

Modern and Contemporary Literature MPhil
Core 1: Texts and Contexts, 1830-1914

The Idea of a University in the 19th Century
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Introduction: At the beginning of the 19th century, what we now call higher education in England was dominated by Oxford and Cambridge. Both were notorious for their disorganization and laxity: students were mostly upper class boys who came straight from public school and went straight into the clergy; those who taught them were mostly transient ex-students waiting for a clergyman's position to become vacant: tutors could not marry, were not salaried, and rarely stayed long. Everyone had to subscribe to the 39 Articles of the Church of England. All students studied for the same degree, which consisted primarily of classics in Oxford and mathematics in Cambridge; there were no separate faculties and few specialist professors. All teaching was conducted by college tutors, who instructed students in every text and subject; a system of public examinations had only recently been instituted. The situation began to attract criticism as new ideas about what universities should be spread from Germany, whose institutions were more secular, more professional, and primarily dedicated to the pursuit of specialist research.

Pressure for reform came from several groups. Utilitarians insisted that university study should become more useful, by training a more diverse student body for the period's new forms of industry. Dissenters called for the repeal of the Test Acts, which required that all members subscribe to the 39 Articles. Students from the recently reformed public schools demanded better teaching. Liberal academics wished for a more Germanic model: for specialization, professionalization, an expanded curriculum, and a shift of emphasis from teaching to research. All this and more did change over the course of the century. New research laboratories and institutes for technical and applied study were founded, and new universities were built in London and the industrial towns, offering wide-ranging, specialized curricula. A series of Royal Commissions investigated Oxford and Cambridge, and instigated major reforms, widening curricula, professionalizing teaching, and establishing specialist degrees in a range of the natural and moral sciences, including history, law, oriental studies, modern languages, English, and anthropology. The Universities Test Acts were repealed in 1871, and something more like a career structure was established so that the roles of fellow and clergyman no longer had to overlap. Women were admitted to Oxford and Cambridge in the 1870s, and the class base widened too. But these wide-ranging practical changes were also accompanied by a crucial period of theoretical reflection whose reverberations are still felt in debates about the nature and purpose of universities today.

For this seminar, we will read three in a series of powerfully influential lectures on the idea of a university, given by John Henry Newman at the founding of the new Catholic University of Ireland in 1852. Newman had been an enormously influential tutor, preacher, and Tractarian at Oxford until his conversion to Catholicism in 1845; when he gave these lectures he had recently been appointed Rector of the Catholic University. His lectures are often cited out of context in discussions about higher education, but as his extensive quotations indicate, they were in close dialogue with the debates of his day; we will be studying them in relation to those debates, in order to piece together a more comprehensive picture of the nature and significance of his contribution, and develop our own contribution to debates about the idea of a university, in the 19th century and today.

You should read and make notes on the ‘texts’ and ‘contexts’ listed below, and come prepared to contribute in detail to discussion; you are welcome to explore any of the ‘further reading’, at your leisure and according to your interests.

Texts:

John Henry Newman, Discourse V (‘Knowledge Its Own End’), Discourse VI (‘Knowledge Viewed in Relation to Learning’), and Discourse VII (‘Knowledge Viewed in Relation to Professional Skill’), in *The Idea of a University* (1873), pp.99-178

A PDF is supplied of this work, and also of the two earlier works of Newman’s that it combines, which you may like to consult for comparison: *Discourses on the Scope and Nature of University Education Addressed to the Catholics of Dublin* (1852), and *Lectures and Essays on University Subjects* (1859). I also encourage you to consult either of the following scholarly editions for their useful annotations and introductions, and experiment with the search capacity and indexes of <http://www.newmanreader.org/>:

John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University*, ed. Ian T. Ker (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976) [Discourses V-VII, pp.94-155; explanatory notes, pp.600-614]

John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University*, ed. Frank M. Turner (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996) [Discourses V-VII, pp.76-126; explanatory notes, pp.236-238]

Contexts:

T. W. Heyck, ‘The Reform of the University System’, in *The Transformation of Intellectual Life in Victorian England* (1982), pp.155-89

Further Reading:

For the Edinburgh Review/Coplestone debate, from which Newman quotes in Discourse VII, see:

[Richard Payne Knight], *Edinburgh Review*, 14 (July 1809), 429-41

[John Playfair], *Edinburgh Review*, 11 (January 1808), 249-84

[Sydney Smith], *Edinburgh Review*, 15 (October 1809), 40-53

Edward Coplestone, *A Reply to the Calumnies of the Edinburgh Review against Oxford* (1810)

[Richard Payne Knight, John Playfair, and Sydney Smith], review of Coplestone’s *Reply to the Calumnies*, in *Edinburgh Review*, 16 (April 1810), 158-87

[John Davison], *Quarterly Review*, 6 (October 1811), 173-76

For other important attacks on the University of Oxford, see:

[Dr Southwood Smith], ‘Present System of Education’, in *Westminster Review* (July 1825), 147-76

[Sir William Hamilton], 'Universities of England—Oxford', in *Edinburgh Review* (June 1831), 384-427

For reflections on the idea of a university from other 19th century university leaders, see:

John Stuart Mill, *Inaugural Address Delivered to the University of St. Andrews* (1867)

Mark Pattison, *Suggestions on Academical Organization with Especial Reference to Oxford* (1868)

For literary works of the period that reflect significantly on these debates, see:

Alfred Tennyson, *The Princess, a Medley* (1847)

Thomas Hughes, *Tom Brown at Oxford* (1861)

Mrs Humphry Ward, *Robert Elsmere* (1888)

Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure* (1895)

For recent scholarship on this subject, see:

A. J. Engel, 'Emerging Concepts of the Academic Profession 1800-1854', in *From Clergyman to Don: The Rise of the Academic Profession in Nineteenth-Century Oxford* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), pp.14-54

Stefan Collini, 'Their Title to be Heard: Professionalization and its Discontents', in *Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain, 1850-1930* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp.199-250

Colin Barr, 'The Idea of a University, in Ireland', in *Paul Cullen, John Henry Newman, and the Catholic University of Ireland, 1845-1865* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), pp.73-90

William Clark, 'The Research University and Beyond', in *Academic Charisma and the Origins of the Research University* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), pp.435-76

H. S. Jones, 'The Endowment of Learning', in *Intellect and Character in Victorian England: Mark Pattison and the Invention of the Don* (2007), pp.178-218

Gerard Loughlin, 'Theology in the University', in *The Cambridge Companion to John Henry Newman*, ed. Ian Ker and Terrence Merrigan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp.221-40

Heather Ellis, 'Defensive Modernization: The Tractarian Threat and the Royal Commission of 1850', in *Generational Conflict and University Reform: Oxford in the Age of Revolution* (2012), pp.187-228