

CONVIVIUM

(Michael Polanyi Newsletter)

"Our concern with Michael Polanyi's philosophy is not simply with what he himself taught, but with what we, learning from him, may do in carrying further the kind of scientific enquiry which he has taught so many of us."

(Prof. Torrance, Edinburgh)

Interest in the work of Michael Polanyi continues to increase. We held a successful conference, which was jointly organised with the British Society of Aesthetics, on 'Polanyi and Poetry' at the Institute of Contemporary Arts on April 8th, and a residential meeting is to be held in association with Convivium at Cumberland Lodge, the Great Park, Windsor, November 24th -26th entitled 'Belief in Science and in Christian Life'. A number of books and articles have appeared recently either directly on Polanyi's work, or critically examining and sometimes extending his insights. Indeed, it does appear that Polanyi's influence is no longer confined to the U.S.A. but is being increasingly felt in this country.

We are extremely sorry to report the tragic death of Mr. John Brennan, who died in a fire last May. As a founder member and a committee member of Convivium he is a loss we cannot replace but more importantly his recent book 'The Open Texture of Moral Concepts' indicated that he was a profound and original philosopher. His attempt to substantiate the autonomy of ethics in this book had shown that he was in the front rank of moral philosophers. Our deep sympathy goes out to his wife Clare on her loss.

Editor

Report on 'Polanyi and Poetry' Conference, April 8th, at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London.

Although this Conference, held jointly with the British Society of Aesthetics, attracted only 14 or so participants, the quality and depth of the papers and discussion made it very enjoyable for those who were there, and the small size of the meeting gave it a relaxed and intimate atmosphere. Abstracts of the three papers appear below. Graham Martin's paper will be published in the British Journal of Aesthetics in the Winter or Spring 1979.

R.T.A.

Abstract of: Polanyi and the Craft of Poetry.

Poetry is ambiguous in English: it is not, like verse, in simple opposition to prose. If poetry is "what gets lost in translation", then two accurate translations of the same text differ in their poetic qualities - compare, generally, the New English Bible with the Authorised Version. Purpose of this paper to look at the place of craftsmanship in poetry.

Using Polanyi's focal/subsidiary distinction, one can see the urge to abstraction in the modern arts - including "surrealism", concrete poetry, etc., also under that title - as a series of attempts to promote some single element in classical art out of the category of the subsidiary, into the category of the focal. This can be refreshing; but it is in danger of resulting in a sort of trivial tyranny of the craftsman deriving from uncertainty as to what is worth focussing on.

Examples from Blake and Baudelaire show how a re-location of focus can transform a particular image, and in doing so can transform the reader's perception of himself or of history. Recognition of the primary importance and proper use of this power is inseparable from the human development of the poet himself. Here Polanyi's insight into the crucial nature of personal apprenticeship, in the transmission of complex, never-completely-specifiable skills, can be used to see how the cult of originality becomes impoverishing; and also how, for example, the predominance of an academic culture, literary criticism or art history, becomes in fact destructive

for the apprentice artist, because he gets wrong messages on the tacit dimension. Some recent painters have been more concerned to make contributions to art history, than to create paintings.

The paper ends openly: though the central things are unsayable, can we at least craftily point to them ?

David Black

Abstract of "The Tacit Dimension of Poetic Imagery"

One of the things Polanyi seeks to do in Meaning is to explain the great power of metaphor to affect us, by claiming that we 'integrate our existence' into metaphors. I proposed a view of how this process may work in poetry, by drawing on Polanyi's convincing demonstration of the existence of tacit elements in experience, i.e. elements which cannot be made explicit in language. The irony of poetry is that it uses language to evoke in our memories precisely those elements of experience which language cannot express.

In both Polanyi and (for instance) Paul Valéry, normal language is described as being replaced by its meanings - so that the philosopher cannot recall in what language he has just read his morning mail. Metaphor (Polanyi) and poetic language in general (Valéry), however, appear to act differently, in that we remain aware of both vehicle and tenor. What has happened ? The poet sets up obstacles to the normal automatic process of 'understanding' words. What is the effect ? To force into awareness more of the subsidiary elements of meaning than usual; and among these subsidiary elements are nonexplicable mental images, such as sensory and emotional memories. It is often a condition of our understanding poetry that we draw upon such tacit elements. And that there are such tacit elements in memory is attested by contemporary psychology (namely the school of information processing).

It is thus to some extent our own nonexplicit experience that we draw upon in understanding poetry. And this may explain Polanyi's remarks about 'integrating our existence' into metaphors: we

understand them through our own remembered tacit experience; and to do so is an active and personal process.

Does this theory endanger the belief that metaphors can create a sense of newness ? I think not. For metaphors present tacit memories in new and unusual combinations. And in any case the tacit elements we draw upon are often elements we had never noticed before.' To find out what our experience has, all along, been really like, is to remake experience.' (C.S.Lewis)

Graham Dunstan Martin,
Edinburgh University.

Forthcoming Conference

'Belief in Science and in Christian Life'

The Relevance of Michael Polanyi's Thought for Christian Faith and Life.

A Residential Meeting, in association with 'Convivium' at Cumberland Lodge, The Great Park, Windsor, November 24-26, 1978.

The meeting will be chaired by Professor T.F. Torrance, University of Edinburgh. The speakers will be John Fuddefoot, Peter Foster, Daniel Hardy, Iain Torrance, Bishop Leslie Newbigin, Moderator of the United Reform Church.

Further details and a registration form are included with this newsletter.

Recent publications

- # 96 Gill, Jerry H. 'Reasons of the Heart: A Polanyian Reflection', Religious Studies Vol. 14, No. 2, June 1978.
- # 969 Milavec, Aaron, Anglican Theological Review January, 1978, 'Modern Exegesis, Doctrinal Innovations, and the Dynamics of Discipleship'.
- # 128 Mays, Wolfe. 'Michael Polanyi: Recollections and Comparisons', The Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology, Volume 9, Number 1, January 1978.
Dr. Mays states that he would be pleased to send an offprint to anyone who is interested. Address: Philosophy Department, University of Manchester.
- # 91 Gelwick, Richard. Way of Discovery: Introduction to the thought of Michael Polanyi, Oxford University Press, 1977.
- # 860 Hall, James A. Clinical Uses of Dreams: Jungian Interpretations and Enactments Grune and Stratton, New York, 1977.

Dr. Milavec has sent us a precis of his Anglican Theological Review article and details of a book in progress. See below.

Modern Exegesis, Doctrinal Innovations, and the Dynamics of
Discipleship (a precis) #1386

This essay begins by noting the disturbance which is frequently created when exegetical studies of Scriptural texts fail to support confessional understandings current within a particular church. This essay ends by proposing that exegetical conclusions can be intelligible and relevant only for those who cultivate first-century Palestinian instincts (namely, professional exegetes). In effect, therefore, Christians who intend to retain their modernity must meet Jesus through an unbroken chain of disciples, each of which was required to make fresh inquiries and introduce new practices so as to sustain the heritage of his Master. Without such mediating personages, Christianity would be received today with only historical interest - a happening in another age for another people.

The purpose of this essay is to flesh out a framework for envisaging doctrinal development which legitimates discontinuities in belief and practice. Two pioneering formulations of such a framework are briefly sketched from the thought of John Henry Newman and Paul Tillich. Then Michael Polanyi's generalised description of the dynamics undergirding the transmission of a tradition are spelled out with special reference to the dynamics of Christian discipleship.

Following Polanyi, the primitive disciples are to be understood as giving themselves over to their self-chosen Master with the expectation that he would enhance and modify their religious sensibilities so as to replicate his own. The independent successes attributed to the disciples in the Gospels demonstrate the extent to which they had come to share the powers of Jesus as a result of their momentous personal conversion in his hands. It follows from this that the casual observer in church on Sunday is quite immune to being enriched by the preaching and ritual therein as was the casual observer in Galilee listening and watching Jesus. Without a prolonged apprenticeship, nothing substantial of Jesus can be assimilated.

Within the dynamics of discipleship (as established by the Fathers of the Church), the canon of Scriptures function to impose correct modes of feeling and of perception upon a widely-dispersed (in time and place) body of adherents. The Scriptures are thus the normative classics which must be reverentially contemplated by novices under the direction of accomplished teachers. As such, therefore, the classics in art, music, and science have a parallel function in their respective communities: they allow the novice to progressively make his own those standards of excellence which characterize the practitioners of the profession.

The canon of scriptures also function as points of departure whereby probative inquiry by trained practitioners can provide the occasion for transmuting personal knowing powers in response to a fresh discovery of God's cause. In such an instance, the discoverer comes away passionately persuaded that his eyes have been opened to a divine truth, which was formerly unnoticed or obscured within the clues afforded by the text(s) under examination. Such a discovery might go on to transmute the understanding and practice of an entire community. The next generation of disciples will be taught the innovative discoveries of their forebearers as the routine meaning which is illumined and illustrated by the living practitioners of the community. The text of Scriptures (which never changes its words) thus serves to weave into a smooth fabric a whole series of momentous innovations which were occasioned by the various epochs of Christian discipleship. In the end, it would be that generation of disciples who lacked the courage to do anything or say anything which they had not been explicitly taught that would embarrass and ultimately discredit the Master. Has it not been said that the healing medicine of one generation can become the soul-stifling poison of another ?

Aaron Milavec

Outline of a book in progress by Aaron Milavec:

Possible title:

Credo ut Intellegam?

Only a prolonged Apprenticeship can assimilate the personal power of Jesus or What we begin by believing we end by understanding or The dynamics of transmitting the Christian Tradition

Part 1 : Debunking the exaggerated objectivism of science

Ch.1 Personal Faith and an Authoritative Tradition in Science

Ch.11 Experimental Testing and Trustworthy Intuitions in Science

Ch.111 A Generalised Account of the Dynamics Implicated in the Assimilation of a tradition

Part 11 Reaffirming the Primacy of Discipleship within Christianity

Ch.1V The Natural and the Supernatural Christian (clearing away the obstacles which prevent Christians from acknowledging a prolonged apprenticeship as the sine qua non of the Christian transmutation)

Ch.V The Primacy of Discipleship within the Gospel's vocabulary

Ch.V1 Jesus' practice in apprenticing His disciples

Ch.V11 Apprenticeship as opening up a correct estimation of Jesus (the limitation of prophesy, miracles, virgin birth, resurrection: who Jesus is in Mathew's community)

Ch.V111 The Sacred Scriptures as sanctioning the status quo and as provoking fresh discoveries of God's cause

Ch.1X The testing of innovations and the treatment of heretics.

Ch.X A formula for commitment within a parochial and culturally-conditioned Church.

review #1387

J.A.Hall: Clinical Uses of Dreams, Grune and Stratton, New York, 1977.

In this work there are several references to Michael Polanyi and his account of science, and chapter 8 is devoted to a brief exposition of tacit integration followed by its application to word-association tests and the discovery and exploration of complexes by means of them. The subject attends from his complex to the word, but the investigator attends from the subjects response or lack of it to the complex, and then the subject joins the tester in looking from his previous responses to the complex. Then the structure of tacit integration is applied to the relationship between the dream ego and the waking ego, with brief comments on accounting for forgetting dreams, changes in the level of consciousness, and experiences of transcendence, all in relation to the tacit-focal structure of knowing.

R.T.A.

Article

#1388

Michael Polanyi and Dualism

Marjorie Grene, that most sensitive and sympathetic interpreter of Polanyi, wrote in the Polanyi issue of the Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology (Oct. 1977) "Polanyi believed he was reviving dualism when he was helping to refute it." Dr. Brownhill repeated this in Convivium (no.5) "Polanyi's solution provided an argument to deny Cartesian dualism. Unfortunately Polanyi failed to see this."

Nonsense!

We need more light here. I am not convinced that Polanyi thought he was doing one thing when in fact he was doing another.

The mind-body problem evidently still sails a tricky passage between the Scylla of a vicious monism and the Charybdis of a vicious dualism. Collingwood wrote in "the Idea of Nature" - "The seventeenth century bequeathed unsolved to the eighteenth the problem of discovering some intrinsic connection between body and mind. Two errors had to be avoided; first, their essential

difference and indeed opposition must not be denied - mind must not be reduced to a special kind of matter; matter must not be reduced to a special form of mind; secondly, while this difference and opposition are still asserted, they must not be so asserted as to deny an essential unity connecting the two." It seems as if the problem is still rather the same. And if Polanyi's theory of tacit knowledge avoids these two dangers, it is not refuting dualism so much as redeeming it.

Describing the man looking at a cat, while a physiologist looks at the brain processes of the man seeing the cat, Polanyi says - "To see a cat differs sharply from knowledge of the mechanism of seeing a cat," (Meaning, p.49) "These two experiences have a sharply different content and the difference represents the viable core of traditional mind body dualism (My underlining)."

Is that so different from Marjorie Grene saying (JBSP p.169), "knowledge of the brain is not identical with knowledge of the mind, even though the latter depends on the former for its operation and existence." ?

In "the Logic of Tacit Inference" Polanyi discussed the sort of problem which gave rise to dualism; again, it is the difference between attending to and attending from our bodily processes. Dwelling in our bodies we attend from them to things outside; looking at a body an observer sees it as an object. So "body" covers the facts observed from outside, "mind" the integration of the facts from within into their meaning; two different things.

It is this word "things" which seems to worry Marjorie Grene; it is sailing too near Charybdis. Her comment on the cat story is - "Thus mind is not a separate something but is what Ryle calls "minding" it is the higher level operating principle of a complex system" - ("The understanding of Nature") She objects to Polanyi saying, "Mind and body are two different things, just as commonsense always said they were" for, she says, "the theory of mind mediated by the doctrine of tacit knowledge is a theory of mind fundamentally and irrevocably incarnate." Yes, but can

mind is
to
knowing
the
body.

he whole
mind
just
also to
in other
2 diff
logical
rels. ✓

you have incarnation without two different things, one to be incarnate in the other? "My 'being' means my bodily being", Marjorie Grene says, "for that is the only kind of being I have." Isn't that sailing a bit near Scylla? How does it fit in with her statement in the 'knower and the known' (p.218) "Thus in themselves, at least in living nature, all entities exist on at least two levels at once."

✓ It seems she is trying to steer away from the "thingness" of Charybdis, and Folanyi's navigation is directed to avoiding the danger of behaviourism around Scylla; he wants a statement that will allow mind to be independent, to control and direct body, and the term 'aspect' will not do for that. "If mind and body were two aspects of the same thing, the mind conceivably could not do anything but what the bodily mechanism determined." (Meaning p.51) "But the existence of two kinds of awareness - the focal and the subsidiary- distinguishes sharply between the mind as a lived in, from-to experience, and the subsidiaries of this experience when these are viewed focally as a bodily mechanism. In addition the necessity that the boundary conditions limiting the operation of any set of lower level principles must be different from these principles means that the mind can be readily understood to serve as a set of such boundary conditions for the operation of the laws of physiology. Though rooted in the body, the mind is therefore free in its actions from bodily determination - exactly as our commonsense knows it to be free."

✓ Without this sort of dualism Folanyi saw no defence against determinist or behaviourist theories. In "The Structure of Consciousness" he quotes Merleau Ponty's remarks, about the ways in which we experience our bodies, as foreshadowing his own analysis, but he thought they lacked the structure given by the theory of tacit knowledge and the stratification of reality. Without these (dualistically tending) structuring theories, Merleau Ponty

saying, "I do not understand the gestures of others by an act of intellectual interpretation" comes very close to Ryle's saying "I am not inferring to the workings of your mind, I am following them." This leads to Ryle's denial of any explicit interaction of mind and body, since the workings of mind which he is following are not regarded as clues to the mind but as being the mind.

✓ ✓ ✓
To this Polanyi replies, "What actually follows from the fact that the mind and body do not interact explicitly is that they interact according to the logic of tacit knowing. And it is this logic which disposes of the Cartesian dilemma by acknowledging two mutually exclusive ways of being aware of our own body."

✓ ✓ ✓
The navigators agree on one point, that the meaning of the brain is the mind, or as Polanyi puts it the mind is the meaning of the body. As the meaning of the body he felt the mind could have independence, though not as an aspect. Well yes, the meaning of a sentence can cause things to happen independent of its language, grammar, form; and the meaning can cause the form to be altered or can be given a new form, e.g., a map or graph. ✓
There is a temptation to call the meaning a different thing.

✓ ✓
It is hard to see how dualism can be cut out of Polanyi without destroying his whole thought. But the evils of Cartesian dualism are not in him nor did he think they were; he claimed to have disposed of Cartesian dualism as a dilemma. What he has is no longer one strange division of the world into mind and matter, but a series of dualisms between levels of existence with the operational principles that control them, grasped by tacit knowing. If he has sometimes driven too near Charybdis by the wids of 'freedom for the mind', it is hard to correct the course without bumping into Scylla.

You can't I suppose, refute dualism. A passage from Whitehead bringing out its wider meanings shows one that. The passage is

at the end of his chapter on Objects and Subjects in "Adventures of Ideas".

"The dualism in the later Platonic dialogues between the Platonic 'souls and the Platonic 'physical nature'; the dualism between the Cartesian 'thinking substance' and the Cartesian 'extended substance'; the dualism between the Lockian 'human understanding' and the Lockian 'external things' described for him by Galileo and Newton - all these kindred dualisms are here found within each occasion of actuality. Each occasion has its physical inheritance and its mental reaction which drives it on to self-completion. The world is not merely physical, nor is it merely mental. Nor is it merely one with many subordinates. Nor is it merely a complete fact, in its essence static with the illusion of change. Whenever a vicious dualism appears, it is by reason of mistaking an abstraction for a final concrete fact.

The universe is dual because, in the fullest sense, it is both transient and eternal. The Universe is dual because each actuality requires abstract character. The Universe is dual because each occasion unites its formal immediacy with objective otherness. The Universe is many because it is wholly and completely to be analysed into many final actualities - or in Cartesian language into many *res verae*. The Universe is one, because of the universal immanence. There is thus a dualism in this contrast between the unity and multiplicity. Throughout the Universe there rules this union of opposites which is the ground of dualism."

This cosmic view shows how deep and wide the question can be; not lightly to be resolved. I would have thought Polanyi had a fairly clear idea of how he was staring through its dangers, but I would like to hear more about this.

D. Scott