
Reviews

Robert E. Innis, *Consciousness and the Play of Signs*.
Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 1994. pp.178.

On the cover of this attractively titled book is an abstract drawing of straight lines and five overlapping circles. It is, one surmises, a sort of Venn diagram referring to the half dozen closely related philosophers discussed inside. The book is fairly dense and may be slightly teutonic for Polanyian tastes. However, the author makes important connections and explores conceptual overlaps, concentrating on Peirce, Buhler, Dewey and Cassirer; with Michael Polanyi as a sort of intermittent anchor-man. They all represent various shades of what might be called “constructivism” or non-reductive realism and in all of them sensory and aesthetic experiences are accepted as being important and prior to any theorizing. Whenever Polanyi makes an entry, there is, for me at least, a sense of relief, of dawning clarity. This may be due partly to personal partisanship but there is also a deeper reason. Polanyi was not only remarkably clear in almost all his expositions but he also maintained that clarity over an extremely wide range of phenomena: from very small to very large; and he made clarity possible in many dynamic, shifting situations.

The book starts with two chapters on C.S. Peirce and on his approach to the theory of signs. His starting point is perception and how this leads on to motor skills and then to language skills.

The home from which we always set out in our reasonings is “the parish of perception” ... situated within a linguistic-predicational matrix ... [and yet] “it is we that are in it, rather than it in any of us” (pp. 14 and 17).

Which is a pleasant way of putting it: no Cartesian ego

enclosed in the skull but journeys of exploration from the parish of perception. We travel first and do the serious thinking afterwards. Or, as Kirkegaard put it, “we live forwards and understand backwards” (quoted p. 17).

Our journey would have been easier if Polanyi had been “foregrounded” (the author likes this word) at the beginning. He is not ignored; but just insufficiently used as a route-map. In Chapter 3, “The Tagit Logic of Consciousness,” most of the material is excellent. However, when Innis comes to Polanyi’s ideas on art, “indication” and metaphor, the argument becomes slightly confused. This is partly the result of his reliance on that “Perception and Metaphor” chapter in the Polanyi-Prosch book, *Meaning*: not one of Polanyi’s most exemplary expositions.

The chapter on Dewey, “Action, Meaning, Quality,” was extremely interesting; with many close links between Dewey and Polanyi being explored. There is scope for further harnessing and harmonizing of these two whose feet are so firmly planted in practical action, doing and knowing.

Chapter VI is a closely argued and difficult exposition of Ernst Cassirer’s ideas. The focus is mainly on his classic, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. It was this book which was such a crucial stimulus for Susanne Langer. I had hoped that her ideas would be more fully discussed; for she, more than almost anyone, seemed to command the conceptual range and insight which could have carried forward Polanyi’s ideas on heuristics and Cassirer’s understanding of the dynamism and ‘pregnance’ of symbolis. Inniscertainly recognizes the importance of Langer and in a laudatory note (p. 145) praises her great trilogy, *Mind an Essay in Human Feeling*.

On Susanne Langer, as on several others, Innis

is at his best when suggesting where the exciting and productive overlaps might be found. It is a fine book for starting you on a journey of discovery; not so successful at making you feel that you've got an adequate mental map with which to replace the Venn diagram you started with.

Robin A. Hodgkin
39 Holyoake Road
Oxford, OX3 7BL
UK

Dale Cannon, *Six Ways of Being Religious: A Framework for Comparative Studies of Religion*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1996. Pp. xiv + 402. ISBN: 0-534-25332-6.

Cannon seeks to provide a way of fostering an inter-religious understanding that is responsive to the complexity of religious life and practice. To that end, he sets up a framework which distinguishes between six ways of being religious: sacred right, right action, devotion, shamanic mediation, mystical quest and reasoned inquiry. These six ways, he contends, can be found in all the major world religious traditions, although not necessarily in each subtradition. Part I of the book provides the more abstract, theoretical introduction to the framework. In this part of the book, Cannon also locates himself in debates over the nature of religious studies and provides his own phenomenology of religion. Parts II and III of the book represent increasingly refined applications of the framework to Buddhism and Christianity. Of special interest to members of the Polanyi Society will be his appropriation of tacit knowing as an explanation for how symbol systems work (pp. 34-35).

The book is effectively structured and clearly written, although it comes across as a mix of genres. At times, it reads like an introductory textbook in the world's religions and contains the usual and useful tools found in a textbook, such as study questions, chapter summaries, glossaries and indices. At other times, the book reads like a constructive proposal intended for one's colleagues. This mix of styles correlates with the book's strengths and

weaknesses. Its greatest strength lies in the potential Cannon's proposal has for "complexifying" the study of religious life, i.e., of providing a more finely textured account of similarities and differences both between sub-groups within a larger religious tradition and between traditions (see, for example, pp. 147 ff. and pp. 369 ff.). Parts II and III of the book able illustrate the payoff on this point. The book's greatest weakness lies in the fact that Cannon does not always satisfactorily answer all the questions critics will want to raise about his constructive proposal. For example, while Cannon clearly wants to move beyond Enlightenment philosophy, it is fair to ask if he does not find himself still bound to problematic concepts (like empathetic objectivity which he describes on pp. 17-21) or the notion that for something to be shared in common it must be neutral for all participants. One wonders if more attention to Polanyi's account of personal knowledge might be useful here.

Cannon rightly notes that this book is not intended for use in a first course in comparative religion. It should work well, however, with upper level students in a methods course. Still, even if the text itself is not suitable for introductory courses, the theoretical framework Cannon sets out provides an interesting structure around which such a course might be fruitfully constructed. In that case, the book would provide useful background information for the professor.

Paul Lewis
The College of Wooster
Wooster, OH 44691

Electronic Discussion Group

The Polanyi Society supports an electronic discussion group exploring implications of the thought of Michael Polanyi. For those with access to the INTERNET, send a message to "owner-polanyi@sbu.edu" to join the list or to request further information. Communications about the electronic discussion group may also be directed to John V. Apczynski, Department of Theology, St. Bonaventure University, St. Bonaventure, NY 14778-0012 PHONE: (716) 375-2298 FAX: (716) 375-2389.

Polanyi Society Membership

Tradition and Discovery is distributed to members of the Polanyi Society. This periodical supercedes a newsletter and earlier mini-journal published (with some gaps) by the Polanyi Society since the mid seventies. The Polanyi Society has members in thirteen different countries though most live in North America and the United Kingdom. The Society includes those formerly affiliated with the Polanyi group centered in the United Kingdom which published *Convivium: The United Kingdom Review of Post-critical Thought*. There are normally two or three issues of *TAD* each year.

The regular annual membership rate for the Polanyi Society is \$20; the student rate is \$12. The membership cycle follows the academic year; subscriptions are due September 1 to Phil Mullins, Humanities, Missouri Western State College, St. Joseph, MO 64507,. Please make checks payable to the Polanyi Society. Dues can be paid by credit card by providing the following information: subscriber's name as it appears on the card, the card name, and the card number and expiration date. Changes of address and inquiries should be mailed, faxed or e-mailed to Mullins (e-mail: mullins@griffon.mwsc.edu ; fax: USA 816-271-5987).

New members must provide the following subscription information: complete mailing address, telephone (work and home), institutional relationship, and e-mail address and/or fax number (if available). Institutional members should identify a department to contact for billing.

The Polanyi Society attempts to maintain a data base identifying persons interested in or working with Polanyi's philosophical writing. New members can contribute to this effort by writing a short description of their particular interests in Polanyi's work and any publications and /or theses/dissertations related to Polanyi's thought. Please provide complete bibliographic information. Those renewing membership are invited to include information on recent work.

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.

Phil Mullins
Missouri Western State College
St. Joseph, Missouri 64507
Fax (816)271-5987
e-mail: mullins@griffon.mwsc.edu

Walter Gulick
Montana State University, Billings
Billings, Montana 59101
Fax (406)657-2037