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expressed hostility toward "strong individuality"; he stressed "the social value of cooperative thought and action against the private and poetic, which he regarded with suspicion." He could not see a side of the individual that was not social. "Rorty's interest in *la mode française* allows

him to present his liberalism in flashy packaging that conventional liberal doctrines typically lack," Ronald Beiner, a political scientist at the University of Toronto, writes in *Critical Review* (Winter 1993), "but this fancy wrapping comes at a price."

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## Theology to The Rescue

"Newman, God, and the Academy" by Daniel Cere, in *Theological Studies* (Mar. 1994), Boston College, Chestnut Hill, Mass. 02167.

In the modern academy, there is "a strange silence about ultimate questions of good and evil, life and death," observes Cere, a lecturer in religion and theology at Concordia University, Montreal. Theology—the tradition of inquiry into the "God-question," the question of the "supreme good"—has been pushed to the margins of academic debate, replaced by "religious studies," which deals with religious experience only in descriptive and historical terms.

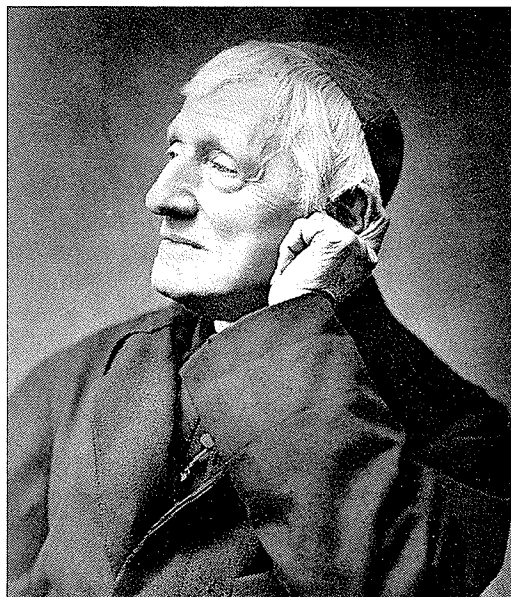
In his controversial 1987 book about higher education, *The Closing of the American Mind*, Allan Bloom blamed the academy's malaise on its blanket repudiation of the Socratic tradition of philosophical inquiry, yet he ignored "the foundational role of the Christian tradition in the development of the university," Cere says. Bloom's own nemesis, Nietzsche, "warned that we cannot expunge 'God' from our grammar and expect that things will go on as before. Athens needs Jerusalem since metaphysical reason cannot stand without a universal ground."

John Henry Newman (1801–90), in his classic defense of liberal education, *The Idea of a University* (1853), presented a more balanced picture, Cere believes: "Newman's bifocal view of the Greek and Judeo-Christian heritage of the academy alerts the reader to the critical role of theology in the emergence of the European university and in the evolution of Western academic discourse."

A Roman Catholic cardinal who, before his conversion, had been a leader of the high-church Oxford Movement in the Church of England,

Newman saw theology not as a sovereign "queen" reigning over the academy but as a legitimate "sister" in the "goodly family of sciences." "I am claiming for Theology nothing singular or special, or which is not partaken by other sciences in their measure," he wrote. Its exclusion—already begun in Newman's day, Cere notes, "on the basis of some narrowly defined and typically indefensible theory of what constitutes a 'scientific' discourse"—left the character of academic discussion deformed. "Attempts to 'slur over' the God question, to deflect attention from it, impose closures on intellectual debate that are without any sufficient warrant," Cere explains.

Theological inquiry, Newman maintained, would respect "the integrity of the distinct theological traditions (Catholic, Protestant, Jewish,



John Henry Cardinal Newman, shown here in 1888

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Islamic, etc.) in their approach to the God question," Cere notes, but those traditions "must engage in dialectical encounter." The dialectic, Newman believed, moved toward universality. That these claims might ultimately compete with one another was no excuse for a retreat into exclusive reliance on faith or into relativism. "No traditions have a claim upon us which shrink

from criticism, and dare not look a rival in the face," Newman wrote—a challenge he might well have hurled at the champions of the modern university, from which theology has been banished. Restoring theology to its place alongside its sister sciences, Cere writes, could do much to revive "the shriveled and cramped soul of modern academic discourse."

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## SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT

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### ***Creationism's Design Flaws***

"Life's Grand Design" by Kenneth R. Miller, in *Technology Review* (Feb.-Mar. 1994), Bldg. W59, MIT, Cambridge, Mass. 02139.

Creationists today tout "intelligent-design theory" as an alternative to evolution. They contend that living organisms have features that are so perfect that they cannot be the result of the random workings of evolution but must be the product of conscious design. However, says Miller, a biologist at Brown University, scientists argue "that complex organisms not only *could* have evolved through evolution's trial-and-error mechanisms, but *must* have done so." And it is the errors that constitute the best evidence.

Take the human eye. It is indeed a marvel, Miller notes. "The eye, like a top-of-the-line modern camera, contains a self-adjusting aperture, an automatic focus system, and inner surfaces surrounded by a dark pigment to minimize the scattering of stray light. [The] sensitivity range of the eye, which gives us excellent vision in bright sunlight as well as in the dimmest moonlight, far surpasses that of any film. Its neural circuitry enables the eye to automatically enhance contrast. And its color-analysis system enables it to quickly adjust to lighting conditions . . . that would require a photographer to change filters and films. Finally, the eye-brain combination produces depth perception that is beyond the range of any camera."

Evolutionary theory can explain such developments in terms of natural selection over thousands of years, along with other factors. The

most persuasive argument for evolution, however, may be the imperfections in nature. Consider the neural wiring for the human eye's light-sensing retinal photoreceptor cells. The wiring is placed not behind the retina but in front of the photoreceptors, thus blocking out some light. That also means that the wiring carrying nerve impulses from the photoreceptors to the brain must go directly through the wall of the retina. As a result, there is a blind spot in the retina, about a millimeter in diameter.

Evolution, which works by repeatedly modifying existing structures, can explain such design "mistakes"; intelligent-design theory cannot. Which is not to say, Miller hastens to add, that evolution and a belief in God are incompatible.

### ***Farewell, Arcadia!***

"Ecological Collapses of Ancient Civilizations: The Golden Age That Never Was" by Jared M. Diamond, in *The Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* (Feb. 1994), Norton's Woods, 136 Irving St., Cambridge, Mass. 02138.

Environmentalists often speak of living in harmony with nature, harking back to an idyllic pre-industrial past. Recent discoveries by archaeologists and paleontologists, however, tell a very different story about this imagined golden age, writes Diamond, a professor of physiology at the medical school of the University of California, Los Angeles.

Consider New Zealand, where the Polynesian settlers known as Maoris arrived around