

Friday Evening Transcript 1

(Ron Hall's "Introduction" to this 1993 Washington Polanyi Society Annual Meeting, which was a Discussion Session with William Poteat, was corrected using the written version Hall sent Gus Breytspraak in 3-2023)

Ron Hall: (Inaudible) the usual sort of introduction about the credentials of Bill Poteat and where he was born and all that sort of thing since most of you know him.

What is interesting, it seems to me, about Bill's teaching is that he has been so instrumental in generating a plurality of ideas. I look at the faces of people I know here who have studied with Bill and I know that you have gone in so many different directions. And I know that I have gone in a different direction than many of you. Bill has generated some??..as I have told him, you have basically set me on my own intellectual agenda and I set it, and I continue to think about that...have thought about it for 20 years.

I know you are anxious to get on to a discussion and Bill has some remarks he wants to make before we begin. But I thought that since there are so many different readings of the import of Bill Poteat's work that I would begin by simply putting some things on the table and just give you a very short statement of some of the things I have gained from studying and continued conversations with this great thinker.

What strikes me about Bill Poteat's published works which have...which now has another one added as of tonight...his numerous journal articles, *Polanyian Meditations*, *Philosophical Daybook*, and the forthcoming *Recovering the Ground* from SUNY Press... is the novelty vis a vis the usual expectations we have of modern philosophical writing and scholarship.

I might call this method of philosophical criticism...philosophical reflection as philosophical reflexion – with an x –

The refreshing *difference* in Bill's method of philosophical reflection/reflexion lies in the fact that its subject is found not – a la Descartes and the whole subsequent history of modern philosophy in the indubitable contents of his own clear focused and disembodied mind but in the bearing of the indubitable coherences of his own lively and dynamic mindbody on every human activity, from the most abstract activity of mathematical thinking, to the most quotidian activity of taking a jog, to the most concrete activity of viva voce felicitous speech acts before some other, to the activity of writing in general and to writing philosophy in particular even more particularly, to the activity of writing philosophy as a critical exercise in anamnesis.

He is well aware that writing in this way opens him to the charge that his work is not scholarly enough, that it is not fully responsible to the philosophic tradition which it addresses, and in particular, to the tradition which it seeks radically to critique.

He mentions, sometimes, it may seem almost in passing, figures such as de Man and Derrida, and seems to dismiss their projects out of hand.

To read him as being irresponsible and disregard him would, in my opinion, be a mistake. There are more ways than one to be responsible in one's philosophical criticism. Bill's writings are not *about* modernity,

they express the lively thinking of a philosopher at work wrestling with the central dilemmas of modern culture.

To read Bill's writing is to read his mind, or more felicitously, his mindbody, and perhaps, indirectly, our own.

In fact, I think that Bill's method is more deeply responsible to the modern philosophic tradition than the usual scholarly approach. To see this requires that we vest thoughtfulness with its rights, that we acknowledge that being a scholar and being a thinker are not always the same thing. Bill Poteat is, to my mind, one of the most profound thinkers on the contemporary scene; his critique of the modern philosophic tradition is indeed one of the most radical that I have encountered...more radical, I would contend, than Polanyi's.

Bill's writings are exercises in recovering the lively and dynamic ground of all human coherence, including the activities of writing and reading a text. As exercises *in* recovering the ground of all meaning and meaning discernment, the texts of Bill's writings are themselves lively and dynamic, moreover, as exercises, they require the active participation of their readers. Bill skillfully draws his readers into the exercise by demanding that they come to terms with the following irreducible and indubitable fact: all meaning and meaning discernment are grounded in and issue from one's own mindbody.

In particular he engages the reader with the text he writes in such a way as to lead them to the acknowledgement that the words they are reading can only be read, that is can only embody the meaning that the writer meant by them and the readers discern in them, if the readers share a common ground with the one who wrote them, namely, the ground from which all meaning and meaning discernment issue forth, the absolutely unique standpoint of every human being, the readers' (and writer's) own lively and dynamic mindbody.

The format of Poteat's latest writings, *Philosophical Daybook* and *Recovering the Ground*, makes for engaging reading on a deeply personal level; reading these books is more like having a conversation than reading usually is. The diary format carries with it a palpable sense of concreteness, of temporality, of the personal, of the personal struggle; I might even say that the text of these books bespeak spirit. It does not seem to me accidental that Bill adopted this very personal, temporally qualified, that is historically dated, format (form and content are not as separate as separable as some may think).

What the text and format of these books both say and show is that the acknowledgement of the flesh and blood mindbody as the ground of all meaning and meaning discernment, especially the meaning and meaning discernment in the lively and dynamic *viva voce* speech act, issues in, is the first and essential step in, the recovery of concrete personal existence

7:35

Recovering the mindbody, it seems for Bill, is a way of recovering the human spirit, the human spirit as essentially incarnate as essentially incarnate, as essentially disclosed in the felicitous speech-act.

In recent discussions beginning with the later Wittgenstein and continuing through post structuralist theorists, especially J. Derrida, there has been a great deal of discussion about "ground" and "groundlessness."

The very idea that thought and action have a stable, indubitable ground has come under radical suspicion, if not simply condemned as an absurdity. The search for such a ground, so the argument goes, is the bitter legacy of Plato to the Western philosophical tradition. Plato's picture of such a ground was shaped, as ours has been, by the metaphors and models of alphabetic literacy, visual metaphors of static timeless eternity. For centuries now, we have been spinning our philosophical wheels trying to find an indubitable ground *outside* of the muck and mire of worldly, embodied existence, to obtain a *techne* to offset the absurdity and anxiety that contingent existence in historical time invariably produces. Our quest to find such a solid, secure, stable metaphysical presence outside the temporal flux, some sort of absolute immutable presence, however, has been frustrated at every turn and we have managed only to dig ourselves deeper into absurdity.

Derrida calls this ill-fated philosophical quest for a point of view outside the world, outside of embodiment, "logocentrism." The reason that the search for such a ground is absurd is simply that no such ground exists. Since such a ground does not exist, we must stop searching for it. We must find a way of living without a ground. For Derrida this translates into the thesis of the undecidability of meaning; as Marx once put it "All that is solid melts into air." Bill agrees with the deconstructionists that there is no such Platonic ground; therefore, he is not proposing that we seek to recover *that* ground.

But herein is the punch of Bill's argument: he claims that the post-structuralists are still informed by this notion of a Platonic ground in their very rejection of it. This is particularly manifest in the pre-occupation of the post-structuralists with the forms of literacy, especially writing. That is, the post-structuralists allow Plato (and hence the metaphors and models that attach to a literate imagination) to define what a ground would be if there were one, and then proclaim that no such ground exists.

The only alternative to such a ground, so they proceed to argue, once it has been seen that no such ground exists, is groundlessness. For Bill, the alternative to logocentrism is not groundlessness, but a different ground, the lively, dynamic ground of the mindbody, especially as that is manifest in the lively and dynamic speech act. Moreover, Bill's proposal to recover this ground is turned against the poststructuralists: he shows that mindbody is presumed, is presupposed, as the ground that informs every human activity, even the most abstracting activities (from musical performance to mathematical thinking) including every Platonic quest for a disembodied logos; and thus, he shows, a fortiori, that the lively and dynamic ground of the mindbody is presupposed even by the poststructuralist's quest to deny the existence of every ground.

Because of its relevance to the current debate concerning the postmodernists critique of modernity and because it offers a rather clear alternative to both Platonic logocentrism and to groundlessness, and because of its very personal style, I believe that Bill Poteat's work is useful to both philosophers, literary critics and religionists; but it is also useful, I would contend, to the ordinary curious intellectual who has a sense that he or she is living at the very edge of, if not over, an infinite abyss. It would surely be a rarity today to find a thoughtful person who does not feel the ground slipping out from under him/her.

Bill's work is constantly provoking in its reader insights and moments of re-cognition. What Bill would have us re-cognize is something that we have, under the pressures of a ubiquitous gnostic contempt for our worldly embodiment, forgotten.

This forgetfulness has not been innocuous; indeed, it had led to the very brink of cultural madness.

But rather than taking up a critical approach to the regnant Gnosticism of our day from within its assumptions, as post modernism tends to do, Bill goes right to the root of the problem. With an uncommon tenacity, he drives our imaginations to a re-membering of our own mindbodies ...a re-membering that constitutes a both radical critique of Gnosticism and a remedy.

I am sure that there are many of you who read Bill's work in a different way and Bill is going to now make an opening statement and then we are just going to find what your questions are and have an open and free discussion in this growing group.

Bill?

13:11

Poteat's Opening Remarks and Friday Night Session

Poteat: The thought that kept occurring to me as you were giving us your prolegomenon was: "How will I ever be able to live up to it?"

I do not wish to usurp the privilege that you have to cross examine me, which, as I understand it, was the purpose of bringing me here.

But there are a couple of impediments that I think I can remove at the outset, impediments which, if left unattended, might make a fruitful interchange among us more difficult or, at any rate, longer in coming.

The first is relatively trivial in itself, but, because it constitutes a kind of stumbling block, I want to, up front, get it out of the way.

Had I known, as I should have known, that the book that I published under the title *Polanyian Meditations: In Search of a Post Critical Logic* would be known by its title rather than its subtitle, then I should have entitled it "In Search of a Post-Critical Logic: Investigations Precipitated by a Sentence on Page 191 of *Personal Knowledge*." (laughter)

Now let me be quite clear about one thing: this in no way diminishes my admiration and love for Michael Polanyi, the man, and my indebtedness to Michael Polanyi, the thinker.

It has, however, had the effect as I have discovered amongst people who have tried to read what I have written, believing that these were indeed "Polanyian Meditations," {of having led them} into some unproductive investments of time and energy, because the temptation is quite obvious and the invitation to this temptation is glaring, to try to translate what is being read in *Polanyian Meditations* and in *Philosophical Daybook* and, as you will see if you will buy the book from SUNY Press, *Recovering the Ground: Critical Investigations*...no critical something or other about anamneses...

In any case, the temptation to try to translate what is happening when you read these books into *Personal Knowledge* or to patch it on to *Personal Knowledge* in some extrinsic way can only delay the process by which the full and proper import of what I have been trying to do will be experienced.

Now a case can be made and I could make it that this is not worth doing anyway but I am saying that, if you should take it that it is worth doing, then it is a good place to begin by entitling the book *In Search of a Post Critical Logic* with the addendum that I just added.

That is the intrinsically uninteresting but practically important first impediment that needs to be removed.

The second one is much more substantive. It is to say, the least, unseemly immodest of me, if not indeed arrogant, in fact absolutely outrageous, for me to make the claim that I am about to make and that is:

That what you have in the two books already published and in the one yet to come is the achievement of a Copernican Revolution in ontology and derivatively epistemology. (my bold here and throughout to indicate Poteat's emphasis evident in change in tone and volume of his speech)

Now I say that, as is obvious, without modesty, first of all because **I believe it to be the simple truth**. But secondly, I say it because it is only when you approach these texts aware that the center of gravity has been drastically changed for reflection that any of the reading that you do in these materials can bear fruit for you.

18:07

Let me say a word or two about the Copernican Revolution. You know Immanuel Kant claimed to have produced one. I think that he was wrong in imagining that he had done that. In fact the prolegomenon in which he made the claim and the *First Critique* in which he tried to carry this out are clearly parasitical upon the writings of Hume, presuppose them, and I think it is not unfair to say, as William Temple does in his Gifford Lectures, *Nature Man and God*, that what Hume handed to Kant as a problem, Kant handed back to Hume as the solution.

Had Kant been more acquainted with his own body, then it would have been self-evident to him that positing the existence of a *ding an sich* which nevertheless must be unknown itself pre-supposes a body that posits it. Had Kant been on more familiar terms with his own body, who knows, there might have been a Mrs. Kant (Audience laughter) so far as I know there was never one.

The Copernican switch in the theoretical posture vis a vis planetary motion is not a theory that can be derived from Ptolemy – indeed it is not an exaggeration to say, and I will call upon my old friend Bill Scott here to bear witness... to bear testimony if he likes.. to this...that....

There is a sense in which, as you might suppose, since after all there is planetary motion and some of it was visible to those who devised the Ptolemaic theory and also to Copernicus who wished to substitute his own...there were, after all, instances of planetary motion.

But this is the kind of lazy response that we make in a situation like this because, strictly speaking, planetary motion **is what it is** in the context of a theory. Otherwise you've got lights in the sky...in the night sky...so that the moment you begin to tie these visible events together one way or another, then they become something different from what they are taken singularly and by themselves.

So there is a sense in which it is not only impossible to infer the Copernican theory from the Ptolemaic theory in the logical or conceptual way; there is a sense in which they don't even have in common a common conception of **what planets are**.

Now I underscore this because I want to make claim, as I don't think Kant could, to the proposition that what I am trying to do in these books stands to the history of the philosophic tradition in a way

analogous to that in which the Copernican theory stood to the subject matter of the Ptolemaic theory and nothing less than that.

This is to say that the gravitationalno let me put it in another way... the foundation of reflection is not simply turned 180 degrees on a fixed axis but the axis itself is radically changed.

And that to which reflection is changed is, as Ron so well put it, the mindbody which is neither mind nor body nor anything that is, strictly speaking, familiar under the conceptual rubrics of either the conception of body or of mind taken by themselves.

Therefore, if you are going to read these materials, and, as I say, I really do wonder whether it is a good idea, but if you take this project up, then you must at all times recognize that you are on ground as different from any you have ever occupied, unless you have been occupying this ground on your own for a long time, in any other philosophical environment.

Now that is all I have to say...the ball is now in your court...and I can only warn you that I have a quite vicious backhand... (long audience laughter)

23:18

Ron Hall: Your Serve

Long silence . Poteat says: "Please. You don't have to follow either what I said or what Ron said. You may ask some perfectly straightforward question like "What the hell do you mean when you say...Yes"

Jere Moorman: Bill, I'm Jere Moorman..I had the pleasure of hearing you ...(inaudible)

Poteat: Yes, Indeed. Very happy to meet you...

Moorman: I'm surprised that I am going first here... but...I have two simple questions and one that was fairly profound to me:

You shifted my axis back from enthusiasm for the impersonal framework of Daoism back to reflecting on my own Christian heritage and, I thank you for that, and so my profound question is I am wondering if this is any way a Christian work in terms of the assumption of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and the "I am" and a lot of very inspiring things about the faithfulness of God and man's inability to be faithful ... it seems to be a very heavy assumption.

1. Could a non-Christian relate to this work?
2. What do you mean by the "felicities"...I guess this is a term of Austin... I looked it up in the dictionary and couldn't figure it out
3. And what do you mean by "*tying a knot in language?*"

Poteat: Well let me take the first one...you are very clever because what you have discovered apparently from reading this stuff is something that I did not myself discover until relatively late in the day. What I mean by that is when I set out, I undertook to do what it was that I was being called upon to do.

Now I don't mean anything spooky by this. I think that it is the way in which the human mindbody gets itself accredited. But I'll give you an illustration of what I mean and then I'll go on to answer your question about is this a Christian thing you are talking about.

Early on in the writing of the first of these now three books...I was saying something in what...

Well let me begin before that...It was my practice, as I dare say it is the practice of most of us, when you are engaged in writing something, to do the day's work, and then at the end of the day, read over what you have written and make notes to yourself about where this is going to go the next day. And so naturally I decided I would use that method and it didn't work because as palpable as if somebody came into my study as I was about to begin that day's work on the basis of the notes made to myself on the preceding day...somebody came to my elbow and said: "*You are not going that way today*"

And this happened several times over...and I see some heads nodding suggesting that this is not a rare phenomenon at all.

The second thing that I want to say is that at some point I was rocking along and I made some reference to Noam Chomsky -some, I am quite sure, **impertinent** reference to Noam Chomsky. And I said maybe you better go check that...did he really say that? And I went to my library and pulled down the book and began to read...and I found myself trying to move from one world into another world...namely from the world I was in when I made the remark about Chomsky to the world in which it was possible for me to establish that Chomsky had or had not said what I claimed he had said.

It took me **four days**, after I had determined that I was not misquoting Chomsky, to recover myself...to **rediscover the place that I was** at the moment that I said that and indeed at in all of the moments in the course of which I was writing what I wrote.

Now this is a long introduction the to first of your questions...It was not until I read *In Search of a Post-Critical Logic* after it had been published...You don't read a book from beginning to end when you are writing it...there are always these interruptions and you are doing page proofing and all of that ...But when I got my copy and opened it up and read it from beginning to end I shut the book and I said, "My God, I'm a Judeo Christian." (laughter)

So far as I know, there is no reference to that at all in the book...I did not feel that it would be edifying-- no that's not the way to talk about it -- because that suggests that my relationship to my own language and what it's doing is a lucid relation and it isn't...I never made such decisions as this...but I did go on and start what became this diary known as *Philosophical Daybook* and again without any *intention* to disclose any sort of theological commitments which I was frankly *eschewing* because I felt that there was...that there has been often been a rush toward a theological appropriation of Polanyi's work as well as now of Wittgenstein's work...and that this was sometimes misguided...so I wanted to keep doing what I was doing.

Now this brings me, I believe, to something that I do say in the second book, and that is something that I can remember saying it in so many words to Jim Stines in a letter in which I was trying to deliver him from the bondage to Martin Heidegger which I have to admit I have failed miserably to do.....

I said, "I am a Yahwist" and that's the final word on the first of your questions...that is to say that's bedrock.

Now your second questions had to do with what do “felicities” mean...the expression felicities

(gap when tape being changed...perhaps begins talking about his communication with his pet golden retriever?)

30:40

And certain signals that I eventually became wise enough to understand that he was giving me...and I went on to say that our relationship was in no sense dependent upon the operation of felicities...and I did indeed have J.L. Austin’s use of that term in mind..

Now what are the felicities according to Austin?

If I were to say to a man and a woman standing before me...”By the laws vested in me by the state of North Carolina and subject to the laws of the church ...I hereby pronounce that you are man and wife”

The felicities that would make that the production of a marriage would not obtain because I have not the priestly authority or the legal authority to do that. Taylor Scott, on the other hand, who was kind enough to do this for me and my present wife, not only observed and indeed, yes he observed the felicities and the felicities obtained because he was an ordained minister of the Episcopal Church and he added a footnote all his own after Pat and I remained on our knees at the kneeling bench not knowing what to do next. Taylor very kindly leaned over and said “OK you can get up now, you are married.” (laughter)

Now does that help? (Yes) And I leave it to you to find whether that has a bearing on the way in which you encountered it.

Now the third one...can this be of any use to a non-Christian...(several voices clarify the question was about “tying a knot in language.”)

This is a rip-off of Ron Hall’s friend ...Soren Kierkegaardand it is not only a characteristically Kierkegaardian witticism but it happens to be absolutely devastatingly true. And indeed, one way of demolishing the absurdities of deconstruction is to say that they don’t know about tying a knot in language.

Tying a knot...at least when I am trying to sew a button on my jacket is necessary to prevent the thread from going over and over through the hole over and over and over again and if language doesn’t have a knot tied in it, then it will not work.

Now let me illustrate a case of a knot being tied in the oddest of all places and that is the OED and I think I make use of this as an illustration somewhere or another...If you look in the OED under the word “metaphor” you will find among other definenda ...”a figure of speech.”

Now the question is, “Is figure of speech a figure of speech?” And the answer is “No it isn’t” although in a certain sense it obviously is. In fact, it dramatically is a figure of speech. But in the context of the OED which gives that as one of the definitions for metaphor the knot has been tied in the string of language and the dictionary takes a stand on the expression “figure of speech” in order to define metaphor.

Now you have said there was another one...

Moorman:...Well, the other one is not so much a question anymore after your answer to the first one when you said you are a Yahwist, but I was wondering that to whatever extent this is a Christian work,

could a Buddhist benefit from your work if he blanches at your reliance on your statement from Exodus about God defining himself..

Poteat: That is something that I just don't know the answer to...I think it is conceivable that I might sneak up on a Buddhist...but I don't bring the subject up about our differencesat the point at which you say they obviously exist...with which, of course, I concur.

Moorman: Thank you...that clears it all up for me...(laughter)

Poteat: You did a service for everybody (more laughter)

36:35

Poteat: Yes, Wally..

Wally Mead: As you know from a manuscript I recently sent you, I've been struggling with your use of the word "reality" especially in the context where you suggest that even our second order, derivative, reflected expressions are in terms of what they point to are as real as that which is more primal in our understandings...

In a sense, I understand what you are saying but I see that as presenting problems in regard to our sense of hierarchy. If we talk about hierarchy, don't we have to suggest that some things ontologically are more significant than others then are we talking about reality?

Or just to append that...are you tying into Polanyi's understanding of reality as that which has potential for bringing out new meanings in the future?

Poteat: I want to...I want to make a cape pass, to use a bullfighting metaphor, by the last of your suggestions about am I tying into Polanyi's notion of hierarchy not because it's not worth discussing but because I think it would take us farther than either of us wants to go with what I take to be your central concern.

I have no trouble with hierarchy and I believe that...let me see if I can set up a different model here and we can talk about this.....

Suppose that I were to say that an entity is identical with the sum of all of the modes of discourse that bring it into being out of its background. That the *whatness* of an entity is identical with the sum of the modes of discourse that bring it into existence or bring it out of the background of the indeterminate....

Its *thisness*, as opposed to its *whatness*, shows itself...but in this scheme nothing is hidden. There is no "something I know not what" as with Locke ... there is no *ding an sich* as with Kant.

And the reason that nothing is hidden is because my mindbody ... our mindbodies... are the exact complements of the *whatness* of entities and the *thisness* of entities. The *whatness* that we can know – and this was what interested Kant – and the *thisness* that shows itself importunately.

Now we have been misled by Kant into supposing that the only thing that can be said about the *whatness* of an entity is..... sorry, only that can be known about an entity is what constitutes its *whatness* and that is identical with the modes of discourse that bring it into being.

But that in contrast the *thisness* of an entity, that shows itself *importunately* does not qualify as a category for predication. Hence you cannot predicate existence.

Now I think that Kant was right in saying that that you cannot predicate existence because what he really meant to be saying, using my language, was the discourse about the *whatness* of entities is not assimilable to the *thisness* of entities which shows itself.

Where I think he went astray (and again I repeat he went astray, I believe, because he was on very unfamiliar terms with his own body) that the importunity with which the *thisness* of every existent entity is no less overpowering that the *whatness* of entities that we can know.

41:37

Now all of this to get to your problem about hierarchy.....

In the piece that you sent me, you showed an uncommon sensitivity to the sense of the dynamism that underlies my discourse, so that, for example, I am very uncomfortable with words like *nature* as in the question "Does man have a *nature*?"

It's not that one cannot find a legitimate use for that word and circumscribe it sufficiently, so that its damage will not be that of returning us to the pre-Copernican world but rather it's affiliation with the Latin *Natura* and with its Greek correlate *Physis* buys into the very static conception of things which among other objectives is the focus of what I have been trying to do... to render dynamic.

So, at any given moment, Wally, I am in the world mindbodily with the whole world of reality out there in front of me. At any given moment, some part of it will be at the center of my focus. For example, your physical presence over there in the front row will be at the center of my attention. But that has as its context, a host of things, which, under different circumstances, are at that moment more important, but equally real to the reality of you as a physical presence in the front row.

So hierarchy there is, but hierarchy is rooted in my mindbody, and in our joint mindbodies, and in so far as we may say well, amongst us, the following hierarchies obtain, I have no trouble with that. But I would want to say that that hierarchy derives its authority and its place in the hierarchy from our convivial mindbodily existence. Now, does that address to your question?

Mead: yes, it does. When you said that the world is totally present to us in as much as we are in the world – is another way of saying that – that the world is totally present to us in to the extent that we indwell, that world?

Poteat: At the moment there is an infinity of realities that do not impinge on me, and I don't think they are impinging on you at the moment. What is real in this room at this moment is the physical

(pause with some chatter while tape is being changed...Wally quips "I may have to listen to that to understand this so" ...laughter...)

45:30

Here we are talking to one another and listening to one another, and we are looking at each other, and the rough and ready subject that we are talking about is what we are talking about – and that constitutes the dynamic world that exists during the two hours or three hours or whatever it turns out to be that we are together doing this.

In that context, the reality, as I believe it to be, of the last judgment is not before us at this time.

But if the subject of the last judgment comes up, and we focus our attention upon it, then it is equally in our midst with all that I had to say to,,, Jere, and all that he had to say back to me. And the ultimate locus of all of this is, for me, first and foremost my own mindbody in the world.

And I make a public apology here for often speaking in the first person, as if to say the second and third person are inferior. What I have found is that if I don't speak in the first person, I very quickly start talking in the third person and that's what we are trying to get away from.

Now when I talk about all of this being consolidated in my mindbody and our joint mindbodies, in so far as we are sharing a common world in this discourse – that is the world, and there is the potentiality for walking down the street in front of the Shoreham and everything else that is out there – both what we would call real and what we would call unreal but what I am no longer willing to distinguish between on *that simple basis*...

This is why I, to my great astonishment, Jere, found myself asking a question of myself rhetorically in the course of writing this third book which is yet to appear: (inaudible) I found myself asking the rhetorical question: "Well then do you believe in the doctrine of transubstantiation?"...and to cut a long story short... which I am generally not inclined to do (laughter) **I answered "Yes!"**

Now this is to give you some hint of the extent to which my grip upon the Ptolemaic universe that I am trying and have transformed for myself by a Copernican one has debauched me. And I think one of the worries that people have when they hear me talking this way or when they read these books ...you know things are going to get out of hand here. And the truth is, they have never been in hand.

And yet, the coherence (and God knows I am not under the impression that there is coherence widespread) but the coherence that we dwell in the midst of is...has the best and indeed the only ground available for it... and that is the mindbodily being of each of us in the world, and of all of us in it together.

50:00

Mead: I don't want to prolong this but I think you answered a statement I came across in your *Recovering the Ground* manuscript. I think I am quoting it accurately here: "both the concept of an extra mundane realm, and the extra mundane realm itself to which the concept refers are equally in the world."

Poteat: yes, isn't that great? I just think that's great.

Mead: Some people would see that as heretical.

Poteat: I know. I think that's why I like it so much.

David Rutledge: (much inaudible) ??? Bill, what struck me about your opening comments was the way you stress the sharpness of the turn you see yourself having made.....The difference between where you are now and where you used to be (inaudible)..

And yet in other places you talk about arriving where you have always been...(inaudible)

Poteat: I don't think I have ever said that David because I didn't realize it until a couple of comedians by the name of Nickell and Stines, the Abbott and Costello of these sessions, brought a volume out of old papers, and re-prints, and unpublished stuff of mine and said we want to bring this out because it is terribly important and I said "It is not important, it's got nothing to do with anything, I will not claim it as my own, it doesn't belong to me...**and I am astonished ...it does... "**

And I owe Abbott and Costello thanks which I shall never be able adequately to tender for what they have done. And you are right...this was all sneaking up on me...and when I decided that I had to take some time off to write something, I thought it was going to be something very different.

I told the Provost at Duke that I had to have the next semester off because if I did not then this thing that was struggling to be born inside of me that I might blow us all up...???they might have been glad to have me go...

And what was working on me there was, as you put it, the seeds that had been sprouting all around.

Dale Cannon made a devastating comment many years ago...I think it came to me secondhand because Dale is much too genteel to say this to your face. (some inaudible through here) He suggested that I was fooling around a lot writing all these things....I brought out a series of papers in the late fifties and early sixties...and he ...I think this was after the piece in *Intellect and Hope* appeared ("Myths, Stories, Histories, Eschatologies" or whatever that thing is) He read that and said he was reminded of how I had taken up some **profound** questions so you might consult Dale as to when this conceptual break occurred.

David Rutledge: (several sentences with only fragments audible) Most people don't read Descartes or Kant... ???culture... intellectual.... ???

I wonder then if the answer is that we think our way to a new place or to essentially stop thinking?...how do you come at the task of helping people who like you are trying to get out of????...

Poteat: Let me first of all say you are right...people don't read Descartes and they don't read Kant and you are also right in the implication that we cannot blame them for the sins of the world.

But there is a sense in which, and I regret that I have not been clear about this as I have gone along....There is a sense in which, Descartes, consolidated intellectual and affectional intimations that had been at least four centuries in the making. So, the publication of the *Discourse on Method* was not a novelty.

Hegel, I am surprised to hear myself saying, Hegel was right when he said that the owl of Minerva only begins her flight when it is already dark. There is a sense in which the two great works by Rene Descartes were Minerva's owl already in flight (inaudible) that is to say that these four centuries or so of intimations had been coming and what Descartes did was done with a kind of complexity that is hardly ever appreciated.

I mean Descartes was no Cartesian. But the Descartes who we know and love is the Descartes that we decided we would take by leaving all of the other complexities. Just as people read their New Testament and their Old Testament in a highly selective way.

Therefore, what I want to say is that though you are absolutely right to suggest that I have not made this clear in any of these books, but what I want to say is that this culture is a creature of our intellectual and affectional endorsement of those views from Descartes that we *wanted* to endorse because they satisfy a Geist that was deep in us, and to change the venue a bit, that Kierkegaard in the immediate stages of the musical erotic with, for my money, absolutely unparalleled prescience Identified with the figures of Don Giovanni, Faust, and the wandering Jew, it was in these three figures that our consciousness was embodied and has still to be shaped,

Ron is right in telling us that this culture is hopelessly aesthetical in the Kierkegaardian sense.

And if you know your Kierkegaard, everybody in here does of course, then you recognize the enormous difficulty, not in a philosophical colloquy, but just in the ordinary common sense in every day conversation with a troubled neighbor who looks at what is happening to this country and this world and finds it impossible to endorse deeply inside himself everything of which he has been deprived by this history.

So I have often asked myself, why are you doing this? Is it imaginable that anybody is helped by it? And most of the time I answer that by saying no..... and I can simply say that I am now looking at more people that have shown some interest in this than I ever thought existed.

The reason that I did this, then is simply because this is my vocation. It was my duty to do this,

And if, as I think is almost certainly happening, the Western world is sliding down a slippery slope. I do not chastise myself that I did not get here in time to save it because I never set out to do that in the first place. All I set out to do was to answer my vocation and do my duty.

1:00:27

That comes, Jere, back to your first question...

Did I answer

(Several sentences from a questioner inaudible....?may have been about Bill's views on current state of universities and scholarly organizations?)

Poteat: The first change that would make is that I would schedule a meeting like this in a room that was much more nearly a square so that we could get perhaps two rows of chairs in a circle and we would all...

(recording on disk 1 ends).

Friday night session continues on TAPE 2 and a separate transcript