

Convivi^um

Newsletter N° 13

October 1981.

C O N T E N T S

News and Notes.

Forms of Atheism - a paper by
Michael Polanyi

David Holbrook and Robin Hodgkin
on Focal Awareness.

Review of Robert Brownhill's
article in New Universities
Quarterly.

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News and Notes

In this number *Convivium* is 'privileged' to print something by Michael Polanyi; the paper Forms of Atheism written in the autumn 1948 for a meeting of 'the Moot', a group which met for discussion during the war and post war years under the inspiration of J H Oldham. This paper, most interesting in itself, is particularly so at this time in view of the different understandings of Polanyi's religious position which have emerged in the American Academy of Religion discussions.

We have mentioned in the last two numbers of *Convivium* the different interpretations of Polanyi's views about religious truth, and the discussions about these at the American Academy of Religion meetings. We hear that the papers read at these discussions, together with Professor W T Scott's 'adjudication' are to be published in the American magazine *Zygon*. We know that readers of *Convivium* will be interested, and shall hope to include a resumé of the argument in our next issue.

Professor W T Scott has now retired from his post at the University of Nevada and is really immersed in the work of his biography of Michael Polanyi.

Professor Harry Prosch was unable to come to England as planned because of illness. At the time when he wrote he was hoping that his critical exposition of Polanyi's thought would shortly be published. We shall hope to give news of it in our next number.

Dr Edward Echeveria has written a book entitled Criticism and Commitment, Major Themes in Contemporary Post Critical Philosophy. He says " In chapter 2 I give an interpretation of Michael Polanyi. Although the book is not exclusively devoted to a study of his work, I do try to place his philosophical work within the broader stream of contemporary philosophy. I do this with respect to J Habermas, the early Heidegger, H C Gadamer and Richard Rorty. I also try to offer an interpretation of Personal Knowledge that elucidates the systematic relevance of Polanyi's 'critique of biology' for his theory of knowledge. The integral relation between these two themes, as far as I can tell, has remained unnoticed in exegesis of this work because too much attention has been paid to the structure of 'Tacit Knowledge per se.'"

The book was originally a Ph D dissertation; it has just been published by Editions Rodopi in Amsterdam and is also available through Humanities Press Inc, 171 First Avenue, Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey 07716, U S A.

There seems to be now little real disagreement between Robin Hodgkin and David Holbrook about 'Tacit Knowledge' (see Convivium March 81) but we print their letters for the interesting points they bring out.

David Holbrook is now a Fellow of Downing College Cambridge and Director of English Studies there.

Further copies of Newsletters are available. price 30p plus postage. Material for inclusion in the March number should be sent to Joan Crewdson by early February.

Professor Richard Golwick may be able to come to England early next year, and if so he would like to meet and discuss Polanyi questions with Convivium readers. If he is able to come we hope to be able to arrange such a meeting.

Polanyi's book The Logic of Liberty has been reprinted in Chicago but not here, and it is impossible to order it here because Routledge and Kegan Paul still have the publishing rights.

Professor T F Torrance has asked Routledge and Kegan Paul to hasten the reprinting of this book. Others might like to add their voices to the request.

Some information has been assembled about the film which Michael Polanyi produced in 1939, called Unemployment and Money. Lack of space prevents this being included in this Convivium; we hope to include it next time. It throws interesting light on Polanyi's strong belief in the importance of seeing in order to understand.

If any economist among Convivium's readers would be interested to see the film and write some comments about it, and perhaps also about the use of such visual models in economics teaching at the present time, this would greatly add to the value of our information. Please write to Joan Crewdson for further information.

Convivium depends on news, information about publications, comment and views coming in from its readers. Without this it can not fulfil its purpose of keeping people in touch with ideas and events connected with Michael Polanyi's thought. We ask you again please to take this as a personal request to you.

Many subscriptions are overdue since last January.

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Joan Crewdson, 12 Cunliffe Close, Oxford OX2 7BL

This number of Convivium has been put together by Dru Scott.

FORMS OF ATHEISM

Notes for December Meeting by Michael Polanyi

(1) I agree with Père Lubac in his "Drame de l'Humanisme Athée" that we need not concern ourselves with atheism that is merely verbal. There were always people who made fun of priests or doctors, and yet continued to fear the gods and take medicines. We are concerned with the convinced repudiator in modern times of God as manifested in the Bible, rejecting him in favour of other gods. There is a wide range of these substituta deities, but they can be reduced for convenience to four types: Athene, Clio, Dionysus and Prometheus.

REASON HIS I-DIV PROIBESS

#1

Belief in the God of the Bible was first overthrown by the followers of Athene, the goddess of reason. They were horrified by the religious wars and disgusted with clerical obscurantism. They believed that the spirit of doubt would destroy fanaticism and establish the rule of tolerance. For the past 300 years (since Collins and Bayle) this belief has been consistently upheld. Though it declined on the continent of Europe during the 19th century, it is still powerfully held in Britain and America. Bertrand Russell is its most distinguished active interpreter today.

The horror of religious fanaticism which animates this oldest form of atheism (its roots go back straight to Lucretius, and then to Democritus) remains one of the most powerful forces opposing the acceptance of any theological authority, based on revelation. I am, myself, very responsive to this kind of horror and never feel at my ease when told that religion "is the blessed sacrament" or that the decisive fact of Christianity is that "the tomb was empty". May I explain this a little.

(2) I reject doubt as a supreme guide, because it logically cannot justify the empiricism which it wishes to promote. Yet in my view all categorical forms of assertion are misleading (no matter whether they assert a certainty or a probability). Only the fiduciary mode, used in the first person "I believe this or that" can be self-consistently upheld. I am ready to claim universal validity for my beliefs, even though I recognise that such commitment inevitably transcends evidence. I take this jump, trusting that God demands it of me and hoping that I may succeed for reasons that pass my limited understanding. Such is the paradox of faith: it demands that we do now what on further reflection must seem unjustifiable. The same antinomy is reflected in the simultaneous demand for self extinction. The rigorous fulfilment of my responsibility as a believer requires that I reduce to zero the part played by my own will as a finite person in the making of my fiduciary decision. My beliefs are surrenders, accepted to avoid further delay which I believe unjustifiable. They simply represent a collapse at the point where I have loaded myself with responsibility to the breaking point. Knowing (or believing) that my beliefs are thus achieved, I shall try always to apply them in a manner consonant with their origin. I cannot hope that they carry report of more than one aspect of reality and would fully expect that this may appear flatly to contradict other true reports on different aspects. I hold it to be fully consistent with my belief in the transcendent origin of my beliefs that I should be ever prepared for new intimations of doubts in respect to them. I have seen how young students of science wrestle in vain with meaningless questions which they cannot help raising in view of the elementary stage of their knowledge, but which could not be asked at all in terms of a more precise formulation. I may add that even in

CATEGORICAL
ASSERTION!

Quietism

their most profound presentation, our present physical theories tend to break down when pursued to certain ultimate consequences, known as the "infinities". Yet nothing more recondite is involved here than the interactions of inanimate particles. I believe, therefore, that when we come to the central mysteries of Creation and Incarnation the texts on which we rely for our knowledge of them can give only one aspect of the truth and may well be compatible with other apparently contradictory reports. Nor can I believe that these texts can be "strictly interpreted" to answer a great many far-reaching questions. The number of questions we can ask about God in their context seems to me greatly in excess of the range that is likely to possess meaning. Indeed I often wonder whether a consistent application of the doctrine of Encounter might not reduce all references to God, that are not addresses in the form of prayer, to the secondary status of crude statements. Those who accord final theological authority to the words of the Bible clearly do so in a sentiment of true submission, but they must realise that the moment they meet other minds their position turns into a claim of their own infallibility, expressed in the rigid finality of their beliefs. I believe that when we pray "Thy will be done" we should offer to surrender to the will of God all our specific beliefs, excepting only what is logically implied in this act of surrender. In this sense I concur with much of the tendencies that find expression in rationalist atheism of the kind I have put down to Athene.

(3) Athenic Reason would have had a fair chance of dissolving God or at least attenuating him to an imperceptible residue, if the deity it was opposing had been any other than the God of the Bible. The 18th century might have led us back to Stoicism or the cult of politeness after the manner of Confucius. But the vision of salvation had opened

The skin on time

men's eyes and they could no longer achieve that indifference to human suffering at the price of which the mind of antiquity (from Socrates to Marcus Aurelius) secured its serenity. Thus Athenic reason failed to dissolve God and merely succeeded in chasing him underground. He embodied himself in various human aspects such as History, Individuality, Political Reform, (Clio, Dionysus, Prometheus), each of which may truly claim to be part of the divine process, but turns into a demon if it demands to be the whole. The tragedy of atheism is that it makes this hybris inevitable.

#2

For the most part this is familiar ground. Yet great questions remain looming unsolved. The apparently most innocuous of the three new gods, Clio, is perhaps the most intractable. Historic forces do exist which largely control our destinies. And some of these do appeal to all my heart. I believe that the British sense of national brotherhood is among the most potent forces of salvation today. I believe that in cultivating that brotherhood British people are obeying the will of God. Yet the claims of German brotherhood under Hitler were denied. And what about Zionism? Or the great Socialist Fatherland? Where nations are struggling for their existence and this leads to mortal conflict between them, what is then the right? We do not really know.

#3

The least dangerous of the trio is in my view the riotous Dionysus. Nietzsche's attempt to shout down the claims of human mercy are comparatively harmless in an age whose chief vice lies in moral perfectionism.

#4

(4) Prometheus the planner of the Good Society is in fact the most potent embodiment today of God among unbelievers, and Christians are

prepared to go with them a long way in this. Since to avoid the torments of Hell has ceased to be their greatest concern, they are inclined to agree that the ability of Christianity to eliminate the evils of this world is a test of its validity. Or at any rate, this is one prevailing Christian mood. Another - which is complementary to the first - is to plunge into the perfectionists' hatred of existing institutions and thence turn away angrily to a wholly transcendent conception of Christianity.

The potency of the modern Prometheus is derived from his combination with Clio. The revolutionary historicism which they produce together is an apt substitute for the Christian hopes of Salvation. It embodies the paradox of faith, by identifying our own actions with something that is happening to us. In its perspective History, Prophecy and Command are all one, and right action is always submission. The doctrine of Marx that freedom is the acceptance of historic necessity, stands in close parallel to the Gospel's teaching that freedom is the service of God. The parallel enables Marxism to absorb and transform into hatred the hopes of Christianity and likewise fortifies Christian Marxists with a vein of materialistic truculence. Acceptance of the utopian hopes of Marxism allies such Christians to the great humanitarians, like Shaftesbury, Lincoln, Gandhi, while the sinister machinery of Marxist dialectic assures them against Pelagian weaknesses to which humanitarians are prone. Thus Marxism has come to appear to an important section of Christian thought as a true and indeed an indispensable introduction to the Christian faith.

This seems to me like using a fan to drive a windmill by which the fan is powered. For I can see little truth in Marxism apart from its

perverted content of Christian hopes. This brings me to the main point of this ever-lengthening note. I would like to urge a radical break with belief in Progress, and ask that we consider the position of atheists as well as Christians - and of the body of humanity in general - after the elimination of this belief.

(5) About 1820 Fourier wrote that in the Phalanstere every child will easily master twenty different industrial arts - both physical and intellectual - by the age of four. From this crazy statement to those of our own time, announcing that science had solved the problem of abundance and that we had now to plan an Age of Plenty, we find an uninterrupted series of similar paranoid manifestations. We must now vigorously shake off this whole swarm of daydreams,

In view of recent historic experience, I should outline the scope of social improvement as follows. We are committed to a mode of production based on a large number of highly specialised industrial plants drawing on a great variety of resources and catering for myriads of different personal demands. This method could be discontinued only at the price of reducing the population of the West to a fraction of its present numbers and would make the remainder miserably poor and utterly defenceless. I do not feel that this is a possible line of policy. Marx was right on the whole in saying that the utilisation of a certain technique of production is possible only within the framework of certain institutions. He rightly recognised, with the followers of Adam Smith, the system of private enterprise operating for a market as the adequate embodiment of industrialism, as it existed then. He was wrong in assuming that this technique of production was in the course of being replaced by another which would require to be embodied in a centrally directed economic system. His forecast of progressive capitalist concentration was clever, but extravagant. The followers

of Adam Smith were wrong in letting their onslaught on protectionism grow into a glorification of capitalism as a state of economic perfection. They were doubly wrong in opposing regulative economic legislation on principle, instead of welcoming it as an essential condition for the rational operation of capitalism. Marx was right in attacking the evils of unregulated capitalism and closer to the truth than his opponents among classical economists in exposing the deep-seated economic disharmonies manifested in recurrent mass unemployment. His manner of evaluating these observations, however, was again fantastic. His blind faith in progress made him conclude that since capitalism was faulty, it would necessarily be supplanted by a new set of institutions, which would eliminate these imperfections. As Columbus inevitably identified the Antilles with India which he had set out to discover, Marx identified the new system of which he had thus thought to have proved the necessity with Socialism. This was the argument for which he claimed that it transformed Socialism from a Utopia into a science. The same manner of reasoning can be observed even today wherever the demand for Socialism is derived from an exposé of the shortcomings of Capitalism. It underlies the most advanced socialist theories which expose the general imperfection of capitalist competition and expect Socialism to restore the perfect competitive market.

Indulging thus in blind hatred of social evils and blind confidence in social salvation, Marx and his successors lost sight in effect of the truth which Marx had been pre-eminent in emphasizing, that social institutions must form an adequate framework for the existing technique of production. Delirant reges, plectuntur Achaii. About fifteen million Russians had to perish in the famines of 1923 and 1932 to impress on their rulers the conclusion that the allocation of resources to a modern

industrial system can be conducted only through a market; that wages must be adequately graded and enterprises must be required to make profits. Each of these features of capitalist economy was introduced after desperate resistance against overwhelming economic necessity. No effort was spared to make them unrecognisable under a cloak of socialist terminology. The manner in which the system works has never been revealed in detail, but enough of it is apparent to show that the only important difference from private enterprise lies in the handling of all major investments by the State. The capital market is eliminated and replaced by the decisions of a large number of public authorities, loosely co-ordinated from the centre. Thus the chances of risk-bearing are carried by the general public, on whose behalf a number of public officials undertake to allocate capital for new enterprise.

The modern theory of Socialism, as developed in the last 15 years, confirms that the central management of a modern industrial system is impossible and leaves no reason to suppose that Socialism can differ from Capitalism in much more than its nomenclature of an identical set of economic functions. Deliria of abundance and perfect justice are dissolving. We are touching earth again. Or at any rate, we touch it so far as a century of sanguine and often sanguinary daydreaming has not finally unfitted us for the hard struggle of stepwise improvement.

Henceforth we shall have to face once more the fact that the condition of man is miserable and that social institutions are full of obvious defects which cannot be eliminated. We shall try to reduce particular defects, but shall know that it will make on the whole only a small difference if we succeed. We shall have to resign ourselves once more to the inevitability of such social evils as economic wastage,

competitive struggle, inequality and oppression.

The question is, whether humanity can learn to live once more without the opiate of progress? This largely constitutes, in my view, the "Drame de l'humanisme athée" today. Dionysian overbearing has happily lost its major appeal. With Clio and Prometheus reduced to infirmity, the Néant naturally tends to fill our perspective. Can we fall back once more on Athene? We cannot, for the reason why she proved insufficient before is still there. It is "the intolerable shirt of flame, which human power cannot remove" - as Eliot described Christian love.

Two Views on Focal Awareness

1. From David Holbrook

6th April 1981

Robin Hodgkin accuses me of misunderstanding Polanyi. I would agree that probably I have a long way to go, before I fully understand the difference between concepts such as Merleau-Ponty's 'antepredicative', and Polanyi's concepts of 'subception' and 'tacit knowing'. But I don't accept that my use of ideas from Polanyi in English for Meaning are inadequate. The sociolinguistic approach, towards which the Bullock Report leans, assumes, among other things, that it is by learning the rules that one improves one's English. This is clear, as I show, from the appalling proposed courses in linguistics for student teachers set out in the report. But, I say, teaching English is an art. Of course, in becoming articulate, one follows 'rules', but as with learning to swim or ride a bicycle, one does not explicitly know what the rules are ('the aim of a skilful performance is achieved by the observance of a set of rules which are not known as such to the person following them', Personal Knowledge, p 49) Of course, there is a quite valid way of studying these rules, as in linguistics: but my simple point was that explicit knowledge of the rules is not the way to develop one's

capacities to use language. (I think this is one of Polanyi's points, as when he points out how focal attention can render one incapable of a skill). As a poet myself, and as author of a critical work on Mahler's Ninth Symphony, I am perfectly aware of the importance of conscious attention to 'technique' in art: but even here I believe, as in working with children on creative writing, it is better to convey the relevance of technique by, say, putting good models before children, to enrich their awareness, rather than go in for explicit analysis of technical schemes and modes.

I cannot accept from Robin Hodgkin that I am wrong to relate Polanyi's concepts of various modes of knowing, including the explicit, to problems of Descartes' 'clear and distinct ideas'. This, surely, is the burden of Professor Marjorie Grene's chapter 'The Errors of Descartes' in The Knower and The Known. There she speaks of her 'second thesis': 'the two-level, focal/subsidiary structure of knowledge, against the wholly lucid, explicit intuition of Descartes' - and this is her theme also in Approaches to a Philosophical Biology. In this, I regard myself as an anti-Cartesian, along with F.R. Leavis, Peter Abbs, and psychoanalysts like Karl Stern, who has pointed out the limitations of the 'masculinization of knowledge' in the Cartesian scientific approach. This involves no rejection of science, but rather an awareness of the bridges between science and the arts, as Polanyi suggests when he says, 'Scientific inquiry is . . . a dynamic exercise of the imagination and is rooted in commitments and beliefs about the nature of things. It is a fiduciary act . . . Its ideal is the discovery of coherence and meaning . . . ' (Meaning, p 63). Because of this kind of emphasis, we can see that, as English and other subjects are brought closer to the universities, in educational processes, there has been a disastrous over-emphasis on what seems to be 'academically respectable': that is,

that which aligns itself with the ideal of 'objectivity' and explicit, Cartesian analysis. In the background, often, is that 'computer' or machine analogy of the mind, which implies that, if only we work hard enough on analysis and logic, we can build an artificial intelligence. In this kind of thinking, there is an implicit denial of the ineffable processes to which Polanyi draws our attention: not least the 'leap of a logical gap', the 'act of imagination', and all those modes of knowing and learning which do not come by 'specifiable, explicit, logically operative steps' (Meaning, p 62). These are our sphere in English.

I think that it is because we are dealing with this kind of intangible process of thought that we cannot satisfy altogether demands for exactness such as Robin Hodgkin seems to be demanding, asking for a 'sharp probe'. This isn't to excuse sloppiness. But the problem may be indicated by looking at a philosopher's essay in the American symposium on the work of D.W. Winnicott, Professor Anthony Flew's contribution to Between Reality and Fantasy edited by Simon A. Grolnick and others. While many psychotherapists find Winnicott's work immensely illuminating, Professor Flew cannot understand why: he cannot find the right 'definitions' and cannot follow the logic, though he shows himself well aware of the phenomena discussed, in his own family. But this is because Winnicott is not trying to write about child experience in the framework of rational-logical thought, but in a phenomenological way. And while he may not make much sense to Professor Flew, he does alongside F.J.J. Buytendijk and Helmuth Plessner - and indeed, to anyone who has experienced children. So, I believe, my use of Polanyi makes sense to those who are working in English teaching, whatever my faults.

However, what I promise to do is to re-read Robin Hodgkin's Born Curious, where he advises us to 'venture into rough ground' and encounter 'difficult philosophy': like him, I have ventured into

philosophy in middle age, to try to understand educational experience, and so I am grateful both for his commendations and his criticism.

2 From Robin Hodgkin

Rapper Rapped

When I took David Holbrook to task for not being sufficiently careful about using Michael Polanyi's terms I put my foot into the same trap. This was pointed out by Drusilla Scott who gave me a firm but kindly rap. In Convivium No. 12 I complained that Holbrook used the term 'focal awareness' as if it meant 'clear and distinct', i.e. sharp-focussed, awareness. Whereas Polanyi uses the term, in an original and characteristic sense, to denote that kind of integrated, unself-conscious, ongoing attention which we experience when we are fully engaged in some skilled, creative action. His examples are well known and numerous.

Subsidiary awareness cannot be focal; but awareness which has been subsidiary can, and often does, become focal. If I am using a hammer skilfully, to consider one of Polanyi's first examples, I do so without being aware (not at least with focal consciousness) of its pressure on the side of my finger. But if I begin to feel that a blister is rubbing, then my focal awareness may shift from the sequence of nails that I am hitting to the source of my discomfort. This shift means that what had been one of a great range of bits of subsidiary knowledge and sensation connected with my integrated action of hammering - the pressure of the handle on my finger - has now been brought into focal awareness, and the nails have moved out, in order that I may diagnose and remedy a problem. My error was to run the two together: to refer to what had been subsidiary, but has now become focal, as if it was still subsidiary.

It is worth noticing three or four Polanyian justifications for making the kind of analytical move here discussed, towards 'thinking about . . .' our skilled acts, as opposed to going on doing them. The

question is especially relevant to education, for an effective teacher has to be constantly moving in and out of objectivity and subjectivity in regard to his and his pupils' work, making 'a systematic oscillation between estrangement and empathy' as Rommetveit puts it. First of all there is the technological reason, discussed on p. 52 of Personal Knowledge - isolating the principle or principles hidden, tacitly, in a traditional skill in order to create a machine or tool to embody them. Secondly, there is the importance of locating, understanding and correcting a fault (or blister) which may develop. Or more positively, there is the business of coaching. Here an expert teacher looks, not for failure, but for relative weakness in the array of skills which a learner is integrating. This, having been identified, can then be subject to special strengthening. There is a further reason for bringing the theory of an art and the principles of action out of the tacit shades and for articulating them publicly: it helps a community to be a community. Conviviality, in Polanyi's sense, is much more than being bonhomous.

REVIEW

Objectivity and Subjectivity in Polanyi's Personal Knowledge.

An article with this title by Dr. Robert Brownhill in the New Universities Quarterly (vol 35 No 3, Summer 1981) looks at the charge of subjectivism brought against Polanyi by some critics, and sets out arguments for and against the criticisms. Dr. Brownhill sees three areas in Polanyi's thought which might be open to the charge of subjectivism, his idea of indwelling as a form of knowledge, his view about the testability of knowledge, and his statements about commitment. But he seriously fails to do justice to Polanyi's thought in these three areas.

For instance in talking about 'indwelling' and the 'assimilation' of particulars, he remarks - "This is a peculiar idea as quite obviously we cannot literally assimilate particulars. Polanyi apparently means that we assimilate concepts of the particulars, and that after a time an abstract pattern emerges which we can consider to be the whole." But no, what we indwell, in Polanyi's account, is not concepts of particulars, it is our whole experience; senses, intuitions, memories and actions; even our own subconscious muscular movements. And we assimilate tools and dwell in them as parts of our own bodies, using them for attending to or affecting the outside world. A skilled carpenter does not assimilate the concept of a hammer; he couldn't do much with that. He assimilates the hammer as an extension of his own body, as we assimilate a language or a theory as an extension of our mental powers. And the pattern that we gradually sense by indwelling our experience cannot easily be called 'abstract.' It is an aspect of reality that we come to recognise as we recognise a face. We don't 'consider it to be the whole' we recognise it as the joint meaning of the particulars or the reality to which they point.

In the other two areas, commitment and testability, Dr. Brownhill also seems to mislead. He says Polanyi's argument that a historian or scientist will be absolutely committed to his interpretative framework "is certainly open to question". But it is clear from all Polanyi's statements on commitment that the term does not mean such obstinate consistency. Commitment is to reality, and may require a comprehensive conversion, or only a small change in our interpretative framework. It involves risk; we may be mistaken, but we have to "take these chances in the hope that the universe is sufficiently intelligible to justify this undertaking."

I quote these words from page 318 of Personal Knowledge (1958 edition) where they are followed by a question which Dr. Brownhill quotes in his article: "But if an active mental process aiming at universality can turn out to have been entirely mistaken, can we still say that in it the subject has risen to the level of the personal by reaching out to reality?" I draw attention to this quotation because it seems to me that Dr. Brownhill misquotes Polanyi's answer, and this is part of my reason for thinking his article misleading. I have to be rather long-winded to explain this and you may need Personal Knowledge open before you to understand my explanation!

"He answers the question", Dr. Brownhill says "by saying that it cannot be personal knowledge as a wrong interpretative framework has been used."

But actually Polanyi does not answer the question in that way. He says something much more complex which Dr. Brownhill understands to mean 'no, it cannot be called personal knowledge' but I understand to mean 'yes, it can.' We have to look at the context. Immediately before this question Polanyi has been talking about commitment and the risks involved in it. The normal outcome of a daring commitment, he says, is failure - or else the success of a vast error. Nevertheless we have to take the risk and hold onto what we truly believe "trusting the unfathomable intimations that call upon us to do so."

Then comes the quoted question, and I think the whole paragraph which starts with the question is to be read as an objection brought by a critic, who is saying in effect 'Can we say such a venture has risen to the level of the personal even when it turns out mistaken - for look at the Azande witch doctor who reasons well within his framework but is altogether deluded.'

"To this I shall reply" the next paragraph begins, being Polanyi's answer to the objection, "by distinguishing between a competent line of thought, which may be erroneous, and mental processes that are altogether illusory." These latter he classes with passive mental states, purely subjective, and in these he includes superstition, madness and mere twaddle. We have to judge what belongs in the madness-twaddle area, but outside it, the personal commitment which may be totally mistaken is nevertheless personal. He goes on to say how we change from one framework to another which we find more correct. But it is implied that no such process is open to the witch doctor or the madman who cannot change his framework and is thus unable to reason personally.

Then testability; here Dr. Brownhill defends Polanyi from the charge of subjectivism by limiting the area in which personal commitment operates. "The personal element is important in arriving at the formulation of a theory, and having the interest to defend it from attack, but the theory must stand on its own feet". Once the theory is found, Dr. Brownhill thinks, the usual criteria of objectivity apply. This is to defend personal knowledge as the illegitimate baby was defended - 'it was only a little one'. But such a defence is not possible, for the element of personal commitment goes right through, with Polanyi, and is vital in the holding of a belief as well as in arriving at it, (see for instance Part 2 of Forms of Atheism above.) The other view is more like Popper's than Polanyi's.

Dr. Brownhill reduces the richness and originality of Polanyi's thought to make it more respectable at the cost of making it hardly worth defending.

Dru Scott.