

THE POLANYI SOCIETY

Vol. X, Number 2, Winter, 1983

Polanyi and Barfield: Complementary Theorists

In a remarkable new book entitled Physics as Metaphor, the author, Roger S. Jones, Professor of Physics at the University of Minnesota, claims that Owen Barfield's "written works are the spiritual ancestors of this book." He elaborates his indebtedness elsewhere as follows:

For the full elaboration of the idea of science and the physical world as a construct of the mind or a collective representation, I owe a great debt to Owen Barfield and his writings, especially his book Saving the Appearances--A Study in Idolatry. It was Barfield who helped me most to fathom the deceptiveness of science by seeing that when metaphors become crystallized and abstract, cut off from their roots in consciousness, and forgotten by their creators, they become idols. For an idolator is not so much one who creates idols, but one who worships them. This failure to recognize the central role of consciousness in reality and thus to treat the physical world as an independent, external, and alien object has been a chronic problem throughout the modern era of scientific discovery, since the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, and has reached a critical stage in the twentieth century with its unconscionable, and largely unconscious, ravaging of the environment.

Readers of this Newsletter perhaps will recognize in this statement something altogether clear throughout the book in discussions not concerned with Barfield: a mind and a voice of deep consanguinity with the thought of Polanyi. Professor Jones is, in a sense, the embodiment of the intellectual ties between Barfield and Polanyi which are the formal subject of Patrick Grant's final chapter in his 1979 study Six Modern Authors and Problems of Belief, published by Harper and Row.

Grant's analysis is possibly the only one to date which treats extensively and carefully the thought of Polanyi and Barfield together. "The theories of both men," he writes, "Meet and overlap on the questions of imagination and the place of art in society." Indeed they do, but Grant expounds the full range of the theories of each, among them Polanyi's epistemology of tacit knowledge and indwelling together with his doctrine of "moral inversion," and Barfield's views concerning participation, the evolution of consciousness, the spiritual law of polarity. Grant covers intelligently Polanyi's and Barfield's mutual preoccupation with the history of science, and he even manages to make some evaluative criticism of the two, especially of Barfield's supposed lack of earthboundness at times and of his unwillingness to confront adequately the problem of pain. Given the comprehensiveness and complexity of Polanyi's and Barfield's arguments, Grant's overview is not equivalent to the separate examinations by Richard Gelwick of the former (The Way of Discovery) or Robert J. Reilly of the latter (Romantic Religion), yet it is both well researched, intelligently expounded, and, best of all, treats the two together.

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For Patrick Grant the preferred emphasis is on the parallelism between Polanyi's late-developing views about imagination and art and Barfield's lifelong preoccupation with the ontology of imagination and poetry. These are interesting parallels, and Grant deserves thanks for emphasizing them. At the same time, Grant's reservations about some facets of Barfield's thought beyond his insights concerning imagination and poetry account, I believe, for his reluctance to press for other central areas of agreement between Barfield's thought and Polanyi's.

In any event, I suggest that the readers of this Newsletter get ahold of Six Modern Authors and Problems of Belief and follow the explication for themselves, for the topic of the relationship of Polanyi's thought with Barfield's is a profound one, only in part because of the sincere admiration each has had of the other's work. The relationship is profound because it happens to illustrate the phenomenon observable elsewhere, that different thinkers from altogether different disciplines and intellectual communities are saying something astonishingly similar; profound, too, because Barfield and Polanyi may well be two of the most penetrating minds of this era. In a few paragraphs, let me simply point to a couple of major areas of parallelism between Polanyi and Barfield over and above those Grant stresses. My suggestions here undoubtedly derive from my full sympathy, different from Grant's, with Barfield's wider views beyond the issue of poetic imagination to the evolution of consciousness in the West.

First of all, Polanyi's complex epistemology, including a conception like "self-giving integrations" (as distinct from "self-centered integrations"), although primarily a discrimination between cognition in art as opposed to science, is in effect the analogue to Barfield's major and ruling argument about participation and polarity, whether as human perception, poetic imagination, or even the shifting predominance of consciousness in its evolution over the length of western history. In Barfield's thought, polar predominance is comparable to Polanyi's concept of focal and subsidiary awareness in knowing. In the distant past, the human mind was far more "subsidiary" in Barfield's thesis than "focal." Historically speaking, the beginning of modern science in the 17th century corresponds to a shifting emphasis (polar predominance) in the development of self-consciousness and a corresponding de-emphasis in participation illustrated, for instance, in the earlier Medieval theory of the humors or the cosmological assumptions dramatized, say, by C. S. Lewis in The Discarded Image--what Thomas Kuhn might call a preceding "paradigm." In any event, Polanyi's wonderful illumination of the "tacit element" in his writings parallels Barfield's clarification of participation at its various degrees at different times in the past as well as the present: participation resides at present in the "collective representations" our mind contributes to human perception, for no one actually "sees" the sub-atomic particles which science correctly informs us are the stuff of reality. Poetry and imaginative art articulate in a self-conscious way this participational connection at a different level. To put much of this in another way, poetry is to the epistemological act in Barfield's thought what science, properly understood, is to the epistemological act in Polanyi.

As with knowing, so too, though less obviously, with being, Barfield's metaphysical views, radiating outward from his arguments concerning poetry, poetic diction, and language history are favorable, I believe, to Polanyi's explication of reality as composing stratified structures or "boundary conditions." Part of their shared view of reality no doubt stems from each man's profound sense of hierarchy traceable to a common source in Augustine, although also in Barfield's case to such loved texts as the poetry of Milton and Dante, the philosophy of Plato, the scientific thought in Coleridge, and the spiritual science of Rudolph Steiner.

But a shared belief in hierarchy, even by two 20th-century thinkers, does not in itself comprise an affinity of theory. Rather it is the energetic view each has of the governing principles at various grades within the hierarchy, and especially the profound opposition each voices to the positivistic assumption that one can account for the higher level within a stratified system by the lower. Barfield often identifies the Darwinian or neo-Darwinian position as the principal source for this positivist error, whereas Polanyi's analysis of boundary conditions themselves implies strongly a comparable critique of Darwinism. Barfield's fundamental argument is evolutionary, though not Darwinian. The fact that Polanyi as philosopher of science does not propose something like Barfield's neo-Coleridgean theory of Logos does not alter the "Barfieldian implications" otherwise of Polanyi's analysis of being. At the same time, Barfield's doctrine of procreative Logos is the sort of argument which has made Patrick Grant and some commentators uneasy, and they prefer him to confine his views to poetry. Nevertheless, the arguments of a fictional character like the scientist Flume in Barfield's book, Unancestral Voice, although based on physicist David Bohm's, would put one in mind, at the very least, of the general orientation of Polanyi's thought. Another kind of connective evidence, in a sense, is the argument by Roger S. Jones in Physics as Metaphor.

Apart from the parallels in their respective views on imagination and art, then, Polanyi and Barfield complement each other in their fundamental epistemological and ontological positions, and in their mutual preoccupation with and commitment to "the rediscovery of meaning," to use a Barfield expression. Each has erected a formidable alternative to the challenge of positivism without resorting to the uneasy "two truth" solution of science and humanities, a solution which seems mainly to have deepened the malaise and made people hunger for something else. If this all-too-brief sketch appears to have stressed Barfield somewhat more than Polanyi, it is on the assumption that Barfield's thought is generally less familiar to readers of this publication, and that such readers hardly need instruction on Polanyi's basic doctrines.

A BARFIELD BIBLIOGRAPHY FOR FURTHER POLANYI-BARFIELD STUDIES

The best overall exposition of his thought is Owen Barfield's Saving the Appearances: A Study in Idolatry (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1965, first published 1957 by Faber and Faber); a version of the same body of thought which takes the form of a dialogue among individuals in different fields of science, philosophy, literature et. al. is Worlds Apart (Connecticut: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1963); an excellent collection of Barfield's best essays is The Rediscovery of Meaning and Other Essays (Connecticut: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1977); An introduction to Barfield's views on the relationship of language to history is Speakers Meaning (Connecticut: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1967). Books by Barfield that would complement these above but are less appropriate places to begin are Poetic Diction: A Study in Meaning (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964, first published 1928 by Faber and Faber), Romanticism Comes of Age (Connecticut: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1967, first published 1944 by Rudolph Steiner Press), What Coleridge Thought (Connecticut: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1971), Unancestral Voice (Connecticut: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1965), and History in English Words (Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1967, first published 1926 by Faber and Faber.)

Barfield's thought is the subject of Evolution of Consciousness: Studies in Polarity, ed. Shirley Sugerman (Connecticut: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1976),

which includes an extended conversation by the editor with Barfield. Owen Barfield was a close lifelong friend of C. S. Lewis, whose books The Discarded Image and The Allegory of Love in particular owe much to Barfield's thought.

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REPORT ON AAR-PS NEGOTIATIONS

Negotiations between the American Academy of Religion and the Polanyi Society continue. For the last two years members of the Polanyi Society who attend the annual meeting of the AAR have sought an official AAR rubric which would allow them to be granted program space. Recently, Professor Jim Wiggins of Syracuse University has become the new Executive Director of the AAR. Wiggins has been very sympathetic to the plight of groups such as the Polanyi Society who in earlier years enjoyed an informal relation with the AAR.

Pressure for program space has now increased dramatically. The present state of affairs, judging from conversations and correspondence with Wiggins, I read in the following fashion.

- 1) The AAR Program Committee continues to be disposed against granting official program status to any petitioning group who they view as oriented primarily around one figure. The recent CSR Bulletin suggests that this logic (which ended the life of the Polanyi Studies Consultation after the 1981 AAR annual meeting) has led to the termination of other AAR groups such as the Wittgenstein Group.
- 2) Wiggins advises that persons who wish to do papers using Polanyi should apply to established annual meeting sections such as Philosophy of Religion and Theology and Religious Reflection. I suspect that it will be a fruitless gesture to re-apply for 1984 program status as a group even under the more general title "Post-Critical Studies Group."
- 3) Wiggins has informed me that the AAR Executive Committee has "almost completed" its deliberations, which have been in limbo for sometime, on the nature of "affiliated society" status in the AAR. The Polanyi Society has a pending application. I assume this application will be judged promptly when the AAR definition is worked out. If we are granted "affiliated society" status, we will be allowed to convene a meeting during the AAR annual meeting.

Wiggins has advised that the AAR will grant certain groups a pre-annual meeting session for this year's Dallas meeting beginning Dec. 19. Although many who responded to the Fall, 1982 Polanyi Society Newsletter questionnaire on alternative strategies for approaching the AAR indicate this is not a desirable alternative, a pre-session meeting appears to be the only alternative open to persons who hope to have any sort of meeting in connection with the annual meeting of the AAR. I have officially applied for space for a pre-session meeting and have been verbally assured by Wiggins that such a meeting can be scheduled for the first day of the AAR meeting (Dec. 19). I hope that this means we will be scheduled for late morning on Dec. 19 so that additional expenses will not be incurred by those wishing to attend and are planning to come to the AAR. If you would be interested in presenting a paper at such a pre-session meeting please send me a precis by May 1, 1983.

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COMPUTERS AND POLANYI

For the Polanyi Society, I have begun a computer storage program that will keep a record of Polanyi bibliography. Below is the first step showing a list of dissertations that explicitly refer to Michael Polanyi in their title. Other groupings will be added as it becomes feasible. Your help in keeping this reference up to date will be appreciated. But if you send information, please be explicit and complete as possible following the example of the bibliography given here.

R.G.

DISSERTATIONS ON MICHAEL POLANYI

in chronological order

*Each dissertation is listed in the following way:

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 Title
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KNOWING IN SOCIAL CASEWORK: SOME EPISTEMOLOGICAL ISSUES
Roberta Wells Imre

(The following are excerpts from the abstract of Dr. Wells' Ph.D. dissertation at Rutgers University, Dissertation Abstracts International, Vol. 42, No. 9, 1981.)

In this study the nature of knowing and of knowledge in social casework is investigated. The current tendency in social work to consider knowledge to be only that which is scientific is seen as reflective of an unexamined acceptance of the philosophy of positivism. In addition, a lack of integration between knowledge and values in social work is attributed to this philosophical perspective.

For this study emphasis is upon knowing persons. The work of Michael Polanyi is discussed with particular reference to the concept that all knowledge is personal knowledge in that it involves the participation of the person who knows. In addition, the importance of tacit knowledge as explicated by Polanyi is noted. The dissertation continues with an emphasis upon the way persons learn and come to know through the use of various languages--verbal, mathematical, and artistic, and stresses that languages are learned in a social context in which human beings are integrally, even primordially, related to each other. An understanding of human relationships and the nature of caring are therefore seen as vital to knowledge of persons and as illustrating that it is possible to know what is good and valuable. In addition, it is noted that self consciousness and awareness of limitation and death as well as mystery characterize human beings who seek meaning for their lives. Reference is made to relevant concepts in the thought of Martin Buber, Gabriel Marcel, and others.

RELIGIOUS KNOWING AND THE TACIT MATRIX: MICHAEL POLANYI'S
CONCEPT OF TACIT KNOWING AND CROSS-CULTURAL MODELS OF
RELIGIOUS RATIONALITY AND/OR CONSCIOUSNESS

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(The following is an excerpt from Dr. Gill's AAR paper, which suggests a new area of Polanyi inquiry.)

There are at least five major cross-cultural models of religious awareness and knowledge: (1) direct encounter and incorrigibility, (2) traditional authority and infallibility, (3) experiential inference and probability, (4) deductive demonstration and indubitability, and (5) existential commitment and authenticity. A great deal of discussion has taken place across and within the traditions revolving around these models as to the proper mode of justification for religious belief. Much, if not most of this discussion has been characterized by philosophical and ethnocentric parochialism, with the exponents of each model forcing its categories on the experience and beliefs of others. What is lacking is a common epistemological axis in which to center these various models and from which to move toward mutual understanding.

My proposal is that the epistemological insights of Michael Polanyi, especially his notion of tacit knowing, can serve well as the initial point of reference for this common axis. With respect to consciousness, Polanyi provides room for both focal and subsidiary awareness on a continuum, thus incorporating the possibility of both direct and indirect religious experience. With respect to behavior, Polanyi provides room for both conceptual and bodily activity on a continuum, thus incorporating the possibility of integrating intellectual assent, liturgical practice, and ethical praxis. The interaction between focal awareness and conceptual activity gives rise to "explicit knowing", while the interaction between subsidiary awareness and bodily activity gives rise to "tacit knowing". These two forms of knowing function as the dual foci of a bi-polar cognitivity continuum, the vectoral direction of which runs from the tacit dimension to the explicit dimension of human knowing and experience.

This model of cognitivity has the potential for overcoming the traditional dichotomies which have for so long plagued discussions of the rational component of religious experience and belief; dichotomies such as those between reason and faith, fact and feeling, assent and practice, East and West, doctrine and mystery, objectivity and subjectivity, verification and intuition, etc. If religious consciousness can be viewed as being grounded in a subsidiary awareness of a mediated transcendence, together with religious knowing being viewed as fundamentally tacit in character, then many traditionally divergent epistemological postures can be integrated and ordered according to a common model, and cross-cultural dialogue will have both a basis and direction.

On the following pages, I shall (1) present the basic epistemological distinctions and insights of Michael Polanyi and (2) endeavor to show how these distinctions and insights might be used to co-ordinate cross-cultural understandings of religious consciousness and rationality. It should go without saying that this exploration is strictly programmatic in character.

NEWS AND NOTES

Walter Gulick's AAR paper on "A Listening Autonomy: The Claims of Feelings in Religious Meaning" drew upon the thought of Michael Polanyi to establish a more adequate understanding of the affective dimension in religious studies. Gulick

contends that feelings must be treated as more than emotive aspects and that they are critical for understanding the cognitive aspects as well as the essential nature of religion itself.

For some time, people have been comparing the thought of Bernard Lonergan and Michael Polanyi. A journal of Lonergan studies entitled METHOD has begun this spring. The first issue has an article by David Oyler on "Emergence." Oyler did his dissertation, see above list, on Michael Polanyi. The next issue is announced to have an article by Eugene Webb on "Lonergan and Polanyi." METHOD is \$12 per year for individuals and may be ordered from the Department of Philosophy, Loyola Marymount University, Loyola Boulevard at West 80th Street, Los Angeles, California 90045.

James Hall, M.D. has published "Polanyi and Jungian Psychology: Dream-Ego and Waking-Ego," in JOURNAL OF ANALYTICAL PSYCHOLOGY, 1982, 27, pp. 239-254. The paper has six sections: I. Polanyi's Concept of Focal and Tacit Structure, II. Focal-Tacit Knowing and Dreams, III. The Phenomenology of Dreams, IV. Clinical Examples, V. The Contemporary Function of the Unanalysed Dream, and VI. The Usefulness of Focal-Tacit Knowing. Hall is also president of The Isthmus Institute in Dallas, Texas, which has inaugurated an annual lecture series for bringing together the most creative minds at the interface of science and religion. Lectures so far have included Nobel Laureates Roger Sperry, Brian Josephson, and Sir John Eccles. Interested persons may write: Isthmus Institute, 8215 Westchester, Suite 244, Dallas, Texas 75225.

Donald Millholland, who did his dissertation on Polanyi (see above list) has published "From Nihilism to Religious Faith" in the GUILFORD REVIEW, No. 17, Spring, 1983. Prof. Millholland is on the faculty of Guilford College and is currently preparing a book on Polanyi and Heidegger.

POLANYI BIOGRAPHER WILLIAM T. SCOTT
OFFERED MATCHING GRANT

The Academy of Independent Scholars is asking for our help in supporting the work of Dr. William T. Scott in his writing of a major biography of Michael Polanyi. So far Dr. Scott has written an introductory chapter and a short version of Polanyi's life in chemistry as well as several interpretive articles on the development of Polanyi's social and religious thought. He has over 100 taped interviews with Polanyi's associates and has studied a substantial portion of Polanyi's over 400 published works. Besides Oxford University Press, two other presses have expressed interest in the biography. The National Endowment for the Humanities has made a matching grant offer of \$44,000, one half of which is to be raised from third parties. Of the \$22,000 that can be matched, \$9,000 has been raised, leaving \$13,000 to be found. Unless matching funds are raised by October 31, 1983, Dr. Scott's work will be jeopardized. Contributions to this project are tax deductible and may be sent to: Academy of Independent Scholars (with note on the check "for biography of Michael Polanyi"), Campus Box 64, 970 Aurora, Boulder, Colorado, 80309.

REPORT ON THE NEXT STAGE
OF THE POLANYI SOCIETY

The growth of Polanyi studies and applications is exponential, as the survey of writing shows. At the same time, however, academic travel budgets are decreasing. The response to our requests for suggestions for a national Polanyi meeting were both positive and negative. Everyone agrees on the need for a general assembly but few can afford it. In the coming academic year, therefore, we are going to try to

schedule a series of regional meetings with either the present co-ordinator or a member of the disciplinary co-ordinators present to try to develop and gain a sense of future direction. In the next months, we will be trying to develop our membership list into potential regional meeting centers. Volunteers to host a day drive in meeting are welcomed. Please contact me for your offers or suggestions.

RG

SUBSCRIBE TO CONVIVIUM

The Polanyi association in Great Britain is known as Convivium and publishes at least twice a year the journal whose cover and contents are below. Subscriptions for overseas members are not yet fixed, but I would suggest \$8 to \$10 for air delivery or \$5 for surface mail. RG

Convivium

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