

The Significance of Poetry for Psychological Theory

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Contemporary associationistic psychology excludes poetic truth an all that it implies regarding the participation of the observer with the observed in building up our conception of reality.

Prefatory Note

The following paper was read September 1966 in New York to a general assembly of Division 10 of the American Psychological Association. It ran counter to the mainstream of American psychology and still does. Perhaps it would have had more impact if it had laid greater stress on Michael Polanyi. Not being much of an academic strategist, I dwelt rather on S.T. Coleridge for reasons, historical and otherwise, that I hoped my discussion would illuminate. So it happened that I invoked the name of Polanyi at only one point, in connection with a quotation from Dorothy Emmet about Coleridge's view that poetic truth is "a knowing which is at the same time a making." Later I was more expansive on this theme. Polanyi himself, I was told, looked with favor on "Personal Knowing and Making," my contribution to Langford and Poteat's *Intellect and Hope* (Duke, 1968). In 1966 I had supposed that a single reference to Polanyi would suffice to bring to my auditors' minds the main thrust of his thought. His *Personal Knowledge* had been in circulation for eight years. It was current enough by 1962 that I did not hesitate to use the concepts of focal and subsidiary awareness at Beloit that summer in lectures published subsequently as *Personality and Science* (Van Nostrand, 1965). Possibly Polanyi's name was not as evocative as I had hoped, either at Beloit in 1962 or in New York in 1966. Yet in 1966 Abraham Maslow, soon to be president of the APA, was trumpeting Polanyi in the preface of his *The Psychology of Science* (Harper & Row, 1966), calling *Personal Knowledge* "this profound work which is certainly required reading for our generation." Maslow was more positive than the editors of *Intellect and Hope*: they admitted puzzlement and entered various caveats against Polanyi's daring venture. I myself, however, like Maslow, wholeheartedly welcomed Polanyi's work. It seemed to me to be boldly articulating an understanding of our human place in the world which has always been current among thinking men, though recently submerged and discredited by Cartesian science. With a man of science now coming forward to lift the repression a hope arose that the ravaged cultural landscape I saw around me might once again be refreshed by life-giving streams. It is hard for me today to justify that hope. Yet one must always hope, and I am encouraged by what I know of John Puddefoot's large work-in-progress.

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My purpose today is to consider that turbulent mid-region of human thought where poetry and science flow into each other and contend for primacy. In order to be as concrete and authoritative as possible in the limited time at my disposal and in order to avail myself of the common fund of knowledge which can be expected in an audience such as this, I will center the discussion on Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), who was a psychologist as well as a poet, though usually not mentioned in the histories of psychology. No doubt the selection of Coleridge as representative of poetry will introduce a certain bias which a more general discussion might be able to avoid, but I personally think that his scope is sufficient to cover a wide range of poetic styles, and, in any case, he has the peculiar advantage for us that he studied passionately and challenged vigorously a psychological theorist who, if he returned today, would find himself reasonably well at home in our American psychological climate, namely David Hartley (1705-1757), the founder of associationism.

My reading of history suggests to me that those who attach themselves tenaciously to associationism or its modern equivalents tend to be antipathetic to poetry, either by choice or by invincible ignorance. Newton — I mention Newton because of his magisterial influence on Hartley —, Newton, “when asked what he thought of poetry, said: ‘I’ll tell that of Berner: he said that poetry was a kind of ingenious nonsense.’”¹ As for Locke, Hartley’s second major authority, “Locke was equally straightforward. ‘Poetry and Gaming, which usually go together, are alike in this, too, that they seldom bring any advantage but to those who have nothing else to live on.’”² Hartley himself showed no enthusiasm for poetry. Neither did James Mill, and although John Stuart Mill has the distinction of having been saved from suicide by reading the poems of Wordsworth, his gratitude did not seriously unbalance his utilitarian sobriety. In America, more recently, Howard Warren, the approving historian of associationism, remarked of his encounter with a representative of the Scottish School at Princeton: “Dr. McCosh’s psychology struck me as too poetical... My sympathies leaned more and more toward associationism.”³ The Battle of Behaviorism fought between McDougall and Watson was, in a sense, a repetition of that between Coleridge and Hartley; for McDougall loved Coleridge and Wordsworth and was fond of quoting them both, whereas Watson was perhaps never touched by poetry at all. I have run across one possible exception to the general rule that associationism and poetry are incompatible. That is the questionable case of Thomas Brown (1778-1820), author of *The Paradise of Coquettes* as well as of *Lectures on the Philosophy of the Human Mind*, who, prouder of his verse than of his philosophy, is nevertheless remembered in the histories as an associationist. I say he is a questionable case, because, on the one hand, his poetry is weak, and, on the other, he considerably modulated the Hartleian mechanics.

Coleridge was far more of a poet than Brown, and he had a more fundamental conflict with Hartley. At first he was a devoted disciple. In an early poem, where he joins together in one breath Milton, Newton, Hartley, and Priestley as precursors of the Millenium, he refers to Hartley as

he of mortal kind
Wisest, he first who marked the ideal tribes
Up the fine fibres through the sentient brain.⁴

That was in 1794, when he was twenty-two. Two years later, when his first child was born, he named him David Hartley. But not long afterwards his discipleship changed into opposition. The basic cause, I think, was his deepening awareness of the nature of poetry, as he composed his own masterpieces and followed Wordsworth’s development; but an episode of 1797 is a part of the story, too, and deserves mention.

In that year Tom Wedgwood, a friend of the radical William Godwin, proposed to Coleridge and Wordsworth that they should join him in making practical application of the principles of associationism to the education of children, for the purpose of fostering a new race of geniuses. I am indebted to a richly learned article by David V. Erdman⁵ for knowledge of this episode and its effects. Wedgwood's educational theory, outlined in a letter to Godwin, emphasizes systematic, controlled input of distinct ideas, under the guidance of a superior character or genius who is himself thoroughly systematized — in short, programmed instruction by a dedicated programmer. The hardware available had not reached today's level of sophistication, but it was pointed in the same direction. Dr. Thomas Beddoes, a physician and scientific writer, another friend of Wedgwood's, was inventing and putting on the market suitable educational equipment — a mathematics textbook accompanied by a kit of "schemes and models of theorems in plane and solid geometry" and sets of Rational Toys, as he called them, such as sequences of tools from the plough to the steam-engine and "interlocking bricks ... that could be pieced together to make mechanical models." In his preface to the textbook of mathematics, Dr. Beddoes explains the purpose of his geometric models and Rational Toys, which are expected to guarantee:

not merely information in mechanics, chemistry, and technology, but the improvement of the senses, by presenting in a certain order and upon principle, objects of touch along with objects of sight. In this important business, we have hitherto trusted to chance. But there is every reason to suppose that INTELLIGENT ART will produce a much quicker and greater effect. Should instruction addressed to sense, be made in any country the principle of education; should the best method of cultivating the senses be studied, and should proper exercises be devised for reproducing ideas (originally well defined,) sometimes with rapidity, at others in diversified trains, the consequence is to me obvious. The inhabitants of that country would speedily become ... superior to the rest of mankind in intellect and efficiency....⁶

From such reasonable arguments and from assignment as superintendents over this sort of education, the two poets recoiled. Wordsworth seems to have been particularly offended by the assumption that children would be corrupted by wild nature's chaotic bounty of uncontrolled and irrational stimuli and should therefore be brought up in bare-walled laboratories. Coleridge took the line that the poetic imagination was a power to be respected in children, and that in his own case it had been nourished by the early reading of fairy-tales — something that would have been forbidden on Wedgwood's principles. He also agreed with Wordsworth that wild nature is anything but chaotic and demoralizing.

The education program that Coleridge rejected was based on a psychological theory which is both simple and comprehensive. In Hartley's scheme all mental life is derived from impressions made on the body by material impact. These impressions follow a dual path: the path of vibrations in the medullary substance of the brain, and the parallel path of sensations in the mind. The sensations pass over into ideas as the vibrations dwindle to vibratiuncles, and persist in that form as the stuff of memory and imagination. The mind is initially an even blanker tablet than it was for Locke, who did slip in a capacity for reflection. Mental activity is simply the association of sensations and ideas and bodily movements according to a perfectly mechanical process, summed up in one law — contiguity.

How could so bare a system have attracted the luxuriant mind of Coleridge? Partly because it was connected, in Hartley's case, with exalted religious views. Once Coleridge had succeeded in disentangling these views from the

psychological system, the system itself appeared to him starkly inadequate. The revulsion was already setting in by 1797, when, agitated by Wedgwood's educational proposals, Coleridge began examining his own education in autobiographical letters to his friend Thomas Poole. He wrote in one of these:

... my father was fond of me, and used to take me on his knee, and hold long conversations with me. I remember, when eight years old, walking with him one winter evening from a farmer's house, a mile from Ottery; and he then told me the names of the stars, and how Jupiter was a thousand times larger than our world, and that the other twinkling stars were suns that had worlds rolling round them; and when I came home, he showed me how they rolled round. I heard him with a profound delight and admiration, but without the least mixture of wonder or incredulity. For from my early reading of fairy tales and about genii, and the like, my mind had been habituated to the Vast; and I never regarded my senses in any way as the *criteria* of my belief. I regulated all my creeds by my conceptions, not by my sight, even at that age. Ought children to be permitted to read romances and stories of giants, magicians, and genii? I know all that has been said against it; but I have formed my faith in the affirmative. I know no other way of giving the mind a love of the great and Whole. Those who have been led to the same truths step by step, through the constant testimony of their senses, seem to me to want a sense which I possess. They contemplate nothing but parts, and all parts are necessarily little, and the universe to them is but a mass of little things. It is true, the mind may become credulous and prone to superstition by the former method; — but are not the experimentalists credulous even to madness in believing any absurdity, rather than believe the grandest truths, if they have not the testimony of their own senses in their favor? I have known some who have been rationally educated, as it is styled. They were marked by a microscopic acuteness; but when they looked at great things, all became a blank, and they saw nothing, and denied that any thing could be seen, and uniformly put the negative of a power for the possession of a power, and called the want of imagination judgment, and the never being moved to rapture philosophy.⁷

The kind of education Coleridge had enjoyed was not that proposed by Wedgwood; furthermore, in regard to his own mental workings, he denies one of the fundamental postulates of the Hartleian system, namely the priority of the senses. Let it be noted that this letter antecedes Coleridge's visit to Germany and his subsequent immersion in Kant and Schelling, to whom entirely too much of Coleridge's theory of poetry has been attributed. I stand with Kathleen Coburn in supposing that it was not his acquaintance with the transcendental Germans so much as it was his knowledge of himself as poet that disenchanting Coleridge with associationistic psychology. I guess, as she does, that "Coleridge began to suspect the soundness of his enthusiasm for Hartley as soon as he saw that Associationism in this form meant the passivity of the mind, a concept he rejected out of his own immediate experience."⁸

Coleridge's contemporary Thomas Brown, as I have mentioned, found it necessary to qualify the Hartleian scheme in a number of ways, notably by stressing that original constitutional differences affect scope of memory and mode of association — introducing thus, in the case of poetic genius, a penchant of the mind for association by analogy rather than by contiguity. Coleridge's revision is more radical. It's not that he denies the occurrence of association, whether by analogy or contiguity; but he brings all mere association under the head of fancy and relegates fancy to a minor though useful role as a sort of hewer of wood and drawer of water for the imperial and non-associationistic power that he calls imagination. Fancy (i.e., the play of association) carries in bundles of memories and pails of feeling, but it builds no fire and makes no feast, and, above all, it does not organize and permeate the whole upsurge of life which

is the poem before the poem appears as a dancing, singing, variegated, thoroughly disciplined and articulated company of living and lovingly embracing words. That is the work of imagination, and Coleridge knew only too well what it was to have to try to do without it. I.A. Richards has correctly underlined this important fact:

The contrast between living power and lifeless mechanism was no abstract matter for him, but a daily torment. Recognizing this more clearly as the `years matured the silent strife`, refusing the comfort of forgetfulness, he had to extricate himself from the Locke tradition, not because it was `false`, but because for himself, at some hours, it was too painfully true. It was the intellectual equivalent of his uncreative moods, and of the temper of an uncreative century.⁹

If Coleridge had been more continuously a poet, if he had been Shakespeare, he would probably not have troubled to deal with associationism at all, except as material for some dramatic joke such as Shakespeare makes of the pedantry of grammarians. He was not Shakespeare, however, and (when at times he was reduced to slaving in the “dark Satanic mills” of the mind) he could plainly see imagination standing at a distance and towering over the humdrum mechanical association of ideas, as some deprived factory worker in one of the new temples of the Industrial Revolution might through a dirty window stare at a far-off regal mountain crowned with blue sky and white clouds.

The central characteristic of the sovereign power of imagination, according to Coleridge, is that it unifies. “Esemplastic” is the term he introduced into English to signify this aspect. Imagination “molds into one.” As applied to the making of poems, this means the unification of diverse elements of imagery, diction, syntax, metre, etc., into a whole in which nothing seems forced, superfluous, deficient, or out of place; in which a prevailing energy sets the tone and gives the meaning to every discriminable part. Neither contiguity nor analogy nor any other supposed law of association accounts for this effect, but only the breath of life which proceeds from the imagination. “Ideas no more recall one another,” he says in 1804, “than the leaves in a tree fluttering in the breeze propagate their motion one to another.”¹⁰ In an exactly parallel sentence, more conventionally phrased, he says: “Association depends in a much greater degree on the recurrence of resembling states of feeling than on trains of ideas.”¹¹

The esemplastic power of imagination does even more than has been suggested by these remarks on states of feeling and the wind that blows the leaves. It not only sets in motion and organizes available materials; it creates what it organizes. For before there is the poem, there is the poet, in a state of feeling capable of generating the poem — not out of absolute nothing, to be sure, but out of a magma of experiencing which is not divisible initially into words or thoughts or things. “Joy” is the term Coleridge applies to this state in one of his most emphatic utterances. From joy is emitted the light by which things are seen, the voice by which words are spoken, the music by which thoughts dance together. In his *Biographia Literaria* Coleridge sums up the doctrine about the unifying power of imagination in a compact statement about man as poet:

The poet, described in ideal perfection, brings the whole soul of man into activity, with the subordination of its faculties to each other according to their relative worth and dignity. He diffuses a tone and spirit of unity, that blends, and (as it were) *fuses*, each into each, by that synthetic and magical power, to which I would exclusively appropriate the name of Imagination. This power, first put in action by the will and understanding, and retained under their irremissive, though gentle and unnoticed, control, ... reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities: of the idea with the image; the individual with the representative; the sense of novelty and freshness

with old and familiar objects; a more than usual state of emotion with more than usual order; judgment ever awake and steady self-possession with enthusiasm and feeling profound or vehement; and while it blends and harmonizes the natural and the artificial, still subordinates art to nature; the manner to the matter; and our admiration of the poet to our sympathy with the poetry.¹²

A second characteristic of the poetic imagination, according to Coleridge, is that it is musical. In his analysis of the marks of poetic power in Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece*, in the very important fifteenth chapter of *Biographia Literaria*, he mentions this first. "The man that hath not music in his soul," he declares, "can indeed never be a genuine poet." And he adds: "But the sense of musical delight, with the power of producing it, is a gift of imagination; and this ... may be cultivated and improved, but can never be learned."¹³ Let me footnote Coleridge here by observing that the individual poem may begin, and often does, as a perfectly wordless condition that might be described as a musical mood, that is, a feeling in which the first structural feature is the pulsation of a rhythm, an intellectual rhythm that seeks to be bodied forth in a concrete expression. The poet, "of imagination all compact," as Shakespeare puts it,

gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.¹⁴

That "airy nothing" is the musical pulsation in the soul. Carol Johnson in her book *Reason's Double Agents* refers to Paul Valéry's experience with "Le Cimetière Marin": It first came to him as a "figure rythmique vide," an empty rhythmical pattern. "He foresaw the necessity of a line dense and `forcement rythmé' to shape an unfolding monologue whose speaker, a certain `moi,' is envisaged as an `amateur d' abstractions.' All this before the words came." She wisely goes on to remark: "But such an inception, with varying states of self-awareness, undoubtedly typifies the experience of many poets."¹⁵

Now, a cardinal feature of this musical impulse is its freedom from egotism. It is the most impersonal of the personal expressions of life. This is what Coleridge seems to mean in his *Dejection Ode* when he says that the creative joy is given only to the pure and in their purest hours. Certainly the purity he has in mind is not puritanical. For he makes it a special point in his examination of Shakespeare's youthful poems of male and female lust that, although the poet is dealing with matter that is not morally or aesthetically elevated, the ever-active, swift, and glancing music plays over the fleshly details with vigorous delight. Neither sensuality nor pride, puritanical or otherwise, is capable of this freedom, which can deal with anything at all and make a poem of it.

A third characteristic of imagination stressed by Coleridge is that its unifying and musical activity participates with external reality in constructing the living reality of the poem. He has various ways of saying this. One vivid statement is found in the *Dejection Ode*:

O Wordsworth! we receive but what we give,
And in our life alone does Nature live:
Ours is her wedding garment, ours her shroud!
And would we ought behold, of higher worth,
Than that inanimate cold world allowed
To the poor loveless ever-anxious crowd,

Ah! from the soul itself must issue forth
A light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud
Enveloping the Earth — ¹⁶

As critics of poetry, we can fix our interest on the musical impulse and the esemplastic power alone and ignore the relation of the poet to his world; we can, if we wish, regard the poetic activity as being self-contained or at least contained within the circle of images and emotions supplied by the poet. But here Coleridge calls our attention to the problem of the relation of the poet's music and unifying passion to a reality which is not the poet himself. That reality, which is the setting of our daily actions and the constant object of scientific investigation, he by no means denies or minimizes; but he asserts that its aspect depends upon the observer, that it meets the observer in terms set by the observer. To the immense crowd of people who are lonely and loveless and anxious, nature is cold and inanimate, exactly the world described by science on the Newtonian model. To the poet turning to it in the confidence of joy, however, it reveals itself as something of higher worth. By virtue of his joy the poet enters into the most intimate of unions, he *weds* himself to nature, and the wedding gift is

A new Earth and new Heaven
Undreamt of by the sensual and the proud.

It is extremely important to notice that Coleridge is not saying that nature is a projection from the Unconscious; he is saying that its reality is such that it responds to us. Not inert and not a machine indifferent to our emotional state, it lives toward and with us when we love it; it dies and becomes cold to us, when we fail to love it. When we are in the right condition of soul (the poet's ideal condition), even aspects of nature which ordinarily seem loathsome to us may become beautiful. Thus in *The Ancient Mariner*, that poem of "dereliction and joy," as Dorothy Emmet calls it, the moment of the mariner's salvation comes when, alone among dead men on a becalmed ship in a rotting tropic ocean, he suddenly sees that the water snakes, in their brilliant colors and energetic kinesis, are beautiful:

O happy living things! no tongue
Their beauty might declare:
A spring of love gushed from my heart,
And I blessed them unaware:
Sure my kind saint took pity on me,
And I blessed them unaware.¹⁷

Observe that the speaker is represented not as a poet but as an ordinary seaman who, after dreadful experiences, now emerges into a new relation with the world. That illustrates the soundness of Dorothy Emmet's understanding of Coleridge when she says: "I believe that Coleridge is concerned to explore not only a source of creative power of imagination shown in genius but also more generally the liberation of the mind from deadness and dereliction, a liberation on which its growth depends."¹⁸

I wish now to elaborate briefly on the topics of emotion, music, and poetic truth, as extracted from Coleridge's analysis of poetic activity, with special reference to their bearing on psychological theory today.

(1) Emotion. The closest point of contact between Coleridge's theory of poetry and the mainstream of

psychological theory is where he emphasizes the associative power of emotion or feeling. We have, for example, his sentence; “Association depends in a much greater degree on the recurrence of resembling states of feeling than on trains of ideas.” Taken in conjunction with the emphasis given by both Coleridge and Wordsworth to emotion as a source of poetry, this statement joins Coleridge’s poetic theory with a massive trend in psychology culminating in Freud.

I must restrict a long history here to a hint. Thomas Brown makes virtually the same statement as Coleridge about the associative force of emotion in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of the Human Mind*:

In cases of the more shadowy resemblance of analogy, in like manner, — as in those comparisons with objects which constitute the similes and metaphors of poetry, — though there may never have been in the mind any proximity of the very images compared, there may have been a proximity of each to an emotion of some sort, which, as common to both, might render each capable indirectly of suggesting the other. When, for example, the whiteness of untrodden snow brings to our mind the innocence of an unpolluted heart, — or a fine morning of spring the cheerful freshness of youth, — they may do this only by the influence of a common emotion excited by them. The tendency to suggestions of analogy ... may thus be only another form, or, at least, a very natural result of that susceptibility of vivid emotion, which, even by those who have not formed the same theory of genius, is usually conceived to be characteristic of the poetic temperament.¹⁹

The theoretical tendency expressed by Brown, already present a century earlier in the emphasis of Shaftesbury and others on the moral sentiments in an effort to compensate for the Enlightenment’s reduction of reason from a full-blooded power or faculty of the soul to a mere ratiocinative combinatorial mechanism, as shown in the brilliant research of Robert Voitle²⁰ — this tendency insinuates itself into much of the subsequent psychological literature and issues in our century in the Word Association studies of Jung, where the associative behavior is used to detect emotional complexes, and in the theory and practice of Freud, where the most random-looking collocations of images and symptoms are taken as revealing, because governed by, persistent emotional currents in the unconscious depths. This development in psychology from the associationism of Hartley to the new-style associationism of Freud is in the direction of a more explicit recognition of the poetic activity inherent in all men when emotionally aroused.

(2) Music. I cannot recall anything in the general psychological theory to which we are ordinarily exposed that makes the slightest concession to the musical element in human experience, as that is meant in Coleridge’s analysis of poetry. The “delight in richness and sweetness of sound,” the “sense of musical delight,” which he links with a phrase from Shakespeare when he says, “The man that hath not music in his soul can indeed never be a genuine poet,” is a non-existent topic for our psychology textbooks. That takes on a very sinister significance if we suppose that there is truth in the Shakespearean passage from which Coleridge drew his phrase. It is that very familiar scene in the Fifth Act of *The Merchant of Venice* where Lorenzo invites Jessica, daughter of an avaricious, bloodthirsty, and frenzied man, to sit on a quiet moonlit bank and contemplate the stars in their harmonious courses. Jessica remarks, after Lorenzo has called upon the musicians to play, “I am never merry when I hear sweet music.” Lorenzo replies:

The reason is, your spirits are attentive:
For do but note a wild and wanton herd,
Or race of youthful and unhandled colts,

Fetching mad bounds, bellowing and neighing loud,
Which is the hot condition of their blood;
If they but hear perchance a trumpet sound,
Or any air of music touch their ears,
You shall perceive them make a mutual stand,
Their savage eyes turn'd to a modest gaze
By the sweet power of music: therefore the poet
Did feign that Orpheus drew trees, stones and floods;
Since nought so stockish, hard and full of rage,
But music for the time doth change his nature.
The man that hath no music in himself,
Nor is not moved with concord of sweet sounds,
Is fit for treasons, stratagems and spoils;
The motions of his spirit are dull as night
And his affections dark as Erebus:
Let no such man be trusted. Mark the music.²¹

Apparently our textbooks are written for boys and girls who have no music in themselves and who can accordingly only understand external stimuli, anatomy of the brain, and schedules of reinforcement consisting of tedium and trinkets. Suppose, however, that the music which is experienced by poets, whether in the form of Valéry's "figure rythmique vide" or Wordsworth's "still sad music of humanity" or Eliot's "unheard music hidden in the shrubbery" or Dylan Thomas's "And the mystery/ Sang alive/ Still in the water and singingbirds" or any other version — suppose that this music, which in truth is not confined to verse-writers, were admitted into textbooks and into the purview of our theories, what would be the outcome? Complete wreckage of the APA? Or a more adequate psychology?

(3) Poetic truth. If the phrase "poetic truth" does not seem too monstrously paradoxical, it might serve usefully as a counterbalance to the phrase "scientific truth." To put it very nakedly, scientific truth has come to mean a world from which man has tried to remove himself, whereas poetic truth concerns a world in which man insists on being present. Now, it appears that a world from which one is absent is different from a world in which one is present. Either world may be described as if it contained all its properties in itself, but the poet, it seems, is readier than the scientist to admit that in some way or other he is a participant in those properties. Coleridge, at least, knew that the manner of his presence in the world influenced the way the world appeared to him; and I think it is not expressing it too strongly to say that he believed that the depth of reality, not merely the surface, is affected by the individual human attitude. Perhaps Wordsworth was never out of rapport with nature. Coleridge, on the other hand, knew what it was to be alienated and divorced. He therefore speculates more on what is required of him if nature is to appear in her wedding garments. He identifies the necessary condition as joy, an outgoingness that blesses and in return is blessed. Its antagonist is envy. In his Philosophical Lectures of 1818, where he uses the term "genius" to stand for poetic power, he says:

The moment you perceive the slightest spirit of envy in a man, be assured that he either has no genius or his genius is dormant at that moment, for all genius consists in a participation of a common spirit. In joy individuality is lost, and it is therefore liveliest in youth, not from any principle in organisation but simply from this, that the hardships of life, that the circumstances that have forced a man in upon his little unthinking contemptible self, have lessened his power of existing universally; it is that only

which brings about those passions. To have a genius is to live in the universal, to know no self but that which is reflected not only from the faces of all around us, our fellow creatures, but reflected from the flowers, the trees, the beasts, yea from the very surface of the (waters and the) sands of the desert.²²

It is from that sort of relationship that poetic truth emerges. Dorothy Emmet, commenting as a philosopher concerned with epistemology, concludes that Coleridge's theory of imagination

... suggests that what is called "poetic truth" is not a matter of correspondence with an external world, nor of coherence in the logical sense of the consistency of propositions. It is the creation of something new, and its truth consists in the authentic realizing and fusing of images in an individual vision. To the poet, this experience is, as Coleridge is always saying, a knowing which is at the same time a making.²³

But is there really any other sort of knowing than "a knowing which is at the same time a making?" Isn't scientific truth, in the style of Newton and Hartley, a making which pretends not to be? A making which is effected by posing as neutral observers and pure logicians, until nature, including human nature, retorts with the cold blank stare of a mechanical robot? Aren't we paid back in coin that bears our own superscription? It is my understanding of Michael Polanyi's position in *Personal Knowledge* that this is indeed the case.

I can illustrate what I think is our general situation as theorists by referring to a theory prevalent among male students on the campus of my university. This theory is that people are unfriendly, especially girls, and the scientific proof is that people, especially girls, do not smile at you. Now and then the campus newspaper, through a letter, an editorial, a cartoon, gives the theory public expression. Furthermore, if from some concealed observation post you watch students going across campus, you will notice that smiles are not exceedingly common. The state of affairs has not reached that described by Eliot in *The Wasteland*,

Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,
And each man fixed his eyes before his feet,

but there is a similarity. An undergraduate honors student of mine, Miss Joan Woodworth, became interested in the local theory. She herself smiles charmingly and readily. And so, as part of the work on her honors paper, she undertook a simple experiment. On certain days, as she crossed the campus to and from classes, she looked into the faces of those approaching her and smiled; on others, she looked but did not smile. The results are not amazing but they are worth considering. When she did not smile, she rarely received a smile. When she did smile, a smile was often returned. Not often enough to suit her, I must add — because when her smile was not returned, she felt personally diminished, and on some days she was unable to continue her experiment. Her tabulations show that her smile elicited a reciprocal smile from 32% of the boys, 63% of the girls. When she did not smile, the frequency of smiling dropped to 5% for the boys, 18% for the girls. Our students do seem to suffer from mutual distrust, and few are inclined to initiate smiling. Even so, one who dares to smile will see more smiles than one who does not. In short, the evidence for the theory that fellow-students are unfriendly is partly generated by the theory, which interdicts smiling.

Not that smiling is safe! Miss Woodworth, reflecting on her experiences, concluded that there is a two-edged

difficulty: If your smile is rejected your self-esteem is damaged, and if it is reciprocated you feel yourself becoming involved with another person more deeply than you may wish. One can see the risk. I believe a similar risk affects our whole knowledge enterprise. In our arrogance or our timidity, we have chosen to place excessively high value on prediction and control in our dealings with the universe. We have been willing to sacrifice beauty and the higher ecstasies and the fullness of life itself for a grammar of science that contains no conscious subjects and no lovingly active verbs.

But that's not the end of the matter. Who knows what the scientific future holds? Along with the Newton who did so much to mechanize our conception of the world, I remember the Newton who, in a moment of poetry, compared himself to a boy contenting himself with a few pebbles picked up on the beach while the whole unexplored ocean of truth roared before him. Along with the Fechner who made such rigorous and parsimonious experimental psychologists of us, I remember the strangely unguarded Fechner who attended to aesthetics and who called seven times to a materialistic age to wake up to the conscious life pervading the whole of nature. And in Coleridge, wrestling with the psychological theory of Hartley in the name of poetry, I see the possibility of a psychological theory which is not afraid to proceed in terms of poetic truth. Indeed, among our contemporaries there are certainly a few, and I suspect there are many, who recognize the attraction and perhaps the necessity of a less constricted psychology than we have, a psychology more conscious of our actual personal involvement in the construction of the world-picture which we call science, and more alert to the possibility that the human family might live at higher levels of delight and wisdom and mutual love than it does, in a universe more responsive to our human condition than we have been taught to believe.

ENDNOTES

¹ Thomas Woods, *Poetry and Philosophy, A Study in the Thought of John Stuart Mill*. London: Hutchinson, 1961. P. 16.

² *Ibid.*, p. 16.

³ Carl Murchison, ed., *A History of Psychology in Autobiography*. New York: Russell & Russell, 1961. Vol. I, p. 450.

⁴ Ernest Hartley Coleridge, ed., *The Poems of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1961. P. 123, 11. 368-370.

⁵ David V. Erdman, "Coleridge, Wordsworth, and the Wedgwood Fund, Part II, Nursery of Genius or School of Nature? How Should Children Grow and What Should Children Read?" *Bulletin of the New York Public Library*, 1956 (October), 60, 487-507.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 492.

⁷ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria; or, Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions*. Prepared for publication in part by the late Henry Nelson Coleridge, completed and published by his widow. New York: Harper, 1853. P. 609.

⁸ I.A. Richards, *Coleridge on Imagination*. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1960. P.xv.

⁹ Ibid., p. 60.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 68.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 68.

¹² Ibid., p. 374.

¹³ Ibid., p. 376.

¹⁴ *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, Act V, Sc. 1, 11. 16-17.

¹⁵ Carol Johnson, *Reason's Double Agents*. Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1966. P. 123.

¹⁶ *Poems*, op. cit., p. 365. Text modified from notes.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 198, 11. 282-287.

¹⁸ Dorothy M. Emmet, "Coleridge on the Growth of the Mind." *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*. Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1952. Vol. 34, 1951-52, 276-295. P. 290.

¹⁹ Thomas Brown, *Lectures on the Philosophy of the Human Mind*. Edinburgh: James Ballantyne, 1820. Vol. II, p. 339.

²⁰ Robert Voitle, "The Reason of the English Enlightenment," *Studies in Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, XXIV/XXVII. Geneva, 1963. Pp. 1735-1774.

²¹ *The Merchant of Venice*. Act V, Sc. 1, 11. 70-88.

²² Quoted by Dorothy Emmet, op. cit., p. 290.

²³ Ibid., p. 295.

Submissions for Publication

Articles, meeting notices and notes likely to be of interest to persons interested in the thought of Michael Polanyi are welcomed. Review suggestions and book reviews should be sent to Walter Gulick (see addresses listed below). Manuscripts, notices and notes should be sent to Phil Mullins. Manuscripts should be doublespaced type with notes at the end; writers are encouraged to employ simple citations within the text when possible. Use MLA or APA style. Abbreviate frequently cited book titles, particularly books by Polanyi (e.g., *Personal Knowledge* becomes *PK*). Shorter articles (10-15 pages) are preferred, although longer manuscripts (20-24 pages) will be considered.

Manuscripts should include the author's name on a separate page since submissions normally will be sent out for blind review. In addition to the typescript of a manuscript to be reviewed, authors are expected to provide an electronic copy (on either a 5.25" or 3.5" disk) of accepted articles; it is helpful if original submissions are accompanied by a disk. ASCII text as well as most popular IBM word processors are acceptable; MAC text can usually be translated to ASCII. Be sure that disks include all relevant information which may help converting files to Word Perfect or ASCII. Persons with questions or problems associated with producing an electronic copy of manuscripts should phone or write Phil Mullins (816-271-4386). Insofar as possible, *TAD* is willing to work with authors who have special problems producing electronic materials.

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Harold G. McCurdy was born and educated in North Carolina. He studied Greek and botany before completing his Ph. D. at Duke in 1938 under William McDougall in psychology. He taught at several colleges before coming to the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill where he worked for many years and retired as Kenan Professor of Psychology in 1971. His many publications include *The Personality of Shakespeare: A Venture in Psychological Method* and *Barbara, the Unconscious Autobiography of a Child Genius*. As the "Prefatory Note" with his article explains, McCurdy contributed an essay to *Intellect and Hope* (1968), an early volume exploring Polanyi's thought. Since his retirement, McCurdy has continued to write and publish in both prose and verse. He reports that his essay "The Duality of Experience and the Perplexities of Method" appearing in *Humanistic Psychology* (1981), edited by Royce and Mos is perhaps his most significant recent publication. McCurdy's article here comes to us via the good fortune of having UK Polanyi scholar John Puddefoot visit North Carolina and, by chance, have a conversation with the author.