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Discourse and Context
An Interdisciplinary Study of John Henry Newman

Edited by
Gerard Magill

Southern Illinois University Press
Carbondale and Edwardsville
To Dad, in memory of Mum,
for learning and love

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ABBREVIATIONS OF NEWMAN'S WORKS

The standard abbreviations of the works of John Henry Newman are adopted in this collection.

- *Apo.* Apologia Pro Vita Sua: Being a History of His Religious Opinions
- *Ari.* The Arians of the Fourth Century
- *Call.* Callista, A Sketch of the Third Century. In the later editions of 1889, 1890: Callista, a Tale of the Third Century
- *Cons.* On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine, ed. John Coulson
- *Diff.* I, Certain Difficulties Felt by Anglicans in Catholic Teaching. 2 vols.
- *GA* An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent
- *PS.* Parochial and Plain Sermons. 8 vols.
- *Proof* The Argument from Conscience to the Existence of God, according to J. H. Newman, ed. Adrian J. Boekraad and Henry Tristram
- *SD* Sermons Bearing on Subjects of the Day
TP. I Theological Papers of John Henry Newman on Faith and Certainty, ed.
   Hugo M. de Achaval and J. Derek Holmes
US Fifteen Sermons Preached before the University of Oxford 182643
VM The Via Media of the Anglican Church. 2 vols.
I, II
INTRODUCTION: THE INTELLECTUAL ETHOS OF JOHN HENRY NEWMAN

GERARD MAGILL

As a university scholar and a religious minister in nineteenth-century Britain, John Henry Newman (1801-190) had a remarkable influence upon his age. His intellectual ethos pervaded the interdisciplinary interests of his writings and elicited widespread recognition in secular and religious circles alike. The intellectual achievement and the broad spectrum of his works are evident from the considerable number that have become classics: the *Oxford University Sermons* (1826-43) in theology; the *Dublin University Discourses* (1852) in his *Idea of a University* (1873) in education; the *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (1864), his spiritual autobiography, in literature; and the *Grammar of Assent* (1870) in philosophy. Appointed a Fellow at Oriel College, Oxford, in 1822, Newman quickly established himself as a creative and an original writer. As an Anglican, his influence was extensive, especially in his charismatic leadership of the Oxford Movement in the 1830s, which produced the Tracts that generated a diversity of religious inquiries in Victorian England. After his conversion to Catholicism in 1845, his reputation became widespread, especially by his opposing rationalism in his philosophy of liberal education as rector of the new university in Dublin (1854-58) and by his upholding the legitimacy of faith as a reasonable and a nuanced commitment in his epistemology of belief (1870).

Today scholars in many disciplines continue a critical dialogue with Newman's thought. The present collection arises from papers presented during the three-day Newman Centenary Conference at Saint Louis University in fall 1990. This selection of essays examines the contribution of Newman's writings from an interdisciplinary perspective. The specialties of literature and history, theory of rhetoric and education, and philosophy and theology provide diverse horizons for engaging Newman's insights with contemporary scholarship. An amazing array of intellectual giants...
throughout history are called upon to understand Newman and to offer a scholarly appraisal of his creativity and genius. As a result, the cluster of issues discussed portrays the enduring prominence of Newman today. The following essays have been selected to reflect the impressive and increasing variety of literature on Newman studies, constructively expanding the boundaries of interdisciplinary scholarship.

This collection, then, should attract a broad range of readers who are interested in Newman's intellectual ethos. The title of this book, *Discourse and Context*, is intended to depict the interplay between discourse and context that pervades his writings. Newman consciously impressed upon his readers the relevance of historical context for appreciating the supple and malleable nature of persuasive discourse (logical, rhetorical, and prudential). In this reflective, introductory essay, I explain the organizing divisions that I use to elucidate the relation between discourse and context in Newman's works: *individuality, understanding, education, commitment*, and *interpretation*. First, Newman's *individuality*, portraying the personal context of his thought, had a significant impact upon his vision. Second, his approach to *understanding* was determined by a keen sense of the historical nature of practical reason for meaningful discourse. Third, his view of *education*, celebrating freedom of inquiry toward progress in knowledge, was sensitive to the role of culture. Fourth, *commitment* was important for his epistemology to apprehend historical reality as a basic condition for religious perception. Fifth, the *interpretation* of his thought today flourishes by means of the study of later historical contexts (for example, modernism) to illumine his discourse.

Newman was an *individualist* and a controversialist. Edward E. Kelly ("Identity and Discourse: A Study in Newman's Individualism") shows how Newman emphasized individuality. This emphasis was a drive to self-realization both in his way of thinking and of living. That natural characteristic was nourished by an inclination in his youth toward Calvinistic Evangelicalism, with its tendency to isolate self from reality. His selfwill was accompanied by an anxiety that fueled his fear of shame and failure as a university student at Trinity College, Oxford. That characteristic also spawned a self-protective personality, evident in his selective account of his tutorial quarrel with Edward Hawkins, provost of Oriel college, Oxford, and in his self-vindications in the *Apologia*.

Nonetheless, self-assurance prevailed in Newman's temperament. His confidence was allied closely to the controversial state of mind that thrived on conflict, paradox, and challenging disjunction as rhetorical instruments. They were evident especially in his *Letters and Diaries* during his years at
Oxford. He delighted in taking opponents to the brink in argument, sporting with dull adversaries and thriving on more substantial polemic in religion: against Catholicism as an Anglican and, much later, against Anglicanism as a Catholic.

It is no surprise, then, to find in Newman a commitment to individualistic and controversial theology. Unfortunately, this commitment was encumbered with personal bias, witnessed most especially in his study against Arianism (1833), and in his remarks against Luther on the question of justification (1838). Still, Newman's approach also yielded a rich harvest in theological discourse: his theory on doctrinal development as an Anglican and his interpretation of infallibility as a Catholic. Because of his individual, controversial spirit, he sidestepped the systematic theologies of Catholic scholasticism and of the Anglican Caroline divines.

However, Newman's individualistic use of those seventeenth-century Anglican theologians, whom we know as the Caroline divines, reveals the weaker side of his scholarship. Kenneth L. Parker ("Newman's Individualistic Use of the Caroline Divines in the Via Media") suggests that Newman's use of the Caroline divines appears superficial and selective. This occurs despite Newman's professed interest in synthesizing Anglican doctrine. Newman appealed to those scholars when writing his Lectures on the Prophetical Office of the Church and also in The Via Media (1836) in which he hypothesized a via media between the apparent excesses of Roman Catholicism and of popular Protestantism. The Caroline divines, he claimed, were one of the cornerstones of his argument. But Newman's unreflective quotations suggest that he used those theologians not in a scholarly way. Rather, he used them to support his own vision of a renewed Anglican tradition and to win polemical battles. There is little evidence that Newman seriously studied those thinkers. Rather, his casual and unsystematic interest can be attributed to his fascination for another tradition, the early Church.

In the 1830s Newman became closely acquainted with the patristic writings of the early Church. Previously, however, he had been schooled in the more ancient works of Greek philosophy, especially in what can be called the phronesis tradition of Aristotle. Mary Katherine Tillman ("Economies of Reason: Newman and the Phronesis Tradition") explains that the mode of reasoning in the phronesis tradition primarily shaped Newman's outlook on understanding. Three different contexts facilitate a grasp of the subtle understanding that engenders the variety of discourse in Newman's texts: the ancient thought of Aristotle and the modern thought of Heidegger and Ricoeur.
The *phronesis* tradition, from Parmenides, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, provided the context for Newman's economies of reason. In the *phronesis* tradition, practical reason cannot be isolated from the discursive community in which it arises. Insightfully, that tradition recognized the indeterminate, time-bound nature of human discourse while seeking progress in understanding. Likewise, by coining the term *illative sense* Newman introduced into his own epistemology the economizing activity of practical reason as the regulating principle for all reasoning. That is, the practical reason of the illative sense adjusts (economizes) to its subject matter with deliberation moving back and forth dialectically. The illative sense adjusts in relation to the whole person within the community of discourse as the context within which thought develops progressively. There are many examples of Newman's economies of reason: his different appeals to organic growth to mediate his hypothesis of doctrinal development, to biology to unfold his theology of the Church, to mathematics to interpret the processes of reasoning, and, above all, to music to accommodate the energy and subtle intricacies of thought. For Newman the disclosure of every economy was the fruit of *phronesis*, the means for inquiry to break through to insight.

Aristotle adopted ethical deliberation (*phronesis*) by using rhetoric as an intellectual function oriented to the contingent, to the indeterminate, and to praxis. To interpret the meaning of contingent matters, he explained, requires a dynamic framework of values, beliefs, laws, and practices. Within the context of that framework, Aristotle's rhetoric was the communication of good reasons for inquiry, argument, and judgment. In an extension of that intellectual stance, Newman and Heidegger share this common ground, which Walter Jost ("Philosophic Rhetoric: Newman and Heidegger") calls philosophic rhetoric. The function of philosophic rhetoric, in part, is to argue and deliberate persuasively on contingent matters. Heidegger's indirect appeal to rhetoric is located in his use of horizons, forestructures, and, more obliquely, poetic language. According to Heidegger, we know through historically specific horizons of understanding. Because the horizons are necessarily topical (mediated in human experience of language and time) and ethical-political (constituted by established traditions, beliefs), they depend, in part, upon persuasive interpretation, not rational demonstration. Horizons of understanding are structured by prior orientations toward the world, called forestructures of understanding. These forestructures of understanding grasp the past and present as a meaningful whole; moreover, they open us to the future, to what is new. Together, the horizons and the forestructures of understanding are circumscribed by
the insight and language of poetry, requiring the imaginative use of analogy, metaphor, and the "naming" word.

Heidegger's analysis illuminates the extent to which the poetic imagination pervades Newman's epistemology of belief. For Newman the primacy of the real over the notional required an interpretative apprehension. As for Heidegger's horizons, for Newman the concrete or real was mediated by personal experience (through values, beliefs, traditions) as a persuasive interpretation (philosophic rhetoric). This approach contrasted with the rationalist and romantic approaches in the nineteenth century. Akin to Heidegger's forestructures of understanding, Newman used dynamic and situational concepts in his rhetorical language to argue for a persuasive interpretation of reality. Newman's use of "anteccdent probabilities" drawn from past experience and culture, his "openness" to what is new, and his confidence in holding a "view" to organize and interpret are interdependent dimensions of his philosophic rhetoric. However, Newman's philosophic rhetoric as mental understanding did not abandon conceptual speech because all language, as explained later by Ricocur, is multilayered.

Ricoeur's theory of discourse focuses upon the interpretation of texts and of action in the world considered as text. Alan J. Crowley ("Theory of Discourse: Newman and Ricocur") shows that Ricoeur's literary theory, like Heidegger's philosophy, encourages an interdisciplinary integration of Newman's thought today. This approach portrays Newman's rhetoric not as style but as a mode of intellectual understanding that controls his theoretical discourse. Ricocur illumines Newman by tracing the relation between respecting the text (as a structured entity that has a message) and reconceiving the text (through reading and rewriting). This relation requires a critical consciousness of language, personal commitment, and appropriation of meaning. Ricoeur's explanation of the language of discourse (the reading and interpretation of text) clarifies Newman's method as one of rhetorical performance. For Ricoeur the efficacy of discourse depends upon a provisional position of value (believed, received, or intuited) in understanding. As a result, there can be a process of interpretation that seeks new meaning in the original text. For Newman the efficacy of discourse depends upon the personal commitment of assent to propositions as meaningful. Thus, we can interpret the text and live out its interpretation. By applying Newman's view of rhetorical understanding, we can attempt to resolve the tension of tradition and value versus pluralism in liberal education today. Newman's methodology suggests that the teacher makes a personal commitment in moral assent: there is established a structure of values that can be examined and reformed. This development will occur when others
reconstruct meaning and enact new values. Hence, Newman's rhetoric establishes a balance between structure and interpretative critique. As a consequence, liberal education encourages the preservation of pluralistic discourse.

The essays in the third division of this collection examine Newman's approach to liberal education in *The Idea of a University*. The essays discuss the relation of Christianity to culture and evaluate the viability of Newman's argument today. James C. Livingston ("Christianity and Culture in Newman's *Idea of a University*") claims that Newman anticipated the continuing discussion in the twentieth century on the relation of Christianity to culture. This relation arises from the fundamental question in Newman's *Idea* about the interplay between religious and secular knowledge. Different resolutions to the question are offered: on the one hand, by the quest for resonance among diverse traditions in correlationist theology (Paul Tillich, Karl Rahner, Bernard Lonergan, David Tracy); on the other hand, by the opposition to Enlightenment modernity in postliberal theology (Karl Barth, Hans Frei, George Lindbeck). The question can be posed by comparing Matthew Arnold and John Henry Newman. Arnold proposed a correlational and dialectical understanding of the relation between Christianity and culture. Newman developed a metaphor of the circle of knowledge to explain the intellectual function of theology (adopting a dialectical approach) and the moral function of theology (adopting an authoritative approach) in university education.

In a similar vein, Edward Jeremy Miller ("Newman's *Idea of a University*: Is It Viable Today?") shows that the viability of Newman's *Idea* can be addressed in terms of his dialectics where free inquiry and regulation come together. These are sustained by a creative tension that enables a civility of discourse. Newman's philosophy of liberal education emphasizes the active, formative power of knowledge as the source of intellectual order and meaning. They belong to the personal process of learning in the quest for truth. Today Newman's vision is consonant with upholding university autonomy, academic freedom, and the role of critical theology within the liberal arts tradition. His emphasis upon the centrality of personal commitment in the process of learning remains an important question for the philosophy of education. Knowledge is a capacity to discriminate and to discern relations between facts and ideas and then to judge and to act upon them.

The importance of commitment also is at the basis of Newman's religious epistemology and theological method. M. Jamie Ferreira ("The Grammar of the Heart: Newman on Faith and Imagination") explains that Newman's
relational epistemology deals with the legitimacy of religious conversion. This approach entails an appeal to the imagination as a personal commitment to informal inference and assent. Newman's appeal is described as "the grammar of the heart" in the sense of expanding upon the motto on his coat of arms as a cardinal of the Catholic Church: "Heart speaks to heart." Newman avoided the dangers of deception in using the imagination by emphasizing that it is integral to the process of informal reasoning. It is this rational process that leads to assent and certitude. The imagination, Newman argued, rationally achieves religious certitude by recognizing what Ferreira calls a critical threshold. This threshold entails the qualitative transition (conversion) from evidence and inference to certitude. In the transition the conclusion (certitude) is continuous with, though different from, what preceded (evidence and inference) in the way that the point of boiling is a critical threshold for water turning to steam. Certitude, therefore, has two characteristics as a function of the imagination. First, certitude entails a personal recognition of a truth: it is not merely the passive acceptance of a conclusion that is proven demonstratively. Second, certitude occurs all at once: it does not admit of degrees, even though continuous with preceding evidence, just as the boiling point of water (continuous with the preceding temperature increase) is a critical threshold for a qualitative transition to steam.

By ascertaining a critical threshold, the imagination yields a reorienting vision. That is, certitude legitimately perceives the preceding inferences from a different perspective. In a united act of reasoning and judgment, the imagination interprets a coalescence of evidence (inference) to generate certitude (assent) as a new seeing, a re-visioning. This imaginative shift to a new vision through a critical threshold requires clustering the evidence into a proof (inference) and affirming the conclusion with certitude (assent). In this way Newman justified the qualitative transition (conversion) to religious faith. Conversion, then, like certitude, entails a personal commitment that answers to the imagination.

The role of personal commitment in informal inference and assent constitutes Newman's appeal to the imagination (as the grammar of the heart). Also, his appeal to the imagination is crucial in his theological method (as the dynamism of the living mind). Just as commitment can lead the heart to assent, commitment also can impel the mind to dissent legitimately from ecclesial authority and doctrine. Gerard Magill ("The Living Mind: Newman on Assent and Dissent") offers a systematic account of the relation between assent and dissent in Newman's writings. The analysis is based upon Newman's commitment to inference and assent in