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# **John Henry Newman, Nassau Senior, and the Separation of Political Economy from Theology in the Nineteenth Century**

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John Henry Newman's *Idea of a University* contains a significant but neglected discussion of the new science of political economy, where Newman responds to the 1826 inaugural lecture of Nassau Senior, the first Drummond Professor of Political Economy at the University of Oxford. Apart from Senior's importance as the occupant of the first university chair of political economy, his inaugural lecture on the scope and method of political economy set the parameters of much of the subsequent methodological debate in the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries. A. M. C. Waterman (1994, 59), reaffirming the earlier verdict of Marian Bowley (1937), states that "it was Senior . . . who was the most important writer on scope and method among the classical economists, and the one whose work was most influential for the twentieth century development of economic methodology."

This exchange between Senior and Newman occurs at a critical moment for scholars interested in the relationship between economics and religion, as it was during this period that political economy in Britain cut

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its explicit ties with Christian theology. Despite a recent revival of interest among historians in religious influences on nineteenth-century political economy (see, for instance, Hilton 1988; Brent 1993; and Waterman 1991, 1994), Newman's critique of the emerging discipline of political economy has been passed over with minimal comment. It has been similarly neglected by economists, perhaps because Newman wrote very little on economic issues and Newman never names Senior, despite quoting extensively from Senior's inaugural lecture.

The purpose of this article is to present the exchange between Senior and Newman in context and assess the validity of the model of the relationship between economics and theology offered by Newman in his critique of Senior. It also briefly contrasts the model with the influential alternative account given by Richard Whately, a mutual friend and Senior's successor in the Drummond Chair.

### Background

Some background information on Newman, Senior, and the links between the two is helpful in understanding their exchange over the relationship between political economy and theology. John Henry Newman (1801–1890) was one of the major figures of the nineteenth century, and the breadth of his writings make him of interest to historians, theologians, philosophers, and literary critics, among others.<sup>1</sup> After an evangelical upbringing, Newman became a Fellow of Oriel College, Oxford, and vicar of the University Church of St. Mary in 1828, building a considerable reputation as a teacher, writer, and preacher. His *Sermons* (1871) from this period are famous. After participating in what became known as the Oxford movement in the 1830s and 1840s, he resigned his Oxford positions and was received into the Roman Catholic Church in 1845. From 1851–58 he was rector of the newly established Catholic University of Ireland, then spent the remainder of his life working in the oratory he founded in Birmingham. Newman continued to write letters, sermons, tracts on various issues, and a number of major books, including his autobiographical *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* in 1864, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* in 1870, and the final compilation of the *Idea of a University* in 1873. He was made a cardinal before he died in 1890.

1. Biographies of Newman include Dessain 1966 and Ker 1988.

Nassau Senior (1780–1864) is familiar to many economists as the first holder of the Drummond Chair at Oxford (he held the chair from 1825–30, and again from 1847–52). Senior's place in the history of economic thought comes from his lectures on the scope and method of political economy,<sup>2</sup> some innovations within the Ricardian system, and his involvement as an economist in several controversial policy questions.

Information about connections between Newman and Senior is elusive. They were contemporaries at Oxford, but Senior is only mentioned twice and fairly incidentally in the thirty-one volumes of Newman's letters and diaries. The major Newman biographies are silent on the subject. Senior mentions Newman in relation to the Oxford-movement disputes in his own correspondence (see Levy 1970),<sup>3</sup> but there is no information about his relationship with Newman in the important period leading up to *Idea of a University*. From the little we know of Senior's religious views (see the letters to Whately quoted in Levy 1970, 57–59), frank and cordial discussions between Senior and Newman on this subject would have been unlikely. Senior, though, opposed religious discrimination, and in 1831 he had to resign from his subsequent appointment after the Drummond Chair, a professorship at King's College London, over his support for a proposal that the Catholic Church in Ireland receive some of the established church revenues.

There exists, however, an indirect connection between Newman and Senior through Richard Whately (1787–1863). Whately, who succeeded Senior in the Drummond Chair (from 1830–31), was both teacher and lifelong friend to Senior. Whately also had a significant influence on Newman while they were together at Oriel College. Newman describes this influence of Whately during his early years at Oriel, stating in the *Apologia* that Whately “opened my mind and taught me to think” (quoted in Ker 1988, 19). Whately's *Elements of Logic* contains an appendix on definitions of value, wealth, rent, etc. in political economy. In the preface Whately ([1826] 1857, viii) explains that this appendix was “furnished by the kindness of my friend and former pupil, Mr Senior, of Magdalen College.” The other friend (apart from Edward Copleston, to whom the work is dedicated) whose assistance is acknowledged is “the

2. Senior's methodology is discussed by Bowley (1937) and Denis O'Brien (1975).

3. I have not consulted Senior's journal for the period, which was previously held by his daughter, Mrs. M. C. M. Simpson, and is now among the papers held by the National Library of Wales. Details of Senior's papers are given in Sturges 1975.

Rev J. Newman, Fellow of Oriel College, who actually composed a considerable portion of the work as it now stands, from manuscripts not designed for publication, and who is the original author of several pages” (viii). Whately and Newman fell out in 1829 over the issue of religious tests at Oxford and never met during the years Newman was rector of the Catholic University (1851–58) and Whately was Anglican archbishop of Dublin (1831–63).

### **Senior’s Inaugural Lecture**

The text that forms the basis for Newman’s critique of political economy is Senior’s inaugural lecture of December 1826 (Senior [1827] 1966). Newman may have attended the lecture, and his letters indicate that he possessed a copy in May 1827, mentioning it among his papers in a letter to his sister Jemima (Ker and Gornall 1979, 17). While Newman may have been one of the “relatively large assembly, including a number of distinguished Oxonians” sitting in one of the schools of the Bodleian quadrangle as the lecture began (Levy 1970, 52–53), he may also be among those who “walked out one by one, leaving him [Senior] only with the Vice-Chancellor” (Levy 1970, 52–53). Hardly an auspicious start for the first lecture by an economics professor at an English university,<sup>4</sup> although Levy suggests the walkout was due to Senior’s “weak voice,” which made him difficult to hear. It may not be a coincidence that Newman’s quotations come exclusively from the first part of the lecture.

There was considerable suspicion of political economy at Oxford, with one influential Oxonian Sydney Smith suggesting that “a set of lectures on political economy would be discouraged in Oxford, probably despised, probably not permitted” (Mallet 1927, 215). The founder of the chair, Henry Drummond, “was anxious to have it understood that he relied on the University to keep the study in its proper place” (Mallet 1927, 215). Perhaps in view of this suspicion, Whately encouraged Senior to emphasize the importance of the science of political economy in his inaugural lecture (Culler 1955, 250–51).

Turning now to the content of Senior’s inaugural lecture, he begins by predicting that political economy will soon “rank among the first of the moral sciences in interest and in utility” (Senior [1827] 1966, 1), and he proceeds to define it as the science of wealth, which is divided into

4. The early history of academic economics in England is described in Checkland 1951.

“theoretic and practical” branches (7).<sup>5</sup> The theoretic branch “rests on a very few general propositions, which are the result of observation, or consciousness, and which almost every man, as soon as he hears them, admits, as familiar to his thoughts, or at least, as included in his previous knowledge” (7). These propositions are listed later in the lecture and are as follows: (1) wealth is one of “those things . . . which are transferable; which are limited in quantity; and which, directly or indirectly produce pleasure or prevent pain”; (2) “every person is desirous to obtain, with as little sacrifice as possible, as much as possible of the articles of wealth”; (3) “the powers of labour . . . may be indefinitely increased by using their products as the means of further production”; (4) “agricultural skill remaining the same, [any] additional labour employed on the land within a given district, produces a less than proportional return”; and (5) “the population of a given district is limited only by moral or physical evil, or by deficiency in the means of obtaining those articles of wealth” (35–36). He adds that the second proposition “is a matter of consciousness; the others are matters of observation” (36).<sup>6</sup>

A striking feature of Senior’s lecture is his assessment of certainty and universality, which attaches to political economy: “I hope in the course of these lectures to prove the truth of my statement, that the theoretic branch of the science, that which treats the nature, production and distribution of wealth,—is capable of all the certainty that can belong to any science, not founded exclusively on definitions; and I hope also, to show that many conclusions, and those of the highest importance, in the practical branch, rest so immediately on the conclusions of the theoretic branch as to possess equal certainty and universality” (11).

5. Senior saw science as a disciplined enquiry that required theoretical clarity, to be contrasted with the collection of practical maxims about economic life. He followed convention in calling political economy a moral science and did not have well-developed views on moral philosophy. Senior says in an 1845 letter that “I am no metaphysician, and a very ill-read moralist. I have never read Locke or Stewart, or Brown or Reid, or indeed anything on these subjects, except Aristotle, [William] Paley and Adam Smith” (quoted in Hilton 1988, 45).

6. The division of the science of political economy into theoretic and practical branches corresponds to the distinction between the science and the art of political economy in his later works. Senior’s later works drew back from this confidence about the art of political economy, or even its possibility, before turning again in the direction of his original position. The changes of view and possible reasons are described in Bowley 1937. It might be speculated that Newman’s criticisms of his Drummond lecture, if known to Senior in the 1820s or 1830s, perhaps through Whately, might have influenced Senior’s change of views.

### Newman's Critique

Newman's views on political economy were presented in his own inaugural lectures as rector of the Catholic University of Ireland in 1852; those lectures were published as the *Idea of a University*, in 1873.<sup>7</sup> The situation surrounding the lectures was difficult, as Newman had to maintain the support of the Irish bishops for the university yet give his newly appointed and future professors control of the curriculum and the freedom to run the university—two powers that he felt was necessary for the professors to have.<sup>8</sup>

Within the lectures, the context of Newman's discussion of political economy was a larger argument about how the sciences, including theology, are part of a circle of knowledge that should be reflected in the structure of a university.<sup>9</sup> This is explained at the beginning of the lecture in which he discusses political economy: "In order to have possession of truth at all we must have the whole truth; and no one science, no two sciences, no one family of sciences, nay, not even all secular science, is the whole truth; revealed truth enters to a very great extent into the province of science, philosophy, and literature, and to put it to one side, in compliment to secular science, is simply, under colour of a compliment, to do science great damage" (Newman [1873] 1976, 72–73). The image of

7. Newman's lectures were given in 1852 and published shortly afterward, although he revised them in 1873. None of Newman's revisions affects the argument of the present essay. Page references in the present article are to the Clarendon Press critical edition published in 1976. For readers with other editions, the main discussion of political economy (pp. 72–74 and 83–89 of the Clarendon Press edition) is in sections 1 and 10–12 of discourse 4.

8. The length of time between Senior's and Newman's lectures raises the question of when Newman formed his ideas—at the time of Senior's lecture or much later? Newman's copy of Senior's lecture, held among his papers at the Birmingham Oratory, has marks beside some of the passages Newman attacks. As we know from his correspondence, he owned this copy in 1827 (the year after the lecture); it was dispatched with some of his other papers shortly afterward. It seems likely, therefore, that Newman's views were formed early and the Catholic University lectures gave him an occasion to present them.

9. It should also be remembered that Senior's and Newman's lectures are part of a wider nineteenth-century discussion of the relationship between the sciences and theology (see for example Chadwick 1975 or Brooke 1991). Both lectures occurred well before the portrayal of a generalized war between science and religion in works such as John William Draper's *History of the Conflict between Religion and Science* in the 1870s, and before the publication of Darwin's *Origin of the Species* in 1859, which was used by many of the warriors. In the period considered in the present essay, science and religion were not generally regarded as being opposed; instead, the battles were fought over particular issues—for instance the theological implications of Malthus's theory. The relevant background is more fully described in works such as Hilton 1988, Waterman 1991, and Winch 1996.

the circle of knowledge is used frequently by Newman to emphasize the complementarity between different pieces of knowledge—how they all fit together into something greater.

Newman begins his specific comments on political economy by affirming that there is nothing wrong in principle with a science of wealth, describing it as “a science simply lawful and useful, for it is no sin to make money” (83). He agrees with Senior’s description of political economy as a moral science and accepts Senior’s proposed method of logical deduction from a set of premises. Newman then traces its moral character to Senior’s second premise: that every person desires as much wealth as possible with as little sacrifice as possible. While it is true that this premise only states that wealth is sought rather than ought to be sought, the context indicates that wealth is evaluated positively. This positive evaluation of wealth-seeking is one of the reasons Senior considers political economy to be a moral science, and Senior’s comments elsewhere in the lecture about wealth leading to virtue and true religion will be considered below. If it is accepted that the premise of wealth-seeking is given moral significance by Senior, the crucial issue then is its ethical authority. Newman argues that Senior’s attribution of the premise to introspection gives it no ethical authority, nor does Senior’s suggestion that the premise is consistent with observation, and no other argument is offered for its ethical force. Newman also considers Senior’s reliance on introspection as a source of moral premises defective, as it leaves no room for theological restraints and balances on the moral content of political economy.<sup>10</sup> Thus Senior’s claim for a moral character for political economy on the grounds of morally authoritative premises obtained through introspection is problematic.

As well as having moral premises, Senior claimed a moral quality for political economy on the grounds that it assists the pursuit of wealth and that wealth is a source of moral improvement and promotes religion. This draws sharp criticism from Newman.<sup>11</sup> The passage is worth

10. This objection, that political economy excludes theology by its method, also comes up in a letter written in 1840 to his sister Jemima, where Newman ([1840] 1979, 244–45) laments “Political Economists, who cannot accept (it is impossible) the Scripture rules about almsgiving, renunciation of wealth, self denial, etc.”

11. There is a similarly sharp exchange in 1841 between Newman and Sir Robert Peel on the question of whether opening a public reading room would lead to moral improvement. Newman concludes that “taking human nature as it is actually found” Sir Robert Peel’s suggestion “that grief, anger, cowardice, self conceit, pride, or passion, can be subdued by an examination of shells or grasses, or inhaling of gasses, or chipping of rocks, or calculating the longitude [or



quoting in full: “He [Senior] says the ‘endeavour to accumulate . . . is, to the mass of mankind, the great source,’ not merely a source, but the great source, and of what? of social and economic progress?—such an answer would have been more within the limits of his art,—no, but . . . ‘of great moral improvement’” (88). And he continues: “But it is not enough that morals and happiness are made to depend on gain and accumulation; the practice of Religion is ascribed to these causes also, and in the following way. Wealth depends on the pursuit of wealth; education depends on wealth; knowledge depends on education; and Religion depends on knowledge; therefore Religion depends on the pursuit of wealth.” Newman’s point is that Senior’s claim for a moral quality for political economy as a promoter of wealth goes beyond the proper bounds of political economy, straying into the domains of ethics and theology. It could conceivably be argued, despite Newman’s scorn, that Senior’s view of wealth has some basis in theology, but the issue remains theological rather than economic.<sup>12</sup> Newman’s most important point is the methodological one that political economy lacks appropriate tools for dealing with such issues and goes beyond its proper domain in asserting that moral benefits flow from the practice of political economy.

There are some interesting remarks by Newman about the false humility of political economy. Senior ([1827] 1966, 11–12) pleads that the pursuit of wealth (and the science of political economy, which studies it) is “one of the humblest of human occupations, far inferior to the pursuit of virtue,” etc. Newman ([1873] 1976, 86–87) argues that political economy cannot choose its own place among the sciences, and pretending it can is dangerous. Its proper scope can only be determined in conjunction with other disciplines, like philosophy and theology, which have tools appropriate to such questions.

The common threads that run through all of Newman’s particular criticisms of political economy are false self-sufficiency and a tendency to go beyond its proper bounds. Political economy goes beyond proper bounds in constructing for itself an introspective ethic, in excluding theological ethics, in claiming that wealth leads to moral improvement,

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we might add the labors of the political economist], is the veriest of pretences which sophist or mountebank ever professed to a gaping auditory” and that we must seek virtue “in graver and holier places than libraries or reading rooms.” These comments on the Tamworth reading room can be found in Ker 1989, 306–12, with the quotations coming from p. 310.

12. Boyd Hilton (1988) discusses the complexity and ambiguity of theological evaluations of wealth during the period, even restricting attention to evangelicals.

and in deciding its own place among the sciences. This critique is summarized with characteristic eloquence by Newman ([1873] 1976, 89) toward the end of his discussion of political economy: "There is reason and truth in the 'leading ideas,' as they are called and 'large views' of scientific men; I only say that though they speak the truth, they do not speak the whole truth; that they speak a narrow truth and think it a broad truth; that their deductions must be compared with other truths, which are acknowledged to be truths, in order to verify, complete and correct them. They say what is true . . . , but [it is] not the measure of all things; [and if] inordinately, extravagantly, ruinously carried out, in spite of other sciences, in spite of Theology, sure to become but a great bubble and burst."

### **Is Newman's Critique Persuasive?**

Before assessing the validity of Newman's critique, some possible misunderstandings of his position must be dealt with. It is important to recognize that Newman's criticisms do not come from ignorance of political economy or lack of appreciation of its value as a science. Some previous writers (e.g., Sydney Checkland [1951]) who discuss Newman's influence on the formation of political economy dismiss him this way, wrongly associating him with the extreme antiscientific views of some other leaders of the Oxford movement.

There is evidence of Newman's familiarity with political economy. His library contained works by T. R. Malthus, David Ricardo, Senior, and Whately (see Earnest and Tracey 1984). All these works seem to have been acquired before his remarks on Senior's lecture, but afterward his reading in the subject seems to have been less. Scattered through Newman's letters are positive comments about the value of economic analysis together with a healthy reluctance to pronounce judgment on technical issues beyond his competence.<sup>13</sup>

13. A good test of Newman's attitude toward political economy is his treatment of the subject as rector of the Catholic University of Ireland. Among the first group of professors recruited for his university was a professor of political economy, John O'Hagan, whom Newman vigorously defended from clerical interference. In an 1854 letter to Archbishop Cullen, Newman ([1854] 1979, 263) points out that his professors (including O'Hagan) "have their own sufficient sphere, in which I should not think of interfering." After Newman resigned as rector, O'Hagan wrote expressing appreciation for Newman's support and later visited Newman several times at Birmingham. If political economy failed to flourish at the Catholic University,

Another possible misunderstanding of Newman's criticisms of political economy's self-sufficiency and tendency to go beyond its proper bounds would be that he saw no distinction between political economy and theology. Some of his contemporaries in the church were suspicious of political economy and wanted it, if carried on at all, to be carried on as a branch of moral philosophy or theology. Newman clearly rejects this position, assigning it a place alongside the more established sciences and describing political economy as "a science simply lawful and useful" ([1873] 1976, 83). Newman in fact stresses that theology as well as political economy must respect its proper bounds: "The enemies of Catholicism ought to be the last to deny this [the possibility of the sciences exceeding their proper bounds]:—for they have never been blind to a like usurpation, as they have called it on the part of the theologians; those who accuse us of wishing, in accordance with Scripture language, to make the sun go round the earth, are not the men to deny that a science which exceeds its limits falls into error" (74). Later, in the *Apologia*, although the comment is not in relation to political economy, he remarks that in spite of its divine origin, "the Bible does not answer a purpose for which it was never intended" (Newman [1864] 1912, 220).<sup>14</sup> There is no

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lack of support from Newman was not the cause. Furthermore, on the distinctness of political economy from theology it is worth noting that at Newman's Catholic University political economy was established within the Faculty of Arts (the other faculties being Medicine, Law, and Theology). Newman feared proposals that would lead to the university becoming "priest ridden. I mean, men who do not know literature and science will have the direction" (quoted in Hodgson 1998, 8). One of Newman's letters of 1855 mentions a payment of five pounds due to O'Hagan for the inaugural lecture. The almanac of the Catholic University gives an outline of John O'Hagan's introductory lectures in political economy. The four topics covered are "1. The good of the individual, the end of society. 2. General view of the distribution of wealth. 3. Theories of socialism. 4. Theories of progress." Among the almanacs and calendars held at the Birmingham Oratory I have been unable to locate the text of O'Hagan's inaugural lecture, if it was published at all. Some idea of the possible content of the lectures can be gained from an article O'Hagan wrote for the journal associated with the university, *Atlantis*, in 1860, titled "Views Preliminary to the Study of Political Economy." There is no record of textbooks at that time, but in 1863 the calendar lists Mill's *Principles of Political Economy* as the primary reference for students of political economy. Taking all this evidence together, the course in political economy at Newman's university did not seem to be an appendage of theology. From the limited evidence we have, it appears that the content of the lectures on political economy at the Catholic University did not differ radically from that of the lectures of the Whately professors at Trinity College Dublin, and the differences that did exist were not clearly attributable to Newman's influence. Further information about Newman's role in the Catholic University may be found in McGrath 1951. Thomas Boylan and Timothy Foley (1992) discuss political economy in Ireland, briefly mentioning the Catholic University (64) and the Whately professors (17–43).

14. There are similar statements in Whately. After giving examples of astronomy and geology, Whately (1831, 28) comments that "historical or physical truths may be established by

suggestion in any of his writings that the content of economic science can be derived from theology or that theology makes scientific investigation redundant.

Having cleared up some possible misunderstandings of Newman's position, its substance can now be assessed. The success of Newman's critique depends first on theological knowledge having a validity of its own and second on theological knowledge being relevant to political economy.

The first issue is the validity of theological knowledge alongside scientific knowledge, including economic knowledge. Unlike many of his fellow churchmen, Newman was not content merely to appeal to revelation as the justification of religious knowledge, and he felt it important to clarify the structure and grounds of both religious and scientific knowledge. In the *Idea of a University* we get a few sketches of an argument that was later to be presented more fully in his *Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (1870).

Newman's argument begins from the observation that little of what we know comes from logical deduction from a set of premises, because sure premises are difficult to find.<sup>15</sup> Instead it typically comes through an accumulation of probabilities, which point to truth, to which we then assent. Discerning truth from the probabilistic evidence is a skill that Newman calls the illative sense, which in Newman's philosophy is related to the Aristotelian notion of *phronesis* or judgment. Granting assent to a discerned truth is an act of the will, and assent is individual and has a moral dimension. While Newman's main purpose in *A Grammar of Assent* was to clarify and justify religious belief, he showed through a number of examples that the same process of accumulating probabilistic evidence leading to assent applies in other areas, including the sciences. For instance, to give his most famous example, we believe that Great Britain is an island, without having circumnavigated it, or even having

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their own proper evidence," and although "a Christian will indeed feel antecedently a strong persuasion that conclusions inconsistent with the Bible never will be established . . . it is not a sign of faith—on the contrary, it indicates rather a want of faith, or else a culpable indolence—to decline meeting any theorist on his own ground, and to cut short any controversy by an appeal to the authority of Scripture." Waterman (1991, 260) considers that Newman echoes his teacher Whately on this point.

15. Fuller treatments of Newman's argument and its relationship to the literature on the justification of religious knowledge are Ker 1988 and Kenny 1992. Newman's writings on the justification of knowledge and belief have received considerable attention in recent years after a long period of neglect.

met people who have, and certainly without it having been proved from a set of indubitable premises. We see maps showing Great Britain as an island and accept this as a basis for action, even though the evidence is imperfect. Similarly for theological knowledge there is an accumulation of imperfect evidence (including conscience, observation of the nature of the world and humanity, the testimony of others) for accepting theological truths. If both scientific knowledge and religious knowledge consist of assents given to truths recognized in evidence that can never be perfect, then the sciences cannot claim that their knowledge rests on foundations superior to those of theological knowledge.

If all knowledge is one, and assents have the same structure, this does not imply that the method of accumulating the probabilistic evidence that precedes assent is the same in all areas. Different types of judgment are needed for different types of evidence; a scientist has a well-developed illative sense in his or her field. Deciding on appropriate methods for physics was a task for physicists, and those methods may differ from the methods used in other sciences.<sup>16</sup> As noted above, different skills are needed in different areas of knowledge. Newman refrained from commenting on appropriate methods for accumulating evidence that leads to assent in political economy, leaving this for Senior and his fellow political economists to resolve.

Having now presented Newman's argument for the validity of theological knowledge, the second issue is the relevance of theology to political economy. Here Newman is not entirely clear. At some points he appears to be suggesting that the role of theology is to supply moral premises from which the political economist can then reason. For instance, "Religion furnishes facts to the other sciences, which those sciences, left to themselves would never reach" (Newman [1873] 1976, 73). The subsequent paragraphs indicate that Newman includes moral principles as facts that can be premises in a deductive argument. Specifically in relation to political economy, he states that "given that wealth is to be sought, this and that is the method of gaining it. This is the extent to which the political economist has a right to go; he has no right to determine that wealth is at any rate to be sought, or that it is the way to

16. In an essay titled *Christianity and Physical Science* (discussed by Peter Hodgson [1998]), Newman regarded the empirical methodology he observed in contemporary physics as entirely proper, in contrast to the more deductive method of systematic theology. As Hodgson argues, these may not be entirely valid descriptions of the methods of the two disciplines, but the point about different methods being appropriate to different disciplines remains.

be virtuous and the price of happiness" (84). Here Newman implies that theology and ethics must supply what the political economist cannot.

There is some tension between this view, which would give theologians the role of formulating moral premises within political economy, and his comments on the proper separation of the disciplines. It is even more difficult to reconcile this view with Newman's general epistemological views. Newman cannot envisage theology as supplying indubitable moral premises from which the economist reasons deductively. A position more consistent with his general views would be that theology, along with other disciplines like moral philosophy that have appropriate tools, produces evidence and arguments about the moral principles that guide the political economist and others. Moral principles guide all aspects of the practice of political economy rather than merely supplying moral premises for deductive arguments. Part of the inconsistency in Newman's position can be explained by his acceptance, for the sake of argument, of Senior's method of deduction from certain premises to certain economic conclusions, and Newman's own inductive view of science.<sup>17</sup> It must nevertheless be acknowledged that Newman is not completely clear and consistent about how theology actually affects the practice of political economy.

To summarize Newman's model of the relationship between political economy and theology:

1. All knowledge is one, and economic truth cannot contradict theological truth.
2. Economic knowledge and theological knowledge are both well grounded.
3. Different branches of knowledge are distinct and have their own tasks. The task of economics is to understand how the economy operates, while the task of theology is to supply an ethic for the political economists and to balance and ethically guide the work of political economists.
4. While distinct, the different branches of knowledge form a circle and depend on each other. Economics is of limited use without ethics and theology.

17. Newman's first university sermon of 1826 (Newman [1873] 1976, 9), preached just before Senior's lecture, indicates a strong preference for the inductive method in scientific investigation. Hodgson (1998), who discusses Newman's early mathematical and scientific work, also describes his method as inductive.

### Comparison with Whately

In view of the importance of Richard Whately's writings on the relationship between political economy and theology, it is worth briefly comparing his position with Newman's. Whately had a great deal of influence on the methodology of economics through his close relationship with Nassau Senior, through his position as Drummond Professor at Oxford, and subsequently through his vigorous promotion of political economy and authorship of an influential school textbook while Anglican archbishop of Dublin.<sup>18</sup> By contrast, the possibility of Newman influencing the subsequent direction of political economy was lost when he left Oxford and was received into the Roman Catholic Church, cutting him off from those who were building the new science.

As emphasized by Waterman (1991, 1994), Whately's writings were in a particular polemical context—he was seeking to show (against widespread opinion in the church) that political economy was not in conflict with theology and (against the utilitarians) that political economy was unable to generate policy conclusions without some additional ethical input. Whately's views are contained in his Drummond lectures (Whately 1831) and review of Senior's lectures (Whately 1828). The relevant aspects of Whately's model of the relationship between political economy and theology (as summarized by Waterman [1994, 57–58]) are as follows:

1. Scientific or secular knowledge is sharply distinct from theological or sacred knowledge.
2. Scientific knowledge comes by experience: that is to say, through the interpreting of observational data by theory.
3. Theological knowledge comes by faith: that is to say, by the spiritual discernment of the strictly religious truths contained in

18. Newman does not mention or quote from Whately in his comments on political economy in *Idea of a University*. If Newman's views were formed soon after Senior's lectures in 1826, as suggested in a previous footnote, then Whately's own Drummond lectures of 1831 would not have been available to Newman. Newman also may have avoided comment on Whately's views so as not to inflame the already delicate situation he was in as rector of a new Catholic university in the city where Whately was Anglican archbishop and had established a chair in economics. Commenting critically on Whately would also have been a sensitive personal issue after Whately had ended their friendship in 1829 and had hardened his attitude after Newman was received into the Roman Catholic Church. Newman's diaries indicate he was open to rebuilding relations with Whately in Dublin.

revelation and that are, and must be, beyond the reach of unassisted reason.

4. Reason may make use of scientific knowledge in corroborating religious knowledge. This is natural theology.
5. Reason cannot be at variance with faith because the latter generates knowledge where the former cannot operate.
6. Political economy is the scientific study of the nature, production, and distribution of wealth.
7. Because the science of political economy abstracts from ethical aspects of its subject matter, political economy can provide guidance only with respect to the means of obtaining certain social ends, and none at all about whether those ends ought to be pursued.

It is not surprising, given Newman's and Whately's close intellectual and personal links in the years leading up to Senior's lecture, that they share many views on the relationship between political economy and theology. Both men held the unusual view for churchmen of their time that political economy was valuable and distinct from theology. Both believed that political economy and theology could not contradict each other. Both also rejected the view that political economy could generate its own ethic. There are, however, important differences between Newman's and Whately's models of the relationship between political economy and theology. While Whately's position was powerful in its polemical context and commands respect, Newman's offers something more general (in the sense of being appropriate beyond the original polemical context) and better grounded.

Whately's polemical task of making political economy "safe" for the church (Waterman 1991, 1994) was well served by his sharp epistemological dualism expressed in points 1 to 5 above, but this dualism has dangers in other contexts. Political economists can be discouraged by this supposed sharp epistemological separation from bringing scientific and ethical/theological considerations together in ways that are fruitful. The philosophical necessity of such a sharp epistemological dualism was not demonstrated by Whately. By contrast, Newman distinguishes political economy from theology while maintaining that all knowledge is attained in essentially the same way and has the same epistemological status. The philosophical arguments supporting his position were suggested in the *Idea of a University* and more fully developed in the *Grammar of Assent*. With no epistemological gulf to bridge, economics and



theology and ethics can be more readily brought together in relation to practical problems by economists, theologians, and others. Newman's philosophy provides grounds for questioning the marginalization of theology in mainstream writing on economic issues that has occurred since the mid-nineteenth century.

Related to Whately's epistemological dualism is his identification of theological knowledge with normative questions and his exclusion of theology from what we would now call positive economics.<sup>19</sup> The sharpness of Whately's distinction is clear from points 6 and 7 of Waterman's summary above. For Newman, theology has a broader role in guiding the practice of economics, in providing a framework in which political economy operates, and in offering critical perspectives on the content of political economy. None is purely normative. It must be acknowledged that Newman's discussion of the role of theology is less precise than Whately's, and questions remain about how exactly theology influences the practice of economics.

### **Conclusion**

Despite the strengths of Newman's critique and alternative model of the relationship between political economy and theology, it has not had much influence. Since the mid-nineteenth century we have seen the separation of political economy from theology that Senior, Whately, and Newman all supported, but without a recognition of Newman's points that political economy and theology are both valid forms of knowledge and connected in a circle of knowledge. Tendencies that flow from not recognizing this connectedness, such as arrogant self-sufficiency and an encroachment on the domains of other disciplines, which Newman saw in the first lecture by a professor of political economy, have become more and more evident as political economy has grown as a discipline.

19. The possibility and value of the positive/normative distinction are contentious issues; but grounds for rejecting the distinction, at least very sharp forms of the distinction, are given in Hausman and McPherson 1996.

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