

“Things, Subsidiary Focal Integration, and a Metaphysics of Liberty: Comparing Michael Polanyi and Michael Hanby on Science and Metaphysics”

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Introduction

The purpose of this essay is to attest to and explore the resonance I am finding between Michael Polanyi’s innovative science-inspired philosophical claims and Classical Christian metaphysics (CCM) as developed especially by philosopher Michael Hanby in his book, *No God, No Science? Theology, Cosmology, Biology*.¹ I want to show how Polanyi’s core philosophical insights seem intuitively well attuned to CCM’s central claims.²

I begin with a few definitions and prefatory comments. Consistently with this metaphysical tradition, I have come to regard *metaphysics* as concerning the most fundamental claims about reality. They are so fundamental as to be indemonstrable, except insofar as they cannot coherently be denied in any demonstrations, nor in our actual knowing and being.³ I think of these as the metaphysics of childhood—how we all quite naturally move toward the world from our first moments of infancy in the loving gaze of the mother’s smile.⁴ As we grow up, especially in this milieu, however, incoherent denying of them happens and damages human efforts. Modernity seems to have installed this denial as its defining agenda. Yet on this fundamental level, metaphysics concerns and envelops us all, Michael Polanyi and the modern enterprise of science included.

So there is an obvious sense in which Polanyi’s work is intuitively imbued with metaphysics. But I believe that his philosophical proposals set him apart in this anti-metaphysical, reductivist, materialist, positivist, modernist era as being especially attuned to metaphysics and its mutual, concrete but indeterminate bearing on scientific discovery. He stands out as having dealt modernity a kind of healing, hope restoring, wound. I suggest that he serves as a kind of “Shepherd of Being”—something Heidegger enjoined and Hanby and others call for.⁵

¹Michael Hanby, *No God, No Science? Theology, Cosmology, Biology* (West Sussex, UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2013). Hereafter page number citations in text. In search of a better grasp of CCM, and given the COVID-lengthened preparation time for this paper, I also studied D.C. Schindler, *A Companion to Ferdinand Ulrich’s Homo Abyssus* (Baltimore: Humanum, 2019). Hanby, as well as his colleague, Schindler, are well acquainted with Polanyi’s work and find it kin to their own. This is one reason for this inquiry of mine.

² My exploration focuses more extensively on Hanby’s work and CCM, since it is these I am trying to elucidate for the sake of the comparison. I will presume that Polanyi’s claims are familiar and espoused by most participants in this meeting.

³ However, this does not appear to restrict endless creative thought about them!

⁴ Find more on this fertile and delightful metaphysical claim in “Excursus 2: “Consent, the Mother, and the Other: CCM Resonant with Polanyi.” [Deleted from this version of the paper.]

⁵ Schindler, *Companion*, 148. Contemporary CCM philosophers seem to agree in their assessment of Heidegger, that he reopened the critically important question of being, but that his own proposals failed to understand and properly develop it. They believe that CCM, by contrast, does.

On the one hand, Polanyi explicitly saw himself as doing epistemology and also metaphysics, as it seemed obvious to him (distinctively) that science requires these efforts. On the other hand, it is not as if Polanyi ever directly engages formal CCM. It seems more an intuitive grasp, and a fundamental, implicit openness. This is what my reflection in this essay is concerned to explore. As it turns out, this is just what Hanby commends regarding the complementary relationship between science and metaphysics or theology, as will be seen.

Classical Christian metaphysics (CCM) is generally understood to refer to the Western philosophical tradition growing to fullest flourishing especially in the work of 13th century philosopher Thomas Aquinas. It embraces the fertile best of Platonism and of Aristotelianism, and it seeks to develop it. It finds that the philosophical resources of historic Christianity, as they are developed in the early centuries of the Christian era, strategically supply what was implicitly lacking in Classical metaphysics.

Contemporary philosophers returning to tap CCM's resources generally understand *modernist epistemology* to begin definitively in the 1600s especially with the claims of Rene Descartes and Francis Bacon. As will be seen, modernism is definitively characterized to have rejected metaphysics, these rich and unavoidably necessary motifs as so much occult baggage, to its (and our) own detriment and incoherence.

The Christian doctrine of creation is in brief as follows. *Creatio ex nihilo*, as expressed by CCM philosopher D.C. Schindler, "is not a discrete event that takes place in history, in relation to which there are other events that occur 'before' and 'after.' Indeed, creation is the emanation of the *whole* of being, which means also the whole of history and indeed the whole of time, in an absolutely inclusive sense. There is only *one* act of creation, which both *has* occurred and *is* occurring." Schindler quotes Aquinas: "Since creation is without movement, a thing is being created and is already created at the same time."⁶ Hanby's theses accord with this CCM tradition. He remarks: "Creation is the event of the world: the novel appearance of a gratuitous surplus of being that is somehow not God." (323)⁷

The matter of the Christian doctrine of creation, either in its defective form as a doctrine of origins, or as per CCM as a theological doctrine of God and as a metaphysical claim about the structure of the world, is not a topic which Polanyi himself has in view. Hanby's comment about the innovative work of scientists Hans Driesch and of David Bohm (scientists whose ideas Polanyi also considers) pertains aptly to Polanyi: "Of course neither Driesch nor Bohm contends for the Christian doctrine of creation ex nihilo. Both may well reject it for all I know. This is only to say that what creation affirms of the ontological structure of reality shows up, as it were, in these [scientists'] concepts." (405)⁸

⁶ Schindler, *Companion*, 81 (Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 1.45.2ad3).

⁷ I think it is philosophically and historically telling regarding modernity that, growing up as I did as a Bible-believing Protestant, I have never heard this account of creation before. I did not hear it at church, and I did not learn it in my PhD studies in philosophy. Hanby accounts entirely for my own woeful state of understanding, and in turn my situation demonstrates his representation of it: I am a product of modernity's rejection of classical Christian metaphysics.

⁸ For what it's worth, I am not sure that Polanyi's preoccupation with emergence has to do with origins, so much as with metaphysical irreducibility. See Polanyi, PK, ch. 11; TD, Lecture 2; "Knowing and Being" (Greene, ed., *Knowing and Being*).

Hanby's Argument and the Central Theses of CCM

Michael Hanby's agenda in this book works out of this CCM tradition, developing and applying its implications specifically to modern science—specifically, Darwinism. Very briefly stated, he argues that the entire creationism-evolution debate concerning the origins of the universe is wrongheaded—and not for reasons generally cited. Creationism represents a historically false and defective understanding of the Christian doctrine of creation. The latter consists in, not a scientific claim about origins, but a theological claim about God, and a metaphysical claim about the structure of reality.

Darwinism is defective and self-defeating, not for any scientific merit it holds, but because of its covertly held, defective, modernity-invented theology and metaphysics. Darwinism and all of science would be greatly helped by the metaphysics it attempts to deny: CCM—Classical Christian metaphysics—specifically the heart notions of things, and the act of being, or *esse*.

Science should be open to such originary metaphysics. At the same time, it should not see doing metaphysics or theology this as a scientific pursuit. Science, metaphysics, and theology are disciplines distinguishable from each other, but complementary. To deny the complementarity, to believe that legitimate science is entirely closed to these other fields, is actually to be inappropriately and covertly committing oneself to dogmatic claims in the adjacent fields. CCM distinctively undergirds the very openness which honors science to stand on its own.⁹

These are Hanby's main claims in the book. In what follows, I explore further three inexhaustively fertile, historically and intrinsically intertwined metaphysical claims which lie at the heart of CCM: *esse*, the act of being; particular things, as ontological individuals; and the metaphysics of the relatedness of the world to its ultimate principle. Then I will reflect on how they appear to be intuitively honored in Polanyi's core philosophical insights.

Esse, the Act of Being

Hanby devotes extensive attention to CCM's philosophical discovery of *esse*, the act of being. "We need to explicate the notion of being for the sake of science," says Hanby. (51)

What is in view in the term, *act*, of course is heavily imbued with its distinctive Aristotelian and Classical Christian meaning. Act has to do with *actual*, and *actualized*. The acorn actualizes as my neighbor's majestic pin oak, potency to act. Thus far Aristotle. (57-74) CCM's distinctive and perhaps most important contribution is to identify that there has to be more to complete an Aristotelian account of a thing. A thing actualizes in a far more foundational way than merely from potency to act, in that it comes to be. In addition to essence there must be *esse*. Once the matter of *esse* is identified, it upstages essence to become the main act in metaphysics.¹⁰

Esse is the act of *being*. Things are *ens* or *entia*—that is, creatures—the term or result of creation, of *esse*. *Esse* is not part of the thing's essence but is the very actualizing of the thing itself. (83-85; 353-64) It is, to quote Aquinas, "the actuality of all acts, the perfection of all perfections." Schindler explains: "It

⁹ Hanby, *No God, passim*. See esp. "Introduction," and "Discourse on Method" (ch. 1). Find my further reflection on Hanby and Polanyi in this regard in "Excursus 1: Hanby and Polanyi on the Complementarity of Science and Metaphysics." [Deleted from this version of the paper.]

¹⁰ W Norris Clarke, S.J., trans. and ed., *An Introduction to the Metaphysics of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, DC: Regnery Gateway, 1953), xv-xvi.

is a kind of act, therefore, that causally transcends the acts that specify beings in diverse ways.”¹¹ *Esse* is an event—a happening; it is *not* a *thing*. *Esse* does not exist—“any more than running runs.”¹² The act of being, as *esse* is called, is the existing, the “izing” of things.¹³ *Esse*, united to but not part of the essence in the thing, according to Schindler, “does not lose the simplicity of its perfection in this unity but remains a kind of indeterminate fullness.”¹⁴ *Esse* is “the pure mediation of giving.” (358-9) Hanby says of *esse*: “the incommunicability proper to each thing, making each thing its own little world; this restores interiority necessary to its being its own project.”

The distinction between *essentia* and *esse*, essence and existence, is known as *the real distinction*. (83, 351) *Essentia* is the particular form (*Gestalt*) that is that thing’s identity and particularity and commonality and endless depths. The real distinction means that *esse* and *essentia* are distinct but not separable; they mutually require each other without reducing to one another. Each enables the other to be what it itself is.¹⁵

Esse metaphysically flavors the structure of all things. Ever connected with but distinguishable from a thing’s nature, it is the dynamic, inexhaustive heart of its being, here and now. For organic things, it is life. For the human being, it is distinctively the person, the living intellect. (348) It is the dynamic, ongoing, moment by moment actualizing of a thing’s capacities in intrinsic relation to its world of intrinsically related others.

Thus, says Hanby, we must inquire deeply into the nature of being as act. This inner act of existence (being) is the very thing which is both proper to each thing and common and to all things. (35) *Act* just is a being at work remaining itself. A thing is actual when it is most fully itself, ripe. Act is not a static facticity, but rather the completion or fullness, and thus the perpetuation, of the activity which is the logos or form that is the thing. “To be actual is to be the kind of thing it is by doing what that kind of thing does.” (61) And this activity essentially includes relating to others. To be is to be self-communicating—especially to us human knowers as part of completion of a thing’s act. (72)

Further, *esse* (the act of being) and *essentia* (the form a thing is), so related, together require a qualitatively different (from either of themselves), ultimate metaphysical anchor, which can be known as God. This fundamental metaphysical reasoning begins for every human with the undeniable phenomenon of the mother’s smile—hence the metaphysics of childhood. In a widely known passage in his multivolume work on theological aesthetics, called, “The Miracle of Being and the Fourfold Distinction,”¹⁶ Hans Urs von Balthasar offers a kind of phenomenological ontological account of the very

¹¹ Schindler, “What’s the Difference? On the Metaphysics of Participation in a Christian Context” (*St Anselm Journal* 3:1 (Fall 2005), 16) Aquinas, *De Potentia*, 7, 2, 9; *Summa Theologica* I, 3, 4.

¹² Hanby, 381. He is quoting Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Glory of the Lord IV: The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Antiquity* (Trans. B. McNeil, et. al.; San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 404. See also Schindler, *Companion*, 37.

¹³ Hanby, 347; “izing” is Adrian Walker’s playful term in “Personal Singularity and the *Communio Personarum*: A Creative Development of Thomas Aquinas’ Doctrine of *Esse Commune*” (*Communio* 31, 457-75).

¹⁴ Schindler, *Companion*, 162.

¹⁵ Throughout CCM one finds frequent emphasis on distinction as polarity rather than separation. I believe that this is the referent of the idea of *analogy*. See for example Schindler, *Catholicity*, 267-68.

¹⁶ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord, V: The Realm of Metaphysics in the Modern Age* (trans. O. Davies, et. al.; San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991), 613-27.

small child's awakening to consciousness in the loving gaze of his mother.¹⁷ Hanby incorporates this account into his own exposition of creation as the ontological structure of the world. (350)

According to Aquinas, *esse* alone is the world's only and first efficient cause (not something Aristotle ever realized), and it is identical to the Christian doctrine of creation. It is an event which each thing, and all creation together, *is*. What is more, in CCM the event and the structure of the result is through and through *love*, and *gift*—thus, fundamentally interpersoned.¹⁸ As it developed historically, CCM innovated with respect to the neoPlatonic idea of emanation. (74-77) Reality, as good, is not lack, but excess, an inexhaustible surplus of giving.¹⁹ Reality is gift, or the giving of the gift. To say that the real is gift is to indicate that a thing's interior ontological structure is *ex nihilo* (—since a gift might not have been given). (342) Good, to be itself, must be self-diffusive.

Also, strikingly, good requires an “other” to which it gives itself away. So reality is fundamentally interpersonal communion, love. Creation is fundamentally consent; createdness is fundamentally also the consent of reception. According to Hanby, “the very act of standing in oneself is the act of receiving oneself as a gift.” (358-9) That act of being—*esse*—is consent. It is gifting and the reception of gift. All this renders things inexhaustively abundant, the way a loved person would be—even as love and gift single out the other in their incommunicable particularity.

Esse is not simply a yes affirmation that God makes the world, or that the world is here. Rather it is the yes that the world actually *is*. (Hence the metaphysical centrality of consent.) The “that” of something is not a mere checking of the box next to the “what.” Rather, we should inject it with all the profound wonder of the “You're here!” of, say, Louis Zamperini's mother, when he first returned from being missing in action in World War 2. *Esse* is a generous showing up out of nowhere. I have been toying with these as examples of it: Christmas morning, when Mom is actually presenting you a surprise gift; the college president's moment of conferring your degree; the consent of a woman to a marriage proposal; a father of a bride giving his daughter away at a wedding.²⁰

Things and the Problem of Particularity

According to Hanby, the unfolding of ancient Western metaphysics was tending toward noticing and needing to address an integrally related metaphysical conundrum lying at its heart. PreChristian Greek thought as yet had offered no positive account of particularity, or difference. (73-74) It only had a positive account of unity and generality in place, centered on the idea of essence and the Good or One. Essence is what a thing is, and what it has in common with others of its kind. But particularity, or difference among individuals, for Aristotle, for example, could only be numerical distinction, and it could only be a lack—a way that individuals fall short of the One. Being different was not itself a positive quality. The reason for this lack, as I will say shortly, is that Greek philosophy lacked an adequate

¹⁷ Opening line of Hans Urs von Balthasar, “Movement Toward God”; in *Explorations in Theology, III: Creator Spirit* (trans. Brian McNeil; San Francisco: Ignatius 1993), 15. See Schindler's reflection on this in “Surprised by Truth,” ch. 2 in *Catholicity*, 44.

¹⁸ Cp. the work of Polanyi Society colleague, Phillip Rolnick, *Person, Grace and God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).

¹⁹ Multiple writers join in citing Dionysius' *Divine Names*, ch IV. Schindler describes the Areopagite's innovation as “one of the most dramatic moments in the history of Western thought” (*Catholicity of Reason* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 210-11).

²⁰ I also believe that *esse* is what we are attending to whenever we cultivate presence and awareness. See Don Riso and Russ Hudson, *The Wisdom of the Enneagram* (New York: Random House (Bantam Books), 1999).

account of the relation of God to the world. Without it, the One absorbs the many; and things, the many, have no stand-on-their-own distinctive integrity and value.

What needed to develop was the identification of *esse*, and of the real distinction between being and essence. The act of being is the “superessential” act which makes a thing the uniquely particular thing it is. Hanby and CCM philosophers feel that the distinction is implicit in Plato and desired in Aristotle, but not identified as such for some centuries. However, as historic Christianity wrestled to elaborate its own claims, it began to produce obviously anticipative forerunners of it. The ensuing centuries of reflection to understand and articulate, in this order, the Christian doctrines of the Incarnation, of the Trinity (including the positive difference intrinsic to the unity of God), and of creation (the nature of God’s relation to the world, his creation), augmented the fundamentals of metaphysics to make sense of human experience especially of persons, ourselves and others, and of things.²¹ (77-90) As it turns out, the particularity and positive difference of things and persons is distinctively at home in a Christian vision. And it is specifically this which was lacking from the outset of Greek philosophy, what it requires for its completion.

Hanby quotes Robert Spaemann explicating 12th century Richard of St. Victor’s understanding of “person.”²² “A person, Richard writes, cannot be a substance, but only the bearer of a substance, for which he appeals for support to the canonical phrasing of the doctrine of the Trinity, where the three divine persons are distinguished from the one divine substance. ‘Substance,’ Richard goes on, denotes a something, a *quid*, a given *case of X* where there could in principle always be *other* concrete cases of X. ‘Person,’ on the other hand, stands for ‘a property of a unique subject.’ What ‘person’ means, then, is something that essentially cannot be encapsulated in description, however carefully specified, but must by definition belong to a unique individual in each case. Richard now offers his own definition: a person is ‘a sole and self-standing existent in a singular mode of rational existence.’ Person is a mode of existence, not a qualitative state. It is the sustaining of existence as a particular individual—*existence*, not *essence*.” (85)

A key result of studying Hanby’s work is a concrete conviction regarding the philosophical importance of things.²³ A *thing* is an existing ontological identity, and a thing’s actualized/ing form is this identity. (60) Further, a thing’s form has ontological priority over any of its parts, and over its historical development. No thing is ever merely temporal; the order of being must be distinguished from the order of generation. (60) It is not that its form eclipses the thing’s parts and history; in fact, parts and history have their reality only with a view to the form that thing is. This will prove key to the value which this philosophical account renders to science, Darwinism in particular.

According to Hanby, “to be in any way whatsoever is to have a measure of unity and intelligibility.” (55) And, “to know anything is to grasp a unity or identity—what is—that transcends flux. To be committed to knowledge is to be committed to the intrinsic intelligibility of being.” (57) All our knowing presupposes this implicit understanding of being and knowing.

²¹According to Rolnick, the notion of “person” was birthed within the Christian tradition (*Person, Grace and God*).

²² Hanby’s quotation is from Robert Spaemann, *Persons: The Difference Between ‘Someone’ and ‘Something’* (trans. O. O’Donovan; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) 29-30.

²³ This simplicity never fails to make me very glad to be a philosopher.

While Greek philosophy displayed an implicit metaphysical lack, modernity definitively and outrightly rejects this metaphysical, anthropological, and epistemological account. Modernity denies things. According to Robert Spaemann, modernity rejected “the other.”²⁴ Instead, it espouses the reduction of things to parts outside of parts—although they can no longer be designated as parts. “Things” “are” mere aggregates of...[what]? This “metaphysical extrinsicism evacuates creatures of the unity, intelligibility, and interiority inherent in our elementary experience of them.” (34) This defining move is Hanby’s target of critique, because it is self-referentially inconsistent. The practice of science must presume an ontology of things; the stance of modern science rejects things. This modernist move countenances a thoroughly artificial manipulation of such aggregates for pragmatic, commodifiable, purposes. Human freedom, on this approach, radically denies freedom to the other—to things.

The Problem of God and the World

As I mentioned before, Greek philosophy’s lacking a positive account of particularity a direct implication of its failure to discover fully the *difference* between God and the world. Hanby relates that in Aristotle is an ambivalence over difference: things don’t matter in themselves. Difference is an unintelligible defect. So ancient philosophy yields a reductivism too. (74) Things could not be satisfactorily distinguished from their ultimate principle—except insofar as they fell short of it. God and things were locked in what might helpfully compared to the therapeutic liability known as emotional fusion. Things could have no positive autonomy and freedom from God. Neither could things be healthily distinguished from one another: they could not be both deeply related to each other as common beings and at the same time regarded as uniquely “other” with respect to each other.

Hanby summarizes Christianity’s metaphysical contribution which resolves the Greek difficulty and which is critical to the practice of science: “This difficulty is traceable, ultimately, to a failure to cognize fully the difference both *within* the simple unity of the first principle and the difference *between* God the source and the cosmos itself. Christianity achieves the first with the doctrine of the Trinity, which implies a fundamental transformation of act and its perfection, and the second with the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, which sunders the various monisms binding God of necessity to the world. With this, created being in its entirety will acquire the structure of a gift, and nothing—not even matter—falls outside of it.” (86)

The development of Christian thought led to an understanding of God as far more radically transcendent, with respect to his creation, than the Greeks had been able to imagine. God is so radically transcendent that it is no deficiency for him also to be radically immanent—as exemplified in the Incarnation: Jesus as fully God and fully human, with these natures unmingled. But the Incarnation, then, shows the way to how creation is derivatively autonomous with respect to a radically transcendent, radically immanent, God. Things in their particularity have autonomy and value. They require an ultimate metaphysical anchor, but they are neither threatened nor abandoned by God. This is the significance of reality being *gift*. Hanby suggests that apart from the formative historical occurrence of Christianity, Greek thought would have needed to develop this sophistication on its own to be adequate as thought and as making sense of reality and subsequently science.

²⁴ Robert Spaemann, “Introduction,” in *A Robert Spaemann Reader: Philosophical Essays on Nature, God, and the Human Person*. (D.C. and Jeanne Heffernan Schindler, ed. and trans., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 3.

Thus, Hanby is saying that science requires the Christian doctrine of creation: a positive metaphysical account of things as autonomous and intrinsically meaningful, both their own selves as well as intimately connected in relations to all other things. According to Hanby, “the Christian doctrine of creation alone protects the rights of nature.” (300) Elsewhere he says, “the world’s autonomy is dependent on its reception of *esse*.” (346)

This entire account of the act of being concerns, then, a prescientific metaphysic. Its alignment with the Christian doctrine of God and his creating is a prescientific theology. It falls properly to science, according to Hanby as I said, not to prove what is indemonstrable yet unavoidable, and not to do theology proper, but to allow itself to see this structure and propose ideas implicitly open to it. The scientist’s task is neither to do theology or metaphysics—nor to presume to shut it out. Rather, it is *to see creation*. (380) As Hanby concludes his book memorably, quoting Balthasar, “Whoever sees the most, wins.” (405)

The Problem with Darwinism and with Creationism; Metaphysics, Theology, and Science

All this sophisticated metaphysics is what 14th century William of Ockham, wielding his famous principle of annihilation, eliminated in a misguided attempt to exalt the freedom of God.²⁵ Modernist science, following Ockham’s metaphysical annihilationism, strives to reject the fundamental metaphysics essential to the regard of things which science cannot help but surreptitiously persist in unevenly acknowledging. Hanby repeatedly describes the exchange as follows: modernity replaced *act* with *fact*. (115) Fact, interestingly, etymologically involves making; modernity also replaced all nature with artifice, rendering all things essentially manipulable for pragmatic purposes. Modernist antimetaphysics outrightly rejected the particularity of things, by reducing them to components therein consigned to be justifiably manipulable for the sake of human mastery over nature, power, control, and commodification. In modernity things become mere aggregates of parts outside of parts, as I have noted.²⁶

Yet true humanness and true science presumes and remains motivated by the childlike attunement to and love of things, even as modernist positivism and scientism, and reductivist mechanistic ontology presume to reject them in principle.²⁷ Specifically, Darwinism covertly requires the very metaphysical commitment to the primacy of the irreducible particular individual organism that it denies, if it is to have any scientific traction.

According to Hanby, the problem with Darwinism is defective theology and metaphysics. And the problem with Darwinist theology is that it actually originated with modernity. Early modern scientists such as Isaac Newton channeled Ockham’s devastating metaphysical annihilationism to Darwin specifically through the work of William Paley. Darwin, and all in modern science subsequently, mistakenly presume that Paley’s defective version is standard Christianity, and then endeavor to

²⁵ It is not that God isn’t free, but rather that the modern understanding of freedom, as power rather than love, is, as Schindler memorably labels it, diabolical rather than symbolical. More of this presently.

²⁶ The claims in this section are Hanby’s, from, “The Scientific and Theological Revolution,” ch. 3, and other chapters, in Part 2: *The Eclipse of the Universe*; *No God*.

²⁷ The human knower is a “thing,” also; Polanyi’s emphasis on knowing as responsibly personal accords with this. See *PK*.

eliminate this spurious and easily dismissable form. This modernist theology has cast the doctrine of creation as a matter of origins, but, to quote Jesus, “it was not so in the beginning.”²⁸

To wrap up my admittedly complex and simultaneously simplistic description of Hanby’s CCM and its bearing modern science, specifically Darwinism, CCM at its heart propounds three intrinsically interrelated claims:

1. the heart of being is *esse*, or more specifically the real distinction: *esse* analogically intertwined with *entia* and their *essentia*.
2. a healthy, science and life-undergirding metaphysic requires a positive account of particularity, the primacy of things with their heart of *esse*;
3. and all this requires a sophisticated account of the structural relatedness of things and reality to their ultimate principle, one which honors particularity and difference and accords autonomy, dignity and liberty to things.

Further, this metaphysic is actualized with the Christian doctrine of creation. This doctrine is a claim about the nature of God (theology), and an intrinsically related claim about the structure of reality (metaphysics). And according to Hanby, this is the metaphysics which modernism constitutively rejects, which Darwinism, to be itself, requires, and which all science must espouse even as if it denies it.

Polanyi’s Intuitive Attunement to CCM

Now I want to show the alignment between CCM as I have described it, and Polanyi’s deeply intertwined central claims. Polanyi’s gestaltlike result of subsidiary focal integration compares favorably with the ontological primacy of form. His preoccupation with the act of discovery connects profoundly with the primacy of *esse*, the act of being, exemplifying it because it instantiates it; as do the ever-fascinating “indeterminate future manifestations,” (IFMs) which testify to contact with reality in discovery. Finally, I suggest briefly that this implied metaphysic is essentially a metaphysics of liberty.²⁹

Things, and the Ontological Primacy and Particularity of the Integrative Form

It is impossible to read at length in CCM regarding metaphysical actuality of a thing, a form, and not associate it all with Polanyi’s integrative pattern, the Gestalt-like comprehensive entity resulting from subsidiary focal integration. *Gestalt* is German for form; *entity* as a word which derives from *ens* and *entia*—creatures. The idea of *Gestalt* from which Polanyi develops his epistemology implies an irreducibly simple pattern which transforms previously random particulars into subsidiary, meaningful parts of a an indissoluble and uniquely specific whole.³⁰ CCM and Polanyi equally emphasize the irreducibility of the whole; its logical primacy and priority with respect to parts and even with respect to its history or our search for it. And to emphasize irreducibility in knowing and being obviously is to challenge directly the dominant mainstream, to espouse something the mainstream has dismissed as occult-like.

²⁸ Matthew 19:8.

²⁹ To sharpen the focus of this paper, I have removed a few portions of my reflection to excurses. In Excursis 1, I consider Polanyi’s effort to challenge modernity, and his effort to do metaphysics, with a view to Hanby’s perspective. In Excursis 2, I reflect on Polanyian commitment and CCM. [Deleted from this version of the paper.]

³⁰ Polanyi, *PK*, 123-30.

The integrative form is a unity, but one which interplays dynamically (I would say *perichoretically*—the unity-in-difference motion of love³¹) with its subsidiaries and with its world. It beguiles us with its superior rationality and with its beauty, both Polanyi and CCM aver. It also woos us with its interiority, its inexhaustible depths, its surplus of meaning. To understand it is to remain in wonder at its mystery. It has an indissoluble “ownness,” an incommunicability; this is its *esse* “izzing,” its actuality. It holds itself together even as it gives itself away.

To trust one’s inquiry to pursuit of this thing, with its ontological primacy, is realism indeed. Once we are talking about the actuality of *esse*, it appears to me that realism stands or falls according to whether or not it, and things, are acknowledged. Modernity has pointedly rejected *esse*; no wonder it is antirealist. In contrast, Polanyi’s true-to-experience account, bears witness to things. It’s not as if Polanyi made some arbitrary and unsupported choice to be a realist. Rather, his commitment to an epistemological and metaphysical openness to things obligates him deeply to their reality. This just parallels the commitment to things requisite in a scientist’s anticipation of discovery.

Esse and the Act of Discovery

Over the years, I have become more and more intrigued with Polanyi’s preoccupation with scientific discovery. Obviously it was his job, and he was good at it. That makes him an authority on how it works. But the idea of discovery is metaphysically significant. It presumes that there is some *thing, there*, waiting to be discovered. Discovery is an act of insight; in fact, these two are virtually the same thing. Discovery is an *act*, an event, one which shifts reality as we know it. I have thought extensively about how the event is characterized by a self-manifestation, self-gift, I-You encounter, surprising recognition, transformation, communion, dancelike intimacy, and a sense of bottomless depths and possibilities.³² While I have freighted this with the interpersonal in my own creative philosophical writing, nevertheless, this develops what is at bottom Polanyi’s firsthand understanding of discovery.

Esse is the yes, the giving, the “izzing” that a thing is. Really, it is the most dynamic act imaginable, because it is a continual, responsibly chosen or received, coming to *be*. I am proposing that Polanyi’s account of discovery accords with *esse* and also instantiates it. Discovery reveals *esse* as the event it is, with all the qualities CCM stipulates of it. All the descriptors of discovery listed above accord with the dynamic actuality that is *esse*. I suggest that discovery, or the act of insight, is the best instance we humans undergo of coming face to face with *esse*, affirming it as well as participating in it. It is notable also that for Hanby, Polanyi’s understanding of indwelling and existential meaning makes the best sense of how we all grasp the fundamental reality of *esse*, in, with, and under all our being and thought. (394)³³

Discovery is the significant event it is because it is the lively event of encounter and recognition which is the knower’s eye-opening yes to the known. It is the encounter between the irreducible particularity of the knower with that of the known. Discovery is a judgment of existence.³⁴ It is that critically important

³¹ Esther Lightcap Meek, *Loving to Know: Introducing Covenant Epistemology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011), ch 12.

³² Meek, *Loving to Know*. The thesis of this book is that the best paradigm of knowing is the interpersonal, covenantally constituted, mutually transformative, relationship.

³³ Polanyi, *PK*, 192-202. I am coming to see that existential meaning, as opposed to representative meaning, as far more centrally the character of the act of insight and understanding.

³⁴ Schindler, *Companion*, 173.

yes of consent to being. As Buber relates regarding Goethe, it is saying to the rose, “So! It is You!”³⁵ In the act of discovery, knower and known are “izzing” mutually, coming out to meet each other and join into one.³⁶

In this, the knower contributes to bringing the thing to be what it is, even as the thing brings the knower to be what he/she is. D.C. Schindler offers an extended analysis of how for Ferdinand Ulrich (and himself) the act of knowing brings both the knower and the known to be what they are; as such, humans are the world’s caretakers (*Vollziehen*).³⁷ And speaking the word of consent, of love, is the heart of the act.³⁸ The act of discovery thus lies at the heart of epistemology, ontology, and anthropology.³⁹

This makes sense of why for Polanyi the event of discovery profoundly upstages and is requisite to any subsequent efforts to verify. Thus Polanyi, in his preoccupation with the event and its lively irreducible epistemic structure, offers an account which is intuitively attuned to CCM.

Also, once again we can see how Polanyi’s emphasis here directly challenges modernity in a way that offers to break it open to metaphysical redemption and healing. Schindler, expounding Ulrich, argues that modernity has divorced essence and existence from one another, overemphasizing either the one or the other. Essence absolutizes the past; existence the future. “What is eliminated [in modernity] is the ontological present, in which reason perceives the substance as subsisting, that is, as manifesting itself in its accidents.”⁴⁰ This heavily metaphysical claim, I believe, describes the event of discovery. Discovery recovers and redeems the ontological present, which integrates into itself the past (the logical primacy of the form) and future (the sense of indeterminate future manifestations).⁴¹

Indeterminate Future Manifestations and Mystery

Already we have noted that CCM deems the thing, especially with respect to its dimension of *esse*, inexhaustive in its interior depth and fertile relatedness to others. It is the bottomlessness, the mystery we are well acquainted with in our grasp of another, loved, particular person, or our experience of a great work of art.

Esse lies at the heart of the unity of the thing, giving it an indeterminate fulness, integrating past and indeterminate future into the thing in the present. Hanby notes that *esse* makes each thing a little world (341). A being *subsists*: subsistence is the being’s concrete coenactment of itself in its accidents. (144) It

³⁵ Quoted in Meek, *Loving to Know*, 254.

³⁶ Hanby emphasizes that the Aristotelian tradition sees cause and effect, in the communication of form, as one event. (67-68)

³⁷ Schindler, *Companion*, 80-87. Elsewhere Schindler comments that the intellect open to being is immediately ordered to God (133). And he notes that Ulrich appropriates and redeems Heidegger’s idea of thinking as thanking, as thinking in relation to gift of being. (111, 133)

³⁸ It is no mistake that the book’s cover features an icon of Adam naming the animals.

³⁹ Ulrich, as summarized by Schindler: “Aquinas names being as the first thing the intellect conceives. The ‘being’ meant here is ... being in its movement into subsistence. Finite reason in itself is a potency to become all things; this potency is awakened, but not exhausted, by the particular entity it perceives, which means that that entity is always given as pointing in the light of being to all things. In other words, reason always apprehends the ‘ens’ in the openness of the ontological difference.” (*Companion*, 161)

⁴⁰ Schindler, *Companion*, 173.

⁴¹ Schindler, *Companion*, 143.

is a coenactment because being to begin with is gift, characterized by excessive, “superessential” generosity and abundance, and this gift is received and acted on.⁴²

To experience IFMs in the moment of discovery is to encounter a thing in its indeterminate, inexhaustive fulness, the real distinction but connection between *esse* and the thing, the thing’s subsistence. IFMs are the generous fulness of actual things. No wonder discovery is attended by the IFM Effect. IFMs then, are also metaphysical markers. So Polanyi’s simple affirmation of the phenomenon attests once again to his openness to metaphysics and to the aura of CCM surrounding his central insights.

Polanyi the discoverer’s experience of IFMs adjoining the discovery, attesting to having made contact with reality, is certainly not a phenomenon noted as such or cherished in modernist science. As I have pondered Hanby’s CCM in making this case about Polanyi, I have come to see that Polanyi’s notion of indeterminate future manifestations pointedly targets and challenges modernism and the prevailing “scientific” practice. These latter concern control, to the end of pragmatic utility and human mastery of nature. As such they pursue the determinate, not the *indeterminate*. Further, in our milieu of antirealism and utility, control and hope of progress may envision future possibilities; but these are future possibilities of our manipulation. These may or may not be the *future* possibilities true to the thing itself. These latter are the ones which testify to the reality of the thing, if we have ears to listen. Finally, Polanyi calls them *manifestations*: the thing reveals itself, and continues to reveal itself. I submit that there is within modernist epistemology no room for such self-manifestation of things.

A Metaphysics of Liberty

My deepening acquaintance with CCM and Polanyi’s implicit affirmation of it has led me to affirm the ontological primacy of things as intrinsic to the Polanyian integrative form, and to affirm the ontological liveliness of things and our discovery of them. I also concur that these are just what the milieu of modernity have rejected, and what Polanyi’s philosophical efforts are concerned to address. Further, I see that this inquiry has boosted my own philosophical confidence in the real.⁴³ Real things have/are a lively integrity. To believe otherwise is the essence of antirealism, and potentially damaging. To affirm real things, as in discovery, is “thinking as thanking”: it is the gift of self to the other.⁴⁴ It is intrinsically to accord things, the others, liberty to be themselves. This is the regard for the other which Spaemann, Schindler and other contemporary CCM philosophers charge modernity with rejecting.

For example, D.C. Schindler has recently argued that the idea of will and freedom was intentionally distorted in modernity by John Locke to become diabolical (setting at odds) as opposed to symbolical (joining together).⁴⁵ Freedom should not be seen as an arbitrary power; rather, freedom has an essential connection with the good (which is convertible with the real existing thing), as well as intrinsically in

⁴² Schindler, *Companion*, 144. For example, my sister could play the piano masterfully. Her exercise of that gift was fraught with possibilities, ifms, which actualized surprisingly but predictably over her entire life. What’s more, the possibilities were indeterminate for her: she didn’t “know” exactly what would transpire.

⁴³ Meek, *Contact With Reality: Michael Polanyi’s Realism and Why It Matters* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2017).

⁴⁴ Schindler, *Companion*, 111, 133.

⁴⁵ Schindler, *Freedom from Reality: The Diabolical Character of Modern Liberty* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2017), 7; see also his “Goodness: Freedom as the Gift of the Self,” ch. 3 in *Love and the Postmodern Predicament: Restoring the Real in Beauty, Goodness and Truth* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2017). Dr. Schindler first delivered this lecture as part of the Dr. Byron I. Bitar Memorial Lecture Series, for the Philosophy Program at Geneva College, in 2015.

relation to the other. Freedom is the gift of self—a gift of self to the other, and in the process a receiving of oneself from the other.

So the CCM account of ontological primacy of things also suggests a metaphysics of liberty. On the basis of this essay's comparative work, I believe therefore that a metaphysics of liberty is implicit in Polanyi's central philosophical claims. His account of discovery exudes a regard for things; although I have not considered it here, his doctrine of levels exudes a regard for openness to higher levels. His subsidiary focal integration exudes regard for the sought for pattern, even as it treats with integrity the subsidiaries which support it. —All this in an ever dynamic interplay between interrelated poles of knowing or being. And if you see that the lively decentralized activity of the society of explorers is the playing out of a subsidiary-focal integrative structure, you understand that the jointly held vision of reality that is science holds a primacy, in free service to which scientists participate fruitfully in liberty together. True liberty, it appears, begins with the primacy, and gift structure, of the real. It is the liberty of lively, loved, things.

In Conclusion

Polanyi's central philosophical insights—subsidiary focal integration, the act of discovery with its attendant sense of indeterminate future manifestations in making contact with reality—therefore, display deep resonance with the central motifs of Classical Christian metaphysics—things, and *esse*. I have spoken of Polanyi's work as having an openness to CCM. Polanyian epistemology and ontology, in their indeterminacy and irreducibility, themselves provide support for the viability of such an intuitive attunement. I have reflected on a few implications of this mutuality—such as the primacy of real things and the naturalness of Polanyi's realism. And I have suggested that this resonance suggests a metaphysics of liberty implicit in Polanyi's brilliant proposals and vision.

The two thinkers, Michaels Polanyi and Hanby, share the agenda of challenging a covert defective and damaging modernist epistemology and metaphysics which skews even the practice of science. Polanyi's innovative proposals may be seen to carry out within modernity an implicit metaphysical opening, an essential beginning to healing. Polanyi's proposals accord with what Hanby calls for: a practice of science which acknowledges within science, and thus not as metaphysics or theology per se, the ontological structure of reality as creation.