

# THE POLANYI SOCIETY



September 8, 1977

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Dear Member of the Polanyi Society:

As Fred Kirschenmann mentioned to you in his last correspondence, I have agreed to take over the task of coordinating the Newsletter for the next year.

It is my present hope to issue four copies of the Newsletter if the information I receive from the general membership gives me enough material to do so. Present plans call for mailing these out at the beginning of September, December, March, and June. I would request that you have any information for the Newsletter to me by the following deadlines: 15 November for December; 15 February for March; and 15 May for June.

Address all correspondence to me at:

University of Dayton  
Office for Moral and Religious Education  
Dayton, Ohio 45469

With best wishes,

Bruno V. Manno, Ph.D.  
General Coordinator

BVM/gdp

## RHETORIC IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF MICHAEL POLANYI

A Forum on "Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Michael Polanyi" was held in connection with the American Philosophical Association Convention in Chicago, April 29, 1977. Two papers were presented and three respondents were invited. A number of others attending the APA Convention were present, including Charles Hartshorne and Charner Perry.

Harry Prosch, Coordinator of Philosophy Studies for the Polanyi Society, served as Chairman and submits the following report.

Professor Sam Watson of the Department of English at the University of North Carolina held in his paper "Polanyi's Philosophy of Good Reasons," that rhetoric has historically been a rationale of informal reasoning, concerned with persons' dispositions to believe and act on their beliefs." He thought that rhetoricians are now getting back to dealing with rhetoric as this sort of thing. He thought that there is a growing tendency to take Polanyi's thought seriously in connection with such an enterprise.

He traced Polanyi's answers to two questions as examples of the usefulness of Polanyi's thought to an understanding of rhetoric.

First, he showed how Polanyi held that the destructive force of reductionistic (and of its offspring, totalitarian) thought arises from the rhetorical force of reason understood as formal demonstration (i.e., not as rhetorical demonstration) upon our beliefs and dispositions to act.

Second, he showed how Polanyi's new epistemology (his philosophy of "good," but not formally demonstrative reasons) is able to explain how rhetorical reasoning operates to influence our beliefs in an informal, non-demonstrative manner.

In Polanyi's terms, "good reasons" are really, Watson held, those subsidiaries which we integrate into a focal meaning. When shared by the persons involved in a discussion these subsidiaries enable these persons to see the meaning of what is being said and to understand each other's criticisms. When these subsidiaries are not already shared the audience's sympathy for them must be won sufficiently to dwell in them toward the meaning the speaker sees and wishes to persuade his' audience to hold. Such sympathetic acceptance, Watson quoted from Polanyi, "is a heuristic process, self-modifying act, and to this extent a conversion." "Good reasons" therefore exist, Watson said, "within the existential framework of personal commitment," and "are indwellings which interlocutors come to share."

Since Polanyi's thought holds that personally embodied and non-formal inferences underwrite all acts of knowledge, Watson claimed that what has usually been called rhetoric must undergird, for Polanyi anyhow, all attempts to seek and to state the truth. Rhetoric does not therefore, said Watson, become manipulative or cynical or hypocritical, but rather is understood to be a rational "engagement between co-equal humans."

Professor Robert L. Scott, Chairman of the Department of Speech and Communication at the University of Minnesota, suggested in his paper, "The Tacit Dimension and Rhetoric," that a departure from the "old rhetoric" which concentrated on the speaker and his kit of tools to a new one starting with the auditor as an active agent is currently beginning in the field of Rhetoric and can be particularly facilitated by the notion of the tacit dimension and the concomitant distinction Polanyi made between the focal and the subsidiary. The active role that the viewers play in Polanyi's ideas on the aesthetic experience involved in art (as well as in rites, ceremonies, and traditions) can be transferred, Scott found, to our understanding of how the audience is persuaded through its own active dwelling in subsidiary clues presented to it, and its own integration of these into a focus (as against some contemporary notions of rhetoric as a causal science or a technology of persuasion). Rhetorical persuasion, understood in this Polanyian way, he held, is the genesis of the interpersonal subjectivity involved in conviviality, affiliation, and commitment that Polanyi wrote so much about. Affiliation without commitment is a husk, said Scott, and the test of genuine commitment is certainly in part, at least, the "willingness to advocate to others positions based on it." This advocacy, Scott held, is in turn based on an urge to share; but more primarily, he claimed, we seek through it to confirm what we know--"the confirming seal is the assent of others," he said.

"The test of genuineness in commitment, then, is a double test: affiliation necessitates acting to persuade others, and conviviality demands that the persuader stand ready to be persuaded, not simply by counter-advocacy but by the disbelief of others."

Professor Richard Luecke, of the Department of Philosophy, Valparaiso University, responding to Watson's and to Scott's papers, indicated that their "good reasons" had converted him to the thought of Polanyi and to his rhetorical practice. He was moved, he said, to carry Polanyi's rhetorical practice, used by him for a particular disciplinary proposal, further to a rhetorical discrimination of various sorts of such proposal and to carry Polanyi's distinction between "indication" and "symbolization" further into the public sphere.

He showed the rhetorical value of being able to offer good reasons for taking alternate paths, rather than merely one, and then connected this developed capacity with the achievement of community and communication, whereby government by discussion might develop rather than government by a balancing of interests or by "experts" "brought in" to solve our problems for us.

In this sense, he held, rhetoric might "become once again an art of citizenship, and rhetoricians the teachers of citizens."

Professor Gerry Gill, Department of Philosophy at Eckert College, raised questions concerning what it is that makes good reasons good.

The general discussion moved with this into questions concerning how "conversions" from one set of basic commitments to another might be effected and whether Polanyi stood with or against Popper on certain issues, especially on the question of an "open society." Some discussants were of the opinion that both Polanyi and Popper really held that communication and community required some common commitments in order to exist and that the absolutely open society could not provide for such communication. Others believed that only Polanyi saw this as a necessity. The state of mind Polanyi espoused, in which one understands that, while none of his fundamental convictions can be demonstrably proved, he nevertheless confidently bases his thought and his actions upon them--and vigorously opposes those who think otherwise--proved difficult for some at the forum to see as a basis for tolerance rather than for intolerance. For these latter discussants it seemed that everything should be completely open and every view completely tolerated until the "truth" is discovered. That this position also contained a paradox was visible to some who were present, but not to all.

In other words, the fundamental issues that separate Polanyians for non-Polanyians were very much in evidence at this Forum. However, those who presented papers and their respondents seemed to be a rather general agreement among themselves.

Professor Harry S. Broudy of the College of Education at the University of Illinois was unable to be present due to transportation difficulties. He sent a copy of his response to the Chairman, however, which was not read at the meeting because of time pressures. A summary of it is presented here.

Broudy showed that Polanyi's version of knowing supports the claims that both Scott and Watson made--both that we must rely on good reasons rather than on logical demonstrations and

that a kind of knowing called rhetorical can be justified and explicated. He said that Polanyi's analysis clearly showed that even positivistic theories of knowing and science imply a dependence on tacit clues. But Broudy claimed that Polanyi did not show so clearly the sense in which this account of knowing provides evidence for the truth of a proposition or a belief.

Rationality, Broudy claimed, always means at least giving assent to propositions because they purport to be congruent with some sort of reality. The physical sciences do this, he held, by logical demonstration, explanation, and prediction of the phenomena. But to establish the congruence of belief and of the human reality constituted by intentions and ideals may require the kind of inquiry or knowing Scott called rhetorical. Since good reasons here may be hidden in the tacit components of our knowing, the art of persuasion, or rhetoric, has to make some of these tacit elements explicit.

The uses of rhetoric in education and in politics requires, among other things, that the credibility of the speaker (or teacher) needs to be established. Rhetoric in this sense must show us how to provide good reasons for believing in the speaker rather than merely in what he utters. The epistemology of rhetoric therefore, Broudy held, requires a study of the necessary and sufficient conditions for the establishment, maintenance, and restoration of credibility.

POLANYI AAR 1977 CONSULTATION, SAN FRANCISCO

Thursday 9-12, Dec. 29, 1977

Richard Gelwick, Stephens College, and John Apczynski, St. Bonaventure University, presiding.

The 1977 consultation will be on an open basis and invites all interested Polanyi scholars to participate. The topics grow out of last year's discussion and will focus on the extensions and implications of Polanyi's thought for Christian theology. The following papers will be presented as a basis for discussion.

Charles S. McCoy, Pacific School of Religion and Graduate Theological Union, "Polanyi and Pluralistic Theology". Respondent, Frank Kirkpatrick, Trinity College, Hartford.

Robert T. Osborn, Duke University, "Polanyi and Liberation Theology". Respondent, Bruno Manno, University of Dayton.

Joe Kroger, St. Michaels College, "A Theology of Discovery". Respondent, Harold Kuester, New College

Persons wishing to participate in the Consultation should secure copies of the papers from their authors by writing to the above addresses, enclosing one dollar for expenses, and also notifying Richard Gelwick, Stephens College, Columbia, Missouri 65201.

#### PUBLICATION ANNOUNCEMENT

Oxford University Press has announced the publication of a book which can serve as an introduction to the thought of Michael Polanyi. It is entitled THE WAY OF DISCOVERY and is authored by Richard Gelwick.

From Richard Gelwick I received the following correspondence:

I attended the International Academy of Religious Science and the International Academy of Philosophy of Science symposiums on "Christian Theology in the Context of a Scientific Revolution" at St. John's University this month. Michael's philosophy was very much in the forefront in the presentations of a number of speakers, including Professor Torrance of Edinburgh.