

The Re-Imagined Aristotelianism of John Henry Newman

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IN DEFENSE OF TRADITION, “Burke theorized shoddily” and should be remembered as “an agent of positive harm.”¹ This is the judgment of Alasdair MacIntyre, no shoddy theorist of tradition himself. Questioning the wisdom of Burke’s “wisdom without reflection,” MacIntyre argues that a healthy tradition is always vitally dialectical, “a socially embodied argument.” For Burke, by contrast, tradition is valued for its stability and so is set against reason and the conflict inherent in dialectics. Accordingly, MacIntyre finds in Burke neither the resources for a philosophical defense of tradition nor an accurate portrayal of the health of actual traditions. “Indeed,” says MacIntyre, “when a tradition becomes Burkean, it is always dying or already dead.”²

If he finds Burke’s concept of tradition theoretically wanting, MacIntyre does recognize its political advantages, both in the eighteenth century and more recently. MacIntyre distances himself from “the ideological uses to which the concept of a tradition has been put by conservative political theorists.” As a defender of tradition in the modern acad-

emy, MacIntyre may at first appear to be simply engaged in some politically correct triangulation. But MacIntyre believes he is more truly conservative, more fundamentally opposed to modern liberalism, than Burke. What is more, as an alternative to Burke, MacIntyre points to “a far more important theorist of tradition,”³ one who “theorized with insight”⁴ and to whom MacIntyre acknowledges “a massive debt”⁵: John Henry Newman.

What makes Newman so superior a theorist of tradition? MacIntyre does not explain how he comes to this judgment, nor does he indicate what it is about Newman’s reflection on tradition that is so important. After acknowledging his debt to Newman, MacIntyre insists that he will “proceed independently,” and the reader is left to judge for himself what MacIntyre may have found so valuable in Newman’s thought. Ironically, one of the founding texts of contemporary Burkean conservatism, Russell Kirk’s *Conservative Mind*, may help point us to the philosophical insight of Newman’s that is so appreciated by MacIntyre. To be sure, Kirk more often portrays Newman as a defender of particular traditional elements of civilization—especially liberal education and religious faith—than as a “philosopher of tradition.” Nonetheless, Kirk does locate Newman’s importance in his role as a philosopher,⁶ praising him for articulat-

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ing the value of knowledge, the limits of reason and science, the danger of utilitarianism and rationalism, the nature of intellectual virtue, and the necessity of such virtue for the grasp of first principles.

These emphases point to the connection between Newman's philosophy of tradition and one venerable, pre-modern tradition of philosophy. A fundamental feature of Newman's defense of tradition is an appreciation for, and natural deference to, classical Greek philosophy, and here, one philosopher in particular stands out. Newman conceives of and defends tradition with a mind formed and disciplined by a study of *Aristotle*.

I

Scholars have attempted to classify Newman's philosophy in relation to various familiar categories and figures in the history of philosophy.⁷ Classification is complicated by the fact that most of his writings are occasional and theological, rather than systematic and philosophical, but the one exception, *A Grammar of Assent* (1870), advances a detailed epistemology worked out over a lifetime and central to the argument of such works as the *Tracts*, the Oxford sermons (1826-1843), *The Arians of the Fourth Century* (1833), and *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (1845). Thus, while Newman's thought is marked by both originality and eclecticism, it also displays a remarkable coherence, and a consistency over the course of his long life.

Sometimes described as an empiricist, it is uncertain when or how seriously Newman read Locke.⁸ He has reminded other commentators of Hume, with his insistence on the limits of speculative reason and the necessity of practical certainty. For placing the burden of theological argument on practical reason rather than speculative metaphysics, he has even been compared to Kierkegaard.⁹ In basing a proof for the existence of God

on the experience of conscience, Newman seems closer to Augustine than Aquinas, and a case can be made for Newman's Platonism.¹⁰

The influence of Aristotle—especially the *Nichomachean Ethics*, *Rhetoric*, and *Poetics*—is widely acknowledged but nonetheless usually underestimated. It is assumed that because Newman's exposure to Aristotle was early, it does not give us much insight into Newman's mature thought. Such an assumption counts against both the consistency of Newman's intellectual career and the implicit Aristotelianism of the central features of Newman's philosophy.

It also counts against Newman's explicit professions of Peripatetic allegiance. The strongest of these occurs in *The Idea of a University* (1852/58), where Newman goes so far as to argue that everyone is, or should be, an Aristotelian. "While the world lasts," says Newman, "will Aristotle's doctrine on these matters last, for he is the oracle of nature and truth." Of immediate concern were topics central to the *Idea*: the order of knowledge and the good of liberal learning. But the praise for Aristotle does not end there. "While we are men," Newman continues,

we cannot help, to a great extent, being Aristotelians, for the great Master does but analyze the thoughts, feelings, views, and opinions of human kind. He has told us the meaning of our own words and ideas, before we were born. In many subject-matters, to think correctly, is to think like Aristotle; and we are his disciples whether we will or no, though we may not know it.¹¹

This encomium to Aristotle cannot be dismissed as an empty piety, a superficial deference to classical authority. Aristotelianism saturates *The Idea of a University*: in Newman's defense of liberal as opposed to servile arts; in the treatment of intellectual disciplines as "sciences," which are not only interrelated but ordered in a hierarchy; in the notion

of “the philosophical habit of mind,” that intellectual virtue which Newman says is the fruit of genuine education—in each of these subject matters, to understand Newman accurately is to think like Aristotle.

Nor is that all. None of these memorable, isolated themes of Newman’s *Idea* can properly be understood apart from the argument of the whole, and that argument itself makes clear that the Aristotelianism of the *Idea* is not just a recurring trope but an organizing principle. The argument of the *Idea* can be summarized in three theses: that the university must serve intellectual truth as its end; that theology is not only a proper science but the highest science, and must be included in, and allowed to govern, the university curriculum; and that knowledge of truth, while a good in itself, is not the highest good for man, and so the university must be ordered toward the Church. Thus, the agenda of Newman’s occasional lectures—to defend the founding of a new Catholic university—is fulfilled only within the framework of the Aristotelian notion of a hierarchy of human knowledge and a hierarchy of human goods.

Neither the Catholic end nor the Aristotelian means of Newman’s argument have rendered it useless to theorists of the modern secular university. As Newman himself acknowledged and intended, the Catholicism is contingent to the main argument about the nature and purpose of a liberal education.¹² The Aristotelianism, integral to Newman’s argument, is harder to ignore, but easy to misunderstand. Some interpreters believe that Newman’s conception of a “liberal” education, in which knowledge is pursued as its own end, lends support to the relativistic elective system, in which the content of education is considered less important than the opportunity to develop “critical thinking skills” by exercising the mind on whatever interests it. Yet Aristo-

totelian reason, even more than Catholic faith, led Newman in the opposite direction, to insist that a university must teach the truth and form minds—that is, must bring minds into conformity with genuine objects of knowledge. A university, says Newman, “by its very name professes to teach universal knowledge...to set forth the right standard and to train according to it.”¹³

In articulating a “universal knowledge” over and above the specialized sciences, Newman has recourse to the Aristotelian notion of a “science of sciences.” This should not be conflated with theology, the science whose inclusion in the curriculum Newman is concerned to justify. Theology is a particular science, which is sovereign because it treats the highest things and is concerned with our ultimate end. The “science of sciences” is philosophy, sovereign insofar as it provides the underlying principles of all reasoning, and so is presumed or presupposed in the exercise of any particular science.¹⁴

Newman’s contemporaries, unlike his readers a century and half later, could be expected to retain some confidence in the unity and universality of knowledge. Newman can almost take it for granted that the business of an institution committed to teaching universal knowledge would include philosophy. This is part of the reason why Newman does not say much about what it means to study philosophy; at times, he seems to imply that it will be acquired indirectly. But it is clear that Newman’s “philosophy,” as the science of sciences, includes both metaphysics and logic.¹⁵ Like Aristotle, whose *Metaphysics* argued that first philosophy must treat not only first principles of substance but also first principles of rationality,¹⁶ Newman discerned the necessary connection between architectonic wisdom and the science of reasoning.

Although Newman exploits this Aristotelian notion of a universal science of

sciences to defend the inclusion of theology in a university curriculum, he still locates the purpose of a liberal education not in religious or theological knowledge, but in “a philosophical habit of mind.” Roughly speaking, this is an ability to understand all things in their proper perspective. In an oft-quoted passage, Newman characterizes the habit by describing its operation:

[I]f we would improve the intellect, first of all, we must ascend; we cannot gain real knowledge on a level; we must generalize, we must reduce to method, we must have a grasp of principles, and group and shape our acquisitions by means of them.¹⁷

The phrase “a philosophical habit of mind” describes what Newman had originally struggled to name, a “perfection or virtue of the intellect,” which he first called simply “philosophy.”¹⁸ So philosophy is not just a science, but a virtue, and this in the specifically Aristotelian sense of an acquired capacity or “habit.” Like Aristotle, Newman emphasizes both the intellectual dimension of the virtue—the power by which one “apprehends the great outlines of knowledge”—and the moral and affective dimension—its fostering of “freedom, equitableness, calmness, moderation.”¹⁹

In describing this “philosophical habit of mind,” Newman is articulating what Aristotle simply called “wisdom” or *sophia*, the highest of the virtues of speculative intellect. Aristotle says that *sophia* is “the most finished of the forms of knowledge,” explaining that it includes both the apprehension of first principles (by intuition or *nous*) and the grasp of what follows from first principles (by “scientific” knowledge or *episteme*). It is “knowledge of the highest objects” with “its proper completion.”²⁰

The ability of the *Idea of a University* to communicate a notion of philosophy or “wisdom” as both a science and a virtue makes clear not only the fact, but also the

subtlety, of Newman’s Aristotelianism. This subtlety, in turn, accounts for its being so often overlooked. The Aristotelianism of Newman’s argument is unadvertised and vernacular. Newman offers a translation of Aristotle so natural and unobtrusive that we need not look behind it for sources.

This “translation” of Aristotelian intellectual virtue is carried out further in Newman’s most properly philosophical work, *A Grammar of Assent*. Commonly treated as a work within the philosophy of religion, or religious epistemology, religion is actually treated there almost as an epilogue. The reasonableness of Christian faith is defended only as an application of a general epistemology which is worked out over eight of the ten chapters. Even when Newman considers Christianity explicitly, he claims to speak not as a Christian but as a philosopher—and as an Aristotelian. Asserting that among all the candidates for revealed religion, Christianity alone fulfills “the aspirations, needs, and foreshadowings of natural faith and devotion,” Newman denies that this conclusion is based on his own Christian faith. He cites sociological and ethical considerations independent of his religious belief. But most importantly, he insists, “as to the intellectual position from which I have contemplated the subject”—that is, as to the principal epistemological considerations which occupy the bulk of the *Grammar of Assent*—“Aristotle has been my master.”²¹

Aristotle is clearly the master even of what is taken to be most original in the *Grammar of Assent*, Newman’s notion of “the Illative Sense.” First introduced as a kind of “faculty,”²² a power of discernment and judgment, Newman also defines it as a “perfection or virtue”²³ of that faculty. In both senses, what Newman is describing recalls Aristotle’s *phronesis*—practical reasoning, or its virtue, prudence. Newman himself makes the con-

nection to *phronesis*, arguing that the Illative Sense only extends to matters of reasoning about truth what the Aristotelian virtue provides for reasoning about conduct.²⁴ A note makes clear that Newman recognizes that Aristotelian *phronesis* already included what he means by the Illative Sense, but that given the context of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle did not develop his account of it with respect to intellectual assent, only with respect to action.²⁵

Newman has rightly perceived that he is developing the virtue of *phronesis* in a direction that Aristotle had already indicated. Introduced as a virtue for guiding action, for Aristotle it is primarily an intellectual virtue (a perfection of thought), not a moral virtue (a perfection of desire). Aristotle likens it to “perception” and “judgment,” and it is clear that *phronesis* includes *nous* (“intuition,” “understanding,” sometimes simply “sense”), the virtue—which is also a part of *sophia* or wisdom—by which the intellect is able to grasp undemonstrable truths.²⁶ Newman originally described his project in the general terms of classical or “virtue” epistemology: “My book is to show that a right moral state of mind germinates or even generates good intellectual principles.”²⁷ As it turned out, Newman’s *Grammar of Assent* can properly be read as an extension of Aristotle’s theory of intellectual virtue in Book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, making clear the limitation of scientific reasoning, and establishing the intellectual and moral requirements of a virtue of right discernment.

II

As one commentator has put it, *A Grammar of Assent* “moves toward...the enthronement of *phronesis*.”²⁸ As we have seen, the *Grammar* and the *Idea* together move toward the enthronement of *phronesis* and *sophia*. In his two most philosophical works, Newman offers a reinvigorated articulation of the two central

Aristotelian intellectual virtues.²⁹ And the significance of this for our understanding of Newman as a critic of liberalism must be highlighted. Newman is not just, as some conservatives have appreciated, a critic of false philosophies—of utilitarianism, rationalism, and skepticism. Newman is a promoter of true philosophy, combining what so many modern philosophers had viewed as opposed: epistemological modesty, and metaphysical and ethical realism. Newman offers an account of how genuine knowledge is possible, but depends as much on properly formed habits as on scientific procedure. True wisdom, for Newman, is not the product of a rigorous method, but the prize of a disciplined soul.

Newman’s philosophy is thus marked, on the one hand, by confidence in the power of reason and the order of sciences; and on the other hand, by attention to the limitations of reason, and to the need for principles and virtues which are beyond the reach of demonstrative reason. Many criticisms of Newman are born of a failure to hold both of these aspects of his thought together. Two recent critics are illustrative. In a couple of essays on education, Edward Tingley has argued that Newman is an advocate of Enlightenment ideals.³⁰ Tingley rightly distinguishes between genuine initiation into Aristotelian *sophia* and *phronesis*, and “knowledge” as a commodity derived from technique. But Tingley finds Newman’s conception of education dependent on the latter rather than the former. According to Tingley, Newman’s understanding of “knowledge” concedes too much to the Enlightenment conception of reason. In Newman’s characterization of the philosophical habit of mind, Tingley finds not a description of the virtue whereby one may grasp first principles, but a rationalist method for efficient production in the knowledge industry. Newman, for Tingley, is thus not a true defender of classical liberal education, but a modern “techni-

cian of learning.”

Why Tingley insists on interpreting Newman’s sense of “universal knowledge” as if it expressed Cartesian evidentialism as opposed to Aristotelian wisdom is not clear, but in supposedly defending a more Aristotelian view of wisdom, Tingley is farther from Aristotle than he realizes. Tingley takes Newman to task for advocating the idea of “knowledge as its own end”—but this is one of the rare occasions where Newman’s use remains faithful not just to the sense but to the letter of Aristotle. Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* begins with a reflection on the nobility, sovereignty, and value of knowledge (*episteme*, not *sophia*) “for its own sake.”³¹

If Tingley gives us the rationalist Newman, the recent biographical study by Frank Turner offers us Newman the irrationalist.³² Turner begins by questioning the continuity of Newman’s intellectual life. According to Turner, the supposedly unifying factor—the critique of liberalism—is in fact a self-serving later interpretation, invented by the Catholic Newman to justify the behavior of the Anglican Newman, and more useful for hagiographers than for historians. Thus, Turner confines his study to the Anglican Newman of the Tractarian movement, attempting to discern what actually motivated Newman at the time. He finds in the Tractarian Newman not a man moved primarily by ideas, but a man of complex psychological and political motives, and more opposed to Protestant faith than to “liberal” thought.

Despite the posture of objective historiography, Turner’s study is more postmodern than scientific. Originating with an incredulity towards Newman’s meta-narrative, it consistently finds political and psychological motivations for theological positions. At his worst, Turner descends to puerile psychopathography, with almost parodic speculation about death fixations, eating disorders, and (of course) sexual orientation. Those of

Newman’s ideas that cannot be deconstructed are simply ignored (e.g., Turner’s treatment of Newman’s Oxford sermons on faith and reason³³). Turner’s simplistic historiography rules out coherence of thought and action as implying a “teleology” and “inevitability” supposedly opposed to true historical “contingency.” In its barest form, Turner’s interpretation of Newman is merely circular: beginning with the assumption that Newman’s actions cannot be understood in terms of philosophical motives, he “concludes” that Newman’s philosophical arguments were mere “universalist rhetoric”³⁴ in the mercenary service of his emotional and political interest. It is not a surprise then, when Turner pronounces Newman a Nietzschean irrationalist, a skeptic about knowledge, and a relativist about good and evil.³⁵

Tingley’s Enlightenment Newman or Turner’s Postmodern Newman? There is a third rival version of John Henry Newman, a version that resolves the dialectic between, and gives us perspective on, the other two: Newman the Aristotelian, aware of both the power and limits of theoretical reason, neither relativist nor rationalist.

Newman’s criticism of rationalism was consistent, and consistently Aristotelian. As an Anglican, Newman wrote:

To Rationalize is to ask for *reasons* out of place; to ask improperly how we are to *account* for certain things, to be unwilling to believe them unless they can be accounted for, i.e. referred to something else as a cause, to some existing system as harmonizing with them or taking them up into itself.³⁶

Aristotle identified this same mistake, and expressed it in the same language. In discussing first principles of reason, he argued that not everything can be demonstrated, because there are no prior principles from which first principles can be demonstrated. Those who deny the

principle of non-contradiction, for instance,

demand a reason for everything. They want a starting point, and want to grasp it by demonstration; while it is obvious from their actions that they have no conviction. But their case is just what we have stated before; for they require a reason for things which have no reason.³⁷

For Newman, opposition to this philosophical mistake remains a thread running through his intellectual life. The mistake becomes, indeed, the central feature of liberalism, as Newman defined it most completely in a note to his *Apologia*:

Whenever men are able to act at all, there is the chance of extreme and intemperate action; and therefore, when there is exercise of mind, there is the chance of wayward or mistaken exercise. Liberty of thought is in itself a good; but it gives an opening to false liberty. Now by Liberalism I mean false liberty of thought, or the exercise of thought upon matters, in which, from the constitution of the human mind, thought cannot be brought to any successful issue, and therefore is out of place. Among such matters are first principles of whatever kind.³⁸

Liberalism, then, is a philosophical error, an epistemological heresy. Denying first principles amounts to a kind of rationalism. It also amounts to relativism: as Aristotle had already explained, the demand to justify first principles most commonly arises from a Protagorean epistemology which, aware of its own inability to completely justify anything, locates truth in appearances. In that case, all opinions are true, and truth is relative.³⁹ Newman could almost be expounding on Book IV of the *Metaphysics* when he, too, notices the essential link between rationalism and a relativizing empiricism: in *Tract 73* he noted that rationalism, characterized by “its love of systematizing,” often ends up “basing its system upon personal experience, on the evidence of sense.”⁴⁰

III

This brings us to Newman’s theory of tradition, which is part of his positive epistemology and continuous with the critique of liberalism. If we cannot demonstrate, or derive from our senses, all the truths that we ought to know, we will need to apprehend these truths from some source other than argument or “objective” evidence. It is tempting to appeal here to automatic “intuition” or to universally “innate” ideas. But we are talking about *human* epistemology, not a theory of knowledge for disembodied intellects, and we cannot ignore the fact that human beings live in relation to other human beings. Learning is not a relation between one man and his ideas, but between one man and other men. We learn from others by acquiring the virtues of successful individuals and growing into the patterns of life embodied by the community. In this sense, the “intuition” of principles is informed *by authority*—the implicitly or explicitly claimed privilege of a person or institution already better informed.

As Aristotle said, “We are bound to give heed to the undemonstrated sayings and opinions of the experienced and the aged, not less than to demonstrations; because, from their having the eye for experience, they behold the principles of things.”⁴¹ This passage was a favorite of Newman’s; he cites it in *A Grammar of Assent*, setting up his introduction of the “Illative Sense.”⁴² He draws out the implications of Aristotle’s insight: “Instead of trusting logical science, we must trust persons, namely, those who by long acquaintance with their subject have a right to judge.”⁴³ This requires us to attend to such persons, to “follow their history,” and to “learn as they have learned,” so that we may “make ourselves of their number.”⁴⁴

Knowledge depends on personal testimony; prudence defers to history; learning is joining a tradition. Newman’s explicitly traditionalist epistemology pro-

vides the background not only of his general understanding of the relationship between faith and reason, but of his particular theory of the development of Christian doctrine. But note that it is not an *ad hoc* traditionalism; nor is Newman simply offering an anti-theoretical critique of liberal epistemology. Rather, he is articulating an alternative, positive theory of knowledge—a theory which he finds already “stated in substance” in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*.⁴⁵

By contrast, Burke’s more rhetorical defense of tradition might occasionally defer to Greek philosophy for its antiquity and authority, but not for its argument. If one sought to discover a philosophy underlying Burke’s defense, it would be easy to dismiss as a kind of pragmatism—or, perhaps, to dignify it a bit, a “common sense” philosophy: tradition is beneficial, a fact recognized by those uncorrupted by ideology or (in Burke’s tellingly pejorative sense) “metaphysics.” The problem with this view is not that it is wrong, but that it offers no account of why it is right—and it includes no philosophical framework (no *metaphysics*) that could support such an account. In Aristotelian terms, Burke’s defense of tradition begins and ends at an argument *quia* (establishing the fact *that*). This is an important project, but it is natural to inquire further for the argument *propter quid* (explaining the reason *why*).

It has been the abiding philosophical challenge of conservatism to ground its appeal to tradition on something more solid than pragmatic calculation or personal faith, to articulate “traditionalism” as a principled view that does not reduce to one of its historic enemies: utilitarianism on the one hand, or subjectivized irrationalism on the other. In short, if “the conservative mind” was born in reaction to Enlightenment innovation, and that innovation could be traced to an epistemological prejudice against tradition, then the project of the conservative mind

could not be complete without a positive, counter-Enlightenment epistemology. Newman recognized this challenge, and no doubt this is one reason MacIntyre preferred him to Burke as a theorist of tradition.

A further reason is that Newman appreciated the important role that Aristotle could play in meeting this challenge. MacIntyre was drawn to Aristotle not just because Aristotle was an exemplar of the “virtue” tradition that MacIntyre wanted to rehabilitate. Aristotle helped MacIntyre to articulate the very notion of a “philosophical tradition,” and to account for the rationality of arguments within and between traditions. In Aristotle’s conception, philosophy is a dialectical activity, an activity that takes place over time, a “practice” which both produces and is produced by a habit of the soul, the acquired perfection of wisdom. The activity or practice of philosophy is thus necessarily historical—and Aristotle’s awareness of this is evident from his subtle use of intellectual history at the beginning of his major philosophical works. It is Aristotle, as much as Nietzsche, who informs MacIntyre’s strategy of “arguing with” philosophers by “outnarrating” them.

IV

In any effort to revive an Aristotelian alternative to Enlightenment ideas it is essential that Aristotle be re-narrated. To be an Aristotelian is not to commit oneself to a set of doctrines, but to habituate one’s mind to a way of thinking. A modern Aristotelian must be what Newman called a “learned Aristotelian”:

one who can answer any whatever philosophical questions in the way that Aristotle would have answered them. If they are questions which did not occur in Aristotle’s age, he still answers them.... In one respect he knows more than Aristotle; because, in new emergencies after the time of Aristotle, he *can* and *does* answer what Aristotle

would have answered, but for the want of the opportunity did not.⁴⁶

Newman himself was just such a “learned Aristotelian.” But more importantly, in Newman we have the valuable reminder that such an identity is not a merely academic alternative, that the exercise of Aristotelian ideas need not take place within the technical vocabulary of medieval scholasticism or Anglo-American analytic philosophy. After all, the context of Newman’s primary intellectual battles—the “new emergencies” of his time—were not primarily philosophical and scholarly, but religious and personal. Moreover, the ethos of Victorian England and ecclesiastical politics set uniquely demanding rhetorical standards. One of the reasons that Newman’s Aristotelianism is so easily overlooked is that he met the challenge of this rhetorical context so successfully; his literary talent disguises his philosophical pedigree. Newman communicates Aristotelian ideas, not hardened and familiar in the technical terminology of scholastic manuals, but renovated and re-imagined in the vigorous language of his personal style. Newman’s learned Aristotelianism is a re-imagined Aristotelianism.

But even effective re-imagination is essentially Aristotelian. As Newman well

knew, Aristotle held that sense and intellect are mediated by imagination.⁴⁷ Hence, Aristotle takes rhetoric and poetry quite seriously, and in an early essay, Newman relates Aristotle’s “most true and philosophical”⁴⁸ theory of poetry. There, Newman notes that “the greatest of analytical philosophers” also understood that “a word has power to convey a world of information to the imagination, and to act as a spell upon the feelings.”⁴⁹ Newman not only appreciated this point, he made it a central feature of his *Grammar of Assent*: mere ideas tend to be “abstract” and “notional,” but vivid thought, and effective communication, makes use of images, concrete and “real.”⁵⁰

Like poetic masters, who have “subjected metaphysics to their art,”⁵¹ Newman was not content to rehearse Aristotelian terms, but felt compelled to revivify Aristotle’s concepts in creative language that would capture the imagination. Not only is this authentically Aristotelian, it is authentically traditionalist, in the sense described by MacIntyre: old truths kept current in socially embodied argument, creatively reinvigorated in new dialectical contexts. As a theorist of tradition, Newman does not just point us back to philosophical sources; he models the virtues which allow those sources to speak anew in subsequent ages.

1. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, 1988), 8, 353. 2. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame, 1984), 222. 3. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?*, 353. 4. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?*, 8. 5. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?*, 354. 6. Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Eliot*, 7th revised edition (Washington, 1987), 266. 7. For a detailed account and discussion of sources, see Edward Sillem, ed., *The Philosophical Notebook of John Henry Newman*, Vol. 1: *General Introduction to the Study of Newman’s Philosophy* (Louvain, 1969). For a briefer and more recent account of Newman’s place in the history of philosophy, see Fergus Kerr, “In an Isolated and, Philosophically Uninfluential Way”: Newman and Oxford Philosophy,” in *Newman and the Word*,

ed. Terrence Merrigan and Ian T. Kerr (Louvain, 2000), 155-179. 8. Sillem, 191-203. 9. Ralph McInerny, *Characters in Search of Their Author: The Gifford Lectures, 1999-2000* (Notre Dame, 2001), 100-108. 10. Louis Dupré, “Newman and the Neoplatonic Tradition in England,” in *Newman and the Word*, 137-154. 11. John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University*, ed. Martin J. Svaglic (Notre Dame, 1982), 82-83 (Discourse V, § 5). 12. Newman, *Idea*, 6 (I.3). 13. Newman, *Idea*, 115 (VII.1). 14. Newman, *Idea*, 38 (III.4). To be sure, Aristotle ultimately identifies theology and first philosophy in the *Metaphysics*, but it takes many pages before it is clear that the science of being *qua* being is best pursued as the science of separate, immaterial substance. Newman must

keep the two separate, beginning, to an even greater degree than Aristotle did, with an audience that is not yet convinced that divinity is the primary concern of the philosopher. **15.** As for logic, the method of the sciences, Newman clearly sides with Aristotle. “The boldest, simplest, and most comprehensive theory which has been invented for the analysis of the reasoning process, is the well-known science for which we are indebted to Aristotle....” John Henry Newman, “Implicit and Explicit Reason” [1840], Sermon XIII in John Henry Newman, *Fifteen Sermons Preached before the University of Oxford* [3rd edition, 1872] (Notre Dame, 1997), 258. **16.** Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, IV. **17.** Newman, *Idea*, 105 (VI.7). **18.** Newman, *Idea*, 94 (VI.1). **19.** Newman, *Idea*, 76 (V.1). Cf. xlii, xliii (Preface), where Newman describes the virtue in terms of “the force, the steadiness, the comprehensiveness and the versatility of intellect, the command over our own powers, the instinctive and just estimate of things as they pass before us...” and “the good sense, sobriety of thought, reasonableness, candour, self-command, and steadiness of view....” **20.** Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, VI.7. **21.** John Henry Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (Notre Dame, 1979), 334. **22.** Newman, *Grammar*, 262. **23.** Newman, *Grammar*, 271. **24.** Newman, *Grammar*, 277-279. **25.** Newman, *Grammar*, 277, n. 1. After defining *phronesis* in a stricter sense as right reasoning about conduct (*Nichomachean Ethics*, VI.8-9), Aristotle discusses right reasoning about truth in terms of the analogous virtues *synesis* (“understanding” or “intelligence”) and *gnome* (“sense” or “judgment”), and goes on to argue that these intellectual virtues cannot be separated (*Nichomachean Ethics*, VI.10-11). **26.** Newman’s interest in rehabilitating the faculty and virtue of *nous* is also evident in his explicitly theological writings, where he once describes the apprehension of revelation as “supernatural *nous*.” John Henry Newman, “Papers of 1860 on the Evidence for Revelation,” in *The Theological Papers of John Henry Newman on Faith and Certainty*, ed. Hugo M. de Achaval and J. Derek Holmes (Oxford, 1976), 88. **27.** From a letter to Newman’s publisher, published in *Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman*, ed. C. S. Dessain and Thomas Gornall (Oxford, 1973), Vol. 25, 51; cited in Nicholas Lash, “Introduction” to Newman, *Grammar*, 11. **28.** Joseph Dunne, *Back to the Rough Ground: Practical Judgment and the Lure of Technique* (Notre Dame, 1993), 55. **29.** For Aristotle, *phronesis* is the highest virtue of the deliberative or calculative part of the soul (*logistikon*), more important than “art” (*techne*), while *sophia* is the highest virtue of the “contemplative” part of the soul (*epistemonikon*), a union of both “science” (*episteme*) and “intuition” (*nous*). *Nichomachean Ethics*, VI.1-7. **30.** Ed-

ward Tingley, “Technicians of Learning,” *First Things* 105 (August/September 2000), 29-35; Edward Tingley, “Knowledge for the Sake of Knowledge,” *First Things* 119 (January 2002), 15-17; cf. Edward Tingley, Correspondence [reply to John Crosby], *First Things* 122 (April 2002). **31.** Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, I.2 (982a14-15, 30-33). **32.** Frank M. Turner, *John Henry Newman: The Challenge to Evangelical Religion* (New Haven, 2002). **33.** John Henry Newman, *Fifteen Sermons*, esp. sermons 10 (“Faith and Reason, Contrasted as Habits of Mind”) and 11 (“The Nature of Faith in Relation to Reason”). Turner treats these crucial writings—regarded by Newman upon publication as his “best volume”—in a dismissive paragraph of confusedly concatenated quotations. Turner, 330. **34.** Turner, 640. **35.** Turner, 449, 478-479. Turner speculates, preposterously, that Newman would have been a better philosopher if only he had read more German idealism, which would have given him “more dynamic philosophical presuppositions” and a more secure “metaphysical foundation.” Turner, 599. **36.** John Henry Newman, *Tract 73* (“On the Introduction of Rationalistic Principles into Religion”), quoted in Turner, 239. This passage does not appear in the version published as Essay II in John Henry Newman, *Essays Critical and Historical*, Vol. 1 (London, 1907), 30-99. **37.** Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, IV.6 (1011a8-13). **38.** “Note A: Liberalism,” in John Henry Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (Boston, 1956), 271. This passage, together with the criticism of rationalism from *Tract 73*, would seem to be sufficient to establish the continuity thesis that Turner denies. **39.** Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, IV.5. **40.** Newman, *Tract 73*, quoted in Turner, 239. **41.** Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, VI.11 (1143b11-14). **42.** Newman, *Grammar*, 268; Newman quoted the same passage in his “Assent and Intuition,” in Newman, *The Theological Papers...on Faith and Certainty*, 74. **43.** Newman, *Grammar*, 268-269. **44.** Newman, *Grammar*, 269. **45.** Newman, *Grammar*, 269. **46.** From a paper on doctrinal development, 1868, published in *The Theological Papers of John Henry Newman on Biblical Inspiration and on Infallibility*, ed. Derek Holmes (Oxford, 1979), quoted in Ian Ker, “Forward” to John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (Notre Dame, 1989), xxiv. **47.** Aristotle, *De Anima*, III.3.8. **48.** Newman, “Poetry, with reference to Aristotle’s *Poetics*” (1829), in Newman, *Essays Critical and Historical*, vol. 1, 9. **49.** Newman, “Poetry,” 8-9. Yet for some reason Sillem, who noted much of Aristotle’s influence on Newman, finds “no traces of the Aristotelian ideas...of the intellect and imagination in any of [Newman’s] works.” Sillem, 157. **50.** On Newman’s distinction between notional and real assent, cf. Newman, *Grammar*, 49-92. **51.** Newman, “Poetry,” 18.