THE POLANYI SOCIETY

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With the Fall issue of the Polanyi Society Newsletter, we began an experiment with the development of a modest periodical and also the bringing up to date our membership list. Both of these efforts have been useful to our purposes.

First, the general response to the idea of a periodical has been very positive and this issue begins the publication of articles submitted for this purpose as well as continuing our sharing of news generally. The question of a title for the periodical got an open but varied response. Most were favorable toward any name that continued to foster Polanyi interest. Some merely wanted to continue the present title "Polanyi Society." A compromise is to combine both a new title with a subtitle such as "Periodical of the Polanyi Society." The advantage of a periodical title is for citation by authors and libraries in their works. We are proposing three choices: DISCOVERY: PERIODICAL OF THE POLANYI SOCIETY OR COMMON GROUND: PERIODICAL OF THE POLANYI SOCIETY. Let us hear your preference, or if you will, your alternatives or objections.

Second, the December mailing of the Fall issue with the membership renewal form was a disaster. Although the first class mail, many numbers reported not receiving the rust colored booklet that was sent out and consequently missed both its news and the opportunity for membership renewal. A membership renewal form is enclosed again for those who did not receive or return for 1983-84. For the sake of the periodical budget, membership in the future will be more specifically on an annual academic year basis.

Finally, the willingness to expand our communication, to produce materials for publication, in addition to the editorial and advisory responsibility, is very encouraging. All of our labor in producing the newsletter and periodical are presently donated, which makes our functioning on a small budget feasible. Your and Stephens College’s support are very much appreciated.

Richard Gabriel

MEMBERSHIP AND A PERIODICAL

SUBMISSIONS FOR PUBLICATION

Please use material typed and camera ready so that we do not have to retype it. Put the article’s title in capital letters, your name under the title, use 1/4 inch margins, and pencil on lightly the page numbers. Please send two copies.
historian studies the profoundly unique personalities of the past; such study is the most intimate form of scientific inquiry—it more closely resembles an encounter than an observational act—and it reveals the most comprehensive dimensions of reality, those dimensions concerned with human beings as thinking creatures.

In sum, in Polanyi's conception of comprehensive entities, knowing and being are united. Polanyi's notion of reality serves to link knowing and being: his conception is likely to be problematic for those who wish to dissent exclusively from either the perspective of knowing or that of being. Reality is an emergent, an intricately complex fabric of relationally constituted entities whose rich depths human investigations constantly seek to uncover.

Can the novel philosophical position in which Polanyi discusses reality provide a foundation for understanding ritual, a phenomenon pervasive in human experience? This is a question which I believe merits exploration. Polanyi himself, of course, was interested in the ways in which myth and ritual provide meaning in human society. Others, however, who have studied ritual have taken approaches which introduce questions about reality more directly: Ronald Grimes, a contemporary student of ritual, develops ideas I find especially fruitful. In “Defining Nascent Ritual,” Grimes proposes the following “soft” definition of what he terms “ritualizing, which is the process whereby ritual creativity is exercised”:

Ritualizing transpires as an animated persons enact formative gestures in the face of receptivity during crucial times in found places.

These brief reflections explicate, analyze and modestly re-formulate, from a Polanyian perspective, the point of view articulated in Grimes' essay definition. I find Grimes' perspective a congenial one here I intend primarily to begin charting territory which others interested in either or both the work of Grimes or Polanyi can further explore.

More needs to be said, initially, about “ritualizing.” The general form of the neologism emphasizes that Grimes' interest is in an activity. This activity is a name for “creative” or "nascent" ritual.” Nascent ritualizing processes sometimes develop into rituals and ritual systems at other times they do not. By studying ritualizing as a genre of action, a more comprehensive view of ritual itself may be developed. Grimes suggests that study of ritual need to appreciate the emergence of ritual in developmental terms: ritualizing thus is the first phase of such an emergence. But as more is of interest is another element of a developmental typology. According to Grimes, ritualizing is an activity clearly linked to theatre and healing. Encounters with the therapist as well as the gestural activity of some experimental theatre groups have not yet developed into components, even though such activities do not become rituals of a more stable, conventional sort. Grimes

Polanyi's appreciation for the diversity and complexity of reality is implied in his vision of a spectrum of sciences ranging from physics to the study of dramatic history. He understands the study of drama, i.e., dramatic history, as an endeavor in continuity with the study of nature. The
finds these post-modern domains of intrinsic interest: much of his recent field work has, in fact, been with experimental theatre, where he views an essential element in attempting to generate ritual processes and "incubate religious symbols."  An important, striking image in Grimes' discussion of ritual is the image of the human being as a ritual actor. A ritual actor is a person, although not all persons are human beings. A person is "one who invests surfaces with a sense of significance." Those who participate in ritual are "persona" beings who "concretize and display values by means such as clothing, facial gesture, posture, or even objects." The ritual actor is anointed or enspirited in that he/she is infused with certain values displayed in significant surfaces. Ritualizing, the nascent phase of ritual, occurs as a layering or stripping of such surfaces. Such ritual actions are "thick with sensory meaning" and "attempts to wed the indicative and subjunctive, the literal and symbolic, the real and the dramatic."  

Ritual enactment occurs only as the actor recognizes a certain responsive surfaces of some aspect of the cosmos. Grimes therefore speaks of a perceived receptive face necessary for ritualizing: the facebefore which ritualizing is enacted is not reducible to the same surface or front part of something. Rather the face is that facet upon which some act depends. This face elicits gestures from the ritual actor. Such gestures make ritual enactment a communicative action received by others, sometimes very deeply. Grimes views gesture as the heart of ritual and ritualizing. The persona's performance takes concrete form in the body. The ritualizing moment is one in which the body knowingly responds. But too often the ritual-analytical of ritualizing misses the significance of the body's way of knowing and transposes enactment into an illustration of myth and idea. Ritual gestures are "movements and poses as bearers of evocative power." They are "attitudes"—"the total bearing of a person who expresses a valued style of living." Gestures or attitudes are recognizable styles which evoke feeling and sensibilities which can form culture. The gestures of ritual participants are located and occurring deeds. Ritual and ritualizing occur at junctures of our temporal experience. But it is also the case that our sense of lifetime as a fabric, woven with the thread of temporality, reflects our immersion in ritual: "Ritual is formative of the ways we live our time." Ritual occurs not just in space but in a fundamental place, ground hallowed and "pregnant with formative power." Persona responding to a face of receptivity do so in ritual places; ritual gestures are in part elicited by the persona's sense of being grounded by place. Ritual places become a generative center from which the larger oriented world takes shape.

Finally, it is the image of ritual as a living phenomenon that Grimes seeks to emphasize: "Rituals have life cycles and life spans. They occur. They do not merely recur. A ritual is a performance, a 'going through form.' The dynamism of ritual is best represented as an analogue of breathing. Breathing is rhythmic to some degree controllable by conscious subjects. But breathing also has an involuntary aspect, a life of its own which in fact sustains human life and upowers, at times, the intentional modes of human being. But breathing always gets away from us. Likewise ritual. We can form it and modulate it, but because it is a response to processes that encompass and exceed us, we cannot contain it for long. It escapes, finds other forms, and spins new webs. As for breathing so for ritualizing there are voluntary qualities and involuntary qualities are central.

It is particularly the spontaneous, preconscious, foundational aspects of ritualizing to which the breathing metaphor draws attention: 'Ritualizing emerges periodically in the interface between our cultural and genetic heritage.'

III

In order to clarify what I deem the most fruitful and suggestive elements of Grimes' approach to ritual, a question can be posed: can ritualizing as a type of human action be appropriately described as a mode of human experience? Certainly, Grimes seems to depend upon and to presuppose the adequacy of a language of experience. He argues the ritual actor recognizes a receptive face of the cosmos and becomes an animated being; the act is a creature who articulates with the body a formative bearing which is a response to that fundament which has presented itself. Such a perspective seemingly accepts human experience as its ground. As I read Grimes' perspective, however, he is careful not to exploit a language of experience in order to resolve the human involvement in ritualizing into either a psychological state or a psycho-social function.

Grimes' definition is a conservative definition in the sense that he denies the validity of the law of parsimony often found operative in accounts of ritual: such a law explains—and often explains away—the experience of a ritual participant in psychological or sociological terms. Ritual involvement is only partially illuminated by speaking chiefly of its effect on human adjustment and well-being. Grimes' definition struggles to emphasize the sense in which ritualizing and ritual processes are richer phenomena than envisioned by such a human-centered account. Ritual involvement is of more than human making, ritualizing is an activity in which "we come ourselves, we make ourselves." The emphasis here, and throughout Grimes' reflections, is upon the deeply-felt call impinging upon the ritual actor and not to be misconstrued as an emphasis upon the subjectivism of the actor. Since many of Grimes' examples come from experimental theatre, it is likely he misunderstands this point. Grimes draws our attention in quite a different direction.
His point of departure for studying ritual seems to me, instead, what might be termed cosmic vitalism. That is, it is the dynamics of the cosmos reaching into the human realm which Grimes seeks to illuminate in fixing attention on ritualizing: "Ritualizing is how we actively wait formative pulsations." Ritual enactment is a responsive, gestural deed which is grounded in the lure of transitional rhythms of the cosmos. ... the compelling force of ritual exceeds private ownership."

A part of Grimes' attempt to make a place for the initiating dynamism of the cosmos reaching into the realm of the ritual actor emerges in his discussion of "animation." Although animating power is variously named, according to Grimes, such power is a critical element in all ritual processes, for such power breathes life into the persona; the body of the ritual actor thus becomes the body of the person. The ritual person becomes masked. Grimes' discussion of animation conspicuously avoids the type of experiential language found in discussions of animism whereby a subject involved in ritual is said to "personify." "Personification" often is identified as a process in which internal concepts and feelings of a subject are projected upon an external environment. Grimes carefully avoids such a Cartesian framework in his analysis of animation.

In this era when thinkers in religious studies manifest a certain inebriation with human imagination, it is of interest that Grimes' analysis includes no treatment of the contribution of imagination to ritualizing. I suspect Grimes' intention in such an omission is to transcend our normal Cartesian image of the imagination as a subject's faculty. Like accounts of "personification," accounts of imagination easily slip into a bifurcated conceptual framework which presupposes an imagining subject fundamentally estranged from the cosmos. Rather than focusing attention on an imagining subject, Grimes speaks of ritualizing enactment which occurs only in a context of receptivity: "Ritualizing is enactment in the face of imagined, socially experienced and mythically construed receptivity." Ritualizing is enactment "before" a face of the cosmos; such a "face," according to Grimes, has many names and "is not objectifiable though it is "other." It is as much inside the ritual actor as outside."

I find Grimes' analysis, in sum, one which struggles to escape a subject-world dualism. It is an analysis implying that ritual studies require a lexicon that acknowledges the affective power exerted upon persons by a fundamentally dynamic cosmos. Although I cannot, in these preliminary comments, explore this formulation, I conclude with another "soft" definition of ritualizing which relies on Polanyi's philosophical framework and, in particular, his conception of reality... I view my formulation as complementing Grimes' perspective, while at the same time making clearer the vitalism I find there: Ritualizing occurs as bodily creatures are comprehended (i.e., grasped or overtake) by the transcending real emergent in the cosmos.
EVOLUTION AND THE ACTS OF GOD

David N. Rutledge, Furman University

This paper begins with the assumption that Christian notions of "act of God" have been particularly inadequate since the Darwinian theory of evolution rendered classical views of natural theology untenable. Any satisfactory conception of God's action in the world must be developed with full awareness of the challenge which modern evolutionary theory presents to traditional views. My purpose here is to delineate the nature of this challenge, and some of the reasons it has not been adequately acknowledged or understood by Christian apologists. My own work thus far has tended to support the suggestion of Polanyi and others that an inaccurate understanding of science has distorted a number of academic disciplines which have attempted either to model themselves upon science, or challenge its apparent claims. This paper looks at such a general claim in the concrete disputes of religion and science in the nineteenth century.

The particular issue on which I concentrate below in the apparent conditioning of many Christian responses to Darwin by an allegiance to an inductive, scrupulously empirical model of knowledge which, while similar in spirit to the scientific model of the day, actually prevented any engagement with the most serious challenges of evolution to traditional views of God. I first pull together general and specific evidence that Baconian empiricism dominated American theology in mid-century, effectively blocking an accurate assessment of both evolutionary theory and its relationship to biblical reality; and second, I indicate that the claim to eliminate "purpose" and "design" from the world was the evolutionary position which most needed, and still needs, adequate theological examination.

I first assume, on the basis of recent research by a variety of people, that the military metaphor of "conflict" which has governed religion and science research for the past twenty years, is seriously inaccurate and should be discarded. I assume, secondly, that far from being essentially a "religion versus science" struggle, the evolution debate was chiefly a confrontation of two rival views of what science was, the clash of two different epistemologies and philosophies of science. And third, I assume that when the Origin of Species was published, no consensus had been reached in England or America as to the implications of the new approaches to biblical study then being introduced by romanticism and German scholarship.

This doomed the religious response to Darwin to take place primarily within the traditional interpretive framework of inerrancy, producing ignorance and misunderstanding on both sides of the question.

Bozeman, Hovencamp, and Marsden have clarified in recent years the extent to which American and British religious thought in the mid-nineteenth century was strongly influenced by the empiricism of the Scottish philosophers, or Common Sense Realism. The movement was primarily the result of the work of two men, Thomas Reid (1710-1796) and Dugald Stewart (1753-1828). Their distinctive point of view can be summarized as displaying great enthusiasm for science; identifying Francis Bacon, rather than Newton, as the father of modern science; and claiming that all knowledge is empirically obtained. They argued that objective facts are decisive in the legitimation of knowledge claims, and general laws are simply careful summaries of the facts, rooted in a meticulous survey of the particulars. Hypotheses, theories, and imaginative constructs in general were distrusted, therefore, for such constructs gave free reign to mental inventiveness, imprudence, and fantasy. It yielded only metaphysical extravagances, not knowledge. This empirical demand for knowledge did restrict its scope, but it had the virtue of producing certainty, as the gains of natural science testified.

Such a philosophy, dominant in many intellectual circles of England and America until the middle of the nineteenth century, provided an epistemological foundation for the biblical orthodoxy that characterized the 1800s. It was compatible with, and even encouraged, natural science, and sent the exegete looking in the pages of the biblical text for the "facts" of God's revelation. The particular form of this influence in America was conservative, or Old School, Presbyterianism. Through its strong confessionalism, insistence on verbal inspiration of scripture, thorough seminary training of ministers, and Baconian interest in natural science, the Old School Presbyterianism led by Charles Hodge and Henry Ward Beecher was prepared to challenge Darwinism from a traditional perspective. I will now turn to one of the people who took up the task.

John William Dawson

To give concrete detail to this picture of the confusion of empiricism and biblicalism, I want to examine one man, a Canadian who described himself as a "geologist and natural theologian." John William Dawson is a useful figure to study because he was both a noted scientist and a competent exegete of inerrantist persuasions; he opposed evolution fiercely, yet sided with Darwin on less momentous scientific issues; and he has not been as exhaustively studied as have his contemporaries, Gray, Agassiz, or Sedgwick.

A slightly younger contemporary of Darwin, Dawson was born in 1820 to Scottish Presbyterian parents, and lived most of his life in Canada, dying in Montreal in 1899. A geologist, he became "the best-distinguished anti-Darwinian" according to the English-speaking world" according to Darwin, or Agassiz in 1873. From his biography we may note his early
study of Hebrew, his study at Edinburgh, the stronghold of Common Sense Realism, and his distinguished scientific career. This impact is a conjunction of these scientific achievements in two books with which I wish to deal, The Origin of the World According to Revelation and Science (1884) and Modern Ideas of Evolution, as Related to Revelation and Science (1890).

First, these books show Dawson's scientific empiricism clearly. He criticizes evolution's tendency to engage in "all-embracing generalizations," "speculations," "assumptions," "suppositions," and in the "hypothetical." Science must return, he argues, somewhat plaintively, to "exact science" that is careful and deliberate in nature. In a variety of ways, he argues that evolutionary theory does not rest solidly on a foundation of facts, to which it is related by induction, but on a moment of insight by Darwin. Lacking full substantiation, which in the nature of the case cannot be provided (we have no eye-witnesses and no primary data from the moment of origin), the theory remains a highly dubious hypothesis. A characteristic comment:

...so long as any writers state correctly what they observe, without insisting on any fanciful hypothesis, science has no fault to find with them. What science most detests is the ignorant speculations of those who have not observed at all, or have observed imperfectly. It is a leading excellence of the Hebrew Scriptures that they state facts without giving any theories to account for them. (Origin, p. 60n.)

A second common strategy of Dawson's is to persistently discredit specifically literary readings or interpretations of the Bible. He distinguishes between "poetical mythos," which is a fanciful invention, "figurative expressions," which are colorful ways of stating facts, and "descriptive" statements, which give us truth in direct fashion. He only discusses the historically oriented books of the Bible, neglecting prophets, wisdom, and poetic books. At one point he calls for a reduction of "verbal and literary training" in seminaries in order to increase the amount of scientific preparation. Here he reflects the general anti-pathy of conservative American Calvinism to humanistic studies generally.

The final end of these assumptions is a view of a Bible as a mirror image of the natural, physical world. Both are the products of God's benevolent activity, and both worlds can be read for revealed truth if we use the proper methods, those of the exegete, and those of science. "Truth" is a function of a statement's correspondence to physical reality, and there can be no essential conflict between faith and science. Here the conservative Dawson sounds identical to the liberal Deists who developed natural theology into a high art in the English-speaking world. It is a position which increasingly isolates Dawson from his scientific colleagues. Most of his colleagues make the "paradigm switch" to the new way of conceiving science, just as some of his religious brethren make the switch to the new way of conceiving the Bible that is developed by higher criticism. Why was Dawson unable to change?

One answer is that Dawson's conviction that truth lies in the realm of physical entities alone prevented him from accepting the utility of a scientific theory that went far beyond the available facts in its implications, just as it prevented his appreciation of the metaphorical level of scriptural narrative. This is an unsurprising position when we reflect on the degree to which the scientific revolution has reshaped conceptions of knowledge and value. As many, Michael Polanyi among them, have argued, the empiricist sensibility is the dominant sensibility, or epistemological paradigm, of our age. To the degree that this is so, it is perfectly natural to find scientific creationists in contemporary America. They are visible reminders of the cruel dilemma into which people who take both Bible and science seriously are often put. The crucial mistake of Dawson's position is, I would suggest, that he manacles theology to a standard intrinsically inimicable to it. It was to give to an external, extra-territorial criterion -- that of scientific knowledge -- the power and the right to determine the shape of religious belief. One consequence of this "sell out" to science on the part of Old School Realism was the orphaning of biblicism when biology accepted evolutionary theory as its central principle. Without a strictly empirical science to keep man's investigation of nature within biblical paradigms, a biblicism like Dawson's fell easy prey to fundamentalism. A second consequence was the distortion of Christianity's consideration of evolution by the empiricist model of truth. To see this more clearly, we will turn to Design in the science and theology of Darwin's day.

The Issue of Design

Histories of the period commonly say that Darwin destroyed the argument from Design. This cliché is inaccurate in several respects. First, Darwin 'destroys,' or at least renders problematic, only one form of the Design argument, that of William Paley and the "Evidences" school; other forms are perhaps possible. Second, Darwin can not obliterate design in nature, but only a state of mind that saw pattern as design. Third, what is weakened by evolution is, perhaps, not design (or pattern) in nature, but an argument for God's existence based on such design. Fourth, Darwin's real target in the Origin is not design in nature, but special creation as a scientific explanation. And finally, the various ways of understanding "design" in the period must be clarified. From
these issues, let me select a few assertions that can, I think, be defended.

The "design" of Dawson and his contemporaries was "an arrangement of parts according to plan so as to produce a complete pattern." Its emphasis is not on function (that the eye is designed in order to see), as much as it is on the fittingness or orderliness of pattern, for a man like Dawson was perfectly aware that some features of nature seemed to have no discernible function (rudimentary or vestigial organs, etc.), and must simply serve to satisfy the Creator's love of beauty, or variety. What is significant about this view is that the design of nature is static; it need not be seen as a pattern fixed eternally by the Creator in His initial act of creation. Nature then can be understood to have the formal structure of a system, a library bookshelf, in which books are arranged horizontally according to some exact system (the Dewey Decimal system, perhaps), and these shelves then arranged vertically in cases. A library of this sort is the antithesis of accident; it, like the nature of Dawson, is a model of planned contrivance, of rational design. In the realist, however, though books may be entered or removed at different times, the design of the whole, that is, the system of order governing where books are placed, is unchanging, inflexible.

For the realist, such a static view of design coheres perfectly with an empiricist epistemology, for in it the human mind operates as a great categorizer, placing like with like until every particle of nature is properly arranged within God's system. God is not capricious, and thus facts can be expected to be related in orderly ways. In both science and theology, the human mind can passively piece together the parts of God's system until the complete pattern emerges.

Darwin's objection to such views, which N. Gillespie has exhaustively analyzed, is that they are useless in science because they do not explain anything, that is, give predictive power. The ultimate explanation will be a design framework is 'God's will,' which is beyond our comprehension. Thus it is on scientific grounds that Darwin opposes the empiricist views of design -- they are unproductive.

At this point we can begin to sense that "design," "purpose," "pattern," and related terms do not comfortably fit into positivistic language. The literalistic imagination of an empiricist like Dawson, which tries to conceive of every dimension of life in terms of Newtonian mechanics, results in knowledge that is stripped of ambiguity and equivocation. This is a great gain for the biologist interested in certainty, but it has the unintended consequence of making the acts of God disappear altogether. For if the positivistic (or empiricist) epistemology is accepted, then God can only be said to "act" through nature, in "creation by law," where His activity takes the form of physical events fully within the realm of physical nature. Thus, if our allegiance is to this empirical mind-set, then only Nature can "act," and God loses almost all personal reality in His relation to the individual believer. To know Nature is to know God, but we know nothing of God except what we know of nature. "That tremendous word," God, becomes superfluous.

If, however, we do not accept the mind-set of empiricism, then we are free to think and speak in non-literal ways. Metaphor and symbol become the central features of both language and knowledge, such that in conceiving of God and His actions in the world, we affirm that the meaning of that action is unspecified in any complete way. Such symbolic thought reminds us that there is always more to a real event than the surface, physical features of which science speaks. The literalist imagination strives at control; the symbolic imagination strives toward participation, and demands openness, wonder, flexibility, and vulnerability. When re-oriented in this way, we do not think of God's acts as another kind of force producing discrete, external changes in physical reality, but we attend to the biblical affirmation that God is unquantifiable, and is primarily known in experiences of justice or of love. In short, to know God we must first attend to the interaction of persons, not of mere chemicals or forces. To think otherwise would be to mistake God's place in our world of meaning for His "space" in a world of fact.

Such re-orientation is difficult to achieve. One cogent effort in the direction I have in mind is in Gary's recent book On Knowing God, in which he uses Wittgenstein, Merleau-Ponty, and Polanyi to envision alternative ways of conceiving of language, action, knowledge, and eventually, God. But if my historical comments are correct, a coherent theology will be possible only after such re-orientation occurs. The degree of difficulty we may anticipate is suggested in a comment by Poteat: "Persuading a man that he ought to think of the world as having been created is not unlike persuading a man who speaks a language having no personal pronouns that there are persons."

1This paper condenses its original form considerably, particularly in eliminating all notes. Interested persons are encouraged to write to the author for the fuller version.

The primary texts used, in addition to those cited here, are cited in James C. Livingston, "Darwin, Darwinianism, and Theology: Recent Studies," Religious Studies Review, 8(2) (April, 1982).
Knowing In Action: A Conference on Michael Polanyi and Education held at Kent State University, Kent, Ohio, March 8 and 9 was an outstanding success. Despite a blizzard that closed the university, roads, and airlines on the opening evening of the conference, about 250 participants attended the next day. Polanyi Society members traveling to the conference were the most affected, and a number traveling from North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Kentucky had to turn back. The twenty members did attend had special meetings for their own work and abstracts of their papers are included in this issue.

Raymond Wilken is to be congratulated for his meticulous and excellent planning and organization. There is reported interest in having another conference at Kent State in the future. The papers of the conference speakers are being considered for publication by a major education journal. Video tapes of the addresses are $2.50 to be available through Raymond Wilken.

One of the valuable results of the conference is the national interest that it generated. A number of persons discovered Polanyi and the Polanyi Society and have joined. Wilken has had many requests for copies of the conference materials.

The conference opened with a banquet for the Polanyi Society members followed by a spontaneous round table discussion sparked by the leadership of Bruce Raddick of Simpson College. The addresses of the conference were as follows: Richard Galwick, "Catching Knowing in Action: Polanyi's Discovery;" Harry S. Brown, University of Illinois, "The Uses of Knowledge in Personal Life and Professional Practice;" Donald T. Campbell, Lehigh University, "Michael Polanyi's Epistemological Sociology of Science and Its Importance for Educational Research;" Maxine Green, Columbia University, "The Problematics of the Humanities: Polanyi's Cues and Clues;" and Avery Dulles, Catholic University of America, "Michael Polanyi's Theory of Knowledge and Contemporary Theology."

The conference staff working with Raymond Wilken as hosts and planners was most gracious and effective. If a future conference can be held there, everyone present at this one will want to return.

Abstracts of "John Dewey and Polanyi"
by Harry Proshak

My presentation will show the striking similarities of John Dewey's analysis to that of Michael Polanyi of the problem of modern thought which our modern philosophies have not adequately handled. These include his notion that modern science has fostered in us the idea of material reductionism which has left the moral and spiritual beauties of the world adrift, with no understandable connections in a world thought to be fully governed by mathematical and mechanical laws. Our failure to solve this problem is due, he thought, to our commitment to the notion that the world is a static world of things and that values, if any can be found, would have to be found as properties of these things.

The nature of the shift in epistemological and ontological beliefs advocated by Dewey as needed for a solution resulted in his finding that our notion of objectivity has been misplaced, since it cannot be used to the public consequences of our intended actions, as simply some of the interactions which are what really constitute the stuff of the world. The paper shows, however, that, as Polanyi has pointed out, not even such public actions can avoid the necessity of subjecting to our personal judgments about their meaning and significance, and thus that Dewey actually failed to find something wholly objective to hang his epistemology upon.

I then show how Dewey is led by his proposed resolution to come to the notion that true knowledge is technical, or is engineering in form, and thus to his proposal that education and social guidance are like other engineering arts, but that certain tacit understandings of Dewey led him to develop his concepts of these "engineering" arts along the lines of participatory democracies—instead of along the lines of, say, civil engineering.

Evidence is then shown for the operation in Dewey's thought of tacit elements and even for a glinting of the subsidiary-focal, very like Polanyi's, although it is also shown that, unlike Polanyi, Dewey did not seem to recognize the existence of these elements explicitly.

I then suggest that reading Dewey with the kind of respect for such elements engendered by Polanyi's work enables us, both to understand Dewey...
better, and to provide, in some instances, better grounds for his conclusions. Then I show how the grounding which Polanyi gave in "outsider-biology" for the necessity of "mutuality" in achieving our very knowledge of man provides a far more cogent basis for democratic methods in education and in the organization of the society than that provided by Dewey (which was said by him only to be a "faith" in the potentialities of [mill} human beings).

My presentation will conclude by showing how Polanyi claimed that it is essential for our free society to respect its traditional values which values Dewey appeared to call seriously into question, although he actually seemed to retain them tacitly in his work.

NOTE: This will be an extremely condensed version of a longer paper I have submitted for publication in what I hope is an appropriate journal.

Tacit Knowledge in Social Work Research and Practice

Abstract

Michael Polanyi's concept of the tacit dimension in all knowing is helpful in clarifying some of the problems researchers and practitioners in social work encounter in trying to work together. Part of the difficulty is seen to be related to the tendency in social work to accept positivist definitions of science, and hence of researchers, as objective and, if not value free, at least neutral with respect to value questions. Practitioners on the other hand are seen as subjective and inclined to be influenced in their thinking by intuition and personal preferences.

This paper discusses Polanyi's concept of how the person of the scientist and commitments at various levels are involved in research. The place and importance of intuition in both science and social work practice is noted. Reference is made to comments by David Bohm about how it is possible for insight to free the mind from the traps of scientific absolutism (which at times appears to have replaced the religious absolutism against which science originally revolted.)

It is suggested, however, that there is an important difference in the degree of detachment possible in physical science in contrast to the prima facie personal involvement of practitioners with other human beings. This inevitable interpersonal involvement needs to be studied and recognition of the tacit dimension, in both social worker and client, would be enlightening in this process. (Much practice research has been reductive in effect as it has been designed to meet the requirements of empirical research defined in positivist terms.)

Several areas for possible exploration are indicated. For example, social work education and practice consistently emphasize the necessity of self awareness and perceptive use of self. What is meant by these expressions can be seen to be clarified by Polanyi's concept of indwelling. The practitioner dwells in the self with all of its tacit components, including skills learned first tacitly and then known tacitly, while focusing on learning to understand and meet the needs of this other human being. It is these tacit components which make it possible to, as Polanyi might say, to "know the mind" of this other person—and thus to understand what is needed.

This paper represents a beginning exploration of how Polanyi's concepts might illuminate social work processes and open the way for research into what practice is really about.

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HOW POLANYI WOULD IMPROVE DAVID TRACY'S ANALYSIS OF THE CLASSIC

Dr. Aaron Hilove
Carthage College

In recent years, David Tracy has emerged as a major spokesman for specifying the function of the Scriptures within the theological enterprise as paralleling the role which classics play within the humanities. In his latest volume, The Analogical Imagination (1981), Tracy argues that the "dangerous memory of genius" erupts anew in new situations, having been evoked by those who honor the classical Christian texts. These fresh eruptions, Tracy endeavors to justify as the Christian counterpart of the solans claim to meaning and truth which the classics in art, music, drama, literature exert upon their respective publics. Tracy himself acknowledges that "the heart of the argument of the entire book may be found in the argument on the phenomenon of the classic"(ix).

I have strong sympathy with Tracy's basic program. My own writings have independently arrived at many parallels with Tracy's thought. With my background in Gadamer and Polanyi, however, I judge that I am an excellent position to improve and correct Tracy's description of "the phenomenon of the classic." Accordingly the body of my paper will isolate three soft spots within Tracy's analysis and propose how Polanyi would remedy them:

1. Tracy's analysis of the classics is nearly devoid of a proper recognition of how authority and systematic appropriations function to determine the proper meaning and performance of the classics.

2. Tracy's analysis of the functions of the classics concentrates almost exclusively on their prophetic function in marking fresh and startling discoveries while neglecting the prior conservative function whereby the appropriate classics serve to impose correct modes of feeling and perception upon a widely dispersed (in place and in time) body of adherents.

3. Tracy's analysis of the production of the classics fails to functionally interrelate talent, training, and inspiration and overplays (following Nietzsche) the role of "dislocation" in the production of a work of genius. As such, Tracy is unable to provide any persuasive description of how colleagues come to recognize "genius" within the production of one of their peers.

In sum, the Sacred Scriptures do function within the church in much the same way as the classics in art, music, and science function within their respective publics but Tracy's analysis provides an elliptic and misleading view of how classics function that needs to be corrected and supplemented by the richer perspective of Michael Polanyi.

ABSTRACT

Richard C. Gelwick
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William Perry's Modal of Cognitive Development and Michael Polanyi's Philosophy of Commitment

The aim of this paper is twofold:

1. To elaborate more fully than William Perry has done the philosophical foundation of commitment in relational relativism based upon the philosophy of Michael Polanyi and

2. To show how the creative work of both Perry and Polanyi is related to the person's personal development and personal knowledge although Perry's account published in 1970 in The Mind at Work and the other's account published in 1953 in Personal Knowledge. In both cases, the philosophical position is that a person's judgment based upon the experience of a personal commitment is not merely a perception but is personal and subjective. Perry's model has described the processes and changes by which college students grow from simplistic and dualistic caricatures toward intelligent inter-subjective comprehension of knowledge in context. Polanyi's modal theory is a philosophical foundation for his work in not only appropriate and correct but also the kind of application and extension of Polanyi's epistemology that Polanyi himself sought.

In conclusion, the two figures reveal some basic similarities. Perry contends in the less mature mind a way of thinking about the nature of knowledge and reality that presents itself in absolute alternatives. Furthermore, when this approach to knowing does not seem to work later stages move toward a type of synthetic attitude, tends to show commitment to available alternatives since there is no satisfactory absolute and one position seems to be as truthful as any other. This position described by Perry in the intellectual development of college students is parallel to a much larger cultural situation recognized by Polanyi in his philosophy where the Enlightenment led at first toward a search for absolute rational truths but in the 19th and 20th century turned into positivism and nihilism, both forms of disappointment with the failure of finding absolute answers. Perry found, however, in his research that students do move in some cases beyond these stages toward learning to make commitments toward truth by recognizing how to hold to knowledge in a particular context. Michael Polanyi argues for a similar alternative in the whole philosophy of knowledge by showing how it is possible to be committed to some knowledge as true even though conceptively it might be false even though conceptively it might be false. Both are aimed at making knowledge to be true universally even when we are aware of its risk.

It is therefore very correctly perceived by William Perry and Michael Polanyi that Perry has provided an explanation of how we can justify as and reasonable to our commitment levels of knowledge as "concerned relativism," or as Polanyi would say the most objective alternative in the whole philosophy of knowledge by showing how it is possible to be committed to some knowledge as true even though conceptively it might be false even though conceptively it might be false. Both are aimed at making knowledge to be true universally even when we are aware of its risk.

The complementarity of Perry and Polanyi is seen in two instances in the work of the author, namely, defining the interdisciplinary study as a theoretical model of how we can justify as and reasonable to our commitment levels of knowledge as "concerned relativism," or as Polanyi would say the most objective alternative in the whole philosophy of knowledge by showing how it is possible to be committed to some knowledge as true even though conceptively it might be false even though conceptively it might be false. Both are aimed at making knowledge to be true universally even when we are aware of its risk.

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The second case and application is shown in the teaching of philosophy, particularly the history and philosophy of science. Here again the author found in his teaching confirmation of the major parallels discussed above between Peirce and Polanski. First, there is a major problem in getting students to understand that science is not just an accumulation and systematic organization of facts. One of the obstructing problems in inquiring into the nature of scientific knowledge and its development was the student's assumption that the way to approach a problem is to go and look up the right answer. Modern scientists to them, it seemed, are persons who were able to look clearly at nature, whereas people in the Middle Ages were blind. Students had great difficulty in grasping that modern science grew as its early pioneers learned to put on a new kind of "thinking cap." But the acquisition of a new thinking cap meant entertaining plausible ideas and indeed ones that were not easily or directly confirmable by appeal to ordinary physical observations. Papers written at the beginning of the course and at the end reveal that it was when students began to deal with the problem of knowledge within its contextual dimensions that they began to move toward understanding how scientific ideas grow and change. They could not do this, however, until they gave up the older notion of science as facts and discovered that science itself is a philosophical commitment and risk.

As we face today a very dangerous and complex technological world where alternatives are not offered in dualistic and simple terms, the work of William Perry, buttressed philosophically by the thought of Michael Polanyi, suggests how we must both with students and faculty in educating for living with ambiguity yet responsible choices within the available knowledge that we have. The moral nature of knowledge is recovered without reenacting the absolute final answer of the symphony of absolute relativities by understanding the heuristic nature of contextual relativism and its pursuit of truth and good.

ABSTRACTS OF PAPERS AT OTHER MEETINGS

ABSTRACT

God and the Image-of-God in Dreams: A Perspective from Jung and Polanski

J. A. Hall, University of Texas Health Science Center

The image of God is rare in dreams, although there are dreams that include religious figures, at times from cultures not known to the waking ego and requiring archetypal amplification to reveal their religious meaning. Other dream phenomena are religious in meaning through the contextual use of dream images, although the images are not religious in usual clinical amplifications. The Self or Central Archetype in Jungian theory is seen as the maker of dreams, selecting for the dream-ego a particular role within the dramatic form of the dream. Jung was careful to distinguish the term God from the image-of-God, in order to maintain an empirical and scientific frame for his statements. When the dream is seen from a classical Jungian perspective, it is in compensatory relationship to the distortions of the waking ego attempting to maintain a dominant-ego-image against the encompassing wholeness of the psyche. It is useful in clinical Jungian analysis to consider the dream as produced by the Self in relation to the ongoing process of the individual ego. This constitutes the image-of-God in a process very different from an explicit dream image but consistent with Jung's view of the Self. The focal tissue shifts suggested by Michael Polanski are in some ways a better frame of reference for such changing forms than the classical distinction of conscious/unconscious. Clinical examples will be cited.

FROM THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF RELIGION

HUMOR AND MICHAEL POLANSKI'S THEORY OF TACIT KNOWING (Jere Hoorman)

HUMOR AND MICHAEL POLANSKI'S THEORY OF TACIT KNOWING will outline the structure of tacit knowing and use the structure for the analysis of the structure of humor.

Tacit knowing is a mechanism uncovered by the scientist/philosopher Michael Polanyi...a mechanism which he sees as an essential process of thinking. Of course, humor is also an essential process of thinking...the paper will attempt to investigate how the two processes can illuminate each other.

The theory of tacit knowing is offered by Polanski as an alternative to the ideal of a wholly explicit truth...an ideal most relentlessly pursued by the logical positivists...the definition of humor used in the paper is of similar ken...HUMOR CONSISTS IN THE INDIRECT AFFIRMATION OF THE IDEAL LOGICAL ORDER BY MEANS OF THE DEVIATION OF THE LIMITED ORDER OF ACTUALLY...In other words...both humor and tacit knowing will be seen to be antitheses to an overblown objectivity.

The structure of tacit knowing distinguishes between two kinds of awareness...focal and subsidiary...both mutually exclusive...Another way this is put by Polanski is..."knowledge by attending to" and "knowledge by relying on." Basically, it will be seen...you can't attend to and rely on at the same time.

Polanski shows how a totally focal knowledge is absurd...and we shall see how humor often uncovers two focal objects which satisfy the same subsidiary clues...This phenomenon of the fusion of disparate objects is found not only in humor...but in metaphor...and even in something so fundamental as the emergence of universal terms...

We shall see how Polanski argues that all knowledge is either tacit, or rooted in the tacit...such knowledge includes as part of it's universal intent a recognition of the nature...Humor will be seen to occur when the ideal of objectivity is excessive, and mass not recognized...i.e. failure to recognize metaphorical quality of all language...

In addition...the logic of tacit inference will be seen as the method used to integrate the clues into a more comprehensive entity...a small discovery event which takes place when one gets the point of a joke and punishment is relieved. This discovery will be seen to be of a similar structure as original scientific discoveries; both discoveries will be seen to be largely tacit sets...

Polanski's theory as outlined in THE TACIT DIMENSION (Anchor Books) will be relied upon; but the presentation will be presented with no previous familiarity with Polanski's work assumed.

FROM THE NATIONAL LINGUISTIC HUMAN CONFERENCE
From Convinion


I have just been reading this book and marveling that a book which reflects so many ideas familiar to me from my reading of Polanyi could have not a single reference to Michael Polanyi in the index. Alasdair MacIntyre is writing about the failure of modern thought to justify morality and its attempt to reduce this to the status of personal preference, resulting in the rejection of conventional morality and in a culture which has increasingly come to embody modern theory. This loss of objective moral standards constitutes a grave cultural impoverishment and, according to MacIntyre, the only way to recover a sense of the objectivity and authority of moral rules and to restore the language and practice of morality to an honoured place within our social life is to recreate forms of community within which objective moral standards can again become meaningful and sustain us through "the new dark ages which are already upon us." (p 245) Since the Enlightenment, every attempt to find a new basis for the rules of morality has failed, whether it be the greatest happiness of the greatest number or the idea that man qua man has certain natural rights. The idea of human rights, like utility, has proved to be a moral fiction, but in our present culture of bureaucratic individualism moral debate continues with much rationality between the individual who argues for his rights and the institution which argues for utility, a debate in which the preferences of arbitrary will and desire are barely concealed. As MacIntyre says, modern society represents a victory for instrumentalism continuing to extend the range of moral fictions. One of these is that what MacIntyre calls the 'manager' class has an expertise and a bureaucratic efficiccy which gives it authority to exercise social control and use vast resources in the interests of social change. This claim to authority mirrors the claims made by the natural sciences to have certain knowledge of a domain of morally neutral facts, on the basis of which law-like generalisations can be made and applied.

Legitimation of the institutional forms of twentieth century social life depend on the belief that the claims of 18th century philosophy have been vindicatd, but as MacIntyre shows in some detail, the concept of management effectiveness based on a knowledge that gives predictive power is one more moral fiction. Apart from this, attempts to create a predictable bureaucracy committed to creating an equally predictable society is doomed to failure, since any organisation efficient enough to be able to render society predictable would itself have to be predictable and organisational success correlates, not with predictability, but with adaptability, individual initiative and a multiplicity of centres of problem-solving and decision-making.

MacIntyre suggests that our modern tendency to start from a concern with rules and then define virtue as the effective desire to act on right principles should be reversed. We should attend first to the question of what sort of persons we are to become. The self is a social creation and life is a hazardous progress, (Polanyi might say, a heuristic exploration), in which virtues are qualities tending to achievement and vices qualities tending to failure. Every life exhibits a certain narrative order, within which the self can win or lose, save itself or be destroyed. For us, in a post-Aristotelian world, certain questions concern us: What is our human talent? In what does human well-being consist? In a world without city-states,
how can we function as part of an ordered community, seeking the human good together in friendship, understanding this term in Aristotle’s sense, which is close to what Polanyi means by conviviality? What role can conflict be understood to play in human life, if it is to help us learn what our ends and purposes are? MacIntyre offers some suggestions of his own, but it is my hope that someone who reads this book will be tempted to take up these crucial questions and explore the kind of answers that a study of Polanyi’s thought might yield. If MacIntyre is right, then Polanyi’s vision needs to be brought back centre stage, the vision of a free society, structured in ways that can create interlocking centres of conviviality at every level of our social and economic life, able to function for the common good and for common ends under a firmament of self-set standards of excellence such as have inspired and ruled men’s lives in every age.  

Joan Creadson

FROM CONVIVIUM


This is a critique of the way in which theology has been influenced by the inheritance of the Enlightenment. It stresses the need for theology to take note of such writers as Gadamer and Polanyi and to use their insights appropriately. The book is reviewed in Theology. Jan. 1984, by Maurice Wiles, who commends it as having important things to say, although it betrays an uncritical dependence on the patristic tradition.

Since the publication of Andrew Louth’s book, two others have appeared, also applying Polanyi’s thought to theological issues. Both are reviewed in this issue of Convivium. I would welcome offers of further review for our October issue.

Finally — please do not wait to be asked for offers of articles, information, notices of books, reviews, and anything of interest to our readers. I would also like to ask all of you to do a little ‘promoting’ and try to get some new subscribers in the course of 1984!

Joan Creadson

FROM CONVIVIUM

MICHAEL POLANYI AND THE FREEDOM OF SCIENCE

In the immediate post-war years there took place in this country a vigorous debate on the freedom of science that raised basic questions of perennial interest concerning the necessary conditions for the healthy growth of scientific research. It is worthwhile recalling that debate because of its relevance to current tendencies to plan science and to subdue it to sociological ends.

The root of that debate may be found in the previous decade, when a group of socialist scientists launched a campaign urging that science should be organised for the benefit of all. Their motivation was wholly laudable; they saw the widespread misery in many countries in the late ‘twenties and early ‘thirties, and were convinced that an era of health and plenty could be ushered in by the systematic application of science and, furthermore, that scientific research should be directed with this end in view. These beliefs were powerfully expressed by Professor J.H. Beran in his book ‘The Social Function of Science’ (Routledge, 1939) and in the widely-read popular science books of Leonard Huxley, H. G. Wells and John Crewe. These writers greatly admired the way science was organised in the Soviet Union, and urged that their methods should be generally adopted.

During the war years many academic scientists willingly set aside their research, and beat their energies to the task of national survival. In so doing they recognised that they had to work towards definite objectives under centralised direction, and that their work must remain secret, conditions that are the exact opposite to those of normal scientific research. After the war, these habits tended to linger on, facilitating the task of those who aimed to establish the State direction of science as the accepted norm.

This was recognised by several prominent scientists as an insidious danger, and they saw an urgent need to reassert the freedom of scientific research and to counter the propaganda of the advocates of State direction. To do this they founded the Society for the Freedom of Science, and published a number of Occasional Pamphlets. The aims of the Society were summarised by its President, Sir George Thomson, at a meeting in 1951 to celebrate the tenth anniversary of its foundation:

I think our best defence is to educate scientific and political opinion that it is realised that any interference with scientific liberty will quickly destroy the life of science, with all that that means for the well-being, and indeed for the safety of the State. To do this is one of our most important functions — planning ‘is an insidious disease,’ and it is our duty to meet it with new and effective remedies.

One of the most active members of the Society was Michael Polanyi, and in three of the earliest Occasional Papers he presented cogent arguments in support of the freedom of science. These papers are: No. 2, Rights and duties of science (1945); No. 4, The planning of science (1946); and No. 6, The foundations of academic freedom (1949).
In these papers he first emphasizes the essential distinction between pure and applied science, the one directed to the extension of knowledge and the other to its practical application. The former proceeds by its inner logic, in a way that is understood by the working scientist. It is impossible to predict the results of any investigation, and in particular whether they will have any practical application. It is thus simply not possible to direct pure research so that it will serve a particular social need, and any attempt to do so destroys the fruitfulness of that research. Once a discovery is made, however, and it appears to have some practical application, it is then possible to undertake research so as to realize that application in the most efficient way. Such research is indeed undertaken for a particular social purpose, and it is entirely sensible that it should be directed by the appropriate authority.

Polanyi remarks that there is in this no implication that the 'pure' scientists are in some way superior to the 'applied' scientists; it is just that they are engaging in different types of activity. Furthermore, these activities are distinguished by their objectives, not by the means employed. Thus two scientists may be doing very similar work with the same apparatus, and yet one is doing pure science and the other applied science. He illustrates this by the analogy of mines and tunnels, both of which are excavated by similar equipment, but have quite different objectives. It is no good confusing the two. If you are digging a tunnel it is no good doing it in a place where it might later on be useful as a mine, and if you are looking for minerals it is no good choosing the place so that your excavation will later be useful as a tunnel. Of course it is always useful to keep your eyes open; if in the course of digging a tunnel you happen to notice some useful minerals, then you note the fact and later, perhaps, you start to dig them out. But when you do this you stop digging a tunnel and start a mine.

The proponents of State direction frequently maintain that this is the most efficient way to solve problems, and this has indeed a superficial plausibility. Polanyi exposes the fallacy by another analogy: imagine that you must complete a large and complicated jigsaw puzzle as quickly as possible. What would be the best way to go about it? An advocate of centralized direction would say that you must organize a team of people who will follow the instructions of a leader. The alternative strategy is to let each member of the team work individually on his own initiative, fitting in pieces wherever he can, all the time keeping his eye on what other members of the team are doing, and adjusting his actions as far as he can to correlate with theirs. It is very easy to see which way will get the puzzle completed first.

Polanyi quotes a statement of Enrico Fermi: 'Experience has indicated that the somewhat haphazard exploration of the field of knowledge that results from an intensive freedom of the individual scientist to choose his own subject is the only way to ensure that no important line of attack is neglected.' Polanyi comments that the analogy of the jigsaw illustrates this, namely that on the one hand the actions of individuals acting according to their own judgment may become spontaneously and yet efficiently co-ordinated to a joint task, while on the other hand subordination of the individual efforts to a central authority would destroy their co-operation.

Polanyi recognizes the inadequacies of the jigsaw analogy, in particular the uncertainties in the overall pattern that we seek in research contrasted with the certainty that in a jigsaw each piece has a definite place. While this is a warning not to carry the analogy too far, the progress of science over the last three centuries is sufficient assurance that there is an overall pattern, although often of deeper subtlety than that anticipated by even the most far-sighted discoverer. This gives us 'a sufficient logical ground for the spontaneous elaboration of individual scientific discoveries. The ground is provided by such coherence as science does possess. In so far as there exists a steady underlying purpose in each step of scientific discovery and each step can be competently judged as to its conformity to this purpose, and its success in approaching it, these steps can be made to add up spontaneously to the most efficient pursuit of science.'

Examined more deeply, science combines the two apparently opposed concepts of freedom, namely the absence of external constraint and the liberation from personal ends by submission to impersonal obligations. 'Originality is the principal virtue of a scientist. One of the revolutionary characters of scientific progress is indeed proverbial, and yet science has a most closely knit professional tradition, and is noted for its continuity of discipline and strength of corporate spirit.' There is thus no conflict between the principles of spontaneity and constraint.

This unity between personal creative passion and willingness to submit to tradition and discipline is a necessary consequence of the spiritual reality of science. When the scientist's intuition sees discovery it is reaching out for contact with a reality in which all other scientists participate with him. Therefore, his most personal act is an act of intuition and conscience linked closely with the universal system and the canons of science. While the whole progress of science is due to the force of individual impulses, these impulses are not respected in science as such, but only in so far as they are dedicated to the tradition of science and are disciplined by the standards of science. Thus, 'if the spontaneous growth of scholarship requires that scholars be dedicated to the service of a transcendent reality, then this impulse implies that they must be free of all other authority.' This applies not only to science but to all scholarship, and ultimately academic freedom can only exist in a free society.

If this transcendent reality is denied, and with it the spiritual foundations of all freely dedicated human activities, then the State inherits the ultimate devotion of men. 'If our conception of truth and justice are determined in any case by interests of some kind or other, then it is right that the public interest should override all personal interests in this matter. We have here a full justification of totalitarianism.'

The inescapable logic of this analysis of the freedom of the scientist and the consequences of its denial are borne out in grisly detail by the fate of science in Soviet Russia. As soon as one penetrates the superficial adulteration of its socialist adherents, one sees the appalling reality of science enslaved to an alien ideology. This also was publicized by the Society for Freedom in Science, particular attention was paid to the destruction of genetics, the exile of Vernov to his death in Siberia and his replacement by Lyusenko. The poverty of Soviet science, and the enslavement of its spokesmen to Party dogmas are scathingly exposed by the simple device of reprinting extracts from Pravda, Izvestiya and the Soviet Monitor.

Peter Hodgson
FROM CONVIVIUM

BOOK REVIEWS

Leslie Newbigin, *The Other Side of '64*. W.C.C. paper £1.95 from B.C.C. 75 pp.

Questions for the Churches

I first read a typescript of this short book which came to me as an unpremeditated photocopy of a fairly illegible original, and was very excited by it. Rumour has it that the author was driven to write it out of exasperation with discussions at the British Council of Churches which he felt rested upon a too-ready identification with post-Enlightenment values and assumptions. In sixty pages (there is a post-script by Wesley Araratlah from the perspective of Indian Christianity), Newbigin summarises a programme which he hopes will revitalise the Church for a dialogue with modern culture which is not hopelessly relativised by that culture. The book is already a summary of a vast enterprise, and a review which pretended to be able further to condense the material would be an impertinence. I shall therefore concentrate on one central theme, in which Newbigin’s thought is used.

To engage effectively with a modern world-view dominated by post-Enlightenment science and rationalism, and to contribute to its future from a distinctive and valuable position, the Church must recover the courage of its convictions and speak authoritatively out of the faith grounded in Scripture and Tradition. In this sense, of staunchly advocating its distinctive perspective, not for its own benefit, but for the benefit of mankind, the Church is called upon and required to be legitimately and appropriately doctrinal. In other words, far from assuming a "defensive" position of "this is what they are, and no discussion is necessary" (which is sterile), the Church must stand before the world its own heart-felt contribution to the debate about the shape and future society. It has insights which do not originate in a scientific world-view, which it should not abandon only to ingratiate itself with that world-view. On the contrary, it should cling to those insights until they are shown either to be untenable or to be of no value.

In this way, Newbigin picks out two central themes in Polanyi which cannot be separated: the notions of conviviality and of the paradox of self-set standards. Polanyi recognises the perpetual tension between our obligations to a peer-group, a community, a "convivial", as the source or font of our world-view, and our equal (but sometimes opposite) obligation to dissent from the received wisdom of that world-view, not for our own sake, but that the community might be enriched, moved on, restrained from or redeemed from error. This is the way of the cross, of the way which not out of pride but out of love refuses to comply. This is the paradox: because I love my community, and one everything I believe and know to it (as the ground of my "fiducial framework"), and am therefore under an obligation to it, for just this reason I cannot affirm aspects of its belief or practice which I am persuade of, and I am condemned and compelled to dissent either until I am convinced that I am wrong (let us never forget that aspect of things), or until they are convinced that they are wrong. In some cases, as with Jesus, this refusal to give in can lead to death at the hands of those one loves more than life itself. On this basis alone, religious education cannot be taught as an aspect of "culture", for it is of the essence of genuine religion that it reaches beyond its own culture without denying its dependence on its modes of expression and world-views. Rationalist utopianism now looks like a bad joke, along with other would-be secular messiah's and master-plans. Yet if religions stop where they point out these failures, perhaps with a touch of self-indulgent delight, they neither make a useful contribution to the debate, nor do justice to what they claim to believe.

All sorts of clichés and commonplace phrases spring to mind which are connected with this argument: "grasp the nettle"; "practice what you preach"; "have the courage of your convictions". They are all apatitic because at its heart the Church seems to have lost confidence in the credibility and relevance of what gave it life. We now need to justify ourselves in terms other than those arising directly from proclamation of the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Son of God, Son of the Author and Creator of all things visible and invisible, whose mighty acts are proclaimed in Scripture and made known in Tradition. Either we capitulate to the kind of evangelical self-righteousness which asks whether you are saved (brother) with a doubtful glint in its eye, or to absorption into ephemeral issues which align all-too-easily with contemporary party politics and fringe groupings. In each case, but in markedly different ways, the result is superficiality; we content ourselves with addressing symptoms or counting heads because we can no longer find it in ourselves to believe that the Gospel itself can change the world radically, in the true sense of "to the roots of its being". Whatever the deficiencies of Newbigin's argument (and he admits that they are many), his response to this kind of analysis is plain: nothing less will do.

For Newbigin, the Gospel challenges the world thus: you are using the wrong concepts, in order to implement the wrong plans, which are directed towards the wrong goals: even your efforts at self-renewal are vain, and compound your hopelessness, for wherever you seek to cure any or addressing the symptoms rather than the force you merely succeed in infecting others with it. Thus, if I understand him rightly, some Christians ally themselves with the left in order to oppose the evils of the Right, or argue that we should spread materialist views of happiness in order to overcome the shortcomings of materialist economies which cannot deliver the goods (in all senses of the word), and so on. Nowhere does any Gospel speak distinctively against the innermost contradiction of Enlightenment philosophy: the establishment and defence of human autonomy based upon Individualism simultaneously with the establishment and defence of objectivist science based upon the complete eradication of all personal elements from knowledge. The result, a man with rights but no duties, with perception and knowledge but no responsibility for what he perceives and knows, has been catastrophic.

The man Jesus placed love of God, and love of neighbour, and love of self, side by side because he did not see autonomy and independence as constituting "happiness". Today, the Church cannot preach a gospel which satisfies human expectations because nobody and nothing can satisfy expectations based upon illusion and error (Enlightenment expectations). Instead we should be asking at least five questions: what does mean to be a human person; what is the goal of human life; what are the rights and capabilities of governments; what is our vision of the future; and what is involved in genuine knowing?
Newbigin reminded me of perhaps the greatest piece of literature in the Bible, if not the world, the story of Job. Unlike Job, the Church has sought to ease its suffering by listening too readily to latter-day Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar and Elihu; it has too readily repeated of its "dogmatism", of its lack of science, of its dependence upon distant history, of its lack of irrefutable proof for its claims. It was left to remind itself of him who created the foundations of the world. In that court, and in the presence of that judge, it would certainly learn that it had entered what it did not understand, and that it had put the words too wonderful for it to hear; and then it would see with its eyes what it had only heard with its ears, and could legitimately despise itself, and repent in dust and ashes.

FROM CONVIVIUM

John C. Puddefoot


Gonton's book will make fascinating reading for anyone interested in both theology and the thought of Michael Polanyi. I hope it will also provide an illuminating introduction to Polanyi's thought for those who have not yet discovered the relevance of his ideas for theological method. In the first instance, this book is about Christology, but the issues it raises are of central importance for theology as a whole. Gonton highlights the irreducibly dualistic assumptions, both epistemological and ontological, of classical and Enlightenment thought and shows how inadequate these are as a framework within which to explore theological and Christological reality. The fundamental problem of Christology is how to understand the claim that Jesus is both God and man. Gonton shows that if we are ever to understand the human life of Jesus as the presence of God in time and to make this central Christian claim meaningful, we need to work with non-dualistic assumptions about the nature of both knowing and being. He finds in Michael Polanyi's parable of personal knowledge the necessary non-dualistic framework of thought for this and argues that the key to this unitive understanding of knowledge lies in Polanyi's metaphor of indwelling, which enables us to do theology in a way that makes possible a critical affirmation of Christianity's foundational beliefs without introducing discontinuity. Once we accept that all knowing is a matter of 'indwelling', we can, says Gonton, appreciate that "(all) human intellectual enterprises are necessarily fallible, but not for that matter necessarily mistaken. In fact the reverse is the case. Because we indwell the world knowledge can be contingent, fallible and partial without for that reason losing its claim to be knowledge. That is the significance for our purposes of the epistemology of Polanyi." (p 185)

Not only does Polanyi free us from having to view the problems of Christology from the perspective provided by the Enlightenment, but he frees us to think again at the method of the New Testament, which confidently holds together that which is 'from below' - the human and temporal - and that which is 'from above' - the eternal and divine - within an interpretative framework supplied by tradition. Knowing by indwelling combines both approaches to Christology and allows us to work from above - experienced as a self-revelatory quality in the object of our knowing - and from below in a dynamic interaction of reason, imagination and intuition. Gonton is concerned to show that it is possible to be modern and to contribute theologically to the thought of our age without capitulating to its irreligious thinking. Here it is important to take Gonton's point that it is not only the language of the tradition that we indwell, but the reality of which it speaks. According to Michael Polanyi, there is no direct fit between words and things. All language is indirect and can perform its task only with the aid of metaphor and other figures of speech. This is not to deny that words can bring to light hidden aspects of reality. When we use words successfully, this can be an aid to indwelling the reality to which they refer. But there is a dynamic internality of relation between our words and the real world. This inner dynamic is at work in the theological enterprise as in every exploratory activity of the human mind. There is no radical discontinuity between language and reality. According to the New Testament writers, the Christ which is our present knowledge and Gonton suggests that "by our personal indwelling of his reality (through the language of worship and tradition) our words may come to express, successfully but indirectly, something of the truth about him." (p 147) The metaphor of indwelling is already familiar to the New Testament writers. Paul talks of being 'in Christ' and the Johannine literature contains many expressions of mutual indwelling. Even Polanyi's central category of commissively echoes Christian language about a relationship with Christ which becomes more real in the worshipping community. As the personal relationship of worship gives rise to doxological language, this in turn is indwelt and makes possible a clearer account of the object of the believer's worship, through whom indwelling becomes actual.

The importance of Michael Polanyi's theory of knowledge for Gonton's thesis is out of all proportion to the space given to a description of his thought, but Gonton takes full advantage of its implications in working out his own methodological approach to Christology. In particular, he sees how it opens up the possibility of doing theology in a way that allows us to assimilate the gifts of tradition without being its slave and how it liberates us from a rigid view of the relationship of words and things. Polanyi's epistemology greatly strengthens Gonton's hand as he sets out to show how, "far from abandoning the tradition, we may learn to stand on the giant's shoulders in the cautious hope of being able to see a little further than they." (p 208) In his Epilogue, Gonton concludes his plea for continuity in Christology with the warning that a 'critical' theology which operates only or chiefly by rejection of all that came before the modern era will be a blind theology, for it will have lost its roots" and he goes on to say that we shall not have the theological tools to combat distortions of Christology unless we accept the legacy of the Fathers and take further the process of thinking which they began. "They realized that the Incarnation demanded a rethinking of the word 'God'. The God of Christendom largely...escaped that rethinking, but it was an aberration and unrecon. to the main direction of patristic theology and Christology." To renew our thinking "about the living Jesus of the Church's worship and of New Testament confession...cannot be done without assistance from the past, nor without the great labour of exercising thought and judgment as to where the past was right and where it was wrong." (pp 208/209)
The pivotal statement at the heart of Gunton’s discussion is that Jesus of Nazareth is the logic of God’s holy loving, making present in historical actuality its eternal reality. Within the dualistic framework of modern thought, the concept of God-manhood raises insoluble problems, not least because the words God-man are understood in mutually exclusive ways, which make this kind of self-differentiation in God logically impossible. Gunton suggests that we can only avoid dualism and docetism by seeing the life of Jesus as the very power and knowledge of the love of God expressed under the conditions of temporality and humanity. The question of contradiction is then seen to depend, not on the concept of God uniquely present in the world, but in the meaning of the words we use to express this.

Many of the issues raised by this book concern questions of ontology as much as questions of epistemology, which gives me cause to regret that Gunton did not develop Polanyi’s ideas more fully in this area in discussing the problem of soteriology. Gunton himself seems to handle the discussion more confidently at the epistemological than the ontological level, but he has to move from epistemology to ontology in dealing with the question of the relationship of Christology to soteriology and I believe he could have better illuminated the discussion if he had made use of Polanyi’s ontology which flows naturally from his theory of knowledge and which has important implications for the nature of ultimate reality. However, no doubt this needs to be the subject matter of another book.

Joan G. Crewston

POLANYIAN MEDITATIONS

WE CAN KNOW MORE THAN
WE CAN TELL.

YOU CAN’T PHILOSOPHIZE
YOUR LIFE
AND LIVE IT TOO.
A SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCE
OF THE PERCEIVING PERSON
WHICH IS BALANCED FROM
HIS OWN POINT OF VIEW,
BUT NOT OTHERWISE.

A NEUTRAL IMPULSE
IS NEVER WITHOUT A SENSE
OF ITS POSSIBLE
INADEQUACY.

MEMBERSHIP/RENEWAL OF MEMBERSHIP

To bring our records up to date and to sustain the stream of ideas
and information through the Polanyi Society, we are asking all old and
new members to complete and return the form below. There are several
items that will help us to build up, correct, and facilitate our data
bank so that we may put people in contact with each other, organize
meetings, and show foundations and publishers the extent of our support.

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Primary interest in Polanyi (key words)


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Mail to: Richard Colutick
General Coordinator
Polanyi Society
Religion and Philosophy Dept.
Stephens College
Columbia, MD. 215

Please Turn Over
REPORT ON A.A.R. Polanyi Meeting

On December 19, 1983, members of the Polanyi Society attending the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion in Dallas, Texas, met for a three-hour session. Unhappily, our scheduled meeting coincided with one of the worst ice storms in Texas history. Most of the meeting was spent in a lively discussion of papers written by Polanyi Society members which were to be presented in later A.A.R. programs. In the business session, several issues regarding the future of the Polanyi Society were discussed. Richard Geluck’s proposal to expand the newsletter into a mini-journal met with enthusiastic response. Plans for the upcoming Kent State conference on March 8 and 9 were reviewed. It was agreed that the Polanyi Society should again request that the American Academy of Religion provide space for a pre-annual meeting session. The 1984 A.A.R. annual meeting is scheduled for The Palmer House Hotel in Chicago, Ill., on December 8-11.

Phil Williams
Coordinator for Religious Studies

NOTES AND NEWS

CONVIVIUM: A SIX-MONTHLY REVIEW OF POST-CRITICAL THOUGHT published in England has had to raise its subscription rates. Europeans are requested to send subscriptions in Sterling orders. All current issues are 5 pounds for surface delivery and 7 pounds for air delivery. Send subscriptions to: Joan Creedon, 12, Cuniffe Close, Oxford, OX2 7SL, England. The selections in this issue of the Polanyi Society periodical illustrate the value and quality of CONVIVIUM, we publish only selected parts of it, however.

Jere Bronson, San Diego business man and member of the Polanyi Study Group, is planning his annual development of Polanyi’s philosophy through the field of humor. He recently presented a paper at the National Linguistic Humor Conference in Phoenix, Arizona. An abstract of his paper and selections from his submissions of “Polanyi Meditations” are included. A stand-up comedian, Bronson is the author of ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE, NUMEROUS INTERPRETATIONS OF SCRIPTURE, AND THE NUMEROUS DICTIONARY OF ECONOMICS. Persons interested in ordering copies of his work may write him at the address listed in the membership list above.

William K. Coggin has revised his article published as “Polanyi and Peirce” A SHORT SEMANTIC SYMPHONY in PEER/TEXT: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF RHETORIC, August 1981, and is willing to share with those who request it this longer version. See membership list for his address.

James Scovil of the Philosophy and Religion Dept. at Appalachian State University, Boone, NC 28607, is interested in trying to have a Polanyi group at the North Carolina Professors of Religion meeting next Fall. Anyone interested should contact him.

One of the possibilities in the plans for the Polanyi group meeting at the Chicago meeting of the American Academy of Religion next Dec. 8-11 is a tour of the Polanyi Archives at the University of Chicago Joseph Regenstein Library.