiarities of its subject with that rapidity and certainty attend on the sympathy of mind with mind through the eyes, the look, the accent, and the manner, in casual expression thrown off at the moment, and the unstudied turns of familiar conversations…The general principles of any study you may learn by books at home; but the detail, the colour, the tone, the air, the life which makes it live in us, you must catch all these from those in whose it lives already…we must come to the teachers of wisdom, we must repair to the fountain, and drink there. [11]

Newman highlights that the *Mechanics' Institutes* are made for a passive reception of knowledge. And in Lecture IX of the *Idea of University* he points out: "A man may hear a thousand lectures, and read a thousand of volumes, and be at the end of the process very much were he was, as regards knowledge". [12]

From this point of view, fourthly, the main subject of Newman's idea of education in university is the relationship between the sectorial and one-sided approach of different sciences and the education of the whole man. Without this relationship there is no University at all. The acquisition of specialist knowledge and skills must be supplemented by an education of the whole man. Put in other terms: university is both a place of acquisition of particular knowledge and of education, better of education by means of particular and professional skills:

> If then I am arguing, and shall argue, against Professional or Scientific knowledge as the sufficient end of a University Education, let me not be supposed, Gentlemen, to be disrespectful towards particular studies, or arts, or vocations, and those who are engaged in them. In saying that Law or Medicine is not the end of a University course, I do not mean to imply that the University does not teach Law or Medicine. That indeed can it teach at all, if it does not teach something particular? It teaches all knowledge by teaching all branches of knowledge, and in no other way. I do but say that there will be this distinction as regards a Professor of Law, or of Medicine, or of Geology, or of Political Economy in a University and out of it, that out of a University he is in danger of being absorbed and narrowed by his pursuit,, and of

[10] Ibi, pp. 113-114.
[11] Newman, *Rise and Progress of Universities*, pp. 8-9.
[12] Newman, *The idea of a University*, p. 489.

giving Lectures which are the Lectures of nothing more than a lawyer, physician, geologist, or political economist; whereas in a University he will just know were he and his science stand, he has come to it, as it were, from a height, he has taken a survey of all knowledge, he is kept from extravagance by the very rivalry of other studies, he has gained from them a special illumination and largeness of mind and freedom and self-possession, and he treats his own in consequence with a philosophy and a resource, which belongs not to the study itself, but to his liberal education.[13]

In fact, as Newman writes about in another place of the book, university professors

viewed altogether, they approximate to a representation or subjective reflection of the objective truth, as nearly as is possible to the human mind, which advances towards the accurate apprehension of that object, in proportion to the number of sciences which it has mastered; and which, when certain sciences are away, in such a case has but a defective apprehension, in proportion to the value of the sciences which are thus wanting, and the importance of the field on which they are employed. [14]

In order to show the necessary interaction and complementarity of different sciences Newman makes a meaningful example:

Let us take, for instance, man himself as our object of contemplation; then at once we shall find we can view him in a variety of relations; and according to those relations are the sciences of which he is the subject-matter, and according to our acquaintance with them is our possession of a true knowledge of him. We may view him in relation to the material elements of his body, or to his mental constitution, or to his household and family, or to the community in which he lives, or to the Being who made him; and in consequence we treat of him respectively as physiologists, or as moral philosophers, or as writers of economics, or of politics, or as theologians. When we think of him in all these relations together, or as the subject at once of all the sciences I have named, then we may be said to reach unto and rest in the idea of man as an object or external fact, similar to that which the eye takes of his outward form. On the other hand, according as we are only physiologists, or only politicians, or only moralists, so is our idea of man more or less unreal; we do not take in the whole of him, and the defect is greater or less, in proportion as the relation is, or is not, important, which is omitted, whether his relation to God, or to his king, or to his children, or to his own component parts. [15]

This capacity of wisdom is the main role of philosophy according to Newman. More than a particular kind of knowledge, philosophy is a peculiar attitude towards knowledge. This kind of wisdom cannot be confused neither with mere erudition and with the encyclopaedism of Enligthment, nor with a sum of the knowledge of the different disciplines, although these dimensions have an important role in **widening of our mind:**

For instance, a great memory, as I have already said, does not make a philosopher, any more than a dictionary can be called a grammar. There are men who embrace in their minds a vast multitude of ideas, but with little sensibility about their real relations towards each other. These may be antiquarians, annalists, naturalists; they may be learned in the law; they may be versed in statistics; they are most useful in their own place; I should shrink from speaking disrespectfully of them; still, there is noting in such attainments to guarantee the absence of narrowness of mind. If they are nothing more than well-read men, or men of information, they have not what specially deserves the name of culture of mind, or fulfils the type of Liberal Education.

In like manner, we sometimes fall in with persons who have seen much of the world, and of the men who, in their day, have played a conspicuous part in it, but who generalize noting, and have no observation, in the true sense of the word. They abound in information in detail, curious and entertaining, about men and things; and, having lived under the influence of no very clear or settled principles, religious or political, they speak of every one and every tiling, only as: so many phenomena, which are complete in themselves, and lead to nothing, not discussing them, or teaching any truth, or instructing the hearer, but simply talking. No one would say that these persons, well informed as they are, had attained to any great culture of intellect or to philosophy.[16]

Furthermore Newman adds:

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[13] Newman, *The idea of a University*, pp. 166-67.
[14] Ibi, p. 47,
[15] Ibi, pp. 47-48.
[16] Ibi, p. 135.

The case is the same still more strikingly where the persons in question are beyond dispute men of inferior powers and deficient education. Perhaps they have been much in foreign countries, and they receive, in a passive, otiose, unfruitful way, the various facts which are forced upon them there. Seafaring men, for example, range from one end, of the earth to the other; but the multiplicity of external objects, which they have encountered, forms no symmetrical and consistent picture upon their imagination. [17]

Also it is useless reading only, restricting ourselves to accumulate notions. Memory alone might be a limit, rather than an advantage:

Such readers are only possessed by their knowledge, not possessed of it nay, in matter of fact they are often even carried away by it, without any volition of their own. Recollect, the Memory can tyrannize, as well as the Imagination. Derangement, I believe, has been considered as a loss of control over the sequence of ideas. The mind, once set in motion, is henceforth deprived of the power of initiation, and becomes the victim, of a tram of associations, one thought suggesting another, in the way of cause and effect, as if by a mechanical process or some physical necessity. No one, who has had experience of men of studious habits, but must recognize the existence of a parallel phenomenon in the case of those who have over-stimulated the Memory. In such persons Reason acts almost as feebly and as impotently as in the mailman; once fairly started on any subject whatever, they have no power of self-control; they passively endure the succession of impulses which are evolved out of the original exciting cause they are passed on from one idea to another and go steadily forward, plodding along one line of thought in spite of the amplest concessions of the hearer, or wandering from it in infinite digression in spite of his remostrances. [18]

Wisdom, which must be the main **aim** of University, requires a consciousness of the principles on which knowledge must be organized as well as the effort of creating harmony between old and new contents, acquiring therefore a kind of synoptical vision:

That only is true enlargement of mind which the power of viewing many things at once as one whole, of referring them severally to their true place in the universal system, of understanding their respective values, are determining their mutual dependence. Thus is that form of Universal Knowledge, of which I have on a former occasion spoken, set up in the individual intellect, and constitutes its perfection. Possessed of this real illumination, the mind never views any part of the extended subject-matter of Knowledge without recollecting that it is but a part, or without the associations, which spring from this recollection. It makes every thing in some sort lead to every thing else; it would communicate the image of the whole to every separate portion, till that whole becomes in imagination like a spirit, every where pervading and penetrating its component parts, and giving them one definite meaning. Just as our bodily organs, wean mentioned, recall their function in the body, as the word ‘creation’ suggests the Creator, and ‘subjects’ a sovereign, so, in the mind of the Philosopher, as we are abstractedly conceiving of him, the elements of the physical and moral world, sciences, arts, pursuits, ranks, offices, events, opinions, individualities, are all viewed as one, with correlative functions, and as gradually by successive combinations converging, one and all, to the true centre. [19]

The capacity of synthesis, by nature all-encompassing, opposite to one-sidedness is the benefit of true wisdom:

To have even a portion of this illuminative reason and true philosophy is the highest state to which nature can aspire, in the way of intellect; it puts the mind above the influences of chance and necessity, above anxiety, suspense, unsettlement, and superstition, which is the lot of the many. Men, whose minds are possessed with some one object, take exaggerated views of its importance, are feverish in the pursuit of it, make it the measure of things which are utterly foreign to it, and are startled and despond if it happens to fail them. They are ever in alarm or in transport. Those on the other hand, who have no object or principle whatever to hold by, lose their way, every step they take. They are thrown out, and do not know what to think or save, at every fresh juncture; they have no view of persons, or occurrences, or facts, which come suddenly upon them, and they hang upon the opinion of others, for want of internal resources. But the intellect, which has been disciplined to the perfection of its powers, which knows, and thinks while it knows, which has learned to leaven the dense mass of facts and events with the elastic force of reason, such an intellect cannot be partial, cannot be exclusive, cannot be impetuous, cannot be at a loss, cannot but be patient, collected, and

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[17] Newman, *The idea of a University*, pp. 135-36.
[18] Ibi, p. 141.
[19] Ibi, p. 137.

majestically calm, because it discerns the end in every beginning, the origin in every end, the law in every interruption, the limit in each delay; because it ever knows where it stands, and how its path lies from one point to another. [20]

Furthermore, speaking of that enlargement of mind that is the very aim of true education, Newman maintains with great insight:

The enlargement consists, not merely in the passive reception into the mind of a number of ideas unknown to it, but in the mind's energetic and simultaneous action upon and towards and among those new ideas, which are rushing in upon it. It is the action of a formative power, reducing to order and meaning the matter of our acquirements; it is a making the objects of our knowledge subjectively our own, or, to use a familiar word, it is a digestion of what we receive, into the substance of our previous state of thought; and without this no enlargement is said to follow. There is no enlargement, unless there be a comparison of ideas one with another, as they come before the mind, and a systematizing of them. We feel our minds to be growing and expanding then, when we not only learn, but refer what we learn to what we know already. It is not the mere addition to our knowledge that is the illumination; but the locomotion, the movement onwards, of that mental centre, to which both what we know, and what we are learning, the accumulating mass of our acquirements, gravitates. And therefore a truly great intellect, and recognized to be such by the common opinion of mankind, such as the intellect of Aristotle, or of St. Thomas, or of Newton, or of Goethe, (I purposely take instances within and without the Catholic pale, when I would speak of the intellect as such,) is one which takes a connected view of old and new, past and present, far and near, and which has an insight into the influence of all these one on another; without which there is no whole, and no centre. It possesses the knowledge, not only of things, but also of their mutual and true relations; knowledge, not merely considered as acquirement, but as philosophy. [21]

Now Newman wonders why erudition fascinates even when it is not expression of true wisdom. In fact

acquirements, again, are emphatically producible, and at a moment; they are a something to show, both for master and scholar; an audience, even though ignorant themselves of the subjects of an examination, can comprehend when questions are answered and when they are not. Here again is a reason why mental culture is in the minds of men identified with the acquisition of knowledge.

The same notion possesses the public mind, when it passes on from the thought of a school to that of a University: and with the best of reasons so far as this, that there is no true culture without acquirements, and that philosophy presupposes knowledge. It requires a great deal of reading. Or a wide range of information, to warrant us in putting: forth our opinions on any serious subject; and without such learning the most original mind may be able indeed to dazzle, to amuse, to refute, to perplex, but not to come to any useful result or any trustworthy conclusion. [22]

Fifthly, once we have stressed the role of philosophy, which roles do play in University, particularly in a Catholic University, religious faith and theology, as rational reflection on faith? If knowledge and, particularly, philosophy in University does not appreciate the central role of theology and therefore of God, it tends inevitably to fragmentation. Therefore a single aspect, a particular discipline assumes one-sidedly an exorbitant role and absorb in them the other disciplines. But Newman stresses that faith and theology can keep a central role in university education only if we appreciate them as true knowledge of reality and not as mere expression of emotions. If this were the case, as accordino to the liberal thought of the Enlightenment, they might legitimately be excluded from University. [23]

[20] Ibi, pp. 137-138.
[21] Ibi, p. 134.
[22] Ibi, pp. 128-129.
[23] See Macintyre, *God, philosophy, universities. A Selective History of the Catholic Philosophical Tradition*, pp. 146-47.

no religious profession, implies that those parties severally consider – not indeed that their own respective opinions are trifles in a moral and practical point of view - of course not; but certainly as much as this, that they are not knowledge. Did they in their hearts believe that their private views of religion, whatever they are, were absolutely and objectively true, it is inconceivable that they would so insult them as to consent to their omission in an Institution which is bound, from the nature of the case - from its very idea and its name - to make a profession of all sorts of knowledge whatever.[24]

In the *Idea* the critics toward the "University without religion", although particularly directed towards the London University are in fact a charge against the spirit of his time, liberal and latitudinarian. Those who better represent it think that Religion consists

…not in knowledge, but in feeling or sentiment. The Old Catholic notion, which still lingers in the established Church, was that faith was an intellectual act, its object truth, and its result knowledge. Thus if you look into the Anglican Prayer Book, you will find definite credenda as well as definite agenda; but in proportion as the Lutheran leaven spread, it becomes fashionable to say that Faith was not an acceptance of revealed doctrine, not an act of the intellect, but a feeling, an emotion, an affection, an appetency; and as this view of Faith obtained, so was the connexion of Faith with Truth and Knowledge more and more either forgotten or denied…Religion as such consisted in something short of intellectual exercises , wiz, in the affections, in the imagination, or inward persuasions and consolations, in pleasurable sensations, sudden changes, and sublime fancies… Religion was based on custom, on prejudice, on law, on education, on habit, on loyalty, on feudalism, on enlightened experience, on many, many things, but not at all on reason; reason was neither its warrant; nor its instrument, and science had as little connexion with it as with the fashions of the season, or the state of the weather…it is as unreasonable of course to demand for religion a chair in a University, as to demand one for fine feeling, sense of honour, patriotism, gratitude, maternal affection, or good companionship, proposal which would be simply unmeaning .[25]

In fact Newman holds that

no one would consent to drop the Newtonian theory, who thought it to have been proved true, in the same sense as the existence of the sun and moon is true. If, then, in an Institution which professes all knowledge, nothing is professed, nothing is taught about the Supreme Being, it is fair to infer that every individual in the number of those who advocate that Institution, supposing him consistent, distinctly holds that nothing is known for certain about the Supreme Being; nothing such, as to have any claim to be regarded as a material addition to the stock of general knowledge existing in the world. If on the other hand it turns out that something considerable is known about the Supreme Being, whether from Reason or Revelation, then the Institution in question professes every science, and yet leaves out the foremost of them. In a word, strong as may appear the assertion, I do not see how I can avoid making it, and bear with me, Gentlemen, while I do so, viz., such an Institution cannot be what it professes, if there be a God. I do not wish to declaim; but, by the very force of the terms, it is very plain, that a Divine Being and a University so circumstanced cannot coexist[26].

But with which arguments do this critics try to exclude religion and theology from the University? Newman maintains:

Nothing is more common in the world at large than to consider the resistance, made on the part of religious men, especially Catholics, to the separation of Secular Education from Religion, as a plain token that there is some real contrariety between human science and Revelation. To the multitude who draw this inference, it matters not whether the protesting parties avow their belief in this contrariety or not; it is borne in upon the many, as if it were self-evident, that religious men would not thus be jealous and alarmed about Science, did they not feel instinctively, though they may not recognize it, that knowledge is their born enemy, and that its progress, if it is not arrested, will be certain to destroy all that they hold venerable and dear. It looks to the world like a misgiving on our part similar to that which is imputed to our refusal to educate by means of the Bible only; why should you dread the sacred text, men say, if it be not against you? And in like manner, why should you dread secular education, except that it is against you? Why impede the circulation of books, which take religious views opposite to your own? Why forbid your children and scholars the free

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[24] Newman, *The idea of a University*, pp. 21-22.
[25] Ibi, pp. 28-29.
[26] Ibi, pp. 23-24.

perusal of poems or tales or essays or other light literature, which you fear would unsettle their minds? Why oblige them to know these persons and to shun those, if you think that your friends have reason on their side as fully as your opponents? Truth is bold and unsuspicious; want of self-reliance is the mark of falsehood. [27]

The obvious presupposition of incredulity in Newman's time is the conviction that

Religion is not the subject-matter of a science. 'You may have opinions in religion, you may have theories, you may have arguments, you may have probabilities you may have anything but demonstration, and therefore you cannot have sciente. [28]

According to the spirit of the Age,

Let us all keep to our own religious opinions respectively, and be content; but so far from it, upon no subject whatever has the intellect of man be fastened so intensely as upon Religion. And the misery is, that, if once we allow it to engage our attention, we are in a circle from which we never shall be able to extricate ourselves. Our mistake reproduces and corroborates itself. A small insect, a wasp or a fly, it is unable to make his way through the pane of glass; and his very failure is the very occasion of greater violence in his struggle then before. He is as heroically obstinate in his resolution to succeed as the assailant or defender of some critical battlefield; he is unflagging and fierce in an effort which cannot lead to anything beyond itself. When then in like manner, you have once resolved that certain religious doctrines shall be indisputably true, and that all men ought to perceive their truth, you have engaged in an undertaking which, though continued on to eternity, will never reach its aim; and since you are convinced you ought to do so, the more you have failed hitherto, the more violent and pertinacious will be your attempt in time to come. An further still, since you are not the only man in the world who is in this error, but one of ten thousand, all holding the general principle that Religion, is scientific, and yet allay differing as to the truths and facts and conclusions of this science, it follows that the misery of social disputation and disunion is added to the misery of a hopeless investigation, and life is not only wasted in fruitless speculation, but embittered by bigoted sectarianism. [29]

Against those who find out an opposition between faith and science Newman replies that also the knowledge of those who do not assent to Christian faith presupposes however a previous option, a faith which implies the absolutisation of a particular, i.e. of their own reason conceived as self-sufficient and as measure of reality. That kind of knowledge, which, according to Saint Paul, "inflates", can become absolutely independent from any religious reference, but, even when it undertakes one, it risks corrupting and making faith feeble. On the one hand in a country that does not profess faith, intellectualism, left to itself, becomes easily scepticism and incredulity; making human mind the measure of every thing, it finishes to view "Revealed Religion from an aspect of its own, - to fuse and recast it… all under the notion, conscious and inconscious, that the human intellect, self-educated and self-supported, is more true and perfect in its ideas and judgments than that of Prophets and Apostles…". [30]

On the other hand the very fact that knowledge is cultivated within Catholicism, for instance in a Catholic University or even coincides with Catholic Theology,

…it is not sufficient security for the Catholicity of a University, even that the whole of Catholic theology should be professed in it, unless the Church breathes her own pure and unearthly spirit into it, and fashions and moulds its organization, and

[27] Ibi, p. 71.
[28] Ibi, p. 387.
[29] Ibi, pp. 388-389.
[30] Ibi, p. 71.

watches over its teaching, and knits together its pupils, and superintend its action…it cannot but be that, left to themselves, they will, in spite of their profession of Catholic Truth, work out results more or less prejudicial to its interests. [31]

In Newman's time incredulity does not try to fight openly against Theology, but to isolate it, stressing other subjects considered more interesting, till subtracting it every aliment. Theology – he believes – can survive only in connection with philosophy and other sciences: "Not to interfere with Theology, not to raise a little finger against it, is the only means of superseding it: the more bitter is the hatred which such men bear it, the less they must show it". [32]

Notwithstanding this kind of risks, Newman, who well knows the history of Christian Europe, considers a gain for believers that the challenges of incredulity in religious matter now are open and no more hidden as in the past. Therefore we can face them with loyalty:

I do not, then, repine at all at the open development unbelief in Germany, supposing unbelief is to be, or at its growing audacity in England; not as if I were satisfied with the state of things, considered positively, but because, in the unavoidable alternative of avowed unbelief and secret, my own personal leaning is in favour of the former. I hold that unbelief is in some shape unavoidable in an age of intellect and in a world like this, considering that faith requires an act of the will, and presupposes the due exercise of religious advantages. You may persist in calling Europe Catholic, though it is not; you may enforce an outward acceptance of Catholic dogma, and an outward obedience to Catholic precept; and your enactments may be, so far, not only pious in themselves, but even merciful towards the teachers of false doctrine, as well as just towards their victims; but this is all that you can do; you cannot bespeak conclusions which, in spite of yourselves, you are leaving free to the human will. There will be, I say, in spite of you, unbelief and immorality to the end of the world, and you must be prepared for immorality more odious, and unbelief more astute, more subtle, more bitter, and more resentful, in proportion as it is obliged to dissemble.

It is one great advantage of an age in which unbelief speaks out, that Faith can speak out too; that, if falsehood assails Truth, Truth can assail falsehood. In such an age it is possible to found a University more emphatically Catholic than could be set up in the middle age, because Truth can entrench itself carefully, and define its own profession severely, and display its colours unequivocally, by occasion of that very unbelief which so shamelessly vaunts itself. And a kindred advantage to this is the confidence which, in such an age, we can place in all who are around us, so that we need look for no foes but those who are in the enemy's camp.[33]

In fact Newman is one of the first modern thinkers sincerely Catholic who emphasizes the freedom of thought of modernity, although criticising many other aspects of the culture of that period.

III) Newman's idea of University and his concept of rationality

In the pages that follow let us try to verify how principles which, according to Newman, are the grounds of University education, are coherent with the concept of rationality which we find in his main works and let verify it in a concrete way. First of all we recall in a synthetic way some important distinctions of Newman. The distinction between *principles* and *doctrine* can be found in *The Development of the Christian Doctrine* and also in *On prejudice.* In the first of these works Newman holds:

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[31] Ibi, pp. 216-217 *passim*
[32] Ibi, p. 396
[33] Ibi, pp. 382-83.

As in mathematical creations figures are formed on distinct formulæ, which are the laws under which they are developed, so it is in ethical and political subjects. Doctrines expand variously according to the mind, individual or social, into which they are received; and the peculiarities of the recipient are the regulating power, the law, the organization, or, as it may be called, the form of the development. The life of doctrines may be said to consist in the law or principle which they embody. Principles are abstract and general, doctrines relate to facts; doctrines develope, and principles at first sight do not; doctrines grow and are enlarged, principles are permanent; doctrines are intellectual, and principles are more immediately ethical and practical. Systems live in principles and represent doctrines. Personal responsibility is a principle, the Being of a God is a doctrine; from that doctrine all theology has come in due course, whereas that principle is not clearer under the Gospel than in paradise, and depends, not on belief in an Almighty Governor, but on conscience.[34]

In other terms: while principles are those convictions on human life with which we are truly and deeply concerned and which do not change along time, being a kind of precomprehension and the stable heart of our approach to life, doctrine is that explicit and external shell connected with Newman's notional assent, which can easier change along history. According to a example of Newman himself, a man might adhere in different times to the doctrines of different religious doctrines without changing however his deepest convictions. It happens then that sometimes we can recognize that what was always the content of our implicit faith and the core of our implicit worldview (*principles*) is better shown by a new explicit worldview (*doctrine*) to which we finally adhere. This is the case of many religious conversions.

According to the Newman of the *Development of Christian Doctrine* these are the criteria in order to verify the genuine development of a doctrine or worldview which develops on the ground of certain principles: Preservation of Type, Continuity of Principles, Power of Assimilation, Logical Sequence, Anticipation of Its Future, Conservative Action upon Its Past, Chronic Vigour 35.

We have to stress, however, that those which he defines *principles* might assume a negative or a positive sense from the anthropological or moral point of view. On the one hand they might be prime principles and insights which open towards reality and others (as Newman considers them in the *Lectures on the Present Position of Catholics in England* and, particularly, in *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*) or rooted prejudices which lead to defending ourselves in front of truth and to standing up to moral change that urges on the other hand. In the first case they seem to play an analogous role of the first speculative and particularly of the first practical principles of the Thomistic tradition.

We can approach the first principles in the positive sense (*Essay on the Development*) to the real assent and the doctrines to the notional assent of the *Grammar of Assent*. Which is, according to Newman, the difference between both assents?

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[34] J.H. Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine,* in *Works*, p. 178.

[35] Cf. Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine,* Ch. VII.

The distinction between *real apprehension* and *notional apprehension* reflects human mind's capacity of preserving and creating images from the concrete on one hand and to form abstract ideas on the other. From the different kind of apprehension depends a different kind of assent. Newman maintains that real apprehension has a different and greater strength than notional apprehension, thus can more draw attention and indirectly change our lives.

The strength of apprehension is not what makes the difference between real apprehension and notional apprehension, but a consequence of the fact that the first concerns a thing, and the other a notion. According to Newman its is not real what is interesting, but is interesting what is realized, that is what we think as real[36].

Principles according to Newman are the object of real assent. I.e.: who really believes in God (*real assent*) more easily adheres to the doctrine that better reflects the absoluteness of the First principle (*notional assent*). In the same way for him who really believes in the dignity of human person, this is the object of a real assent that follows immediately the knowledge of every concrete person and that stands out particularly when his dignity is crucified.

Within western tradition, from Aristotle to Aquinas and afterwards, the immediate apprehension of first principles, speculative and practical (particularly the latter) thanks to *nous* or *intellectus,* attains that previous certainty which is prerogative of real assent, while rational argumentation (*discursus*) connected to rational discourse (*dianoia*, *ratio*) leads from principles towards notional assent.

On one hand is at stake an idea of philosophy as wisdom, in which history as development and hermeneutics, the relationship **of the old with the new** plays a central role, on the other a more unhistorical idea of philosophy in which discussion and clarification of problems are in the foreground. If we consider now Newman's ideal of wisdom in itself, from the point of view of the spatial metaphor of the order of knowledge, it is sketched the image of the Aristotelian science of causes, from first principles to their consequences up-down, but also down-up. Both metaphors, the spatial and the historical one, are necessary within the concept of University knowledge. Both are a kind of extremes of a living polarity. The task of philosophy, according to Newman, would be the continuous search for a harmony between both dimensions:

> Each use of propositions has its own excellence and serviceableness, and each has its own imperfection. To apprehend notionally is to have breadth of mind, but to be shallow; to apprehend really is to be deep, but to be narrow-minded. The latter is the conservative principle of knowledge, and the former the principle of its advancement. Without the apprehension of notions, we should for ever pace round one small circle of knowledge; without a firm hold upon things, we shall waste ourselves in vague speculations. However, real apprehension has the precedence, as being the scope and end and the test of notional; and the fuller is the mind's hold upon things or what it considers such, the more fertile is it in its aspects of them, and the more practical in its definitions. Of course as these two are not inconsistent with each other, they may co-exist in the same mind. Indeed there is no one who does not to a certain extent exercise both the one and the other.[37]

[36] Cf. *Essay in Aid of A Grammar on Assent* in *Works* ch. 4.
[37] Ibi, pp. 34-35.

As Newman stresses in *The Idea of University:*

> Knowledge then is the indispensable condition of expansion of mind, and the instrument of attaining to it; this cannot be denied, it is ever to be insisted on; I begin with it as a first principle; however, the very truth of it carries men too far, and confirms to them the notion that it is the whole of the matter. A narrow mind is thought to be that which contains little knowledge; and an enlarged mind, that which holds a great deal; and what seems to put the matter beyond dispute is, the fact of the great number of studies which are pursued in a University, by its very profession. Lectures are given on every kind of subject; examinations are held; prizes awarded. There are moral, metaphysical, physical Professors; Professors of languages, of history, of mathematics, of experimental science. Lists of questions are published, wonderful for their range and depth, variety and diificulty; treatises are written, which carry upon their very face the evidence of extensive reading or multifarious information; what then is wanting for mental culture to a person of large reading and scientific attainments? What is grasp of mind but acquirement? Where shall philosophical repose be found, but in the consciousness and enjoyment of large intellectual possessions?[38]

On the contrary we might maintain that, according to Newman, knowledge grounded on erudition, acquired thanks to notional assent (for instance thanks to wide readings) must become in part object of real assent, i.e., being perceived as an event, as far as its in integrated into the living conscience of a person, becoming one of the synthetic sources of his cultural and human education.

From Newman's point of view of the polarity between both kinds of assents, university education must educate human mind and the whole man in widening his reason (*doctrine, notional assent*) on one hand, in looking for synthesis and for attachment towards concrete reality (*principles, real assent*) on the other. The synthetical task is certainly the idea of *sophia*, but this cannot be attained according to the Aristotelian and Christian Newman, if we look deep in his thought, without education of ethical virtues and whith them of *phronesis* that "issues orders, then, for its (*sophia*) sake, but not to it" [39].

On the level of the practical dimension of *phronesis* we find, according to the Newman of the *Grammar of Assent, real assent* and with it the assent towards Christian faith that holds the compass of human orientation and of rational reflection, enabling it to put order in his speculative knowledge, unifying it in *sophia*. Hence, according to Newman, the main role of the Church, without which the role of phronesis and of conscience becomes easily in the modern intellectual life a kind of taste, an esthetical and detached sense of good and evil, thus missing the authentic morality. This is the capacity that Aquinas takes to be the expression of the virtue of prudence. But there is a crucial difference between Newman's account and that of Aquinas.

On Aquinas's view the exercise of the virtue of prudence requires the possession of moral virtues. But in *Discourse* 7 Newman's view of a university education, even if successful, not only may but often does result not in fostering good moral character, but in a kind of simulacrum of morality: "Knowledge, the discipline by which it is gained, and the tastes which it forms, have a natural tendency to refine the mind, and to give it an indisposition, simply natural, yet real, nay, more than this, a disgust and abhorrence, towards excesses and enormities of evil".[40] But this disgust and abhorrence are not in themselves genuine moral disgust and abhorrence. They spring

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[38] Newman, *The idea of a University* , p. 130.
[39] Aristoteles, *Nicomachean Ethics* VI 1145a 8-9.
[40] Newman, *The idea of a University*, p. 142.

from a fastidious self-regard, a wish to be able to think well of oneself. The vices that such a mind abhors are generally real vices, but the abhorrence is not genuine moral abhorrence, is not an expression of or the result of attending to the voice of conscience. Indeed such abhorrence functions so as to make us forgetful of conscience. "Their conscience has become a mere self-respect. When they do wrong, they feel not contrition, of which God is the object, but remorse, and a sense of degradation. They call themselves fools, not sinners". [41]

It was, on Newman's view, a failure to recognize the difference between genuine morality and this substitute for it that had allowed so many of his contemporaries to believe that education is the means to moral improvement. With those contemporaries Newman also disagreed about what a good education is. But in *The Idea of a University* he is anxious to emphasize that even the best of university educations may result in a peculiarly dangerous form of bad character, that in which the cultivation of the mind, independently of religion, results in an aesthetic distaste for behaviour unworthy of such a mind, and this aesthetic distaste masquerades as and is confused with moral revulsion. What then is the remedy? It is to ensure that the university community is attentive to that in the moral teaching of the Catholic Church that makes the distinction between the moral and the aesthetic evident. What that teaching discloses is twofold: both the moral limitations of a university education and the tendency of university communities to disguise those limitations from themselves.

Moral philosophy, as sometimes taught, can itself be one such means of disguise, and Newman identifies Shaftesbury as a moral philosopher who had provided just such a disguise by assimilating moral judgments to judgments of taste, so that "conscience, which intimates a Lawgiver," is "superseded by a moral taste or sentiment, which has no sanction beyond the constitution of our nature".[42] A very great deal turns therefore on our ability to mark and define the distinction between moral and aesthetic judgment. A condition for distinguishing adequately between these types of judgment is an ability to distinguish between moral and aesthetic experience. Newman was to say more about this in a book written seventeen years after his Dublin lectures, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent.*

In the *Grammar of Assent* he was to argue that our assent to propositions is characteristically not the outcome of demonstrative argument. The reasons that we are able to give for holding this or that particular belief—including some of our common and familiar beliefs—generally do not entail the conclusions to which we assent, but support them in a variety of other ways, and in order to move from these reasons to an act of assent we have to exercise a capacity for judgment, what Newman called, not altogether happily, "the illative sense." He also spoke of this capacity in Aristotelian terms as *phronesis*, insisting however that there are different kinds of *phronesis* and that someone whose judgment in one area is almost unerring may be notably lacking in judgment in some other

[41] Ibi, p. 192.
[42] Ibi, pp. 199-200.

area. One source of such differences is a difference in the kind of experience that such a one may have had in each of the two different areas and the degree to which she or he has been attentive to what is specific to each kind of experience. Where the nature of conscience and with it the distinction between moral and aesthetic experience are concerned, Newman identifies three relevant differences between the moral and the aesthetic.

A "sense of the beautiful and graceful in nature and art" has respect to the whole range of objects, whether persons or not, while the concern of conscience is only with actions, and primarily with one's own actions. Second, aesthetic taste "is its own evidence, appealing to nothing beyond its own sense of the beautiful or the ugly, "while conscience reaches out toward a standard beyond itself, to which, even if it only perceives that standard dimly, it aspires to conform. Third, that standard is grasped as carrying with it a sanction, and this because the judgments of conscience are uttered by something higher than the self, "a voice, or the echo of a voice, imperative and constraining," while no such dictate is present elsewhere in our experience.[43] Lack of confusion about these differences is important for two reasons. If we acknowledge what it is that distinguishes conscience from aesthetic taste, not only do we safeguard ourselves from becoming victims of that misunderstanding of morality that is apt to result from even the best of university educations, but we also place ourselves on the threshold of an awareness of the reality of God. Furthermore, as it has been noticed, without the acknowledgment of the central role of God and of theology in University education, the ideal of wisdom runs out and cannot be implemented.

IV) Is Newman's Idea of University still up to date?

Lastly we have to answer a question: Newman's University idea is still up to date in contemporary culture, **distinguished** by such pluralism of philosophical approaches and specialization and fragmentation of knowledge that we should speak, as someone has suggested, more of *pluriversitas* than of *universitas*?[44] In fact the demand for "learn to learn" and to have a global education not only still remains valid, but is somehow stressed by the quick specialization owed to the technological development and the new anthropological and ethical problems connected with it. We must know the very ground of human being and of his knowledge in order to master new and unforeseeable situations. Philosophy therefore is still and more important. But more than before, philosophical approach to

[43] MacIntyre, *God, philosophy, universities*, p. 149.
[44] On the topic of the crisis of University today see B. Readings, *The University in Ruins,* Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1996; on the role of Newman's contribution in our situation see the essays in J.H. Newman, *The Idea of a University*, ed. by Frank M. Turner, Yale University, New Haven 1996; G. Loughlin, *Theology in the University* in *The Cambridge Companion to John Henry Newman*, edited by Ian Ker and T. Merrigan, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2009.

knowledge requires an ethical root in order to be complemented. Since moral and human education is the source of the unity of man, it is also the source of the unity of his philosophical approach.

More difficult seems to share today Newman's ideal of wisdom with the central role of theology[45]. Many might still accept it only as a regulative ideal. In fact the problem of God and of Christianity cannot be ignored at least in Western culture, since all Western philosophical reflection is somehow a legitimization, defence of that human-religious event that deeply influences western culture.

Anywhere, according to Macintyre, in the field of knowledge and of community of University research different and alternate views on wisdom and philosophy should meet and face each other, what generally does not happen. He maintains that:

> There is thus a deep incompatibility between the standpoint of any rational tradition of enquiry and the dominant modes of contemporary teaching, discussion, and debate, both academic and non-academic. Where the standpoint of a tradition requires a recognition of the different types of language-in-use through which different types of argument will have to be carried on, the standpoints of the forum of modern cultural liberal culture presupposes the possibility of a common language for all speakers or at the very least of translatability of any one language into any another. Where the standpoint of a tradition involves an acknowledgment that fundamental debate is between competing and conflicting understandings of rationality, the standpoint of the forums of modern liberal culture presupposes the fiction of shared, even if unformulable, universal standards of rationality. Where the standpoint of a tradition cannot be presented except in a way which takes account of the history and the historical situatedness, both of traditions themselves and of those individuals who engage in dialogue with them, the standpoint of the forums of modern liberal cultures presupposes the irrelevance of one's history to one's status a participant in debate. We confront one another in such forums abstracted from and deprived of the particularities of our histories. [46]

Becoming aware of our own tradition and cultural identity, of that which we have in common with others and divide us from others, of the similar and different ideas of what is human and what is wisdom, is the necessary condition for a renaissance of university as a place of free and fertile dialectic. This might happen within a same public university, as Macintyre holds, but also among universities that adhere to different worldviews within a wider community of research and education.

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[45] Cf. J. Milbank, *The Conflict of Faculties: Theology and the Economy of the Sciences*" in M. Thiessen Nation and S. Wells (eds.), *Faithfulness and Fortitude:* in *Conversation with the Theological Ethics of Stanley Hauerwas*, T & T Clark, Edinburgh 2000.

[46] A. Macintyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame 1988, p. 400.