

Polanyi Society Zoom Sessions

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

Phil Mullins

May 21, 2022

Below are materials prepared for the Zoom session of May 21, 2022, as well as a recording of the session. The recording is approximately 1 hour long. Posted materials are for non-commercial use of scholars and students.

This Zoom discussion on the topic “Michael Polanyi on Belief in Science and Society in 1947 and the Contemporary Crisis of Belief” was led by Phil Mullins and made use of Polanyi 1947 essay “Science: Observation and Belief.”

You will find below at the bottom of the page a link for a recording of the session that is on the Zoom Cloud as well another link for the same recording on the Polanyi Society website. The equipment on the Zoom Cloud is likely somewhat more sophisticated (e.g., the “fast forward” is easier to operate) than on your local machine which the recording on the Polanyi Society website will use. But the link for the Zoom Cloud recording will quit working at the point the Polanyi Society rental agreement ends. The link on the Polanyi Society website should, however, continue to operate using your local player.

Immediately below (i.e., preceding the links for the recordings) is the original posting with information about this Zoom session and links for readings.

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) and Phil Mullins (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.

[May 21, 2022 Recording on the Zoom Cloud](#)

[May 21, 2022 Recording on the Polanyi Society Website](#)