

## CONVIVIUM

A Day Conference has been arranged at Oxford on Michael Polanyi and Education for Wednesday, April 7, 1976. You will find details with this newsletter. It is hoped that it may be possible to arrange a conference on science and religion in the Summer, perhaps at Guildford.

### Notes

The Michael Polanyi archives will be housed at the University of Chicago's Joseph Regenstein Library. Enquiries to Mr. Robert Rosenthal, Curator of Special Collections, The University of Chicago, The Joseph Regenstein Library, 1100 East 57th Street, Chicago, Illinois 60637, U.S.A.

Professor T.F. Torrance spoke at a conference on Polanyi's thought held at Chicago last November.

Dr. Magda Polanyi has been kind enough to contribute £50 to Convivium.

The name of this newsletter, 'Convivium', arose out of Polanyi's concept of conviviality. We wonder whether you like the name or can think up some more suitable alternatives. Comments please.

### Article

#### Some Notes on Tacit Awareness

Sometimes, it seems, "tacit knowledge" is used in a loose and indiscriminating manner. I offer these notes as a codification of Polanyi's fundamental ideas and concerns. By "tacit knowledge" and cognate phrases Polanyi refers to three things:

1. Aspects or dimensions of awareness which are implicit or of which the subject is not aware: he is aware of X, but not of his awareness of X or of some part or accompaniment of that awareness. For example, we are not normally aware that we are holding our beliefs to be true.
2. The structure of knowledge of a comprehensive entity or of a complex performance, in which we attend from some things to something else. The poles of this knowledge are called subsidiary and focal (in PK and SM) and proximal and distal (in TD), respectively.
3. And, I think, the subsidiary or proximal pole of knowledge, rather than the whole structure, as in (2).

#### Relationships among these aspects and dimensions.

(a) The contrary of (1) is explicit or self-conscious awareness: one is aware of X, and also aware that one is aware of X. All animal knowledge is implicit, and it is Polanyi's thesis that large areas of human awareness must remain implicit.

(b) The focal pole of tacit awareness (in sense (2)) may or may not be explicit. In PK, p.56. Polanyi drew a sharp distinction between the two poles such that the subsidiary pole (defined in terms of function -cf. TD, p.7) could not be known in itself at the same time, and thus would have to be implicit (or tacit in sense(1)), whether or not the focal pole was explicit. But in his later works Polanyi rightly recognises (as in some of the examples in PK) that at least on some occasions we can be simultaneously aware of the details of a comprehensive entity or performance both as clues to that entity or performance and in themselves: to a certain extent I can be aware, focally aware, both of my hands and the music as I play the piano.

(c) Polanyi's principal concern in PK is to demonstrate the existence of the tacit or implicit elements or aspects of knowledge, aspects that in most cases must remain implicit. Hence he is concerned with more aspects of knowledge than its from-to structure. and it is not only the subsidiary elements that in most cases must remain implicit. For example, there can be no explicit knowledge of the ways in which we alter our framework of thought in order to accomodate radically new items (PK, pp.104ff); it is impossible to formulate rules for distinguishing significant patterns from chance collocations (PK pp.33-42); and likewise the impossibility of formulating rules for allocating specimens to their species and for determining whether or not a specimen requires a new species (PK pp.348-54 -this is a problem for all knowledge, not just for biology). These intellectual powers, those employed in resolving problems such as these, cannot be formalized: we can solve these problems but we cannot say how we solve them, and the latter must remain implicit. But, as far as I know, there is no question here of invoking tacit knowing in the technical senses of (2) or (3) above. In latter works, Polanyi's concerns tend to narrow down to the exposition and application of tacit knowledge in the technical senses of subsidiary-and-focal or subsidiary knowledge.

(d) Subsidiary knowledge is such because it is known in and through its use to focus on a comprehensive entity or a complex and skilful performance. Some parts of it can be made explicit, but most of it must remain implicit, and thus is tacit in all three senses, but, nevertheless not all implicit knowledge is subsidiary knowledge nor is all subsidiary knowledge implicit.

(e) The Rationalist assumption (and Objectivism is a nervous and sceptical variant of Rationalism) is that real knowledge is explicit and fully explicit. Polanyi both draws our attention to large areas of knowledge that happen to be implicit (e.g.in PK ch.4) and argues that significant portions of such knowledge must be implicit. In particular, he is concerned to show that all explicit knowledge - knowledge formulated and articulated and so open to critical scrutiny - essentially rests on necessarily implicit knowledge and skills. Usually, but not always, these implicit elements or aspects are tacit in the special senses: e.g., those mentioned in (c) above are not examples of subsidiary knowledge or of knowledge incorporating the from-to-structure. Consequently, the explicit articulation of some portion of formerly implicit knowledge does not thereby reduce the total amount of implicit knowledge, so that one could hope in time to render all presently implicit knowledge into explicit knowledge.

Rather, immediately when formerly implicit knowledge is made explicit there forms around it, and must form around it, additional elements, aspects, dimensions and uses of implicit knowledge, so that the total volume of implicit knowledge is not diminished but rather grows. (For the forms of implicit knowledge, some of which are tacit in the technical sense, upon which explicit knowledge depends, see PK Ch.5).

Finally, a reminder that mere knowing is not the whole of Polanyi's central concern, especially in PK, for he is equally concerned with the inescapability of commitment, indeed even more so, at least in PK.

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#### Abbreviations

PK= Personal Knowledge  
SM= The Study of Man  
TD= The Tacit Dimension

The article in the next edition is entitled 'The Grounds of knowledge and Discovery' by Michael Polanyi.

#### Abstracts

If anybody would like to send in abstracts of theses or dissertations in our field of interest we would be pleased to publish them.

'Michael Polanyi and the Philosophical Task of Religious Interpretation' by Loyal D. Rue (Abstract of a dissertation submitted to the Faculty of The Hartford Seminary Foundation in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, March, 1974)

This dissertation deals with the epistemology of Michael Polanyi and its implications for the philosophical task of religious interpretation. The dissertation is structured in two major parts and attempts to achieve three things: (1) It presents an interpretation of the epistemology of Michael Polanyi; (2) It attempts to draw out the implications of Polanyi's thought for philosophy of religion and culture; (3) It attempts to evaluate the view of the religious life implicit in Polanyi's epistemology.

Ch.1: Introduction: Critical Philosophy. This introductory chapter is an attempt to articulate what Polanyi means by the term 'critical philosophy'. Part One: Toward a Post-Critical Philosophy. Chapter 2: The negative program. In this chapter it is shown that Polanyi registers both theoretical and practical objections against critical philosophy. Critical philosophy is theoretically objectionable because it fails to account for the tacit basis upon which we understand, discover and uphold knowledge claims. And it is practically objectionable because it ultimately leads to a bifurcation of culture in which the responsible search for the truth is impossible. Chapter 3: The Positive program. This chapter is an exposition of the main features of Polanyi's reformulation of the character of human knowledge. The positive program is intended to overcome the theoretical and practical deficiencies of critical philosophy. The theoretical failure of critical philosophy is given compensation in Polanyi's inclusion of the personal coefficient at the very core of his epistemology. And the practical failures are remedied by showing how the personal coefficient accounts for the continuity

of culture. Part Two: The Philosophical Task of Religious Interpretation. Chapter 4: Polanyi's interpretation of religion. It is suggested that the philosophical task of religious interpretation is to make the religious life intelligible to secular culture without reducing the meaning of the religious life to a particular aspect of culture. It is then argued that this task must be served within the context of a philosophy of culture which attempts to make culture intelligible to itself. It is further argued that Polanyi's framework goes a long way in fulfilling the philosophical task because he develops a philosophy of culture in which the religious life is represented as a mode of knowledge which is continuous with the rest of culture. What constitutes the religious life for Polanyi is shown by extending the characteristic features of personal knowledge. Chapter 5: Personal Knowledge and the Discontinuity of Mystical Religion. The attempt is made to show that what Polanyi's philosophy of religion makes intelligible to culture is not the whole of what must be considered as the religious life; that there exists one mode of the religious life (i.e. mysticism) that is discontinuous with the rest of culture by virtue of not exemplifying the chief characteristic of personal knowledge. Conclusions: There are limitations to a Polanyian philosophy of religion and culture. These limitations are disclosed by the failure of the theory of personal knowledge to account for a considerable amount of religious phenomena. It is further concluded that the disclosure of these limitations provides us with the grounds for drawing an epistemological distinction between two fundamentally different orientations within the religious life.

#### New subscribers and Areas of Primary Interest

- Mr. Peter Abbs, Brechfa, Llanon, Dyfed, Wales. Education, Philosophy.  
Dr. John Baker, The Mill, 26, Mill End, Kidlington, Oxford. Freedom in Science.  
Mr. W.M. Brookes, School of Education, The University, Southampton. Education, Maths., and Phenomenology.  
Mr. Donald Milavec, St. Leonard College, 8100 Clys Road, Dayton, Ohio. Systematic and philosophical theology. Pub. 'The Bible, the Holy Spirit and Human Powers' to be pub. in Scottish Journal Of Theology, 1976. Unpub. A Theology of Christian Revelation Based upon Michael Polanyi's Interpretation of Scientific Discovery', Berkeley: doctoral dissertation at the Graduate Theological Union, 1974. Research in progress, 'Jesus' Miracles: Divinity Proofs or Goads to Action' influenced by Polanyi.  
Dr. A.R. Peacocke, Clare College, Cambridge. Science and Religion. Pub. 'Science and the Christian Experiment', O.U.P., 1971.  
Dr. Magda Polanyi, 22, Upland Park Road, Oxford. General interest.  
Dr. G.L. Frice, Department of Liberal Studies in Science, Manchester University, Manchester. Politics and sociology of science. Research on movement for freedom in science and post war university politics.  
Dr. J.R. Ravetz, Department of Philosophy, The University of Leeds. Social criticism of science. Pub. Scientific Knowledge and its Social Problems, O.U.P., 1971, Penguin, 1973.  
Dr. Loyal D. Rue, Luther College, Decorah, Iowa 52101, U.S.A. Philosophy of religion. Pub. 'Michael Polanyi and the Critical Approach to Sacred Texts', Dialog, Spring, 1973. Unpub. Ph.D. dissertation

'Michael Polanyi and the Philosophical Task of Religious Interpretation'.

Mr. R.D. Wilson, 86, Bramhall Lane South, Bramhall, Stockport, Cheshire. Philosophy of science.

Mrs. Margaret Sloss, 313, Woodstock Road, Oxford. Theology and sociology.

### Recent Publications

Meaning by Michael Polanyi and Harry Prosch, Chicago and London, Chicago University press, 1975.

Meaning consists of Michael Polanyi's lectures at Texas and Chicago Universities in 1969-71, put in order by Harry Prosch and prefaced (Chs. 1 and 2) from previous publications from Polanyi, and likewise concluded with previously published passages and one unpublished lecture (Chs. 12 and 13). Quite a lot of the book, therefore will be familiar to students of Polanyi's work, though the central portion contains important new material. The resulting compilation does form a coherent whole, and the argument moves from the emancipation of the human mind, to loss of meaning, nihilism, the consequent totalitarian ideologies and political systems, through Polanyi's reconstruction of knowledge with his recognition of its form-to structure and necessarily tacit dimensions. A new emphasis is placed on the role of imagination in all knowing. This includes an examination of imagination in the arts, the meaning of myths, the acceptance of religion, and the role of mutual authority in science and society, and this leads him to look again at the conditions necessary for a free society where thought can be allowed to develop. This returns him to a major theme in his work - our contemporary political and moral disorders, which Polanyi claims, result from our contemporary scientific world view which robs human existence and the universe of meaning and so paves the way for nihilism in thought and action. Polanyi's aim is to restore that meaning, or its possibility.

He does this by his familiar re-interpretation of epistemology which does allow us to affirm what we cannot prove and in which imagination is central. I shall concentrate now on the central chapters (4 to 11). His first new problem is to defend the genuineness of artificial coherences, and he begins with a metaphor. Ordinary words and signs have no intrinsic interest: we attend from them to what they designate. I have often felt that there was more to language than this and Mr. R. Harre at a conference on Polanyi (Cumberland Lodge, Feb., 1975) suggested a reverse relationship as holding in addition. This is so with flags, tombstones, memorials, etc., which are the focus of attention but have no intrinsic interest, upon which we bring to bear subsidiary and diffuse memories and associations of intrinsic interest which they integrate. Flags and the like do not indicate or designate, as do words and other signs, but stand for and symbolize. In addition the relevant memories and associations are embodied in their symbols which fuses them and thus reflects back upon them, and which carry us away by integrating our diffuse experiences. Designation integrates a name into its object: symbolization integrates its object into the symbol. Now metaphor also moves us, a fact unexplained by

previous theories, and Polanyi explains metaphor in terms of a fusion of designation and symbolization: unlike the symbol the terms (or vehicle) of a metaphor have a meaning and interest in themselves akin to the meaning which it embodies (its tenor). The tenor bears on the vehicle (as subsidiary to focus) but the vehicle returns upon the tenor so that it is also embodied in the vehicle, and this again involves ourselves by integrating our diffuse experiences and giving them an object in which to see them as integrated and which is destroyed in an explicit account of the metaphor. I find this to be a very important extension of Polanyi's account of language and of the from-to structure of knowledge.

After metaphor, works of art, which also fuse incompatible elements - "story" or prose content (in representative art) with an artificial frame (such as rhythm and rhyme in poetry) and thus are marked both from the world and the person and the artist (no personalist heresy for Polanyi!). But the frame returns upon the prose content, and imagination fuses them into joint meaning, neither bears nor symbolizes the other but both embody each other, and both together stand in the same relationship to the self, as in metaphor. Mimesis is a false account of representative art, for the brushstrokes of a canvass would then be integrated into a joint meaning with the object represented, which would then produce a trivial trompe d'oeil, whereas a focal view of them destroys their meaning: and a work of art arises from their integration with background features, such as the canvass, which are focally incompatible with the object represented.

Imaginative integration also operates in science and technology: in science the subsidiaries are brought to bear on a focus as yet unknown; in technology there is a desired focus which anticipates the subsidiaries that will implement it; but in poetry the problem is open at both ends - in aim and means used, and its meaning comes into existence only with its words. As in science also, art is evaluated in terms of self-set standards of universal intent, but art is a unique artistic problem with its unique solution. Again in both, changes to new standards come about only by valid work done under them, and principles and standards are never deliberately chosen. Science itself has its real importance in its expansion into a world view, and this is an imaginative work like art. Visionary art, resulting from a rejection of mimesis and from general scepticism, reveals a meaningless world by heaping up absurd incompatible images. But it is art and moves us only by integrating its elements into a joint meaning, despite its express professions, content and association with subversive bohemianism, and Polanyi thinks that it has created more meaning than it has destroyed.

Similar structures are found in myths and symbolic actions, but the rapture of sacred myth surpasses that of art and myth fills the world with great meaning. With reference to Levy-Bruhl. Polanyi shows how the archaic mind uses the same powers of tacit integration as the modern mind, but takes them to extremes, whereas modern

thought wrongly distrust them: if the Borros identify themselves with red parrots, modern thinkers identify themselves with automatic machines ! The archaic view is the better for a name is part of the named person, and the image part of its subject. The truth of myths is that of works of art, their power to evoke experiences held to be genuine - the mystery of man's origin and destiny, and is certainly more true than the Laplacean view of the universe.

Religion is also an imaginative integration of incompatibles ( though many theologians would dispute Polanyi's references here to Christian doctrines and rites) which do make literal sense. As in representative art, the story must be plausible, but in religion this is not factual truth in ordinary time ( again Christian theologians - and Jewish and Islamic ones- would assert the plain historical factuality of at least some of their central tenets and institutions), but like visionary art religion integrates incompatible elements into a universal personal meaning which cannot be expressed in a set of coherent statements. If religion ,or something like its story, is to be accepted, then it must be thought that the world can be meaningful as religion claims that it is.

Polanyi then argues that it is more probable that the world is meaningful, i.e. has an end or purpose, than otherwise: even the DNA molecule cannot explain everything about itself, and it never can be reduced to physical and chemical laws. This leads Polanyi to suggest that life and thought operate according to a gradient of meaning, and that even in the physical universe fields evoke but do not cause more stable configurations of forces, so there is no scientific reason to deny the meaningfulness of the universe. This last mentioned chapter recalls the closing sections of Personal Knowledge.

Meaning is a powerful restatement of Polanyian themes and a useful introduction to his thought, with valuable new material on language, art myth and religion, in which everything is allowed to be what it is in its integrity but also in significant relation to and separation from everything else: "a place for everything and everything in its place."

R.T.Allen

The Lysenko Affair by David Joravsky, Harvard University Press, 1970 follows a similar line of argument to Polanyi but see an interesting review by Gary Werskey in th British Journal for the History of Science, No.1975 , who presents an alternative analysis of the affair.

'Michael Polanyi: Personal Knowledge and the Promise of Autonomy' by James L.Wiser, Political Theory, Vol.2 ,No.1 Feb.,1974.

'Logic of Consciousness and the Mind-body problem in Polanyi' by R.E.Innis, Int. Philos. Q. 13,1973.

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A bibliography of Polanyi's work in the humanities is included in this issue.

Send material for inclusion in Convivium to Dr. R.J.Brownhill, Department of Philosophy, University of Surrey, Guildford, Surrey.