

Newman and Contemporary Debates about Catholic Education

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Abstract

In a recent contribution to this journal Loughlin (2011) reflected on the place of wonder in Newman's education. This instructive piece followed a pattern in which Newman is regarded as having made positive contributions to educational debates. It is this pattern or assumption about Newman's contribution to education, particularly for the theory or philosophy of Catholic education that will be the focus in this article. It will be explained that there is some ambiguity over how much Newman's arguments for liberal education are actually grounded in more general theological arguments about the distinctive nature of Catholic education. In what follows it will be argued that a more general analysis of Newman on education draws attention to a wider issue concerning what ought to be the relationship between theology and the theory or philosophy of education. It will be proposed that Newman down played the role of theology in defending liberal education and this has implications for those who might want to appeal to him now in terms of guiding debates about the philosophy of Catholic education.

Keywords

Catholic education, Newman, philosophy of Catholic education, theology and education

Introduction

John Henry Newman (1801–1890) was a leading figure in nineteenth century Britain. Historians have noted his ongoing significance and the stature that he came to enjoy over the last century (Ker 2009, Cornwell 2010). Newman played a key role in the Oxford Movement that brought much renewal to the life of the Church of England in the Victorian period. During his own lifetime he gained considerable notoriety, not least for converting from the Church of England in which he had been an ordained minister, to Roman Catholicism.

He was subsequently ordained as a Catholic priest and towards the end of his life the Pope appointed him a Cardinal. In recent years Newman's stature within the Catholic Church has received further prominence as he has progressed through the beatification process, and in 2010 he was declared 'blessed John Newman' by Pope Benedict XVI. Some of Newman's theological texts such as the *Apologia pro vita sua* and *An essay on the development of doctrine* have remained influential theological texts. Nestled within his theological and pastoral works are a collection of discourses devoted to education, published as the *Idea of a University* in 1852. This work has become a seminal text that has spawned discussions on the nature and purpose of higher education and its relationship with liberal education. His *Idea of a University* contains a set of nine discourses that were originally lectures delivered in Dublin as part of his involvement in establishing and promoting the first Catholic university in Ireland. Newman had been invited by the Irish bishops to be the rector of this university and he played a central role in setting it up. After relinquishing this role and returning from Ireland, Newman opened a school for Catholic boys in Birmingham and took an active role in running it. Newman is notable because his theoretical reflections on education can be juxtaposed with his practical experience and commitment to Catholic education. He declared that

Now from first to last, education, in this large sense of the word has been my line. (Newman, 1956, p. 259)

Moreover, as Cornwell explains

It had become clear to Newman, on his conversion, that his vocation would be the education of Catholics rather than the conversion of Anglicans. (Cornwell, 2010, p.125)

Newman's involvement and commitment to education were grounded in the importance he attached to the pastoral work he carried out as a priest, which was part-and-parcel of how he served others as a minister in the Church. In addition, the various educational projects in which Newman was involved provide an illustration of the kind of relationship that the Catholic Church typically had with education in the nineteenth century. For example, the Irish bishops wanted to respond to the opening of a number of Queen's University colleges in Ireland, which were modelled along the secular lines of University College London. The Irish bishops wanted to provide an alternative to this as they considered this kind of university college to be a new threat to the education of Catholics living in Ireland. It was against this context that Newman was invited to be the first rector of a distinctly Catholic university. Similarly, Newman opened a school for Catholic boys in Birmingham in

order to provide an alternative that Catholics could choose for their sons.

In what follows, the central features of Newman's educational ideas will be outlined before being subjected to a critical analysis. Before launching into this it is important to identify a couple of cautionary notes. Beyond the obvious historical difficulties (such as the rudimentary state of universal education, the effects of the Industrial Revolution and the elitist education found in Oxford and Cambridge universities), Newman's treatment of education can be misunderstood. To be more precise, in advocating 'liberal' education Newman can be easily misunderstood. For him liberal education was about developing the capacity to think and it was closely connected with the traditional liberal arts of the medieval university. As part of this it was possible to study both mathematics and classics. A second cautionary note is the occasional nature of Newman's work on education (Ker 2011).

Newman did not deliberately set out to elaborate a theory of education, if by that we mean a comprehensive statement of principles intended as a guide to educational practice. (Arthur & Nicholls, 2007, p. 60)

Given this, Newman should not be treated as if he provides a detailed theory of Catholic education. In what follows it will be necessary to begin by identifying the key themes in his argument before going on to piece together more generally where Newman stands vis-à-vis the theory of Catholic education. The primary source for this will be the discourses that constitute his *Idea of a University*. A more complete account would need to appeal to his other writings and his sermons but limitations of space preclude appealing to his other work.

Following his conversion to Catholicism Newman's attention shifted to the education and formation of Catholic 'gentlemen'. He seized the opportunity to be practically involved with this goal in Ireland. Here the only universities were ones that Catholics were prohibited from attending either by Church teaching or by legal injunctions about non-conformists attending Protestant universities. However, Newman was not advocating an account of education based on social justice that could be accessed by all members of the Catholic community. This brings into focus the shifts in educational focus since Newman's time:

Now education is treated as a matter of distributive justice... There have also been huge shifts in the nature of knowledge and its role in society... Now the productive person is the educated person. Newman rejected this approach to knowledge and productivity. (Dunne, 2006, p. 414)

In contrast, Newman was primarily concerned with university education for males alone, rather than with providing an account of

Catholic education. These cautionary notes and shifting attitudes need to be kept in view in order to accurately evaluate Newman's work on the theory of Catholic education.

What are the central features of education according to Newman?

Newman weaves together a set of arguments that combine to demonstrate the special nature of a Catholic university and why this is superior to other institutions that claim to be universities. Newman presents these arguments as if they are deductions from the definition of liberal education. Newman opens his discourses on the *Idea of a University* (henceforth *Idea*) by stating his definition of what a university is fundamentally about:

It is a place of teaching and universal knowledge. (Newman, 1996, p. 3)

Newman composed his *Idea* to help his original audience (in Dublin) understand what was different about a Catholic university. In these discourses Newman wanted to set out what was special about a Catholic university and to explain why young Irish men ought to attend this type of university rather than one of the other universities in Ireland. As Turner explained,

Newman needed to demonstrate the necessity for and unique qualities of the new institution being founded. Second, as Newman's task unfolded itself, he had to persuade his audience that their sons should receive not only an education in a Catholic university, but also a liberal rather than a professional education. (Turner, 1996. p. XIV)

Starting from this practical context Newman developed a set of arguments that began by noting the way in which a Catholic university would include the study of theology. However, Newman was at pains to emphasise that he was arguing for a university and not a seminary (Ker 2011). The Catholic university in Dublin would be like other universities and it would include the study of theology as a legitimate part of universal knowledge.

In the second, third and fourth of his discourses Newman constructed further arguments about the importance of theology within a university, and the ways in which theology plays a key role in ensuring that a liberal rather than a utilitarian education takes place. He launched his argument from an analysis of the concept of a university, declaring that

A university, I should lay down, by its very name professes to teach universal knowledge: theology is surely a branch of knowledge: how then is it possible for it to profess to teach all branches of knowledge,

and yet to exclude from the subjects of its teaching one which, to say the least, is as important and as large as any of them.

He went on to add

As to the range of university teaching, certainly the very name of university is inconsistent with restrictions of every kind.a university should teach universal knowledge. (Newman, 1996, p. 24)

Newman maintains that a Catholic university alone is the only kind that can provide an authentic liberal education. In his opening discourses he maintains that in a Catholic university proper recognition is given to theology as a genuine branch of knowledge. Newman was critical of the Queen's universities that had recently been opened in Ireland because these on principle did not teach theology. In contrast, the strength of the Catholic university is that it is able to take seriously open questions, about the existence of God and the possibility of divine revelation, that are part of theology. Newman argues that if God existed then this would have a number of implications for the education offered by the university. At a fundamental level, all knowledge would have its origin in the creative impulse of the one God. There would be a unity to all knowledge that could be traced back to a divine origin. More practically, theology would be a legitimate subject in the university because it involves both a higher knowledge (about God) and it involves the study of the fundamental truths of human existence. Also other subjects would need to understand themselves in relation to the totality of human knowledge. This would mean, for example, that science would not be exploring a neutral or impersonal universe, a brute fact, but rather creation – the work of the creator.

Newman sought to defend the status of theology as both a genuine academic discipline and branch of knowledge. He argued that its exclusion from the curriculum of a university would reflect flawed logic because all knowledge forms a unity and as such theology ought to be part of it. Newman argued that given the definition of a university, it would follow that a university should in principle be committed to the teaching of every branch of knowledge. His deduction is elementary – theology is a branch of knowledge and thus it too ought to be part of what is offered in the curriculum at a university. An institution that prohibited and excluded any science (including the science of theology) on principle was, according to Newman, one that by definition could not be a true university.

Moreover Newman maintained that in a Catholic university theology, along with all the other subjects, has a role to play in providing the necessary counter-balance to the competition that occurs between different academic disciplines. There is a tendency for some subjects to assert themselves over rival disciplines. Newman cited the

example of economics. He argued that in the secular university economics is given a disproportionate importance in the curriculum and in the underlying rationale of the university. Newman maintained that the inclusion of all subjects (including theology) helped to safeguard against economics, or any other subject, becoming superior in the university curriculum. It is as if theology's inclusion has a symbolic significance. The university teaches all branches of knowledge, including theology, and this is how a university is able to foster what Newman refers to as the 'philosophical mind'. It is this philosophical mind that can recognise where one subject is over-reaching its proper limits and unfairly seeking to dominate the curriculum. The inclusion of theology serves this important goal. Newman is not saying that theology is the highest discipline nor that it has the authority to oversee and correct any excesses in other disciplines within the university (Cornwell 2010, Ker 2011). This role he assigns to the philosophical mind trained by a liberal education. However, theology given its presence in the university plays a role in developing this philosophical mind.

In the closing discourses of the *Idea* Newman considers theology and the Church's presence in the Catholic university. In the last discourse he deals with the *Duties of the Church towards knowledge*, where he argues in favour of a special relationship between Church authorities and the university. The Church has oversight of the truths of theology and this gives it the right and responsibility to protect the revealed truth both inside and outside of the university. Newman explains that this does not mean that the Church would censure the content of subjects such as literature, but rather it would insist that theology should be studied alongside whatever is being studied. The Church would promote and guard knowledge and university education, and as such enjoy jurisdiction over the university. Ultimately there is no clash between religion and natural sciences, indeed these will be fostered and pursued in the Catholic university. This is because Newman is arguing for a university rather than a seminary. Equally the study of literature will be a feature of university learning, despite the realisation that it is the product of a fallen human nature. The study of literature needs to be part of the liberal education delivered at a university in order to prepare the student for the world. However it needs to be juxtaposed with Church teachings so that the student can learn to understand other subjects in a more balanced way.

Throughout the *Idea* Newman argues in support of a liberal education, as opposed to one which is bound up with professional or vocational preparation. In the fifth discourse Newman explains that knowledge is its own end. At university students are free to pursue studies according to their individual preference not for any utility. Learning is to be done for its own intrinsic sake.

Knowledge is capable of being its own end. Such is the constitution of the human mind that any kind of knowledge, if it be really such, is its own reward. (Newman, 1996, p. 78).

It is a liberal education as opposed to a servile one that is on offer at university. In this Newman was making a stand against those who wanted to make ‘utility’ or usefulness the point of acquiring knowledge and education. Knowledge is its own reward.

Liberal education, viewed in itself, is simply the cultivation of the intellect as such, and its object is nothing more or less than intellectual excellence. (Newman, 1996, p. 90)

To be educated is to be able to use your mind rather than having to passively absorb a mass of information.

Newman stresses philosophy and sees it as the vehicle to achieving a cultivation of the intellect and this is a principle goal of liberal education. (Ker, 2008, p. 1)

According to Newman it is liberal or philosophical knowledge that is the goal or end of university education. The person educated at university gains a connected view or grasp of things, and this Newman calls philosophical knowledge or the enlargement of the mind (Newman 1996). This could be summed up as the capacity to think. It is important to note that this argument for liberal education is not connected or supported through any theological argument. In Newman’s argument for liberal education there is no attempt to justify or ground it in theology.

A further characteristic of Newman’s account of education is an emphasis on the intellectual rather than on the moral development of the student. He pointed out that

It is a real mistake to burden [liberal education] with virtue or religion as with the mechanical arts. Its direct business is not to steel the soul against temptation or to console it in affliction, any more than to set the loom in motion.

A few sentences later Newman goes on to state that

Knowledge is one thing, and virtue is another. (Newman, 1996, p. 89)

Newman explains that a liberal education does not necessarily lead to virtue or to being a more ethical person. In the final set of discourses a significant distinction is drawn between what a student can gain from a university in terms of faith development. As a human institution the university can bring about the education of the gentleman but this is different to helping the individual overcome their fallen sinful nature as a human being. Newman maintains that persons of genuine ethical virtue can only come into being through faith formation as a Catholic Christian. At university the student receives

the kind of liberal education that helps him to develop his natural human capacities (through becoming a gentleman). At a Catholic university the student has the advantage of being reminded through the presence of theology that Church teachings give numerous insights into the ultimate ends of human life.

The relevance of Newman to the theory of catholic education?

There are three main themes that emerge from the arguments and points made in his *Idea* that bring into focus Newman's positive contribution to the theory of Catholic education. The first is about the inclusion of theology in the curriculum. Newman argued that theology ought to be included in the curriculum because it is a genuine branch of human knowledge. As such, its inclusion expresses that there are no sections of human knowledge that are excluded, in principle, from the curriculum. In this, Newman could be depicted as foreshadowing parts of Hirst's arguments about the forms of knowledge (Hirst 1965). For Hirst 'religion' (here treated as more or less equivalent to theology) was one of the eight forms of knowledge that inform and guide the curriculum. Hirst and Newman would agree that 'religion' could not legitimately be excluded from the curriculum. A further resonance between them would be Newman's argument about the role of all branches of knowledge having a part to play in overcoming the danger of academic imperialism. This would parallel Hirst's insistence that all eight of the forms of knowledge were needed and they were not in competition with each other. Newman's argument about the need to include theology is grounded on the unity of all knowledge. Including theology allows Newman to develop a theological perspective on the curriculum. The various subjects of the curriculum through which the universe is studied and investigated enjoy a unity thanks to theology and can be traced back to a divine origin.

The second theme in Newman's *Idea* is the similarity between the Catholic university and other types of university. When Newman wrote about the university education whether Catholic or not

He treated its 'essence'. But he also wrote about particular universities. He wrote about the university he loved, Oxford, about the university he detested, London, and about the university he wanted to bring into being in Dublin. (Loughlin, 2009, p. 223)

To reiterate the point, Newman's *Idea* is advocating a university education and not arguing in support of a seminary in which theology is the central subject. Like any proper university the goal of a Catholic university education is to gain a liberal education. This is different to professional training or acquiring knowledge for some utilitarian

purpose. There is an intrinsic value to knowledge, and knowledge is its own reward, and this is exactly the same in Dublin as it is in Oxford. The enlargement of the mind is the defining characteristic of a genuine university. Newman argued that an educated person acquires understanding and the ability to think carefully. He explained that

In default of a recognised term I have called the perfection or virtue of the intellect by the name of philosophy, philosophical knowledge, enlargement of the mind, or illumination. (Newman, 1996, p. 114)

Newman did not argue for a distinctly Catholic variant of this kind of university education but rather insisted that any genuine university would be committed to this kind of liberal education. Like all universities the Catholic one that Newman wanted to establish in Dublin would be committed to the enlargement of the mind. The advantage of a Catholic university was that it included in principle all branches of knowledge (as epitomised through the presence of theology) and this meant it could ensure that economics, and utilitarianism more generally, would not be able to dominate the curriculum. This would help to safeguard a liberal education.

The third theme in Newman's *Idea* is the way that he down plays the religious and moral aspects of education. For Newman education involves fostering the dispositions noted above about the capacity to think, or what he described as enlargement of the mind. According to Newman this disposition was a defining characteristic of being a 'gentleman'. One of the outcomes of a Catholic university would, like others, be the formation of 'gentlemen'. Newman described being a 'gentleman' in very positive terms:

It is well to be a gentleman, it is well to have a cultivated intellect, a delicate taste, a candid, equitable, dispassionate mind, a noble and courteous bearing in the conduct of life; these are the connatural qualities of a large knowledge; they are the objects of a university. (Newman, 1996, p. 89)

On first impression this would appear to be about character education. However, on closer inspection Newman is clear that it does not involve either moral or catechetical aspects. A university education does not involve the catechesis and formation of the student into a Catholic Christian or even into a 'Christian gentleman'. Newman was emphatic about this, and in the preceding sentence to the above quote, he insisted that

Liberal education makes not the Christian, not the Catholic, but the gentleman. (Newman, 1996, p. 89)

One does not become a Catholic through the formal education one receives whilst at university, and Newman was willing to concede

that this would be the situation even within his Catholic university in Dublin. In this third theme, Newman brings into focus the vagueness in the concept of Christian education. His rejection of the catechetical interpretation of this concept is clear. Newman is concerned with the theory, or in his terms the 'Idea', of what education as a whole ought to involve. Newman does not even attempt to argue that it ought to involve catechesis and moral education.

However, this observation should be partially qualified because Newman attached importance to the residential and pastoral aspects of a university education. Newman was committed to students living in the university and having a close relationship with their tutors. It was through this non-formal education that students might be able to gain both moral and catechetical formation. Rupert (1998) has drawn attention to the way Newman's practical plans for the university in Dublin had as one of its initial projects the building of the university church. No doubt Newman assumed that the students would be attending it and perhaps gaining religious formation through it. This means that catechesis and moral formation would in this partial way be a part of the Catholic university that Newman proposed. However, it was certainly not in the formal education that took place there. In this Newman is characterising a basic similarity between the good practice he was involved with as a Fellow at Oriel and in the Catholic university he planned for Dublin. Newman's stance on how a liberal education does not make someone a Christian is suggestive of another way in which he foreshadowed arguments subsequently developed by Hirst, in that Hirst argued both that Christian education was a contradiction in terms (Hirst 1992), and that there was a fundamental difference between the formation of someone as a Christian (catechesis) and a genuine education (Hirst 1976).

A Critical Discussion of Newman and the Theory of Catholic Education

The theory of Catholic education that emerges out of Newman's discourses on the *Idea* has many positive features. However, these can often be obscured by the standard criticisms that are leveled against Newman's broader account of university and liberal education. It should be noted that many of these criticisms although significant are not the primary focus for this thesis, and as such little sustained attention will be given to defending Newman against them. It will be argued that the most striking feature of Newman's argument in support for liberal education is made without recourse to theological arguments. He merely argues in favour of including theology in the curriculum and does not support or underpin liberal education on theological grounds.

Newman's arguments do not provide a religious or theological justification for liberal education. A Catholic university, like any other, is a place where liberal education can be pursued. However, in this claim Newman has not explained how theology could underpin liberal education. Newman can be criticised for juxtaposing liberal education and a Catholic university without providing any kind of supporting argument about how the 'Catholicity' of a university would ground or justify the liberal education that ought to take place there. Newman does not specify why the education in a Catholic university would need to be a liberal one. It might well have been that the Irish bishops who invited him to run the Catholic university would have preferred a super-seminary (theology plus other subjects), however this is not what Newman argued for (Cornwell 2010; Ker 2011; Rupert 1988). Newman modelled his proposed Catholic university not on the seminary but on what he saw as the best aspects of non-Catholic universities (such as Oxford). Moreover in Newman's argument for a liberal education it was the enlargement of the mind (the capacity to think) rather than any subject, theology included, that played the key role. A liberal education does not prepare you for a specific profession but it does develop the disposition of enlargement of the mind. For Newman this disposition is the defining characteristic of the 'gentleman'. A successful liberal education resulted in the formation of the 'gentleman' and this is different from the formation of someone as a Christian. This indicates a dissonance between a Catholic university, liberal education and the catechesis of someone as a Christian. According to Cornwell (2010) there is a striking paradox at play in Newman's argument here given his audience, in particular the Irish bishops who wanted a Catholic university which was established on religion. He explains that Newman was proposing that

the Church as educator, and the university as educator, are two different entities; capable of collaboration, yet not one and the same thing.
(Cornwell, 2010, p. 131)

A university will, according to Newman, be geared to a liberal education in which the enlargement of the mind is fostered, rather than the formation of the Christian.

This brings into focus an ambiguity in Newman between the relationship between liberal education and theology. This stems from the way the arguments of the *Idea* lead to two separate sets of claims. Some of the discourses are aimed at justifying the inclusion of theology in the curriculum of the university, whilst others deal with the distinctive features of liberal education. If there is a tacit connection between these sets of claims, it is weakened by the quality of some of Newman's arguments for the inclusion of theology in the university curriculum. Newman blends together a number of arguments about

theology's place in the university in order to make two points. The first is to insist on its legitimate place in the university curriculum and the second is to argue for the special role that theology plays within the curriculum. Newman argues that theology is an essential or defining feature of the concept of a 'university'. Without it there is a distortion of what universal knowledge consists of. There can only be a unity and cohesion of knowledge if all branches of knowledge are present within the curriculum. Newman comes close to presenting these points as a syllogism, arguing from his definition that a university is a place where there is a universal teaching of knowledge. However both the logical form and the soundness of the premise in this syllogism can be challenged. Newman takes it as a given that theology just is a branch of knowledge, yet this is an assumption. Given Newman's experience of studying and teaching at Oxford where he had learnt and taught the discipline called divinity or theology, it is an assumption grounded on his faith. However, as Loughlin pointed out

Yet Newman does little to defend his claim that theology is knowledge. He thinks it is sufficient to note that unbelief rests upon a mere assumption, that philosophy has yet to show the unattainability of religious truth, and that the onus probandi lies with those who think otherwise. (Loughlin, 2009, p. 229)

Newman simply rejects, without refuting, the arguments of those who would deny the truth and knowledge status of theological discourse. At a general level he could be accused of merely asserting his assumptions that theology involves knowledge, and that the 'knowledge' in theology is basically the same as that found in other disciplines or branches of knowledge. The concern here is that Newman is using the concept of knowledge in an unrecognisable way, in that Newman appears to be inferring from the presence of the subject of theology that theology is a branch of universal knowledge. There is of course an academic discipline known as 'theology', however this is not the same as establishing that this subject is a branch of universal knowledge. Moreover, it is as if Newman has failed to appreciate the controversial nature of many theological claims, not least the question of God's existence. One way of defending Newman would be to interpret him as presenting a conditional argument in which the existence of God is taken as given. In making the argument for a Catholic university, Newman was of course speaking to a predominantly Catholic audience, and he was there at the behest of the Irish Catholic bishops. In this context issues of God's existence would not have been seriously raised or questioned. This is to maintain that in effect Newman was setting out what the implications would be for a university if God's existence was known. Newman, like his audience, simply accepted the existence of God. However,

Newman could be criticised for glossing between the conditional premise of ‘if’ God exists and the making of an assumption that God does exist. Indeed if God does exist a reasonable case can be made (as Newman did) to show that this would impact on the other disciplines of knowledge in the university. There is in theory a difference between the study of God’s creation and the study of a universe which is not the product of a creator God. Newman’s argument is weakened by the presence of his assumption about the existence of God.

Of course if the opening premise is weak, this makes it harder to accept the deductions and conclusions in the rest of Newman’s argument in the *Idea*. One way in which Newman could attempt to support his opening premise would be to appeal to natural theology. Newman, like many other Catholic theologians in the nineteenth century, had much confidence in what natural theology could legitimately establish. During the First Vatican Council (1869–70) the dogmatic teaching in *Dei Filius* was promulgated and this document asserted the ability of natural theology to prove beliefs such as the existence of God. For Newman, as a Catholic speaking with other Catholics about his vision for the Catholic university, he may well have felt fully confident about natural theology allowing him to take his opening premise as being true and unproblematic.

However there are a number of problems with appealing to natural theology in this way. At the obvious level it would appear that Newman is being over confident about what natural theology can legitimately establish. Amongst contemporary Catholic theologians the common interpretation of *Dei Filius* (1870) is that it asserted the possibility of being able to engage in natural theology rather than teaching that it can be used definitively to prove the existence of God. The success or otherwise of Newman’s account of Catholic education is connected with the question of whether or not natural theology is able to establish the existence of God. The upshot of this is that, despite the conviction of his faith and the possibility of appealing to natural theology, Newman has still employed a premise that is conditional on accepting the existence of God. As such it is a controversial premise.

What is intriguing about Newman’s *Idea* is the way he avoids positing any relationship between his religious assumptions about God’s existence and what ought to be taught to students. He more or less adopts the liberal curriculum as it currently stands and makes no recourse to theology. He has not attempted to develop an argument about why Catholic Christians ought to follow this kind of curriculum. This is the major concern with Newman’s contribution to the theory of Catholic education. The problem is that it avoids exploring or understates the relationship between theology and educational theory. There is no real attempt to provide a theological

explanation of why a Catholic university would be committed to providing a liberal education. Moreover, the arguments Newman employed to justify the inclusion of theology complicate the situation. They risk the danger of implying that the justification for Catholic education is dependent on assumptions about whether or not God exists. Ultimately Newman's way of arguing ends up under-emphasising the relationship between theology and educational theory. When it comes to liberal education Newman has not sought to use theology to justify why it ought to be a defining characteristic of a Catholic university.

Newman's failure to underpin his educational argument on theology can be briefly illustrated by referring to one of the more general criticisms raised against him. This concerns his definition of universities as places where there is the teaching of universal knowledge. There is certainly no theological justification for this definition. In contrast to Newman there are alternate definitions that might be more open to theological justifications. For example, many have put the emphasis on universities as centres of research rather than as places of teaching, and others have drawn attention to them as places of dispute. For example, MacIntyre (1998; 2009) has frequently pointed out that universities are aptly characterised as places of learned disagreement. It is not just that Newman's definition of the university is controversial, but more importantly he also fails to draw upon theology to support his argument.

Conclusion

This article has considered Newman's relevance to the contemporary debates about the theory of Catholic education. He is of course significant as one of the relatively few Catholic theologians who has given an extended consideration to issues of educational theory. In arguing for his idea of a Catholic university Newman brings into focus some distinctions that help to clarify the theory of Catholic education. Perhaps the most important of these concerns his stance on formal education and the formation of someone as a Christian. This distinction brings into focus the vagueness and ambiguity in the concept of Catholic education. This concept can be taken to mean either the education of someone as a Catholic Christian or the approach or theory that Catholics might take of education as a whole. Newman affirms that a liberal education does not make one a Christian, rather the most it will do is make someone a gentleman. In distinguishing between faith formation and education Newman brings into focus the question of what ought to be the relationship between faith formation and formal education. In presenting his arguments in support of a Catholic university Newman suggests that the

concept of Catholic education can be coherently uncoupled from faith formation. In this, Newman was recognising some of the limits of what could be achieved through formal education. Another positive feature of Newman's argument was the role of what he referred to as 'philosophy' (or the enlargement of the mind) in being educated. He is emphatic that the overarching goal of a liberal education is to develop the capacity to think. In assessing the positive features of Newman's account of education it is relatively easy to suggest a resonance between him and Hirst. In some notable respects Newman offers an embryonic version of the kinds of arguments Hirst subsequently developed in support of liberal education. Newman could be characterised as a precursor to Hirst. In this, Newman sought to make the case for liberal education. Of course these positive features of Newman's account need to be counterbalanced with the weaknesses and issues raised about the coherence of his arguments. There are the specific questions about Newman's assumptions about knowledge being a unified whole and the obvious platonic overtones which this brings (Dunne 2006). Moreover, there are some seriously underdeveloped aspects to Newman's argument. The most obvious of these surrounds the relationship between liberal education and theology. In this Newman draws attention to a more fundamental issue about what ought to be the relationship between theology and education within a robust theory of Catholic education. The challenge is to avoid Newman's failure to downplay the relationship between theology and the justification of liberal education. Newman's relevance to the contemporary questions about how to formulate a robust theory of Catholic education are more limited than are typically assumed.

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