

Polanyi Society Zoom Presentation/Discussion

May 21, 2022 11 a.m. Central Standard Daylight Savings Time

Michael Polanyi on Belief in Science and Society in 1947 and the Contemporary Crisis of Belief

Phil Mullins

This Zoom session will examine Polanyi's 6-page essay "Science: Observation and Belief," a remarkably concise 1947 essay that summarizes many of the critical and constructive philosophical ideas that Polanyi developed in his early period. However, I will attempt to extrapolate from some of the claims Polanyi made, soon after World War II, about "belief" in science and society to pose questions about contemporary post-Covid US culture (although perhaps not exclusive US culture). How is "belief" currently thought about in regard to science and society? Is what Polanyi saw as the cultural problem of pervasive skepticism still a problem, and, if so, does contemporary skepticism have the same contours? Is today's cultural ambience, even among intellectuals, rooted in what Polanyi often dubbed "scientism?" What has happened to Polanyi's emphasis upon "truth" and "reality" as necessary constants in a program of ongoing inquiry in a "society of explorers?" Can today's mental dispositions be countered with a post-critical philosophy? These all seem to be big questions (imperfectly but provocatively articulated) that those interested in Polanyi should be asking.

To register for this Zoom session, please send an e-mail to both Gus Breytspraak ([gus.breytspraak@ottawa.edu](mailto:gus.breytspraak@ottawa.edu)) and Phil Mullins ([mullins@missouriwestern.edu](mailto:mullins@missouriwestern.edu)). Registrants will receive a link earlier in the week the session is scheduled.

Polanyi's "[Science: Observation and Belief](#)" (1947)

The one-page reflection "[What about 'Beliefs'](#)" re-articulates some of the questions in the paragraph above.