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CONVIVIUM

(Michael Polanyi Newsletter)

Committee Members

Lady Scott - Chairman
Miss Patricia Smart - Hon.Secretary
Dr. R.J.Brownhill - Hon.Treasurer & Editor
Miss Joan Crewdson - Membership Secretary
Mr. Richard Allen
Dr. G.Price
Dr. J. Robertson

The first number of 'Convivium' was published in the Summer of 1975 after a committee had been set up following a meeting on the thought of Michael Polanyi held at Cumberland Lodge, Windsor. The aim of this newsletter was set out in the first paragraph of that number:

"Convivium is a newsletter which provides information about research into the work of Michael Polanyi. However, it has a wider aim than this, for Michael Polanyi is above all a heuristic thinker who has instigated new ideas in many areas of thought. We are, therefore, also interested in research developing within the spirit of his 'post critical' philosophy."

The committee have in practice deviated from the original intention of the newsletter and have also either organised or helped organise conferences and meetings in different parts of the country not only on the thought of Polanyi but in the areas of his interests. It has also published and distributed a number of papers connected with these interests.

It is now time that we look to the future. What sort of body should 'Convivium' become? Should it carry on in its present form with a co-opted committee publishing the newsletter and organising meetings or should it become a proper society with an elected committee and an annual meeting? Should it be concerned with merely producing the newsletter? Some comments on these possibilities are included in this number but before

a decision is finally made we would like to hear from you about your views on the future of Convivium, so please write and state your views.

Lady Scott writes:

Why Convivium ? The name comes from Michael Polanyi's use in Personal Knowledge of the term 'Conviviality'. There is no brief quotation which conveys the meaning, but what he had in mind was the sense conveyed in his 'Conviviality' chapter, that the growth of knowledge and understanding needs the continuing existence of societies and groups of people pursuing such understanding together, with mutual trust and willingness to criticise and be criticised in their common pursuit. "The current cultivation of thought in society depends throughout", he wrote, "on the same kind of personal confidence which secures the transmission of social lore from one generation to another." And there is a phrase - "the sentiments of trust and the persuasive passions by which the transmission of our articulate heritage is kept flowing." Conviviality is an ingredient of that community of scientists he describes, with its tradition of common beliefs continually encouraging conformity to itself and also encouraging dissent which will change the tradition.

Thus Convivium is an ambitious title. The newsletter, if it is to serve in any miniscule degree the aims of conviviality, depends on the cooperation of its subscribers. Unless they argue, criticise, suggest and take part, it cannot work.

At the end of this issue you will find a subscription renewal form which asks about your area of interest. When we print the list of subscribers next time, you will be able, we hope, to see who is thinking or writing about the same sort of ideas as you are interested in.

Michael Polanyi once wrote in a letter about his feeling of collaboration with -"men and women of various ages who, having taken an interest in my work, started on some enquiry of their own on some kindred lines. Sometimes I have been in close touch with them, often I have hardly heard about them ..." With some element of conviviality among them such people can be a

"Society of Explorers".

Drusilla Scott

Dr. Robert Brownhill writes:

I feel that Convivium should no longer be run by a self perpetuated coopted group but that it should attempt to become a proper society with an elected committee and an annual meeting.

Convivium is a newsletter and also a group supposedly with a common interest. I feel therefore that its members should have some say in its organisation, and that the only way that this can be done is for it to become a society with an annual meeting. An elected committee may also produce a committee with a wider range of interests and new ideas. I also think that the annual meeting should be held at a weekend conference, and that the weekend conference would be the main event of the year with major papers being read but also a session put aside for short papers and general discussion..

I also believe that if we turned Convivium into a society then we should call the resultant society 'The Michael Polanyi Society'. Over the years a number of objections have been made to this proposal: the work of Polanyi should stand on its own feet, that other philosophers do not have societies named after them. It is true that the work of Polanyi should stand on its own feet , and indeed it has to. However , as Drusilla Scott has pointed out, the group is intended to keep like minded people together. Its function is not to proselytize or engage entirely in exegetical criticism.

The Michael Polanyi Society would then not be a society devoted to propaganda on behalf of the thought of Polanyi but a society dedicated to his memory with particular interest in the areas of his own interest , such as, academic freedom, moral responsibility, the relationship between freedom and authority, the nature of science,

and epistemological problems. There are ,of course, many societies named after philosophers which have a wide range of interests and do not devote themselves entirely to explaining the works of their masters : The Aristotelian Society, David Hume Society, John Locke Society, etc.

Robert Brownhill

Mr. Richard Allen writes:

I agree with the idea of turning our group into a proper society A proper society would perhaps be able to attract members more easily, and also new committee members. It would be easier to obtain definitely annual subs.

I still think there is a view for smaller meetings for undergrads. in order to expound basic ideas. Perhaps a series of regional one day events, on a regional basis and advertised intensively around local colleges and universities would be a good idea.

Richard Allen

On talking to different people there seems to be five suggestions about the future of Convivium going the rounds:

- (1) Form a society and call it 'The Michael Polanyi Society' with an annual meeting, elected or co-opted committee and still produce a newsletter and organise conferences.
- (2) Ditto but still call it Convivium.
- (3) Carry on as we are.
- (4) Act merely as a newsletter.
- (5) Pack it all in.

What do you think ? Please let us know as soon as possible.

Editor

Miss Joan Crewdson has recently taken over as membership secretary from Lady Scott and has sent the following for inclusion in this newsletter:

A Personal Letter from your new Membership Secretary.

12, Cunliffe Close,
OXFORD, OX7BL

Dear Fellow Member,

This number of Convivium contains a list of the names of those who receive the Newsletter. Only a few people on this list have paid a subscription during the last year. In order to save postage, I, as the new membership secretary, am writing to you personally through the pages of Convivium to remind you that your subscription is probably overdue.

To simplify arrangements, all subscriptions from now on will become due on January 1st of each year, so any money received by me between now and the end of 1979 will be counted as a subscription for 1980. If you have a conscience about the length of time since you last paid, you will know what to do !

Since Convivium was formed, we have managed to keep the subscription to £1 per annum, largely due to hidden subsidising by members of the committee. If as seems likely, there will be changes in arrangements for producing Convivium in the future, the Newsletter will have to become self-supporting. We would also like to be able to pay our committee members their travelling expenses, which has not been possible hitherto. This means that , after 1980, the subscription may have to go up.

As you will see from this newsletter, the role and value of Convivium is under review, but whatever shape it takes, its future will finally depend on the response we get to this reminder

about subscriptions. After the end of this year an up-to-date list of members will have to be compiled, so please let us hear from you before then. In particular we would like your suggestions for future conferences, as well as your letters, articles or book reviews for publication in Convivium.

Please send subscriptions to the Membership Secretary of Convivium at the above address. Suggestions, articles, etc. to the Editor.

Yours sincerely,

Joan Crewdson

A subscription form is included with this Newsletter - Editor

Recent Publications

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Richard Gelwick, 'What it means to be human', What It Means To Be Human: Essays in Philosophical Anthropology, Political Philosophy and Social Psychology, Ed. Ross Fitzgerald, Pergamon Press, 1978, pp.142-63. In this volume of essays by thinkers from England, Canada, the United States, and Australia, Gelwick argues that the meaning of our humanity is most clearly seen in our creativity. Following the concepts of "A Society of Explorers", he traces the objectivist eclipse of creativity; Polanyi's illumination of science and creativity, Polanyi's contribution to understanding intuition, and Polanyi's recognition that creativity is "I-Thou. The twelve other essays in the volume also present views relevant to the impact of science upon our understanding of human nature today.

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Doug Adams and Phil. Mullins, "Meaning with the arts; the implications of Polanyi's epistemology for aesthetics", Studia Mystica (Summer 1978), pp.28-48.

The Polanyi Society in the United States publish a newsletter and organise conferences, etc. Details of the society can be obtained from the General Coordinator of the society Professor Richard Gelwick, Th.D., Head, Department of Religion and Philosophy, Stephen College, Columbia, MO 65201, U.S.A.

The following letter has appeared in a number of journals:

Correspondence and Papers of Michael Polanyi

Sir,

A major part of Michael Polanyi's papers is now in the Joseph Regenstein Library at the University of Chicago. These are the papers that were in his possession in Oxford, but no systematic effort has been made so far to collect correspondence, manuscripts and memorabilia from people with whom he was in touch. The question as to how to collect this material comes at a time when a biography is being undertaken by Professor W.T. Scott of the University of Nevada at Reno. In the effort to combine the advantage of having original documents available for scholarly use at a centre in Britain, with access to the material of the biographer, and ultimate deposit of copies in the Chicago archive, we wish to make the following request.

We ask anyone possessing such material to get copies made, and to send the originals to Miss Cicely Argyle, 12, Sunderland Avenue, Oxford. She will acknowledge receipt, and will deliver the material to the Contemporary Scientific Archives Centre in Oxford. This centre under the direction of Professor Margaret Gowing, will process and catalogue the material and deliver it for permanent deposit to the Bodleian Library.

The making of copies before entrusting documents to the post is clearly important. The biographer would appreciate having

these copies sent to him, and undertakes to see that when he has made use of them they will finally be sent to the archive in Chicago to fill out that collection. He would also appreciate receiving any recollections and memorabilia, as well as suggestions of other sources of material. His address is: Professor W.T.Scott, Dept. of Physics, University of Nevada 89557 U.S.A.

(Signed) G.N.Burhardt	Drusilla Scott
W.Mansfield Cooper	Todd
Alister Hardy	T.F.Torrance
Robin Hodgkin	Veronica Wedgwood
Arthur Koestler	

Visiting Europe

Dr. Aaron Milavec, Saint Leonard College, Dayton will be visiting France probably for the next twelve months. He can be contacted at:

c/o M.Mer (Tel.in Paris: 320.39.06)
71, av.de Stalingrad
94120 Fontenay sous Bois, FRANCE.

Visiting Nigeria

Mr. Richard Allen and family will be in Nigeria for the next four years. He can be contacted at:

College of Education,
PMB 2129,
Sokoto,
Nigeria.

[pp 9-13 had only a list of members and have been omitted]

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Polanyi On Method in the Natural Sciences and the Study of
History and His Development of the Concept of the Interpretative
Framework ----- R.J. Brownhill

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In developing his philosophical analysis of society Michael Polanyi uses his study of the scientific community as a prototype model for the study of other communities. He believes that his model is applicable whether or not the community is concerned with the study of an intellectual discipline.¹ There are a number of reasons why he believes that he is justified in doing this. He claims that his concept of the scientist's task enables him to tie communities together, and that the scientist's method of achieving knowledge is similar to that in other fields. That the communities will be controlled in a similar way and that their joint knowledge will be shown through a network of traditional beliefs and practices.

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Polanyi believes that reality has a hierarchical structure, and that because of this the scientist is not only concerned with appearances, which he considers is the lowest level of reality,² but must be concerned with grasping all he can about the nature of the structure. In Kantian terminology he is not concerned with the study of appearances, the traditional Kantian concept of the scientist's task but with the study of ultimate reality. This manoeuvre enables Polanyi to argue that this must also be the task of other intellectual disciplines, and that although they may be working at different levels they are all concerned with the one great task of revealing the truth about the one but inexhaustible ultimate reality.

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He argues that within each community knowledge can only be gained by an individual who becomes obsessed with his work and 'indwells'³ in it. It is this heuristic passion that leads on to discovery but it is a passion that is led by a desire to reveal a universal truth. The knowledge that one grasps is not just something that satisfies one's subjective cravings but is something that one makes a universal claim for - one claims that it is objective. Polanyi calls this passion soaked objective claim personal knowledge.⁴

Polanyi argues that the scientific community, like all other communities concerned with intellectual tasks, is controlled by the joint authority of its members. A scientist may know one per cent of all scientific knowledge but another whose work is near to his own will overlap certain areas and a joint authority in overlapping areas will be exercised. This phenomena, Polanyi claims, is continued throughout the scientific community until a network of knowledge is formed and controlled by the combined authority of its members. The individual scientist submits himself to the authority of his peers but at the same time will exercise a certain amount of authority himself. He will have some authority where his sector overlaps with others, and complete authority in his own sector where it does not. The community then is controlled by an organic, general authoritative structure, and its authority is shared by all mature scientists. It is organic because all the scientists are bound together by a mutual faith in the existence of reality, and each attempts to be instrumental in serving the community by producing discoveries. By necessity it has two conflicting elements. It is authoritative, and thereby creates a certain amount of conformity, but at the same time needs to allow for individual initiative. Initiatives do not and cannot come from the community as a whole but from the mature scientist who has gained his own contact with reality.

Polanyi argues that the aggregate of individual initiatives on the part of the mature scientists produce a spontaneous order⁵, and that this order can exist because of the coherence or systematic ideas of science. New ideas must be related to the system of science, and the system of knowledge is automatically used by the mature scientists to judge a theory - I call this the interpersonal knowledge of the scientific community. In a situation where impersonal tests are useless, after all we cannot test our knowledge of things beyond appearances by our knowledge of appearances, consensus can be the only check on wild excesses. This theory of consensus is also strengthened by a complementary theory of mutual obligations - all must reveal reality as they see it.⁶

Polanyi, by his arguments, seems to be committed to the rather vague and metaphysical claim that all intellectual disciplines are concerned with revealing ultimate reality or, at least, the truth, and in such a way is able to tie all disciplines together but more explicitly argues that the study of nature and the study of history are of the same kind, although at a different level. We therefore have two claims: that the activity of the historian is controlled in a similar way to that of the scientist, by the mutual authority of the historians operating through a system of spontaneous coordination. And that the activity of the scientist and the historian are the same but at different levels. I propose to examine these two claims and see what the arguments entail.

Polanyi argues in The Study of Man :

"(My position) denies any discontinuity between the study of nature and the study of man. It claims that all knowledge rests on understanding, and that in this sense knowledge is of the same kind at all levels of existence, it reveals ever new comprehensive features, the study of which requires ever new powers of understanding. I shall readily acknowledge, accordingly, that historians must exercise a special kind of understanding. But I shall argue also that all the distinctive characteristics of the historians method emerge by continuous stages from the progressive modification of the methods used within science." 7

He is arguing here that as the scientist advances from the study of inanimate matter to that of living matter, first the lower forms of life and then the study of intelligence in the higher animals, higher forms of of comprehension come into play until the highest is reached with the study of man himself. The study of the natural sciences and the study of the humanities is a continuous process, and they do not form two distinct forms of understanding.

Comprehension becomes increasingly intense within science until the threshold of the humanities is reached but the process does not end here for comprehension becomes even more intense and complex. Polanyi attempts to illustrate this process. He states:

"Look first at the theories of physics. They deal with the ultimate particulars of nature and establish the existence of patterns, formed by them in space and time. Passionate intimations of this harmonious order are the guides of discovery in physics, and the beauty of a physical theory is the mark of its scientific value. This beauty is enjoyed by dwelling in the theory and observing its confirmation by the facts; the physicist dwells with pleasure in the patterns of inanimate nature while he turns away coldly from disorderly, meaningless collocations of particles."⁸

He goes on to argue that at the next level of understanding, which he calls the "vegetative level," the structural elements of understanding are greatly enriched. On this level he includes not only living vegetative entities but machines and tools. On this level the researcher's participation becomes more intensified as he finds "new, more striking, forms of excellence and failure."⁹ He writes:

"We recognized that to know a machine is to enter into its purpose and acknowledge the rationality of its operations and that to know an organism is to acknowledge the existence of an individual and appreciate its correct growth, form and function, these features being judged to be healthy or abnormal by standards which we consider apposite to an individual as a member of its species."¹⁰

We then move on to the next level, and participation is enforced to an even greater degree. This is the level where we study the deliberate activity of animals. The organism will no longer be attempting to adjust itself to its environment but will be attempting to control it. The organism therefore begins to make mistakes, and the possibility arises of the organism being either correct or incorrect in its judgements but nevertheless remaining a perfectly normal healthy organism. We therefore have a new development to consider as well as the previous alternatives of health and disease which would be our concern at the vegetative level. Polanyi argues that this phenomena of deliberative activity creates a clear distinction between the vegetative level and this new higher level. Whereas the observation of the vegetative level takes place on two logical levels, the observation

of a deliberately active animal will involve three logical levels. He gives the following example to illustrate this point:

"When I say 'the stone is rolling' this involves two logical levels, (1) one for me and my statement about the stone, and (2) another for the stone itself. Usually we think of ourselves on the higher level, talking down to the stone on a lower level. But if I say 'the sentence "the stone is rolling" is true', I need an additional, third level to accommodate the three things brought together by this utterance. There will be (1) a topmost level for myself and my utterance, (2) an intermediate level for the sentence of which I am saying that it is true, and (3) a bottom level, once more, for the stone."

Polanyi is arguing here that the statement 'the sentence "the stone is rolling" is true' brings in an element of conscious judgement by the person who is making the statement. He is trying to illustrate the point that to the observer the organism on the vegetative level makes no conscious judgements but on an animate level, as the organism takes deliberative action, there arises the possibility of the animal making an error, and this necessitates the capacity to make judgements on the part of the animal. The observer comes to realise that the animal has developed an interpretative framework by which it will attempt to judge things.

He argues that an animal, who has developed an interpretative framework, can make two sorts of mistake. He gives the example of a trout who snaps at the angler's fly². In this case the trout is making an error based on a correct interpretative framework. In the case of young geese, who accept a human being as their mother, and identify other humans as part of the flock, the geese judge their experience correctly but are using a wrong interpretative framework. Both these errors can be distinguished, he argues, from a pathological absence of judgment, for instance, in rats with part of their brain removed. There is also the possibility of a correct judgement in a correct interpretative framework, giving us four possibilities:

(1) an incorrect judgement in a correct interpretative framework.

(2) a correct judgement in an incorrect interpretative framework.

- (3) no interpretative framework and no judgement
- (4) a correct judgement in a correct interpretative framework.

There is, in fact, another possibility which Polanyi does not consider, and that is an incorrect judgement in an incorrect interpretative framework. He argues that these possibilities, which can be observed in the activities of animals, prefigure the sort of judgements a historian can make.

We can consider the following examples to give support to the argument. For instance a Marxist will look at a historical situation from a particular point of view. Included in this view will be the belief that a class struggle will be in evidence, and that the state will be used as an instrument of the ruling class to maintain its power. When an actual situation is examined evidence will be found which will tend to confirm the framework. Conflict will be interpreted as class conflict, and within the legislation enacted evidence will be found to confirm the hypothesis that legislation will be in the interests of the ruling class. Yet contrary evidence need not destroy the interpretative framework, although it will tend to make it more sophisticated and flexible. Thus Marx when examining the reign of Louis Philippe, King of the French¹³, finds that his reign does not indicate that consistent support is given to the bourgeoisie as a class but only to the financial aristocracy. This would appear to be contradictory to his main thesis but it is coped with by calling the ruling financiers a faction of the ruling class, and not by a declaration that they represent a different class. A statement that the non-ruling class belonged to the proletariat would have been, from a Marxist point of view, a mistake of category 1, an incorrect judgement in a correct interpretative framework. From a Marxist point of view a statement that the financial aristocracy was a faction of the bourgeoisie made by a conservative historian would be in category 2, a correct judgement in an incorrect interpretative framework. On the other hand to a conservative historian a statement made by a Marxist that the non-ruling bourgeoisie were members

of the of the proletariat would be a mistake in category 5, an incorrect judgement in an incorrect interpretative framework.

Three distinctions can be made between the case of the historian and the case of the geese. The historian can choose his interpretative framework, geese cannot. As he can choose his framework then quite clearly it will be in conscious conflict with other interpretative frameworks, that of the geese will not be. As the historian has chosen his own framework it will be much easier for him to give it up as he knows that it consists of a set of beliefs he has consciously accepted, and believes it is the best framework to use to provide an interpretation of historical actions. When contradictory evidence appears the historian will usually try and make his interpretative framework more sophisticated and flexible but at some point he can give it up. It would be far more difficult for humanised geese to give up their framework, as their commitment to it has become almost innate.

The prefiguration then seems to exist but there are essential differences. The major one is that the historian consciously makes a judgement in deciding to use an interpretative framework and therefore consciously commits himself to a particular framework. The strength of the commitment may well depend on the evidence available for alternatives: it could be a rational commitment not just a commitment.⁴ This suggests that Polanyi's belief that a historian will be absolutely committed to his interpretative framework, and then to his explanation or theory is certainly open to question.

An interpretative framework then is a group of systematic beliefs which one accepts and then uses to interpret other data. In the case considered Marxist theory is accepted and then applied to an actual historical situation. The resultant explanation will be contained within the Marxian framework, Marxian terminology will be used and conflict interpreted along the lines of Marxian theory. Only in rare instances can the facts of the historical situation actually begin to challenge the framework.

There is an analogy between Polanyi's interpretative framework

and Lakatos' "research programme" developing around hard core hypotheses,⁵ although Polanyi's interpretative framework would seem to be the step before the development of such hypotheses, for example, in science it would include the scientist's concepts about the uniformity of nature. Polanyi, in fact, fails to consider the interesting interplay between important theories and the interpretative framework. Can, for instance, hard core hypotheses become part of the interpretative framework, and therefore become even more inviolable? This happened with Marxian theory. The failure of the predictions of the downfall of capitalism became such a challenge to the interpretative framework that Lenin's theory of imperialism had to become part of the framework thereby making it more flexible and able to cope with developments in history. It was not just an ad hoc addition to a weak theory, as Popper suggests,¹⁶ but an important theory which was used to strengthen the interpretative framework.

Polanyi argues that there is another prefiguration of the work of the historian and the scientist. This lies in the recognition of intellectual passions in the lower animals. Their harrassment at being unable to solve a problem, and their delight in a correct solution. He points out that, "We have here the incipient transcendence of self-centred individuality by a personhood striving to achieve intellectual excellence for its own sake."¹⁷

The study of animals then begins to foreshadow the study of man's deliberative activities. And a study of these activities will show that the methods used in the natural sciences and in the study of history are part of the same process which can, as we have seen, be recognised at a lower animal level. That the study of history and the natural sciences are not two distinct forms of knowledge can be demonstrated by the following example which Polanyi gives: the study of the career of Napoleon contrasted with the method of the natural sciences.

Napoleon's career consisted of a series of actions whereas the study of scientific phenomena, for instance, gravitation, comprises events. Napoleon's actions involved questions of judgement, responsibility and motives. This fact has led to the issuing of praise or blame on the part of the historian. In the case of the physicist the possibility of praise or blame cannot arise because, as there are no deliberative actions but merely events, the question of moral responsibility is meaningless. The distinction can be widened still more by considering that in order to really appreciate Napoleon's motives we must attempt to relive his career and his thoughts, and the conclusion we come to will depend on what sort of framework we use in doing this. Pieter Geyl, in his Napoleon For and Against,¹⁸ argued that in practice the appreciation of Napoleon depended on the political view of the historian, and this varied in time and place. In this way the writing of history became itself part of the process of history. This fact certainly seem to distinguish history from the natural sciences.

However, Polanyi argues that these differences do not conclusively demonstrate a distinction. For instance, the distinction between actions recorded by history and the events which are studied by the natural sciences vanishes if we accept that animal psychology is part of the natural sciences, for the actions of animals will be studied. Another argument refers to the observer, for both the historian and the scientist make value judgements. The historians, as we have seen, make moral judgements,¹⁹ and will also make judgements about possible interpretations deciding on whether or not a particular interpretation is consistent with other interpretations of actions in other closely related aspects of the subject. For instance, he may make a choice between different alternatives on the basis of their aesthetic qualities. The scientist, although not making moral value judgements will make similar sorts of judgement. Polanyi states:

"Each appreciates the particular comprehensive entities which form its own subject matter, and the corresponding standards of excellence form an ascending series continuously progressing towards a moral valuation of human actions."²⁰

Polanyi also has an additional argument that the scientist will also attempt to understand the subject matter of his research by the process of indwelling, which is akin to the historian's attempt to study historical actions by reliving the life of the person he is studying. ²¹

Polanyi is using two complementary arguments in an attempt to demonstrate that the study of history and the natural sciences are not distinct. The first is to show that the method of gaining knowledge on the part of the historian and the scientist are the same in certain relevant respects. It is certainly true there are differences, for instance, the quantitative approach of the scientist is not followed to such an extent by the historian but the essential similarity lies in the indwelling of both. Polanyi is arguing that an immersion in the subject of one's research within a particular interpretative framework is essential if one is going to achieve a commitment to the knowledge one gains. One may hit on a correct piece of knowledge accidentally but one would have no commitment to it, and one would not recognise it as a piece of knowledge. Indwelling produces psychological certainty in one's discovery, and therefore a claim that one's opinion is universally valid, that it is knowledge. ²² The second argument is to show that the subject matter of research will exhibit similarities. For instance, as the natural scientist moves from looking at inanimate matter to the study of animate matter he will begin to examine characteristics, which in a more developed form, are the characteristics the historian examines, for example, deliberative actions, the use of judgement.

There is still another argument within Polanyi's general framework, for the historian and the scientist in making their judgements will rely on the standards and values of their respective communities.

Polanyi sees the process of understanding as a continuous process from the study of inanimate matter to the study of history, which needs greater connoisseurship and greater identification ²³ with the subject matter of the study, as it moves through the

natural sciences into the humanities. The final development in this process is man eventually turning attention on himself by the study of his own history and thought. Polanyi also tries to show that like all intellectual activity the fruitful study of history necessitates the immersion or the indwelling of the historian in the subject matter of his research. Like the scientist the historian will approach his task with a certain interpretative framework, and will then judge the subject matter in accordance with this framework.

In working within a framework a historian could make a correct judgement. This would mean that the judgement was consistent with other judgements made within that framework. If his judgement was incorrect we would expect it to be inconsistent with other judgements made. According to the previous analysis of the possible alternatives available to a person making a judgement, the former would be a judgement made in accordance with category 4, a correct judgement in a correct interpretative framework, or category 2, a correct judgement made in an incorrect interpretative framework. The latter would be either an incorrect judgement in a correct interpretative framework, category 1, or an incorrect judgement in an incorrect interpretative framework, category 5.

A problem arises as to whether the interpretative framework used is the right one. I will look at this problem below but, as we have seen in our earlier analysis, the historian will use an interpretative framework that is appropriate to his school. If he did so, and he could not exist in his school if he did not, his judgement, or claim to personal knowledge, will be judged by the interpersonal knowledge of the community of historians of which he is a member. In other words it will be judged by the consensus of opinion²⁴ which exists within his own school of history.

We can therefore say that his method of achieving knowledge through the process of indwelling, and the method of accrediting that knowledge by the consensus of opinion within his own intellectual community is similar to that of the scientist. But Polanyi has a further claim, and this refers to the actual subject matter of the research. It is a claim that there is only one

reality, and that this is made up of different levels: inanimate matter, vegetative matter, animal life, human life, and man immersed in thought, which includes the study of history, the study of law, literature, and so on. There is, in fact, another level and that is man attempting to understand transcendental reality or, from a theological point of view God.²⁵

The conclusion is therefore that the historian and the scientist are engaged in the same task of revealing and understanding reality but at a different level, and that the subject matter of their research is the same but at a different level. Each will work within his own community, which will have its own standards and traditions, and will study his chosen area of reality. However, as can be seen from the terminology I have used there would seem to be a difference, for, whereas we can probably talk about the scientific community, we cannot talk in the same way about the community of historians. We have to talk about communities of historians or rather schools of historians. Even so it does seem possible to argue that within these different schools certain skills have been produced which have proved effective in gaining historical knowledge, and that a body of knowledge has developed which can be used to judge innovations. In other words innovations will have to fit into the interpersonal knowledge of a school.

In this sense truth for a member of a historical school would consist in a correct interpretation of historical phenomena in accordance with his own interpretative framework. This is the personal knowledge of the historian or rather his claim to personal knowledge. If this claim is to be accepted as knowledge, given the status of knowledge, it will have to fit in with the knowledge already possessed by the school, i.e., by their interpersonal knowledge. It is then given the status of being the truth as far as that community is concerned.²⁶

This analysis leads us to argue that each school will have its own interpretative framework to which the interpretative framework of each member will approximate. The original interpretative framework will have arisen because different historians with similar interpretative frameworks will have come together and decided to accept each other's mutual authority in determining the truth. The group by doing this will have created its own decision procedure, an essential ingredient for any community. The acceptance of mutual authority is necessary before we can call it a school and differentiate it from other schools. Indeed to the extent we can show that a school is not governed by the mutual authority of its members then to that extent we deny the existence of the school. New adherents to the school would have to fit into the style of the school. That is their own interpretative framework would have to approximate to the preexisting ideal derived from the original adherents.

Science, on the other hand seems to consist of an interlocking series of interpretative frameworks. The question therefore arises as to why there is not a corresponding breakdown into schools of science as there is in history, and also theology. There seems to be three reasons for this: (1) The subject matter of the research necessitates a more personal involvement, so whereas clashes between scientists will usually be confined to criticisms of methodology, really a criticism of the scientist's competence, to attempts to indicate the failure of a theory, and mere career competitiveness, another factor will enter in the case of history. This would be an attempt to challenge the historians interpretative framework - a challenge that would rarely happen in the case of science - for instance, a challenge to an analysis made from a Marxist point of view. (2) Scientist's do not develop mutually exclusive schools based on different moral interpretative frameworks, so although there are schools of thought in the sense that there is disagreement over specific points this does not effect their whole outlook on science. It is really this moral factor in the interpretation of history that creates the schools.

It would be extremely difficult for a Marxist historian to accept a Whig interpretation of history as the 'truth', all he could do would be to accept it as a Whig interpretation of history. (This is a case where historians are themselves part of the process of history) (3) The methodology of science tends to hold it together, for instance, the use of experimentation, statistical techniques, rules for the presentation of findings. We can say that there appears to be a general consensus as to the technical approach to the subject matter of research but this is not the case with history.

Is there a way of choosing one interpretation rather than another, and can there be rational grounds for this choice? Polanyi's answer to this question when looking at interpretative frameworks in general, is rather ambivalent. He argues:

"If an active mental process, aiming at universality, can turn out to have been altogether mistaken, can we still say that in it the subject has risen to the level of the personal by reaching out to reality?"²⁷

He answers this question by stating that it cannot be personal knowledge as a wrong interpretative framework has been used. Alternative beliefs have to be in conflict, "They are contesting each other's mental existence."²⁸ Polanyi seems to be arguing that the researcher may have used the wrong interpretative framework but he will be incapable of realising this because of the very process of making a discovery, the passionate immersion in his research, the commitment to each stage of discovery. Yet Polanyi does recognise that occasionally the researcher is capable of realising a wrong interpretative framework has been used - He recognises that in practice people have given up their interpretative framework.- as he gives the examples of Arthur Koestler rejecting a Marxist framework, and Karen Horney giving up a Freudian framework.²⁹ He argues that this is not an irrational switch from one interpretative framework to another, in Kuhnian language a gestalt switch, but a switch made for good reasons.

Polanyi argues that it is reality itself that lets the researcher know that he has the correct interpretative framework. He recognises the veridical quality^{3c} of the system he believes in, and when he has the correct framework he is led on on to a whole range of future discoveries. Polanyi is arguing here that the researcher has intimations of future discoveries. But how do these intimations arise, or in Lakatosian language, how does he know that his research programme is progressive? The simple answer, for Polanyi is that his contact with reality reveals it to him. He means by this that the coherence of the framework allows a whole lot of problems to fall into place. The framework is rationally binding on him.^{3'}

You give up a framework when it becomes clear that it is no longer leading to the solution of a whole range of problems, when they no longer fall into place. Your commitment will mean that you will not give it up lightly but will tend to persevere with it and try and explain away failures. Lakatos argues that an indication of degeneracy in a research programme is the development of theories after the events to explain why events have happened. Unfortunately he also argues that a degenerate programme can come to life again and become progressive so there is no clear indication when one should abandon a programme.

A further difficulty lies in the fact that one would not know the veridical qualities of alternative frameworks unless one dwelled within them. You may recognise the weakness of your own framework but not know the strengths of another framework. It could be that the framework you have is the best of a bad bunch but you do not know this. The Polanyian argument seems to entail that you can give up a framework for good reasons, and rationally look for alternatives but that you cannot rationally choose an alternative until you have become committed to it and dwelled within it.

Polanyi's argument then that the study of the natural sciences prefigures the study of history, and that the scientific community can be used as a prototype for the study of other intellectual communities does seem to be justified. The argument when developed lead to a number of problems and qualifications which Polanyi did not foresee but does lead us to view the activity of the historian from a different , and interesting perspective.

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References

1. He argues that the scientific community controls a systematic body of ideas, and that this sort of control is true also of other intellectual communities. Although non-intellectual communities may not have systematic ideas, they will have a body of coherent ideas. M. Polanyi, The Logic of Liberty, London, 1951, p. 46.
2. He states: "What is the most tangible has the least meaning and it is perverse to identify the tangible with the real. For to regard a meaningless sub-stratum as the ultimate reality of all things, must lead to the conclusion that all things are meaningless. And we can avoid this conclusion only if we acknowledge instead that deepest reality is possessed by higher things that are least tangible." M. Polanyi, The Modern Mind: Its Structures and Prospects, lecture delivered at Bowdoin College, Brunswick, Maine, October 19th, 1964.
3. This idea of indwelling seems similar to Dilthey's concept of understanding literature. The notion that we must re-live the author's writing process and his way of thought. It is also akin to Freud's notion of love where our libido overflows on to the outer object and tries to make it part of ourselves, and Heidegger's 'Stimmung' which provides an emotional link between the investigator and the object of attention.
4. See M. Polanyi, Personal Knowledge, London, 1958, p. 303 for a discussion of his distinction between subjective and personal knowledge.
5. M. Polanyi, Foundations of Academic Freedom, Society for Freedom in Science, Occasional Pamphlet, No. 6, September 1947, p. 9 He makes a distinction between spontaneous order and a planned order. The former spontaneously arises within a practice, while the latter is imposed from without. F.A. Hayek makes a similar distinction.

6. The argument for consensus is stronger than it at first seems. If we cannot use impersonal tests to check our theories then there are only two alternatives: we either rely on the authority of the researcher or on the mutual authority of the community. It would appear to be more rational to rely on the authority of the community. This, of course, is not a claim that consensus can reveal the truth but that it is more likely to be correct than the speculation of an individual researcher. See W.H.Walsh, "Knowledge in Its Social Setting", Mind, Vol.LXXX, No.319, July, 1971. The supporting theory of obligation argues that there are three obligations: the researcher's obligation to himself as a seeker after the truth, to other researchers in his community, and to reality itself. The first two are derived from the third. Polanyi argues that the scientist is committed to the truth but as the scientific community is the vehicle of revealed 'truth' (theories that have been given the status of truth) this entails a commitment to the community.
7. M.Polanyi, The Study of Man, London, 1959, pp.72-3.
8. Ibid., pp.73-74.
9. Ibid., p.74.
10. Ibid., p.74.
11. Ibid., pp.75-6.
12. Ibid., p.76.
13. K.Marx, Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte.
14. A rational commitment would be a commitment for good reasons and come about because of those reasons. 'Just a commitment' would be a commitment preceding the reasons. See R.Trigg, Reason and Commitment, Cambridge, 1973.

15. See I.Lakatos, "Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes", in I.Lakatos and A.Muegrave, Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge, Cambridge, 1973.
16. See A.Popper, Objective Knowledge, Oxford, 1972, pp.75-76 for objections to ad hoc arguments.
17. The Study of Man, op.cit.,p.77.
18. Pieter Geyl, Napoleon for and Against, London, 1949.
19. On the other hand M. Oakeshott would argue that he should not do this. See "The Activity of Being a Historian", Rationalism in Politics, London, 1962.
20. The Study of Man, op. cit.,p.80.
21. Oakeshott calls this when referring to the similar theory of Collingwood "a piece of obscene necromancy". Oakeshott, op.cit.
22. See J.Brennan, "Polanyi's transcendence of the distinction between objectivity and subjectivity as applied to the philosophy of science", The Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology, Vol.8, No.3, October 1977, for four arguments to support the claim that Polanyi maintains an objectivist position.
23. The Study of Man,op.cit.,p.81.
24. See Walsh,op.cit.,for a justification of judgements by consensus
25. See Personal knowledge, op.cit.,p.405.
26. The word 'truth' and 'knowledge' sometimes,for Polanyi, appear like a badge we stick on to a theory when certain

26 cont. criteria have been met. They are ascriptive words and they are defeasible. See H.J. Brownhill, "Freedom and authority: the Political Philosophy of Michael Polanyi", The Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology, Vol.8, No.3, October, 1977, for a development of this argument.

27. See Personal Knowledge , op.cit., p.318.

28. Ibid., p.319.

29. Ibid., p.288.

30. Ibid., pp.147-8.

31. For a similar argument see D.Pole, Conditions of Rational Inquiry, London, 1961, pp.88-9.

11/11/1977, Budshyk.