

JOHN HENRY NEWMAN (1801-1890)

There are few names more respected and honored within Catholic higher education than John Henry Newman. He began his vocation as an Anglican churchman and scholar and ended it as a Roman Catholic cardinal. Born and educated in England, Newman is considered one of the great intellectual figures of the 19th century, especially his work on universities. His book, *The Idea of University* (1852), is a collection of the inaugural lectures laying out a philosophy of education for the new Catholic University in Ireland. The following essay is taken from this book, which focuses on the role of professional education within the university.

While Newman saw the principal task of a university in terms of the liberal arts, he did not think that professional education should be excluded from the university. He was however concerned that the increasing specialization of professional training and its potential benefits of professional efficiency and wealth generating abilities would result in more narrowly trained individuals rather than broadly educated persons. He was concerned that narrow training would not only fail to equip professionals for their broader social responsibilities, but would actually undermine professional technical abilities. He states “that a man who has been trained to think upon one subject or for one subject only, will never be a good judge even in that one.” Don Briel has pointed out that “Newman acknowledged the necessity that a modern society define the need for particular professional roles in order to facilitate an efficient social and economic system, but he nonetheless warned that we should not give ourselves up entirely to such a system and insisted on the need for other principles which would modify and correct the coercive effects of social roles. The failure to develop such a set of social checks and balances has produced an impoverishment of the imagination and an increasingly adversarial individualism without a mediating sense of the common good.”

Newman also was concerned that if professional education became severed from the liberal arts within the university context, its inclination would always tend to focus on the particular and instrumental at the expense of the universal and moral, and as a result would “undermine the broader pursuit of the unity of knowledge at the heart of the university’s mission.” A central theme for Newman in this essay “was that professional schools, whether medicine or law, or in our own day, business, must participate in the university’s principal end, which is the teaching of universal knowledge as its own end, and so Newman contrasts the educational philosophy of autonomous professional schools existing independently of a university and those schools which are integrated into the university’s broader curriculum and mission.”¹

QUESTIONS: What are the implications of this essay for business education? What would a Newman School of Business look like? How would it be similar and different than the Opus College of Business? How does Newman construe the relationship between the useful and the good and what are implications of this distinction for our curriculum and research?

¹ See Don Briel’s essay on Newman’s understanding of professional education
<http://www.stthomas.edu/cathstudies/cst/mgmt/facdevelop/mecu/papers/briel.pdf>.

THE IDEA OF A UNIVERSITY

BY JOHN HENRY NEWMAN²

Discourse 7 Knowledge Viewed in Relation to Professional Skill

1.

I have been insisting, in my two preceding Discourses, first, on the cultivation of the intellect, as an end which may reasonably be pursued for its own sake; and next, on the nature of that cultivation, or what that cultivation consists in. Truth of whatever kind is the proper object of the intellect; its cultivation then lies in fitting it to apprehend and contemplate truth. Now the intellect in its present state, with exceptions which need not here be specified, does not discern truth intuitively, or as a whole. We know, not by a direct and simple vision, not at a glance, but, as it were, by piecemeal and accumulation, by a mental process, by going round an object, by the comparison, the combination, the mutual correction, the continual adaptation, of many partial notions, by the employment, concentration, and joint action of many faculties and exercises of mind. Such a union and concert of the intellectual powers, such an enlargement and development, such a comprehensiveness, is necessarily a matter of training. And again, such a training is a matter of rule; it is not mere application, however exemplary, which introduces the mind to truth, nor the reading many books, nor the getting up many subjects, nor the witnessing many experiments, nor the attending many lectures. All this is short of enough; a man may have done it all, yet be lingering in the vestibule of knowledge:—he may not realize what his mouth utters; he may not see with his mental eye what confronts him; he may have no grasp of things as they are; or at least he may have no power at all of advancing one step forward of himself, in consequence of what he has already acquired, no power of discriminating between truth and falsehood, of sifting out the grains of truth from the mass, of arranging things according to their real value, and, if I may use the phrase, of building up ideas. Such a power is the result of a scientific formation of mind; it is an acquired faculty of judgment, of clear-sightedness, of sagacity, of wisdom, of philosophical reach of mind, and of intellectual self-possession and repose,—qualities which do not come of mere acquirement. The bodily eye, the organ for apprehending material objects, is provided by nature; the eye of the mind, of which the object is truth, is the work of discipline and habit.

This process of training, by which the intellect, instead of being formed or sacrificed to some particular or accidental purpose, some specific trade or profession, or study or science, is disciplined for its own sake, for the perception of its own proper object, and for its own highest culture, is called Liberal Education; and though there is no one in whom it is carried as far as is conceivable, or whose intellect would be a pattern of what intellects should be made, yet there is scarcely any one but may gain an idea of what real training is, and at least look towards it, and make its true scope and result, not something else, his standard of excellence; and numbers there are who may submit themselves to it, and secure it to themselves in good measure. And to set forth the right standard, and to train according to it, and to help forward all students towards it according to their various capacities, this I conceive to be the business of a University.

² Newman, John Henry. 1948. *The Uses of Knowledge*, Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 53-77. Used with permission.