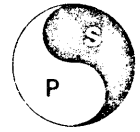


THE POLANYI SOCIETY



NEWS BULLETIN

VOL. IV

FALL

NO. 1

Greetings:

Among items of interest in this issue of the Society's Bulletin is a report by Professor Gelwick on the Polanyi Consultation held in October at the meeting of the AAR in St. Louis.

While several members of the Society continue to submit information regarding their reading and research related to issues of concern to us all, I sense that much more is happening than we are reporting. Also, while the reductionistic tendencies of scientism and the mechanistic structures of behaviorism are still very much at work in our society, I sense an increased level of critical evaluation taking place that should produce more exchange of information among us than is currently taking place.

Perhaps my observations are naive, but I think they have some basis in reality. By way of example, I recently asked a faculty colleague to invite a noted scholar in the Boston area to address our faculty on some of the failings of behaviorism, and he refused on the grounds that there was no sense beating a horse that had been dead for four decades. However that may be, I would like to encourage all members to share any items growing out of their own research and reading that may be of interest to other members in the Society.

Cordially,

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FK/ad

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I. Report on Polanyi Consultation

A Polanyi Consultation was held at the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion in St. Louis, Missouri, October 31, 1976. The meeting was co-chaired by Richard Gelwick, and Robert Osborn of Duke University. About forty persons took part in a lively three-hour session with three papers presented. The following statements are abstracts given by the presenters.

1. Reasons of the Heart: A Polanyian Reflection Jerry H. Gill, Eckerd College.

The aim was to focus on the notion of reasons of the heart "which the reason knows not of, "from the point of view of Michael Polanyi's insights on tacit knowing. While some important reasoning about religion is characterized by explicit factors, some necessarily involves tacit characteristics.

Four of these tacit characteristics were discussed:

- 1) Its mediational character, based in the interaction between focal and subsidiary awareness.
- 2) Its integrative character, based in the whole-part dynamic.
- 3) Its participatory character, flowing from the central role of embodiment.
- 4) Its communal character, which is grounded in the social-fabrid quality of existence.

The Respondent was: Frank Kirkpatrick, Trinity College.

2. Theology as Understanding John V. Apczynski, St. Bonaventure University.

The aim of this paper was to explore the formal procedures of theological understanding in light of the suggestions implicit in the thought of Michael Polanyi.

Presupposed is an understanding of religious faith as an act of "breaking out" whereby its intelligibility is tacitly held in the act of worship. In this sense, faith is a heuristic vision, expressed through appropriate symbols and embodied in special experiences. The object of faith thus can never be comprehended in Polanyi's technical sense. Theology's role is to analyze these experiences and explore the implications of tradition's symbols. The heuristic vision of faith is the source of intelligibility and the basis of objectivity for theology.

In this context theological understanding unfolds through two complementary phases mediated by a foundational inquiry. The first phase explores the levels of meaning sustained by the historical tradition. The second

phase attempts to translate these meanings into contemporary cultural terms. The mediation between the two is performed by a foundational inquiry establishing the conditions for approaching the historical tradition and for the contemporary expression of faith. This inquiry is foundational insofar as it examines the validity of the act of faith itself and assesses contemporary theological understanding of faith's implications.

The respondent was: Joseph Kroger, St. Michael's College.

3. Meaning with the Arts: The Implications of Polanyi's Epistemology for Aesthetics
Doug Adams, Pacific School of Religion

Polanyi's post-critical philosophy provides the ground for discussing shifts from modern to post-modern art and for developing a post-modern aesthetics beyond the pathological approach of the modern art critic or art historian. From Polanyi's understanding of the from-to or tacit-explicit structure of knowing, we see that modern art criticism has mistakenly attended explicitly to the formal qualities of art (when it should have attended only tacitly to such qualities). And this explicit fixation on form has resulted in the treatment of art as an end in itself and removed art as a medium for man to move beyond himself. Alternatively the art historian has inverted attention from the social context to the art and so reduced art to an object or artifact. The structure of knowing suggested by Polanyi's epistemology invites another alternative mode of aesthetics that attends tacitly from the art and explicitly to the meaning. Art thus serves again as a lively extension of man and not as an end or an artifact.

The respondent was: Phil Mullins, Graduate Theological Union.

We are also making plans for the next Polanyi Consultation at the next American Academy of Religion meeting in December of 1977 in San Francisco. The following general announcement is made for all persons wishing to participate in that meeting.

POLANYI CONSULTATION--

This consultation results from a philosophy and theology symposium in 1975 and then a consultation that began at the 1976 annual meeting. Members of the 1976 consultation have agreed to pursue the following two areas of inquiry at the next meeting: (1) Concentration on the extensions and implications of Polanyi for constructive theology rather than primary emphasis upon the exegesis and interpretation of his thought. There is keen interest in exploring examples of theology aided by Polanyi's philosophy; (2) To examine the problem of "theology and falsification" in a "post critical", i.e., Polanyian perspective. Persons interested in participating in this consultation and having specific proposals should write before March 15 to: Richard Gelwick, Religion and Philosophy Department, Stephens College, Columbia, MO, 65201.

--Dick Gelwick

II. Among Response to the Polanyi/Prosch Book on Meaning

Society members have kindly mailed copies of many excellent reviews on the volume, Meaning. Among them was the following delightful observation:

Tacit Inference by a Bicyclist Reading Meaning

By Michael Polanyi and Harry Prosch

Meaning is an explosive book and a beautiful coping stone for the magnificent Polanyi edifice. Clearly, members of the Polanyi Society feel a poignant gratitude to Michael Polanyi and to Harry Prosch that this last fine book saw the light of day--and so shortly before Polanyi's death. The book offers its reader a surprise gift, an embedded delight in seeing an important aspect of the book's meaning embodied in its mode of being: one must imagine a rare kind of mutual indwelling and knowing. another mind that went into the creation of so seamless and whole an essay, for one mind seems to move with creative energy and tacit coherence.

Except in one insignificant and, to me, delightful instance! There is a lapse by (I presume) Harry Prosch in dwelling in the art of bicycle riding.

...we cannot learn to keep our balance on a bicycle by trying to follow the explicit rule that, to compensate for an imbalance, we must force our bicycle into a curve--away from the direction of the imbalance--whose radius is proportional to the square of the bicycle's velocity over the angle of imbalance. Such knowledge is totally ineffectual unless it is known tacitly, that is, unless it is known subsidiarily--unless it is simply dwelt in.

--Meaning, p. 41.

I, a bicyclist, tried dwelling in it--and my body screamed and tensed against a pavement-smash! Without comment, I asked my high-school son, a professional bicycle mechanic and expert bicyclist, to read the paragraph. He looked up from it and said: "That's wrong. The direction of the curve is in the direction of the imbalance." To a bicyclist, the feel is of yielding to the bicycle's will, not forcing--look, Ma, no hands! Now in other places where Polanyi illustrated tacit knowing by bicycle riding (as in PK, pp. 49-50; "The Logic of Tacit Inference," K & B, p. 144; "Sense-Giving and Sense-Reading," K & B, p. 200; "The Creative Imagination," Toward a Unity of Knowledge (Psychological Issues, Monograph 22), pp. 62-3), he had it right. Conclusions: (1) Michael Polanyi, medical doctor, physical chemist, and philosopher, was also a bicyclist. (2) Harry Prosch, philosopher and superb personal-knowledge epistemologist, is not a bicyclist.

To be sure, the above is a sketchy inference, and it could easily turn out that Harry Prosch is a bicyclist or that Michael Polanyi did not ride a bicycle, but sometimes sketchy inferences, especially if they focus from pleasant subsidiaries, can be rather fun. More important, this trivial lapse of indwelling, if it is a lapse, can reaffirm by testing the sensitivity and depth of an awesome achievement of indwelling.

--Leonard Hegland

III. Bibliographic Notes

1. Petrie, Hugh G. "Do You See What I See? The Epistemology of Interdisciplinary Inquiry," The Journal of Aesthetic Education, Vol. 10, No. 1, January 1976.

Geoffrey Payzant calls our attention to this essay which relies heavily on a Polanyian orientation. The following paragraph, taken from the essay, is illustrative:

Tacit knowledge used interpretively can also be seen as extremely suggestive for my problem of how much and what kind of the others' disciplines must be learned for successful interdisciplinary work. One needs to learn enough so that this knowledge can be used to interpret the problem in the other disciplinary categories. Interpretive knowledge is almost surely used tacitly by the disciplinarian and this explains why it is so easy to overlook its importance in interdisciplinary work. Further, one often retreats to a common sense which is tacitly used by all when the going gets rough. My claim is that one *can* and probably must make this interpretive knowledge focal so that all can learn it well enough to enable it to function tacitly from then on in the operation of the group.

2. Chomsky, Norm, Review of Verbal Behavior by B.F. Skinner (The Century Psychological Series), 1957, in Language, Volume 35, Number 1, 1959.

A friend recently called my attention to this very careful critique of Skinner's first effort to incorporate the major aspects of linguistic behavior into a behaviorist framework. Chomsky's response will be of interest to students of Polanyi in that he shares many of Polanyi's concerns. In case the article escaped the attention of some other Polanyi members (as it did mine) I include it here. The following quote from Chomsky's critique is illustrative:

"He (Skinner) utilizes the experimental results as evidence for the scientific character of his system of behavior, and analogic guesses (formulated in terms of a metaphoric extension of the technical vocabulary of the laboratory) as evidence for its scope. This creates the illusion of a rigorous scientific theory with a very broad scope, although in fact the terms used in the description of real-life and of laboratory behavior may be mere homonyms, with at most a vague similarity of meaning. To substantiate this evaluation, a critical account of his book must show that with a literal reading (where the terms of the descriptive system have something like the technical meanings given in Skinner's definitions) the book covers almost no aspect of linguistic behavior, and that with a metaphoric reading, it's no more scientific than the traditional approaches to this subject matter, and rarely as clear and careful."

--Fred Kirschenmann

3. Forest Davis calls attention to the December 1, 1976 issue of Manas which makes extensive reference to Polanyi's ideas in an article entitled, "Hidden Identities."
4. Adams, Doug. "Meaning with the Arts: The Implication of Polanyi's Epistemology for Aesthetics." (Unpublished manuscript).

Taking his point of departure from the observation that "Michael Polanyi's post-critical philosophy provides the ground for discussing shifts from modern to post-modern art and for developing a post-modern aesthetics beyond the pathological approach of the modern art critic or art historian," Professor Adams pleads for consideration of Polyanian epistemology as a means of restoring art as a source for "a lively extension of man and not as an end or an artifact..."

A copy of this paper is on file in the Society's office.

5. Convivium

The Summer, 1976, issue of the Convivium Newsletter contains many items of interest to students of Polanyi's thought in this country. Among them is an intriguing article by Drusilla Scott on "Polanyi and Coleridge." Ms. Scott argues that Polanyi and Coleridge are in essential agreement because Coleridge's use of the "willing suspension of disbelief" did not mean a suspension of our disbelief in the prose content of a work of art, as stated in Meaning (Polanyi and Prosch) but rather means "acceptance within the terms of the poem." This shift in interpretation, argues Scott, means that the working of Coleridge's poetic imagination can be considered as "a field for the study of tacit knowledge."

IV. New Members

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V. Financial Statement

Balance, June 30, 1976		\$ 35.26
<u>Income</u>		
Membership Renewals		<u>321.00</u>
		356.26
<u>Expenses</u>		
Telephone	----	
Duplication & Supplies	25.35	
Postage	23.86	
Secretarial Services	30.00	
AAR Polanyi Reception	<u>50.00</u>	
	129.21	<u>129.21</u>
Balance, January 1, 1977		\$227.05