

Response from Bob Hyatt to Participants in His Session

Hello to all those who were present at my presentation on June 11. I very much appreciate the thoughtful remarks each of you made during the discussion period. Since I am attempting to “plough new ground” I needed your responses. It was good to receive them in such a convivial setting.

The oldest use of the word *convivial* that I have found is “feast”. I consider that’s what we had, metaphorically speaking. What I propose to do in this “response” is to offer a few morsels of clarification in light of the responses each of you brought to the table.

First off Sietske (Fran) Dijkstra asked how I might apply the idea of “window of tolerance” to the case of traumatized 3rd grade student LeCarl. I was not familiar with the concept but Sietske was and her explanation helped us understand how it is useful in treating victims of trauma.

For anyone interested you may go to the website titled “Attachment and Trauma Centre for Healing” which offers a very good explanation of the window of tolerance concept complete with diagrams.

Essentially “window of tolerance” has to do with the contrast between normal and traumatic affect regulation. Trauma victims have a “smaller” window of tolerance and therefore have greater difficulty regulating their emotions before becoming hyper aroused (fight or flight) or hypo aroused (immobilized, frozen). Even though traumatized and despite the fact that he was reenacting his assault, Lecarl was able to regulate his emotions during his sessions with me because the gestalt (frame) of the play space made him feel safe enough to play metaphorically with the original traumatizing episode by opening the “window” of affect regulation sufficiently for him to “tolerate” his

emotions during our weekly sessions. Thanks Sietske for contributing this enlightening (new for me) concept to our convivial feast.

Since they had somewhat similar questions/comments I will consider Betty Wolf and Diane Yeager's remarks next. Betty asked about Polanyi's concept borrowed from I. A. Richards regarding the "isolating" effect of poetry vs. Elizabeth Sewell's view of the permeability of language. Diane raised a somewhat similar question asking if I would accept a somewhat "softer" language than that of Richards to describe the cutting off of poetic language from ordinary day to day speech, perhaps Ricoer's idea of distantiation. Diane also asked whether trauma victims might have a damaged form of knowing.

Taking this last question first, the answer is absolutely yes. Arnold Modell, Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at Harvard says that "Trauma degrades metaphor and massive trauma degrades metaphor absolutely." That is due to the fact that "... the freedom of the *imagination* (italics mine) is limited." He cites holocaust survivors who say they lived "...in a world that is beyond metaphor" (p.113, Modell, 2003. *Imagination and the Meaningful Brain*. MIT).

Although Modell does not address the question of how the arts may alleviate some of the effects of trauma, he does have a fascinating discussion of how artistic activity affects perception and stimulates imagination. (Ibid. pp. 114-117) Interestingly it comes immediately after his discussion of the effect of trauma on the imagination. His understanding is very much in accord with Polanyi's views on perception and imagination expressed both in *Meaning* and *The Tacit*

Dimension and implicitly supports the view I am trying to articulate. I will have more to say about that in a sequel to my presentation.

With regard to Betty and Diane's questions about permeability, isolating and distancing involved in poetic language I will cite a quotation from Elizabeth Sewell's *The Orphic Voice* with which I wholeheartedly agree: "Discovery, in science and poetry, is a mythological situation in which the mind unites with a figure of its own devising as a means toward understanding the world. That figure always takes the form of some kind of language." (p.20) I should note that I consider all forms of art as "some kind of language", mostly if not entirely metaphoric. In the poem I read written by the traumatized vet I believe that the "Monster Within" is just such a poetic /mythological figure of Austin's devising that is in several ways "cut off" from ordinary everyday language which would be too literal and likely to precipitate a re-traumatizing episode if not cast in the language of symbolic form. It is as permeable as Austin needs it to be to express the emotions/ideas that are important for him to understand himself and to communicate that understanding to family, friends, and fellow traumatized vets and to a general reader like me.

I carry no brief for the detailed particulars of I. A. Richards theory and the so called "New Criticism" regarding the extent to which poetry may cut off from ordinary speech. From whatever sources he may have developed his idea I do affirm Polanyi's view that the *subsidiary* elements of rhythm, rhyme, grammar, sound and prose content provide a frame within which these and other subsidiary elements of Austin's wartime experiences, especially including his memories and emotions, indwelled by Austin become the meaning of the *focal object*, the poem. The poem itself then, as Austin gives himself to it, indwelling

it, becomes a means by which, at least tentatively, he achieves a degree of self-understanding, insight/integration that can be communicated.

Succinctly and very aptly Suzanne Langer captures the way she understands the question both Betty and Diane have raised. She says, "The poet's business is to create the appearance of ""experiences,"" the *semblance* (italics mine) of events lived and felt, and to organize them so they constitute a purely and completely experienced reality, a piece of *virtual* (italics hers) life." (p.212, *Feeling and Form*.) That statement is fully consonant with my views.

I am grateful to Betty and Diane for their probing questions and comments which have helped me express with greater clarity, at least for myself, what I am trying to say.

Esther Meek introduced us to the person and work of internationally renowned Kintsugi potter, painter and arts advocate Makoto Fujimura indicating that there might be parallels between his work and the relation of trauma and metaphor expressed through artistic activity that I am developing out of Polanyi. And indeed that is the case.

After our session I discovered a remarkable commencement address that Fujimori had given in 2019 at Judson University. It's titled "Kintsugi Generation" in which he recounts his own trauma after 9/11/2001 when he evacuated to his loft after unsuccessfully trying by subway to reach his home and family just three blocks away. By coincidence his family had also fled to his loft. Like my student LeCarl who wrestled metaphorically over and over with an animal puppet for almost two years before reintegrating himself, Fujimori says he had to "train my imagination by painting over and over images of fire in order to ... transform haunting memories and images of destructive fire into the

fire of sanctification.” His continuing painting images of fire was clearly a quest to recover through the healing power of artistic metaphor.

In April 2019 Fugimura, who developed an increasing reputation as an authority on trauma and art, was invited to speak on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Columbine High School shooting in Littleton, Colorado. As part of the observance he presented a painting of Columbine flowers which had taken him 20 years to complete. The painting he says is a metaphor for the fragility of the lives lost. He also presented a Kintsugi bowl. Originally these bowls were used by tea masters as part of Japanese tea ceremonies. Accidentally broken they were mended and transformed by artists working very slowly over long periods of time using gold to fill the fissures. The Japanese word Kin means “gold” and Tsugi means “mend”. Tsugi also means “to link the generations together”. Fugimura views the bowl as a metaphor for the breaking apart and mending of the traumatized Littleton community. Much of Fujimura’s art consists of taking broken materials and transforming them into something “new”.

I am indebted to Esther for introducing us to this remarkable artist. To read the Judson commencement address go to: Makoto Fujimura Judson University Commencement Address 2019 or just google his name for a wealth of information about him.

Because they are both intent on clarifying how Polanyi’s understanding of the way metaphor functions I will consider Dale Cannon and Stan Scott’s remarks together.

Dale is quite rightly concerned that I may not have paid sufficient attention to Polanyi’s idea of metaphor as a “probe” to be indwelt and

used as a transparent tool for discovery. Dale suggested that Austin in Polanyian view would, composing his poem, have indwelt the poem itself to explore further. Dale's point with regard to Polanyi's concern with metaphor as probe is accurate and well taken.

My concern is not so much with the experience of "discovery" as it is with the experience of traumatic loss and "recovery" especially via artistic means. Austin has lost part of his "self-land" i.e. part of "the ground of his being". My question is this: What is the process by which metaphors function in the potential recovery of the ground he has lost? How can his disintegrated self be reintegrated? Does the heuristic potential of Polanyi's theory of how metaphors work give us any clues? I am trying to approach this question in Polanyian fashion by following an intuitive "hunch" that his theory regarding metaphors has heuristic possibilities for understanding the experience of trauma that he did not consider explicitly but which are present tacitly.

As I see it what Austin is searching for is an explanation of what has happened and is still happening to himself as a result of his traumatic experience. He has chosen poetry as an instrument of self exploration and a means of communicating with those who have suffered directly as he has, e.g. fellow vets, and indirectly, family and friends, so that they will "know".

What comes to my mind when considering this kind of problem is Polanyi's discussion of "insight" as the kind of knowledge which results when imagination thrusts forth intent upon finding a pattern of coherence. As Polanyi says, "...Such insight differs, however from all the *focal* (italics mine) targets (like those of stereo vision, reading a sentence, probing a cavity, etc.) that we have mentioned before, in that this focal target does not lie away from the subsidiaries but

coincides in our imagination with its parts.” (P.54 *Meaning*) This is an almost literal description of what is the case in Austin’s poem as exemplified by these four lines:

Today’s and tomorrow’s, and faraway times!
Needle thin memories, ever so traces!
Sights and sounds of other places,
The Monster is there it’s what he traces.

For Austin in Polanyi’s words, “... the imaginative probing of a puzzling aggregate has established in it an intelligible coherence or meaning.” (p.54, *Ibid.*) However such coherence as he has achieved is not the final solution to his problem which is the recovery of his divided self. It is an important step along the way: He now has a better perception of what the problem is and is not necessarily stuck there. As Modell says, “Metaphor not only *transfers* meaning between different domains, but by means of novel recombinations metaphor can *transform* meaning and generate new perceptions.” (P.27 Modell, *Imagination and the Meaningful Brain*). I would call this recombining process a kind of metaphorical “mapping “in which the focal target metaphor lies close to its subsidiaries like a topographical map. Austin’s hope depends on “finding” a different more self-integrating map/perception.

Just as Fujimura returned many times to repaint his fire images (the metaphor of his 9/11 trauma), no doubt Austin will return to struggle with the dominant symbol/metaphor in his poem. His way may or may not be the rewriting of his poem comparable to Fugimura’s painting(s). His recovery will almost certainly involve continuing struggle with the “monster within” in search of a healing metaphor which will enable him to “break out” (Stan’s words) of his captivity thereby reintegrating his

traumatic experience(s) and recovering the *ground* of his being in the self giving way emphasized by Stan from Polanyi.

Modell describes this repetitive process as an attempt to “achieve mastery” involving “... a rediscovery, a refinding of categories held in memory.” (pp. 61, 63 Modell, *Other Times Other Realities*). This process involves recovering by means of symbolic metaphoric action a *felt* sense of integration, coherence, wholeness I refer you back to my student LeCarl and his repeated wrestling with the puppet and to Fujimura’s repeated painting(s) of fire until he painted the “fire of sanctification” which I view as the refinding, the rediscovery, the restoration of the wholeness (holiness) of his being! I will have more to say about this important idea of the metaphorical refinding of categories held in memory in my sequel paper.

Since our session on June 11 I have reread Austin’s poem several times and discovered in it a depth I had sensed but had not put into words until composing this response. Rereading the words “self-land” a metaphor came to mind, “ground of being”! The very ground of Austin’s being had been sundered. We have moved from “knowing” to “being”. Shortly thereafter I reread Stan’s article in the Feb. 2019 issue of *T&D* and it occurred to me that Austin’s words had intimated a tacit dimension Stan mentions as being “... below the surface structures of art and literature, bringing news from outside logical space.” (p.27) Here below the surface of the words of Austin’s poem “meanings still exist.” and are still “... open to the powers of intuition and imagination...” and, I would add, therefore open to the potential for Austin’s recovery in ways I have outlined above.

I am very grateful to both Stan and Dale for their perceptive questions and remarks which have prompted me to “indwell” more deeply the matters I am exploring.

Richard Ludlow posed the question whether by “indwelling” his poem Austin might be integrated into wholeness and further whether a group of streetwise kids who responded strongly and positively to their teacher’s reading of Hamlet might likewise be integrated into a kind of wholeness.

The key word here is “integrate”. The aim of Austin’s writing is that in the process itself of composing he is in search of (Polanyi might well put it: hoping to “discover”) the words and metaphors which will enable him to reintegrate (I would say “transform”) his traumatic experience(s) in his body/mind so that he can eventually be restored to wholeness. This will not be accomplished by the writing of this one poem alone but is a step in the right direction. And the process is that described by Polanyi when he speaks of the subsidiaries (Austin’s wartime experiences) forming the *tenor* of a metaphor (or symbol) whose focal point is the *vehicle* (monster within) to whom Austin metaphorically gives up (the monster has stolen from him) part of himself. The point I am making is that in order to get to the metaphor of “the monster within” Austin has to that extent already indwelled the poem’s traumatic subsidiaries and to some extent, but not fully, integrated or transformed ---meaning to carry across via metaphor quite literally from one form to another in order to *reform* --- his traumatic experience.

Not incidentally, Dr. Bessel van der Kolk whose book, *The Body Keeps the Score*, first prompted my interest in writing about trauma and the arts has a section (p.238) in which he reports on the success of a program called “Writing to Yourself” in which he demonstrates the value for traumatized persons of writing in a “free association” way which is very much like the process of writing poetry but not meant to be shared publicly, not even with the therapist, except by the therapist reading silently what the person has written. The act of writing about the experience is a way in itself of understanding, absorbing, incorporating, integrating, and thereby leading to existential change.

As for Richard’s question about the influence of reading great literature leading to some kind of wholeness or sanity, I would point you to a book titled *The Theater of War* in which Bryan Doerries chronicles his experiences with a group of professional actors he assembled who for over ten years have done dramatic readings of Sophocles’ plays, especially *Ajax*, for audiences of soldiers at US Army bases who have returned from Iraq and Afghanistan. The audiences also include family members of the soldiers. After each presentation there is a period devoted to the expression of feelings and thoughts on the part of the soldiers and family members. The results have been stunningly successful in opening audiences to the point that they begin really communicating with each other about hitherto unspoken feelings stemming from their wartime experiences. This is a prime example of the value of the artistic framing effect making it “safe” to “speak” about the unspeakable. And it illustrates the strength and durability of great literature which although 2500 years old is yet open to the powers of

intuition and imagination and thence to metaphor and meaning. (See my comments re. Stan Scott's *T&D* article above.

A further question Richard raised was whether perhaps having had a healthy childhood might supply a traumatized person with embodied resources to overcome the destructive effects of their trauma. The answer to that question is definitely yes.

Psychoanalytic literature in the past 25 years especially the self-psychology movement with its emphasis on "intersubjectivity" is replete with references to embodied "emotional memory". And of interest to followers of Polanyi, one of the most prolific analysts in this vein who also holds a Ph.D. in philosophy, is Donna Orange whose first book, *Emotional Understanding, Studies in Psychoanalytic Epistemology*, written in 1995 cites Polanyi's idea of tacit knowledge as a prime source for her conception of emotional memory: Polanyi's the more than we can say that we know. Orange devotes a page and a half to a discussion of Polanyi including quotes. (Pp.107-108,116,122)

The essential idea here is that infants "remember" affective interactions with their caretaker and that these memories remain implicit as the *unthought known*. Some infant researchers suggest that infants have a memorial schema consisting of a gestalt of their affective interaction with their caretakers which Daniel Stern calls a "schema of being with". Because these early affective memories cannot be made explicit suggests that they may be stored as wordless affective metaphors. Where the caregiving has been "good enough" positive metaphors of "being with" may be evoked in therapy in a wordless but nevertheless healing---feeling with--- way with traumatized persons. (I have paraphrased extensively here from p.45 of Modell's *Imagination and the Meaningful Brain* cited previously.)

Thanks Richard Ludlow for your very insightful questions which have prompted me to further delineate some very important ideas.

Richard Moody asked whether it was possible that a part of Austin's form of trauma stemmed from a feeling that he was guilty of a crime that violated a sense of his identity. Without knowing the specifics of his wartime experience that is certainly possible. The result is a split between the "me" and "not me". A variation is "survivor's guilt": "Why him and not me?" The dominant metaphors in these two instances, *I am a criminal, it should have been me*, over time in therapy hopefully will be replaced by some kind of self-forgiving metaphors which make it possible to live with the tragedy despite never completely erasing the memories.

Thanks Richard for providing another dimension to Austin's traumatic story/poem!

Martin Turkis asked whether Iris Murdoch's concept of "unselfing" elaborated in her book, *The Sovereignty of Good*, might have some relevance for our discussion. I presume Martin is referring to Polanyi's idea of the movement in metaphor from "self-centered" to "self-giving". Since our session I have looked at Murdoch's work. I do applaud her concern to restore "experience" and "consciousness" as legitimate objects of philosophical attention. She is especially clear about the connection of metaphor and consciousness: "The development of consciousness in human beings is inseparably connected with the use of metaphor. Metaphors are not merely peripheral decorations or even useful models, they are the

fundamental forms of our condition.” (p. 75) Given my approach to these matters that statement is bedrock!

With regard to her understanding of the “self” as being an illusion in need of “unselfing” I don’t see a useful connection with Polanyi. Polanyi does not look upon “self centered” necessarily as a pejorative term. For example, in the formation of a symbol the self is the place where the subsidiary elements are “centered” .As I see it, with reference to Austin, “self” refers to his core identity as a human being, the place in which he holds his traumatic memories. His self identity has been split. Restoration may come about if he experiences a healing metaphor which he indwells and to which he gives up those subsidiary aspects of his traumatized self by means of which as Polanyi puts it, “...the self becomes integrated” (p.75 of *Meaning*). It is important to remember that this is a process that may occur only over a long period of time with repeated attempts to create or recreate an unconscious wordless metaphor or a consciously articulated metaphor or both which will restore his “self” identity. This brings to mind Merleau-Ponty’s “intentional arc” where the self repeats cycles of action and perception in order to maintain “maximum grip”. I see this process as starkly realistic with nothing “illusory” about it. However I am a fallible human being who may have misunderstood Murdoch’s intent here. Consequently I thank Martin and welcome any response he or others who know Murdoch far better than I may have in rebuttal.

Charles Lowney in his remarks summarized in a helpful way several aspects of the session especially highlighting Polanyi’s concept of “framing” which Charles sees as a “detaching” which makes possible an engagement with tacit clues in the therapeutic situation which would

otherwise be likely to result in a hyper or hypo state of arousal, referring to Sietske's "window of tolerance" idea.

With Charles' restating of the framing concept it occurred to me to look more carefully at "framing" from the point of view of the creator of the art as contrasted with the recipient (reader, viewer, etc.). It occurs to me that for the trauma survivor who creates an art object he/she will supply as much of a frame as is necessary to protect their damaged self. For example they almost never address their trauma in literal terms. Only symbolic terms will do! Even so, the amount of framing they do to protect themselves may not be enough to protect other traumatized persons who are readers, viewers, etc. The website on which Austin's poem appears, together with many other poems written by traumatized vets, has a message warning that the reading of these poems may trigger flashbacks, etc. in some individuals.

I am grateful to Charles for prompting me to reflect further on a very important part of my presentation.

Finally I want to thank Ellen Bernal for the germane questions she posed for my consideration in order to get me and the rest of us off to a good start. In my presentation and in the subsequent discussion and my response I believe we have responded to her excellent prompts.

However I would like to focus on one of her questions further because it is of such import for understanding the therapeutic situation. That is Polanyi's understanding of conviviality. Of course Polanyi did not have in mind conviviality as it applies to the therapeutic setting nevertheless it is a prescient example of the heuristic reach of his thought. Polanyi states, "The interpersonal coincidence of tacit judgments is primordially continuous with the mute interaction of powerful emotions" (PK205)

and further “the sentiments of trust and persuasive passions...bring us back...to the primitive sentiments of fellowship that exist previous to articulation.”(Ibid. 209)

According to psychoanalyst Donna Orange, to whom we referred earlier as having been heavily influenced in her views of the tacit dimension by Polanyi, the basis of therapeutic understanding is *making sense together*. And it is making sense on the tacit level through *felt* (italics mine) but unspoken emotions as well as on the cognitive level. In Polanyian terms I would paraphrase it as the interpersonal sense making that is continuous with the *mute* interaction *between* patient(s) and therapist(s) of powerful emotions especially including trust. As Orange says “let’s figure it out together” is a more modest replacement for the “verbal interpretation” that the therapist authority *gives* to the patient. And further when we ...distinguish emotion and cognition in talking with patients... we show regard for a ‘sense of things’—ours or the patient’s—whether or not this sense is verbalizable. Consequently Orange says “... we will make room in many ...treatments for art, music and poetry as means of creating a shared emotional life. (pp. 11, 99 of *Emotional Understanding*).

On that note I will end my response to your very convivial reception of my presentation and I welcome further dialogue.

Robert P. Hyatt

shoalcreekyatt@aol.com

