

# Tradition & Discovery

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# The Polanyi Society

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# Preface

This issue of *TAD* opens with an article by Elaine Hocks which thoughtfully explores interesting connections between Polanyi, Coleridge and Bahktin. There follows a review article, written by Dale Cannon, on Andy Sanders' *Michael Polanyi's Post-Critical Epistemology: A Reconstruction of Some Aspects of Tacit Knowing*, a substantial scholarly book which somehow did not get reviewed here when it was first published in 1988. Cannon's probing opens up some good questions which Sanders responds to in his "Criticism, Contact with Reality and Truth." The issues examined here go beyond Sanders' book and I expect that more will be said about them in future discussions. Finally, there is C. P. Goodman's short article "Polanyi on Liberal Neutrality" which explores some issues treated in Polanyi's social and political thought. Goodman argues that moral neutrality erodes the liberal practices which sustain a free society. James Stodder, an economist, has written a provocative review of a new book on Karl Polanyi; I hope that future *TAD* materials will, as Stodder invites, further explore the relationship between the ideas of the Polanyi brothers.

In the "News and Notes" section, there is preliminary information about the upcoming November 1998, Polanyi Society annual meeting as well as the upcoming World Congress of Philosophy, a possible forum for some discussion of Michael Polanyi's thought. There is also information about the new UK journal *Appraisal's* third issue which contains several things related to Polanyi.

Phil Mullins

*Tradition and Discovery* is indexed selectively in *The Philosopher's Index* and *Religion One: Periodicals*. Book reviews are indexed in *Index to Book Reviews in Religion*.

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## NEWS AND NOTES

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The Polanyi Society will host two sessions in its annual gathering prior to the November, 1997 annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion/Society of Biblical Literature in San Francisco. On Friday, November 21, we will meet to honor **Charles S. McCoy**, Professor Emeritus at Pacific School of Religion, Berkeley. For thirty years, McCoy introduced generations of seminary and graduate students to the ideas of Michael Polanyi. A panel has been assembled to discuss both McCoy's interpretation of Polanyi and McCoy's contributions to theology, ethics and other areas. To accommodate those with late flights, this session will likely be held from 9 to 11 p.m. at the AAR/SBL host hotel. An earlier evening informal dinner gathering will be arranged for those interested and available. Additional information on Friday evening sessions will be in a future *TAD*. In addition to the Friday night session, there will be a Saturday morning, November 22 (9 a.m.-noon), session with two papers. The papers, respondents, and locations for events on both days will be announced in the next *TAD* (or in a flyer mailed to Polanyi Society members) as soon as plans are finalized. If you are interested in attending the informal dinner honoring McCoy, please contact **Phil Mullins** (see information on the inside front cover); if you have questions about either meeting session, contact **Marty Moleski**, Department of Religious Studies, Canisius College, Buffalo, New York 14208 (Tel: (716) 888-2383, FAX: (716) 886-6506, e-mail: moleski@canisius.edu).

The occurrence of the 20th World Congress of Philosophy, August 10-16, Boston, Massachusetts challenges members of the Polanyi Society to show the contributions and implications of Polanyi's philosophy. The Polanyi Society will have a session at the Conference with presentations, and individuals may submit papers to the 44 sections ranging from Theory of Knowledge to Philosophy and Children. Every major area of philosophical inquiry has a call for papers, including both theoretical and applied fields. For detailed information contact: Congress

Secretariat, American Organizing Committee, Inc., Boston University, 745 Commonwealth Ave., Boston, MA02215; tel. 617-353-3904; fax. 617-353-5441; email. paideia@bu.edu; internet. <http://web.bu.edu/WCP>. Persons wishing to present a paper, or organize a panel at the Polanyi Society session should contact **Richard Gelwick** at the address on the inside *TAD* cover or at email: [rgelwick@mailbox.une.edu](mailto:rgelwick@mailbox.une.edu). Besides the hotel accommodations, dormitory rooms at Boston University will be available for those who register early. It's a great time to visit Boston, and the conference provides off-season rates for accommodations.

The third number of *Appraisal* (ISSN 1358-3336), the new UK journal with particular interest in the thought of Polanyi has just come out. Although the bulk of the issue is devoted to treatment of the Romanian philosopher Lucian Blaga, there are the following articles related to Polanyi's thought: "Illative Sense and Tacit Knowledge: A comparison of the Epistemologies of John Henry Newman and Michael Polanyi by **Martin X. Moleski, SJ** (the first of a two part piece on this topic); "*Science Faith and Society Revisited: Has the Growth of the Scientific Community Affected the Status of Polanyi's Views on Authority in Science?*" by **Brian Gowenlock**; "A Polyanian Theology" by **Julian W. Ward** (a lengthy review of Polanyi Society member Joan Crewdson's *Christian Doctrine in the Light of Michael Polanyi's Theory of Personal Knowledge*, a book also recently reviewed in *TAD* 22:2: 40-41); "Polanyi and Macmurray?" by **Harold Turner** (a brief but interesting inquiry, historical and philosophical, about the possible connections between these contemporaries); there is also a review by **R. T. Allen** of Polanyi Society member John Puddefoot's book *God and the Mind Machine*. *Appraisal* is available at an annual individual subscription rate of £9 per year. Checks should be sent to R. T. Allen, 20 Ulverscroft Road, Loughborough, LE11 3PU, England. Allen can also be reached by fax (01509 215438) and e-mail (101625.3010@compuserve.com).

# Dialectic And The “Two Forces Of One Power”: Reading Coleridge, Polanyi, And Bakhtin In A New Key

Elaine D. Hocks

**Abstract** Key words: polarity, tri-unity, complementarity, indwelling, dialogic imagination, polyphonic novel, monologic discourse.

*The focus of this essay is to read the nineteenth-century theories of poet and philosopher Samuel Taylor Coleridge against the twentieth century theories of chemist and philosopher of science Michael Polanyi, and Russian philologist and critic Mikhail Bakhtin, showing their intellectual similarities and contrasts. My purpose in this essay is to redeem Coleridge’s thought for rhetorical theory by linking him to modern thinkers who are respected within the field.*

## I. Introduction

Descartes, speaking as a naturalist, and in imitation of Archimedes, said, give me matter and motion and I will construct you the universe. We must of course understand him to have meant: I will render the construction of the universe intelligible. In the same sense the transcendental philosopher says: grant me a nature having two contrary forces, the one of which tends to expand infinitely, while the other strives to apprehend or find itself in this infinity, and I will cause the world of intelligences with the whole system of their representations to rise up before you. Every other science presupposes intelligence as already existing and complete: the philosopher contemplates it in its growth, and as it were represents its history to the mind from its birth to its maturity (*Biographia Literaria* 258).

In this passage, Samuel Taylor Coleridge defines his central doctrine, the principle of polarity, as a dynamic and generative interpenetration of opposites. It is this dialectical principle of polarity that embodies the central link between Coleridge’s thought and the philosophic rhetorical tradition developing from Heraclitus, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and other writers who are interested, as Suzanne Langer asserts, in asking fresh questions about the nature of truth and rejecting natural philosophy and sophistic rhetoric, which had become commonplace (*Philosophy in a New Key* 18 hereafter *PNK*). The focus of this essay is to read the nineteenth-century theories of poet and philosopher Samuel Taylor Coleridge against the twentieth century theories of chemist and philosopher of science Michael Polanyi, and Russian philologist and critic Mikhail Bakhtin, showing their intellectual similarities and contrasts.

My goal in this essay is to show the parallels within the theories of mind and language expounded by Coleridge, Polanyi, and Bakhtin, all of whom had an intense interest in ethics. All these men were teachers who passionately desired to change positivistic thinking and the discourse theories that resulted from it. For all three men, positivism placed too much emphasis on the external, material world and on human sense perception as being the only basis for knowledge and precise thought. Redeeming Coleridge, classified as a romantic, for rhetorical theory is an important concern since postmodernist rhetoricians have felt free to denigrate or ignore his work while they expound upon theorists like Polanyi and Bakhtin for their originality.<sup>1</sup> Although this essay focuses primarily on the parallels in the underlying use of polarity

of these three men, one can clearly see how this polar thinking takes different forms within each individual theory.

## II. Coleridge and Polarity

The development of dialectic runs from the dialogues in Plato through a fundamental dialectical epistemology in Aristotle and ultimately through the thought of several modern European philosophers. The new key that Coleridge sounds is to claim for this dialectical principle the title and terminology of “polarity” and to propose it as the basis for all of life. In *The Friend*, for instance, Coleridge connects polarity to ancient Greek philosophy:

Every power in nature and in spirit must evolve an opposite as the sole means and condition of its manifestation: and all opposition is a tendency to re-union. This is the universal law of polarity or essential dualism, first promulgated by Heraclitus . . . The principle may be thus expressed. The identity of thesis and antithesis is the substance of all being; their opposition the condition of all existence or being manifested: and every thing or phenomenon is the exponent of a synthesis as long as the opposite energies are retained in that synthesis (*The Friend* I, 94 ).

Although Coleridge states emphatically that polarity is a principle that can be comprehended only by the imagination, he does use the analogy of electrical poles in order to explain it. In using this analogy, Coleridge points to several important features: the magnetic field, which is created by the combination of an opposition and an attraction between the two poles; polar predominance, which allows the energy field to predominate at either one pole or its opposite; and tri-unity, which names the unified relationship between the poles and the field between.

Setting Coleridge’s doctrine of polarity within its European context and asserting its “continual rebirth in differing epochs” (from the pre-Socratics, through the German romantics from whom Coleridge heavily borrowed, to Freud) is the theme of Thomas McFarland’s challenging essay entitled, “A Complex Dialogue” (290). McFarland begins by showing the roots of polarity in Heraclitus, and then alludes to Coleridge’s acknowledgment of Giordano Bruno’s reassertion of this doctrine in the Renaissance. Bruno writes: “Harmony is not effectuated except where there is contrariety. The spherical does not repose on the spherical, because they touch each other at a point; but the concave rests on the convex” (in McFarland’s, “A Complex Dialogue” 292 hereafter “CD”). McFarland’s main point is that Coleridge used Bruno’s notion of the unifying power of opposites, especially Bruno’s statements about the “minima and maxima of contraries and opposites,” to demonstrate that when “extremes meet,” the observer has evidence of polarity. Coleridge made many notations of empirical evidence to support this principle of polarity, demonstrating his intense preoccupation with it, a fascination, says McFarland, he shared with Bruno. “It is a profound magic,” says Bruno, “to know how to draw out the contrary after having found the point of union” (“CD” 292). Bruno’s importance to Coleridge is that he re-established this Heraclitian doctrine in the Renaissance.

McFarland compliments Coleridge for his “critical acumen” in copying Schelling’s philosophy since in his writing, “we encounter an apex of the doctrine of polarity” (“CD” 311). Yet he adds that even Schelling had no special “property rights” to this concept. Schelling, Hegel, and later writers like Marx and Freud all dipped into the current of polar logic, but Coleridge, according to McFarland’s criticism, used Schelling’s bucket. However, a more balanced view is offered in *What Coleridge Thought* (hereafter *WCT*) by Owen Barfield, a literary critic and a practicing lawyer. “Verbal plagiarism, as a labour-saving breach of the law of copyright, is a matter of determinable fact, and there is not much doubt that, as the law now stands, Schelling could have sued Coleridge in respect of one or two pages in the

*Biographia Literaria*” (WCT 6). In defense, Barfield adds that Coleridge was not interested in “originality” in terms of “novelty” but was concerned with truth, and thus he often “borrowed” from others when his thought merged with theirs. In fact, critics like Nigel Leask argue that Coleridge does admit “the German Provenance of his ideas,” claiming that he is only trying “to render the [German idealistic] system intelligible to my countryman” (*The Politics of Imagination in Coleridge’s Critical Thought* 127).

The force of McFarland’s argument is to deny Coleridge ownership of this term, and, in response to a call to consider the development of Coleridge’s philosophy “in his own terms,” McFarland attacks:

Strictly speaking, neither Coleridge nor any other philosopher can be said ‘on his own terms’ to have said anything at all. Not only the philosophical language he uses but the formulation of the very problems he confronts are given him by his intellectual culture (“CD” 307).

However, Coleridge never claimed ownership, just a refocusing or placing polarity in a new key in his attempt to discover the unifying principle for “this mass of discrete data.” As Langer asserts: “Most new discoveries are suddenly seen things that were always there” (PNK 19). In his concluding remarks McFarland asserts the failure of Coleridge’s life-long efforts:

The principle of polarity that aligns these Sunderings [reason and understanding, imagination and fancy, the head and the heart] was treasured, by him and by his Romantic contemporaries, as a path to an ultimate wholeness. But for Coleridge, even more strikingly than for his contemporaries, the actual experience out of which such treasurings arose was one of fragmentation and splitting apart, and those wounds the doctrine of polar reconciliations was never satisfactorily able to heal (“CD”341).

This description “of fragmentation and splitting apart,” is an apt one, in my view, because it affirms the argument that Coleridge is more of a modern theorist than most postmodern critics would care to admit. Moreover, it enables his readers to see a parallel between Coleridge’s seeking a unified theory of art and life in the face of his fragmented experience, and some of our best postmodern scientists who certainly have an even more fragmented experience yet are currently seeking a unified field theory.<sup>2</sup> In fact, McFarland admits that Coleridge’s “incompleteness as a practicing polar schematist becomes a badge of honor” in comparison to Hegel’s more completed system or attempts to tame reality by “*a priori* networks,” which, in turn, gave way to logical positivism (“CD” 339). However, setting Coleridge within the context of his own thought does not deny the “fragmentation and splitting apart” of his experience, but it simply affirms Coleridge’s epistemology and especially his definition of the imagination, which does have a unifying power in its polar function. Yet the “gaps” and “holes” in Coleridge’s writings, especially in the *Biographia*, clearly identify him as a postmodern (i.e. non-systematic) thinker.

Owen Barfield responds to the call for a consideration of Coleridge’s work “on its own terms and not as a representative of something else, whether it be German idealism, English Platonism, pantheistic mysticism, semantic analysis, or depth psychology” (Barfield 4). In his masterful analysis, *What Coleridge Thought*, Barfield, unlike McFarland, shows a coherent pattern in Coleridge’s thought and also its applicability to contemporary thought, including the philosophy of science. McFarland does pay tribute to Barfield’s tenacious confrontation of passages “ignored or dismissed” by most commentators. Nevertheless, in this same essay, “A Complex Dialogue,” he takes

Barfield to task for his “New Critical concentration on the passages at hand” while ignoring the larger context of Coleridge’s work and for “this Angelocentric distortion of perspective (“CD” 308-309). In other words, Barfield, in considering Coleridge in his own terms, fails to write according to McFarland’s standards.

In his close analysis, Barfield explains the seminal concept of polarity by contrasting logical with polar opposition. He says that logical opposites are contradictory while polar opposites are generative of each other, acting together to create a new product. “Polar opposites exist by virtue of each other as well as at the expense of each other” (*WCT* 36). It is important to comprehend this principle of productive opposition because it underlies all of Coleridge’s philosophy. Not only is polarity the principle of life--”unity in multiety,” but it also undergirds Coleridge’s theories of art, epistemology, and science. As Barfield succinctly puts it, “A cosmology, a philosophy, a psychology, which allows to imagination a primary as well as a secondary role, must begin by recognizing two forces” (*WCT* 29). Although Coleridge himself does not speak of the relationship of dialectic and rhetoric, his theory of the two forces suggests that these two discursive activities form a polar relationship so that, even though we can distinguish between them, we cannot ultimately divide them. Because polarity both names the creative power and is the faculty through which human consciousness becomes aware of itself in the act of creation, it designates a fertile concept that has been used by post-Coleridgean thinkers trying to show dialectical relationships within the field of epistemology, though they will often use different terms.

### III. Polanyi and Complementarity

One such thinker is the chemist and philosopher of science, Michael Polanyi, whose term, “complementarity,” parallels, in the field of scientific discovery, Coleridge’s principle of polarity. In his essay “Knowing and Being,” (hereafter “*KB*”) Polanyi states:

We can see then two complementary efforts aiming at the elucidation of a comprehensive entity. One proceeds from recognition of a whole towards an identification of its particulars; the other, from the recognition of a group of presumed particulars towards the grasping of their relation in the whole.

I have called these two efforts complementary since they contribute jointly to the same final achievement, yet it is also true that each counteracts the other to some extent at every consecutive step. Every time we concentrate our attention on the particulars of a comprehensive entity, our sense of its coherent existence is temporarily weakened; and every time we move in the opposite direction towards a fuller awareness of the whole, the particulars tend to become submerged in the whole (“*KB*” 125).

In this same passage Polanyi goes on to explain that the advantage of these dialectical processes is that every dismemberment adds to the overall knowledge even though it weakens the comprehensive features, and each new integration of the parts adds more to the understanding than it damages understanding by blurring their identity. “Thus an alternation of analysis and integration leads progressively to an ever deeper understanding of a comprehensive unity” (“*KB*” 125). To illustrate this process, Polanyi uses an analogy from medicine. A medical student learns a list of symptoms for various diseases, but only clinical practice can teach him to integrate the clues and form a correct diagnosis. If the student simply focuses on the pole of a memorized list of symptoms at the expense of observing and listening to the patient, he will form a wrong diagnosis; and if he focuses on the opposite pole of the patient’s symptoms without a knowledge of symptoms, he will fail as well. In Polanyi’s explanation, proper medical practice involves a

synthesis of the two poles, yet it would be difficult for the doctor involved to explain exactly how these two opposite poles came together in his mind while he was in the act of discovering an illness.

In commenting on Polanyi's ingenious theory, Richard Gelwick in his study entitled, *The Way of Discovery* (hereafter *WD*), defines Polanyi's epistemology as a new paradigm, "a new way of seeing," or a new set of questions, to use Langer's terminology. About the complementary process of reading, Gelwick writes:

The reading of a text is another form of knowing so common that we scarcely notice its complexity. Polanyi observes here how we perform many feats of integration without being aware that we are doing them. For example, we get the meaning of a sentence or a whole story without concentrating upon grammar, syntax, and vocabulary. When we read, we place these things at the service of our purpose of getting the meaning, and we do not think "subject," "predicate," "tense," and so on. (*WD* 60).

As Gelwick points out, the integration of clues, either by the reader when his mind unites with the text in reading or by the doctor when her skill palpates our organ so dexterously, is a kind of "indwelling," a pouring of ourselves into particulars that forms a complementarity of the two poles--"unity in multitude" as Coleridge named this power of human perception. Polanyi in *Personal Knowledge* (hereafter *PK*) defines "indwelling" in relation to tools or probes: We pour ourselves out into them and assimilate them as part of our own existence. We accept them existentially by dwelling in them (*PK* 59). We indwell language as well.

In discussing this concept in terms of music he writes: "By dwelling in a harmonious sequence of sounds, we acknowledge their joint meaning as a tune: a meaning they have in themselves, existentially" (*PK* 344). Polanyi's complementarity is a comprehending of the whole by interiorizing or "indwelling" the parts. This paradigm shift in Polanyi's thought, according to Gelwick, is that all knowledge revolves around the perceiver and does not separate logic and psychology (*WD* 56). Knowledge is thus personal and involves "belief" in the presence of an external reality with which we can establish contact. Polanyi offers this thesis as a first premise of his theory. "I declare myself committed to the belief in an external reality gradually accessible to knowing, and I regard all true understanding as an intimation of such a reality which, being real, may yet reveal itself to our deepened understanding in an indefinite range of unexpected manifestations" ("KB" 133). On one level, we cannot prove the existence of the world, nature, or reality through our senses alone, yet we still believe it exists. In other words, we cannot demonstrate the reality of the world apart from our belief in the world; belief is fundamental.

Like Coleridge's polarity, Polanyi's complementarity is such a comprehensive concept that he can apply it to many endeavors. He thus argues that the alternation between the poles of dismemberment and integration is not only important in acquiring intellectual knowledge but is helpful in perfecting skills as well. Golfers or tennis players can benefit from an analysis of their strokes because these athletes realize that they cannot learn a skill by learning the constituent motions separately. In fact, focusing on the individual motions separately tends to paralyze performance, and only when the mind refocuses on the purpose of the activity can the isolated motions be put into play. Indeed the kinship of knowing and doing is so intimately bound together that the two can be distinguished but in real life not divided; "distinguishing while not dividing" principles of mind is a notion echoed throughout Coleridge's writings. In his introduction to *Personal Knowledge* Polanyi describes this dialectical relationship:

I regard knowing as an active comprehension of the things known, an action that requires skill. Skillful knowing and doing is performed by subordinating a set of particulars, as clues or tools, to the shaping of a skillful achievement, whether practical or theoretical. We may then be said to become “subsidiarily aware” of their particulars within our “focal awareness” of the coherent entity that we achieve. Clues and tools are things used as such and not observed in themselves. They are made to function as extensions of our bodily equipment and this involves a certain change of our own being. (*PK* vii).

Having expounded such complementarity, Polanyi continues to trace this principle in the workings of our senses, our perceptions, and in our relationships to tools and probes. Our sense organs and internal messages from our brain work as a unity with external stimuli in creating sensory impressions, yet the internal particulars are “never clearly observable in themselves” (“KB” 127). Polanyi explains that any appearance in nature or in human nature has what he calls “a physiognomy,” relating it to “the delicately varied expressions of the human face which we can likewise identify without being able to tell quite how we recognize them” (“KB” 123). We cannot be specific about the particulars that make up the comprehensive unity because “there is always a residue of particulars left unspecified; and . . . even when particulars can be identified, isolation changes their appearance to some extent” (“KB” 124).

We have all had the experience of ordering green-and-white striped material from a swatch only to discover the colors change when we see the whole bolt or place it in our room next to other colors. Polanyi explains by saying: “Since the colour of any patch of a surface varies with the context in which it is placed, coloured patterns are not specifiable in terms of their isolated particulars” (“KB” 124). Removing a concept or discourse from its context is a topic that holds great importance for Mikhail Bakhtin because he believes that discourse, like a being in nature, changes and may even die when torn from its natural environment--“a word uttered at that place and in that time will have a meaning different than it would have under any other conditions. . .” (*The Dialogic Imagination* 428 hereafter *DI*).

In the case of tools or probes as mentioned above, the person becomes the internal stimuli, and the tool becomes the extension of the hand or finger. When a writer uses a typewriter or word processor, these tools become the extension of the mind in transcribing ideas, and the typist integrates the thought with the keys and words on the screen or on the page. Another example of this process involves integrating the parts of our body into a unified whole, an assumption most humans take for granted. However, Polanyi refers to cases of psychotic patients who have normal feeling in their arms and legs, yet do not consider these limbs as part of themselves, believing them to be external objects (*PK* 58). This interpenetration between “inside” and “outside” bears a striking resemblance to Coleridge’s theory of the imagination discussed earlier and Bakhtin’s dialectical theory discussed later.

Polanyi conceives of human consciousness as making contact with reality; he claims that humans passionately participate in the act of knowing, never more so than in the fields of science that claim objectivity. He explains that knowledge is not a thing but an activity that is best described as “a process of knowing.” Knowledge and research keep developing and building in an ever-moving, dynamic process. In his comprehensive study of scientific discovery, *Personal Knowledge*, Polanyi rejects the idea of scientific detachment, which in the exact sciences he believes is harmless because it is disregarded there by scientists (*PK* 141-42). Nevertheless, physicists and chemists will still speak as though their work is objective and factual as compared to humanistic studies. Polanyi’s thought shows the similarity of scientific and humanistic studies; it fosters clear lines of communication and more interdisciplinary studies. Coleridge, too, fosters interdisciplinary connections, which he links together with his “comprehensive theory of life”-

-polarity. He recognizes the participation of the observer in the observed.

Polanyi does argue that this detachment claimed by the hard sciences “exercises a destructive influence in biology, psychology, and sociology,” and he later adds, “in medicine” as well (PK 138-9). He further states that in the case of these higher sciences, the subject matter is intrinsically more interesting because living, but for that reason the subjects don’t lend themselves best to “accurate observation and systematic study” (PK 139). Nevertheless, many areas of inquiry still labor under the spell of the Laplacean delusion of objectivity. Polanyi writes: “The ideal of strictly objective knowledge, paradigmatically formulated by Laplace, continues to sustain a universal tendency to enhance the observational accuracy and systematic precision of science, at the expense of its bearing on its subject matter” (PK 141). In Jacques Lacan’s postmodern revision of Freud, a topic which I can only mention in this essay, Lacan takes this issue into account, showing how Freud himself participated and, in Polanyi’s terms, indwelt his patients.<sup>3</sup> Bakhtin revises Marxism along similar lines showing the impossibility of a scientific treatment of ideology.

In another passage, Polanyi points out that personal knowledge is manifested “in the appreciation of probability and of order in the exact sciences,” and we see it as well in “the way descriptive sciences rely on skills and connoisseurship” (PK 17). He continues by saying that “at all these points the act of knowing includes an appraisal; and this personal coefficient, which shapes all factual knowledge, bridges in doing so the disjunction between subjectivity and objectivity” (PK 17)--a bridge evocative of Coleridge’s principle of polarity as tri-unity. He concludes in *Personal Knowledge* that

So far as we know, the tiny fragments of the universe embodied in man are the only centers of thought and responsibility in the visible world. If that be so, the appearance of the human mind has been so far the ultimate stage in the awakening of the world; and all that has gone before, the strivings of a myriad centres that have taken the risks of living and believing, seem to have all been pursuing, along rival lines, the aim now achieved by us up to this point. They are all akin to us. (PK 405).

This discussion of the complementary relationship of mind and reality is reminiscent of Coleridge’s discussion of the creator-directedness of consciousness in the *Biographia*. For Polanyi as for Coleridge, ideas are no longer Platonic forms that are separable from the individual consciousness that holds those ideas. Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin’s analysis of what he calls the “dialogic imagination” adds another voice to this dialogue concerning the “centers of thought and responsibility in the visible world.”

### **III. Bakhtin and Dialogic**

If we employ Aristotle’s distinction between dialectic and rhetoric, dialectic concerns itself with impersonal examination, definition, and classification of ideas without regard to persons, while rhetoric concerns itself with the relationship between speaker and audience, between the practical agreements and disagreements between people. In his *magnum opus*, *The Dialogic Imagination* (hereafter *DI*), Bakhtin identifies the “layers” within all discourse:

Indeed, any concrete discourse (utterance) finds the object at which it was directed already as it were overlain with qualifications, open to dispute, charged with value, already enveloped in an obscuring mist--or, on the contrary, by the “light” of alien words that have already been spoken about it. It

is entangled, shot through with shared thoughts, points of view, alien value judgments and accents. The word, directed toward its object, enters a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words, value judgments and accents, weaves in and out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with yet a third group: and all this may crucially shape discourse, may leave a trace in all its semantic layers, may complicate its expression and influence its entire stylistic profile (*DI* 276-77).

According to Bakhtin's definition, dialogic seems to fuse dialectic and rhetoric because its concern is with the dynamic relationship of people articulating their ideas in response to one another. Thus he stresses the speech aspect of language, "utterance" or the spoken word, so that he can highlight the immediacy of the type he is seeking. While dialectic attempts to discover the truth and rhetoric seeks to persuade people or change their minds, Bakhtin's "dialogic" strives to articulate and analyze the symphony of voices within ourselves and others.<sup>4</sup> This perspective represents the new key that Bakhtin brings to dialectic--its explicit reunion with rhetoric and the further union of rhetoric with poetics.

Bakhtin, like other Marxist critics, emphasizes the ideological cast of all discourse, but for Bakhtin "ideology," according to Caryl Emerson in "Bakhtin and the Present Moment" (hereafter "BPM"), "is not something inflexible and propagandistic, something politically unfree. For Bakhtin and his colleagues, it meant simply an 'idea system' determined socially, something that *means*" (23). Speaking to this issue, Bakhtin writes:

The living utterance, having taken meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of an utterance; it cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue. After all, the utterance arises out of this dialogue as a continuation of it and as a rejoinder to it--it does not approach the object from the sidelines (*DI* 277).

Even though Bakhtin is often classified as a Marxist, critics like Gary Saul Morson point out that biographical evidence would suggest otherwise since most of his life Bakhtin spent in hiding from the Soviet party and espousing views antithetical to Marxist theory. In supporting this view, Morson argues that it would be hard for critics "to pinpoint the time when this neo-Kantian proponent of individuality, open-ended dialogue, and historical unpredictability--perhaps even of some version of Russian Orthodoxy--could have accepted a class-based, materialist, and teleological account of life" ("BPM" 203). In fact, the evidence shows that Bakhtin attacked Marxism and countered all the "isms" in his Russian society, linking him to both Coleridge and Polanyi, who vigorously fought against the ideologies of their day. Like Polanyi, Bakhtin distrusted extreme relativism because of its link to nihilism.

Because of Bakhtin's intense interest in human freedom and its relation to creativity, he turned to the realistic novel of the nineteenth century, especially the novels of Dostoevsky.<sup>5</sup> "Bakhtin so loved Dostoevsky," according to Morson, "because he saw in him the writer who most palpably and realistically captured the very feel of human freedom" ("BPM" 213). Bakhtin admired this Russian artist for his stress on the complexities of consciousness as opposed to a consignment of all the complexities to "a hypothetical unconscious" because, for both Dostoevsky and Bakhtin, consciousness presupposes an emphasis on moral responsibility rather than "in terms of conditions and diseases" ("BPM" 213). Given this view, Bakhtin's conception of mind is similar to that of Coleridge and Polanyi because for all three the human mind is the center for moral activity. For Bakhtin "the unconscious" that Freud identifies as

the seat of the drives is more aptly defined as that portion of consciousness not yet articulated, or the struggle of various motives and voices within consciousness. Bakhtin's rereading of Freud has certain similarities to Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic reinterpretation because both are interested in structure and language, but they have some real differences as well--Bakhtin is a Dostoevskian existentialist and Lacan is a language materialist.

In a passage from his book praising Dostoevsky's methods, Bakhtin specifies the aim of dialogic discourse and the manner in which this writer reveals "potential," the capacity for various outcomes. Dostoevsky, he argues,

brought together ideas and worldviews, which in real life were absolutely estranged and deaf to one another, and forced them to quarrel. He extended, as it were, these distantly separated ideas by means of a dotted line to the point of their dialogic intersection. In so doing he anticipated future dialogic encounters between ideas which in his time were still dissociated. He foresaw new linkages of ideas, the emergence of new voice-ideas in the worldwide dialogue (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 91, hereafter *PDP*).

Bakhtin claims that Dostoevsky writes a new kind of novel, the polyphonic novel, characterized by a plurality of voices that embody ideas, "a plurality of consciousness, with equal rights and each with its own world" (*PDP* 6). In the polyphonic novel, plot becomes secondary because the focus is on discourse and how it creates the traditional elements of fiction, an analytic method that fuses poetic and rhetoric. The hero becomes "a particular point of view on the world and on one's self;" (*PDP* 47) and the author becomes the medium through which other consciousnesses are presented--his voice is only one among many. Caryl Emerson's essay "Outer World and Inner Speech" describes this "Copernican revolution" Bakhtin attributed to Dostoevsky. "In Dostoevsky's novels, the author is no longer the creator around whom characters are forced to revolve but is, so to speak, himself but a planet among planets" (35). This freedom was for Bakhtin characteristic of all "true novels" and for the genre of the novel as a whole.

Each character in a Dostoevsky novel is thus a free agent whose ideas, "voice-ideas," are tested by his being placed in different situations with unusual and unexpected conditions, causing him and his ideas to collide with other people and their ideas (*PDP* 78-79). Dostoevsky's characters all share in a special characteristic called "unfinalizability"--that is

their capacity to outgrow, as it were, from within and to render untrue any externalizing and finalizing definition of them. As long as a person is alive he lives by the fact that he is not yet finalized, that he has not yet uttered his ultimate word (Bakhtin in Morson 214).

Bakhtin believes that dialogism in both the realistic novel and in life allows people, events, and society a sense of "genuine becoming." He claims that a precedence for this kind of discourse exists in the ancient seriocomic literature of the Socratic dialogue and the Menippean satire, both sharing features of carnivalistic folklore, mixing the high and low, the serious and comic, prose and poetry. In creating his theory, Bakhtin looks back to the Socratic dialogues and Plato's use of dialectic, which seeks truth through the free play of several voices (*PDP* 112-114). Moreover, Bakhtin's emphasis on the dialectical counterpoint of voices and ideas places his theory in the tradition of philosophic rhetoric but formulated in a new key because he rejected Hegel's dialectical method in which the thesis, antithesis, and synthesis could all, according to Bakhtin, occur within a single consciousness and be "monologic," meaning it lacks the dialectical principle. For Bakhtin, debate is essential in the same ways that it was for Plato and Aristotle, the first practitioners

of philosophic rhetoric.

In an article entitled “Dialogics as an Art of Discourse in Literary Criticism” (hereafter “DA”), Don Bialostosky claims that according to Bakhtin,

Dostoevsky is a paragon of dialogic practice because he takes the widest purview for dialogue he imagines, because he hears the mutual bearings of ideas that do not yet hear one another, and because he presses the characters who embody those ideas to further articulation that alters the conversation from which he has drawn them (“DA” 789).

People possess the dialogic imagination when they strive to hear and to recognize the mutual bearings in the diverse voices of others and to answer these voices from their own point of view. Similar to the theoretical positions of Coleridge and Polanyi, Bakhtin’s principle will allow for a distinction of opposites but not a separation. For example, dialogism does not conceive persons as separated from the ideas they voice or ideas from the specific texts or contexts of their discourse. Moreover, Bakhtin’s emphasis on the present moment is in direct contrast to the Soviet practice, one now enshrined in the American academy, of judging the past by the present political and moral standards. George Orwell called this practice “Doublethink” and “Doublespeak” in his anti-utopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Bakhtin’s view was that “everything that belongs to the present dies along with the present” (in Morson 220-221), a view that mitigates against the prideful notion that the current judgments are the wisest possible ones since they are “politically correct.”

In Bakhtin’s view, the best prototype for this discourse is the symposium, because it “represents a series of voices differentiating themselves from one another and open to new voices”(in Bialostosky 790). Moreover, the dialogic model not only fuses dialectic or theses with rhetoric or persons, but also it merges written and spoken discourse with reading, because the dialogic reader is in constant dialogue with what she is reading. When this reader becomes a writer, she is again in dialogue with herself and with the other voices she is creating or citing. Coleridge himself uses such a symposium of “voices” in his *Biographia*, but that is the subject of a different study.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, Kathleen Wheeler seems to be underlining this same polyphonic quality in Coleridge’s prose when she states: “What the *Biographia* reveals is a level of self-consciousness about its own devices, its readership’s habits, its effect upon its readership, and the narrative undermining of authority. . .” (93). This symposium of voices that Wheeler describes presupposes a dialectical relationship between knowledge and language, a polarity defined by Bakhtin’s dialogic imagination and one that is embedded in the writings of both Coleridge and Polanyi.

## V. Some Implications for Composition

Even considering the differences between Coleridge’s polarity, Polanyi’s complementarity, and Bakhtin’s dialogism, their thought connects well with the current paradigm shift to the process model in composition theory with its focus on invention and the recursive nature of writing rather than on the final product. All of these thinkers emphasize the creator-directedness of consciousness, though each with a different perspective. Textuality for these theorists means more than simply knowing how to punctuate a sentence or understanding subject/verb agreement. Thus in the true spirit of romanticism and post-romanticism, every writer has the power to become a creator. Composition, cast in this new key, is thus redefined as an art, not simply a skill. Moreover, we must reinvent the trivium, reinstating rhetoric, grammar, and dialectic as the core of our curriculum where both art and skill are stressed. Perhaps in Coleridgean terms,

art and skill are in a polar relationship within rhetoric, with the art pole having polar predominance. Connecting this model of rhetoric with Bakhtin's dialogic view, I suggest that art is the centripetal pole, expanding outward, and skill the centrifugal pole, seeking form and structure.

Since in Coleridgean terms, creativity is central to human consciousness, any theory of composition informed by the thought of these three thinkers will, as rhetorician Ann Berthoff puts it, "reclaim the imagination."<sup>7</sup> In *The Making of Meaning*, (hereafter *MM*), she argues that

what we need, I think, is to reclaim Imagination as a name for the active mind, the mind in action making meaning. . . . By coming to see how writing thus continues the work of the active mind, we can discover that we know more about composing than we might have thought we did. We can come, as Coleridge put it, to know our knowledge (*MM* 1).

The process model already places consciousness in the center of writing, but I agree with Berthoff that we should reclaim Coleridgean and post-Coleridgean theories of the imagination as the center of the writing process because teachers of writing do need to become philosophers who are interested in actively pursuing knowledge and desire as she suggests. When the imagination is central to rhetorical theory, then teachers may reunite creative writing with discursive writing, letting students experiment with various voices and modes. Teachers can point up the recursive nature of discourse, using Polanyi's theory of the integration of clues. Students, even those struggling with writing, use complex patterns of grammar and syntax without any conscious awareness of their level of difficulty. As Richard Gelwick points out, when they decode text, they are using equally difficult grammatical rules that they often cannot name (*WD* 60).

In sum, I propose that scholars redeem Coleridge's thought for contemporary reflection and explore the ways Coleridge's dialectic thought serves as a precursor to the thought of later writers like Michael Polanyi and Mikhail Bakhtin. The ideas of these three briefly discussed in this essay form a link toward a new consideration of textuality that supports the process model of composition. These three offer a dialectical and philosophic counterpart to process composition theory, an element lacking, according to contemporary rhetoricians. Yet it is important to understand, as Polanyi so aptly states, that all theory, like knowledge, has tacit components, is felt, and is passionately believed. Coleridge passionately believed that polarity expressed the deepest principles of the imagination and of language, and Polanyi and Bakhtin echo elements of polarity when they analyze the ways writers indwell their language and language, in turn, indwells the writer. Understanding these theories can help teachers communicate the polar nature of language itself--we create words but words also create us.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Postmodernists like Ross Winterowd have actually said openly at conferences that Coleridge and the romantic rhetoric he spawned has been detrimental to the field. James Berlin in his book *Rhetoric and Reality* describes expressionist rhetoric, but he never alludes to Coleridge. *Into The Field: Sites of Composition Studies*, a collection of essays edited by Anne Ruggles Gere cites all three writers, but Polanyi and Bakhtin are noted for their theory while Coleridge is mentioned in connection to his poem "Kubla Khan," written in an opium sleep.

<sup>2</sup> I am referring here to the British scientist, Stephen Hawking, whose book *A Brief History of Time* outlines his and others' search for a unified field theory.

<sup>3</sup> In reinterpreting Freud's analysis of Anna, Lacan shows that although Freud was aware of Anna's desire and transference to himself, he was not fully aware of his own desire and transference to Anna. In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, Lacan writes: "an analyst may say that the whole theory of transference is merely a defense of the analyst."

<sup>4</sup> In speaking of a symphony of voices, one is reminded of the "symphony" Coleridge uses in his *Biographia*. Some critics see this "dialogic imagination" as a mark of his genius while others, like Norman Fruman in *Zymandias and the Reconstruction of Opposites* are maddened by it.

<sup>5</sup> Polanyi, too, had a deep interest in Dostoevsky's work. He writes in his essay "The Two Cultures": "The line of modern writing descending from Dostoevsky undertook to explore the limits of nihilism, in search of an authentic residue of moral reality. While this quest has sometimes led to meaningless despair, the movement has, as a whole, hardened the moral tone of our century and cleared the ground for re-laying the foundations of morality" (*Knowing and Being* 44).

<sup>6</sup> In commenting on Bakhtin's writing style as well as his theory, Caryl Emerson notes in her introduction to *The Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* the way in which Bakhtin commingles voices. "In one sentence he will present direct speech, indirect speech, quasi-direct speech, his own voice interwoven with the voices and arguments of his opponents and fellow travelers. Bakhtin's own term for this is 'voice interference' " (xxxvi). I would suggest that Coleridge's *Biographia* has similar "voice interferences," and it is this dialogic style that critics like Fruman find so objectionable. In fact, Dale Bauer's *Feminist Dialogics* argues that dialogics can be reread as a female style of discourse.

<sup>7</sup> Although Coleridge, Polanyi, and Bakhtin all have a similar notion of the human imagination ("multiety in unity"), Lacan cannot be included in these general statements about the imagination because what Coleridge would name the imagination with its active and creative powers, Lacan would most likely label as language, and Lacan rejects any unity within the human subject.

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# Sanders' Analytic Rebuttal To Polanyi's Critics, With Some Musings On Polanyi's Idea Of Truth

Dale Cannon

ABSTRACT Key words: Polanyi, truth, correspondence theory of truth, relational theory of truth, post-critical, tacit knowledge, propositional knowledge, analytic philosophy.

*This article reviews **Michael Polanyi's Post-Critical Epistemology** by Andy F. Sanders but goes on to articulate certain crucial aspects of Polanyi's post-critical understanding of truth that seem to be overlooked in Sanders' account and which challenge conventional analyses of truth.*

Andy F. Sanders, *Michael Polanyi's Post-Critical Epistemology: A Reconstruction of Some Aspects of Tacit Knowing*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988. Pp. iv + 295. ISBN 90-5183-072-6. Special price for members of the Polanyi Society: \$25 (Rodopi, Atlanta GA 2015 South Park Place Atlanta GA 30339 tel 770-933-0027 fax 770-933-9644).

## I. Overview

For some time, Polanyi's thought has needed patient exposition, reformulation, and defense in relation to mainstream Anglo-American epistemology, especially in the face of several serious criticisms and virtual dismissals that have gone unanswered. The way that mainstream has ignored Polanyi's thought is not simply due to its failure to read and interpret Polanyi's work carefully enough. It must be admitted that Polanyi's writing in certain places lends itself to being interpreted in subjectivist ways, especially when encountered out of context by the sensibility for precision and qualification nurtured in mainstream epistemology (or even by the sensibility of a philosophy teacher habituated to countering introductory students' unreadiness to give reasons for their opinions and their naive equation of truth with "truth for me"). Consider, for example, just two passages from *Personal Knowledge*: In one, Polanyi candidly characterizes as an "invitation to dogmatism" his own attempt "to restore to us once more the power for the deliberate holding of unproven beliefs" (*PK*, p. 268). In another, he *appears* to reduce truth, even factual truth, to simply belief, when he writes: ". . . [T]here is no difference, except in emphasis, between saying 'I believe *p*' or "'*p*' is true'. Both utterances emphatically put into words that I am confidently asserting *p*, as a fact." (*PK*, p. 316) Such statements, given few attempts by anyone to rebut criticisms of Polanyi (however misguided those criticisms happen to be) in mainstream philosophical venues and make clear how statements such as those just quoted do not entail subjectivism, have left the impression in some circles that there is little serious philosophy in Polanyi worth defending.

What is called for by philosophers sympathetic to Polanyi is, first, a solid acquaintance with and competence in what has been going on in mainstream epistemology within this century, second, a careful rearticulation and reformulation of Polanyi's argumentation in relation to the issues and analyses that have emerged within that mainstream, and third, a patient answer (by way of rebuttal or concession) to the significant criticisms of Polanyi's thought that have surfaced therein. In Andy Sanders' book (and person) we have all three. Not only does it accomplish each of these objectives quite well, it provides a good entree for understanding a number of the major issues, positions, and discussions of 20th century epistemology. It is very rich fare, much richer than my summary comments to follow

convey. My fear is that its regular price (\$60) combined with the relative obscurity of its publisher, as far as American philosophers are concerned, will keep it from becoming widely known among those who most need to hear its arguments. In any case, professional philosophers convinced of the importance of Polanyi's thought for contemporary epistemology need to read this book and take up the task where Sanders' book leaves off, following Sanders' model.

## II. Synopsis

To be more specific, Sanders has undertaken to explain, reconstruct (in some cases), and defend those theses in Polanyi's epistemology which are most problematic to mainstream Anglo-American philosophy, and to point out significant correlations between Polanyi's ideas and those of other philosophers in that mainstream. Sanders is not unduly deferential to Polanyi, for there are many places where he points out obscurities, lack of development, ambiguities, weaknesses, insufficiently warranted (or possibly unwarranted) claims, and occasional contradictions, and where he does he usually goes on to reconstruct and reformulate a Polanyian insight so that it makes better sense. Sanders' Introduction makes explicit his intentions in these respects and presents a useful sketch Polanyi's life as a scientist and philosopher.

Polanyi's pioneering theory of tacit knowing is given a fine, systematic exposition in chapter 1, accompanied by solutions along the way to puzzles to which Polanyi's theory gives rise--such as the relation between tacit inference and explicit logical inference (by way of appeal to C. S. Peirce's account of *abduction*). In this chapter, Sanders rebuts criticisms voiced by Rom Harré (that tacit knowing in perception is qualitatively distinct from propositional knowing and that a theory of the former is inadequate to account for the logical structure of the latter) and by M. Bradie and H. A. Simon (that the *Meno* dilemma does not require tacit knowing for its solution, as Polanyi contends). A problem raised here, which continues as a theme throughout the book and is left incompletely resolved until chapter 6, is the philosophical legitimacy of "a thoroughly naturalized epistemology" such as Polanyi's that, by giving central place to the personal judgment of the knower, appears to confuse factual psychological considerations with normative logical considerations.

Chapter 2 undertakes "a rational reconstruction of Polanyi's doctrine of the tacit component" of assertions of fact. It is meant to serve as a basis for tackling the notion of (propositional) truth in chapter 3, which Sanders identifies as his own "main epistemological concern." Sanders' avowed objective is to establish that Polanyi's conception of the knower's ubiquitous personal participation in all acts of knowing and understanding does not imply subjectivism. In any case, chapters 2 and 3 are where the trappings of analytic philosophy are most evident, as Sanders makes use of symbolic logical formulae to minimize ambiguity and maximize clarity and focus. He starts off with a useful summary of Polanyi's overall philosophical programme as centered on a critique of objectivism. That summary culminates with this statement: ". . . his [Polanyi's] central objection to objectivism is that it fails to allow for 'the inherently personal character of the act by which truth is declared' (*PK*:71)." According to Sanders, Polanyi defines an "objectivist" theory of truth as one which "implies *the denial (or elimination) of the tacit component* [i.e., "the inherently personal character of the act"] *as a constituent part or factor in the making of any truth-claim.*" Given this focus, Sanders assumes as his primary responsibility a specification as fully and as undeniably as possible the tacit, personal component that objectivism leaves out of account. He draws on H. P. Grice's conception of "utterer's meaning," as distinct from sentence meaning and word meaning, John Searle's theory of illocutions (conventional types of action, distinct from propositional content, which are accomplished through the use of words--specifically, in this case, the action type of *assertion*), Anthony Kenny's conceptual analysis of emotion (specifically, the distinctions between emotions as

feelings and emotions as motives, and between the intentional object and the cause of an emotion), and Searle's theory of intentionality (which draws a parallel between the structure of speech acts and the structure of intentional states such as belief) to gather together and reconstruct in a single complex conception all that Polanyi has to say about the tacit component of assertions of fact: universal intent, heuristic desire, persuasive passion, feelings of satisfaction, and (sincere) belief.

Chapter 3 is devoted to a reconstruction (drawing on John Searle, Donald Davidson, D. A. Bell's exposition of G. Frege's thought, and Alfred Tarski, among others) of what Polanyi has to say about what we, as utterers, mean in saying that a factual statement is *true*. To set the stage, Sanders highlights Polanyi's thesis that any (sincere) articulate assertion is made up of two parts: (a) a sentence conveying its propositional content and (b) a tacit, mental act (of a definite person at a particular place and time) by which the sentence content is asserted (judged, affirmed, assented to, accepted, acknowledged, believed)--namely, the tacit component of which Sanders has given the analysis in chapter 2. In opposition to objectivist accounts of truth, Sanders reminds us, Polanyi seeks to reform our conception of truth to incorporate an acknowledgment of the ineradicable tacit, personal component of the act by which any truth is declared. Sanders takes Polanyi's primary conceptual innovation to be focused in Polanyi's proposal that "*true*" be "redefined . . . as expressing [but not constituting] the asseveration [i.e., the tacit component] of the declarative sentence to which it refers" (*PK*, p. 255). According to Sanders, Polanyi's proposed reformation is given in his claim (e.g., *PK*, p. 254) that *the predicative use of truth* (as in saying "*P* is true.") is equivalent (in utterer's meaning) to both (a) assertive utterances (in this case, simply *asserting "P."*--which Frege, Tarski, and many other philosophers in this century have held) and (b) first person present tense expressions of belief ("I believe that *P*.")--i.e., a three way equivalence. The difference between the three, as brought out by Sanders' analysis, amounts simply to a difference in degree of emphasis on specific features of the tacit component being expressed--e.g., universal intent or belief--and *not* in the propositional content being asserted. Sanders is careful to point out that, for Polanyi, the act of assertion, the personal judgment which has issued in the statement, and the belief that it expresses are not to be understood as any old assertion, judgment, or belief *de facto*, but always are to be understood in a normatively rational, *de jure* way, as responsible to truthful representation, as intending the achievement of truthful representation--hence as implicating or committing the asserter in certain specific ways. (The taken for granted background context for Polanyi's discussion of truth claims, Sanders reminds us, is a community of persons engaged in the quest for new knowledge and new truths.) Thus, first-person present-tense belief statements are for Polanyi to be construed as being issued with universal intent--though Sanders points out that this is somewhat problematic, e.g., when we report, as distinct from express, our belief. The bulk of the chapter is devoted to Sanders clarification and reconstruction of the equivalence stated above, which in a manner of speaking reduces the expressions "I believe (that)" and "is true" to devices for indicating assertions (see *PK*, pp. 28f and 255). I.e., in terms of utterer's meaning, they don't add to the meaning of the simply asserted "*P*" but serve a performative function (in J. L. Austin's and John Searle's sense) of reaffirming or reasserting *P*. Upon reconstruction, Sanders identifies this view as a special version of the so-called Non-descriptive or Performative Theory of Truth, which he shows can be reasonably upheld in the face of criticism (specifically in face of the criticisms of A. R. White that it fails to capture what the words "true" and "false" mean, as distinct from utterer's meaning).

Sanders' stated aim in chapter 4 is to demonstrate how Polanyi's account of "utterer's meaning of truth" (as reconstructed in chapter 3) is in basic accord with the commonsense intuition of truth as agreement with reality--and thus with Polanyi's claim to be a realist. Saunders makes use of A. A. Derkson's survey of realist arguments against instrumentalism to clarify and evaluate what critical remarks Polanyi makes of positivist instrumentalism on behalf of his (Polanyi's) view of science's quest to discover the hidden reality that underlies the facts of nature. Sanders here rebuts critics of Polanyi (Sheffler, Agassi, Musgrave, and Lakatos), who have contended that Polanyi is anything but

a realist. Making sense of Polanyi's realism entails clarifying Polanyi's peculiar conception of reality as "that which is expected to reveal itself indeterminately in the future"--which conception Sanders avers to be "one of the most difficult, complex and obscure parts of Polanyi's philosophy." Deferring to an analysis of Polanyi's notion of reality by Esther Meek (which turns out to be absent from his otherwise complete bibliography), Sanders narrows his focus to pinning down *the property of something being real* in terms of *fruitfulness* (p. 126). (However, rather than "real," it seems that Sanders is instead pinning down "truthlikeness," "verisimilitude," the quality of a theory perceived as "making contact with reality". There seems to be some equivocation or confusion here, perhaps stemming from Polanyi's relatively vague and loose language.) Sanders distinguishes two senses: *fruitfulness*<sub>0</sub>--the sense of actually leading to new and interesting knowledge, and *fruitfulness*<sub>1</sub>--having an indeterminate veridical quality by which *fruitfulness*<sub>0</sub> (i.e., hidden or as yet undisclosed aspects of reality) can be intuitively anticipated (i.e., tacitly but in crucial respects unспециably foreknown) before it occurs (i.e., before the new 'knowledge' can be specified and tested). (A typo at the bottom of p. 126 unfortunately confuses the latter with the former.) Polanyi speaks of the latter's recognition in terms of *intellectual beauty* (also "harmony," "coherence," "depth," and "lasting shapes [*Gestalten*] as tokens of reality"), as distinct from formal elegance (which distinction, Sanders points out, is never fully clarified), for which no strict criteria can be formulated. In an attempt to clarify *fruitfulness*<sub>1</sub> and apprehension of intellectual beauty, Sanders compares Polanyi's realist philosophy of science with that of critical rationalist Imre Lakatos. Lakatos has insightfully contrasted his own view of the appraisal of scientific theories from Polanyi's view in terms of the difference between statute law and case law. The former believes that there are specifiable, universal criteria at work, whereas the latter holds that what criteria are involved cannot be abstracted from consideration of relevant individual cases and the competent judgment of scientists themselves. Whereas Lakatos is at points highly critical of Polanyi (and of the elitism Polanyi's views seem to presuppose)--though inconsistently so, as Sanders points out--Sanders demonstrates that the two are not nearly so divergent as first appears. Thus, for Polanyi (and at times for Lakatos) *fruitfulness*<sub>1</sub> or intellectual beauty as a token of reality, at least in science, turns out to be identifiable (i.e., *fallibly* recognized) only by way of the personal judgment of competent members of the scientific community. It does not itself make something (e.g., a theory) true; as truthlikeness, verisimilitude, a token or mark of what is true, it intimates the discovery of what is true; it is a kind of evidence (though ultimately unспециably, intuitive, and tacit) of truth. It follows that it is wholly compatible with Sanders' analytic reconstruction of Polanyi's account of truth developed in chapter 3, which has to do with explicit assertions of fact. In the last section of chapter 4, Sanders sets out to realize his stated aim for the chapter, namely to show how the notion of truthlikeness being discussed implies the commonsense notion of correspondence with reality or fact. Unfortunately, he confuses this relatively straightforward *epistemological* question of the correspondence relation between the propositional content of a representation of reality (e.g., as found in an assertion or belief-that) and the state of affairs (reality) it purports to represent (with which relation Polanyi completely agrees) with the *ontological* question of the correspondence between the structure of tacit comprehension (which need not immediately involve any proposition as such) and the structure of the comprehensive entity which is its object. Nevertheless, Sanders does make some interesting points about the latter, showing Polanyi's understanding of it to consist in a relationship of homomorphy rather than isomorphy, in rebuttal to the accounts of R. E. Innis, J. B. Bennett, and E. L. Meek.

In chapters 5 and 6, Sanders takes on the most serious and sustained critique of Polanyi's epistemology from the Popperian school of philosophy of science, that of Alan Musgrave. In his 1969 doctoral dissertation at the University of London, Musgrave accuses Polanyi of subjectivism, solipsism, dogmatism, relativism, and psychologism (confusing matters of logical validity with matters of psychological fact). Sanders patiently proceeds one by one to acknowledge the partial truth on which each of these charges is based and to concede the justice of some critical points,

but shows how each charge ultimately falls far short of Polanyi's actual position, which in turn provides a crucial corrective to Popper's position. In support of his argument he draws on Searle's idea that behind and undergirding each particular intentional state (such as a speech act) is a "Network of Intentional States" and a "Background of pre-intentional stances and mental capacities" (which he uses to further specify what is involved in Polanyi's conception of the tacit coefficient to all focal awareness and explicit judgment) and Susan Haack's substantial critique of Critical Rationalism's rigid separation of matters of logic from matters of psychology and its resulting attempt to eliminate from accounts of scientific knowledge reference to a knowing subject. Along the way Sanders puts forward many points, including an interesting distinction between dogmatic justificationism (assuming one's first principles to be self-evident and incorrigible) and methodological dogmatism (tenaciously sticking to one's fallible convictions as long as it is reasonably possible). Significantly, Sanders brings out how Popper's and Polanyi's epistemologies of science, despite the obvious differences and these two philosopher's inability to appreciate each other, at bottom turn out to have considerably more in common than is usually realized and that their respective positions, with certain crucial qualifications, may ultimately be reconcilable.

Chapter 7 is devoted to clarifying Polanyi's extension of the theory of personal knowledge beyond the natural sciences to the humanities and to religion in particular, and how it contributes to a post-critical vision of the world as fundamentally meaningful. Sanders is particularly interested in bringing out the implications of Polanyi's thinking for conceiving religion as a fiduciary framework (analogous to that of modern natural science) and worship as a heuristic vision (of a meaningful and hopeful universe), and for certain other problems in philosophy of religion. Compared to earlier chapters, this chapter is the most open-ended, with promising threads of ideas and arguments leading off in many directions but left dangling, primarily because Polanyi left them undeveloped and in some respects not fully consistent. I had expected more of a climax than it provided.

### III. Going Beyond Sanders' Account

Despite my profound appreciation for all that Sanders has accomplished in this book, I am left with some misgivings. Most relate directly or indirectly to Polanyi's aim to effect a shift in his reader from a critical to a post-critical intellectual sensibility (reflected in the subtitle of *PK: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* and dealt with explicitly in Part Three of *PK*), concerning which at no point in Sanders' book am I left with a clear idea or a keen appreciation, despite its inclusion in the title, *Michael Polanyi's Post-Critical Epistemology*.

Sanders leaves his reader's critical intellectual sensibility intact and unchallenged, as if Polanyi's argument entailed no radical criticism of this sensibility and posture. By the reader's critical intellectual sensibility, I mean first of all the habitual tendency tacitly to assume the posture of an anonymous, detached (in the third person), noncommittal, skeptical assessor of propositions regarding matters of knowledge, truth, and reality, which are to be doubted unless one is given sufficient reason for believing them. (The propriety of which posture, of course, is wholly taken for granted in the analytic tradition in which Sanders' book is couched.) If, as Polanyi contends, truth can be thought of only by believing it, then such a posture is incapable of truly thinking truth, its protestations notwithstanding. The problem Polanyi is most deeply and most perplexingly struggling with in Part Three of *PK* with regard to what he speaks of as "the language of commitment" (which Sanders seems uncomfortable with, though he ventures a defense of it) is *the devising of a post-critical rhetoric for epistemology*. Whether we adopt that language ourselves or something else, Polanyi's insights require that epistemological rhetoric, our very way of doing epistemology, be changed. Things cannot simply go on as they have in the past. Yet Sanders (see, e.g., pp. 167-168) appears to proceed as if differentiating

“in neutral terms” the content of Polanyi’s ideas from his rhetoric and style were entirely unproblematic.

The matter at issue here is not simply rhetoric as some relatively superficial matter, such as how we should express our thoughts. The critical intellectual posture being challenged by Polanyi in part hinges on the assumption that (in principle) one can unproblematically and neutrally specify a *propositional content* of any thought or intention which is then subject to critical reflection (an assumption taken for granted by Searle’s proposed parallel between internal intentional states and external speech acts, which Sanders readily adopts [pp. 61f, 75f]). (Note the requirement that the critical tradition would lay upon us: because everything must be subject to critical reflection in the modern cartesian mode, *everything* is to be construed as a propositional content, or at least unproblematically determinable as such.) Polanyi repeatedly makes the point that we can critically reflect only on something explicitly stated or articulated (e.g., a propositional content or some symbolic representation), but that tacit awareness is not itself subject to critical reflection precisely because it is not representational (hence not propositional). It is an *enacted relationship* in which the knower connects with the known, a *contact with reality*, an *indwelling of the known*. As such, it does not have propositional content--which is not to say that it might not issue forth in, or in part be represented by, some propositional content, or be itself a making sense of and an upholding of some propositional content. To assume that tacit awareness as such has propositional content would be to assume that it is latently or potentially explicit, i.e., already representational. The modern critical tradition takes explicitation /determination /articulation /thematization of the world (its determinate representability) for granted; Polanyi and post-critical philosophy do not. Explicit or articulate knowing is a knowing by representation (*wissen, savoir*) possessable in the absence of what is known. Tacit knowing is a knowing by first person acquaintance (*kennen, connaitre*) possessable only by way of a presence to and a rapport with what is known. Tacit knowing is that upon which our explicit accounts (and thus all instances of explicit knowing) are developed, based, deciphered, and assessed.

Parallel to Polanyi’s distinction between tacit awareness and explicit knowledge is his distinction (observed by Polanyi but rarely remarked) between two kinds of believing: believing *in* (including trust, endorsement, accreditation, reliance, etc., all of which are for Polanyi *a-critical*) and believing *that* or believing *about* (which may be *critical* or *uncritical*). (See *PK*, p. 264.) Neither distinction is absolute; the latter of each pair is rooted and grounded in the former. Believing *in* is more fundamental and foundational than believing *that*. The distinction between believing *in* and believing *that* for the most part gets lost in Sanders’ account of belief, and by default all forms of belief tend to be reduced to believing *that*. In any case, the kind of methodological believing requisite for approaching truth is more fundamentally the former than it is the latter: again, believing *in* is an enacted, developing relationship. It cannot, without distortion, be reduced to assent to a propositional content (believing *that*). Understanding the distinction between believing *in* and believing *that* is crucial for making sense of Polanyi’s remarks about theories and larger fiduciary frameworks as instruments of our knowing, extensions of our bodies, which we indwell and assimilate to ourselves in reaching out to *make contact with* aspects of reality otherwise unknown. Any scientific theory will indeed for a time and in certain circumstances be considered critically, as subject to critically entertained belief *that*. But in shifting our attention from this *focal attention* to the theory, once we have come to recognize it as true, to *subsidiarily attending from* the theory to aspects of reality to which it provides us clues, we come *a-critically* to rely upon the theory (to believe *in* it) so as to put us in contact with (in a direct, though mediated, acquaintance relationship with) those aspects of reality. The believing is importantly different in each case, even though the same theory is involved. But in the latter case, it is the theory as subsidiarily known (indeed, subsidiarily known by the competent scientist), disclosing aspects (clues to hidden reality) to which we are oblivious in attending to the theory focally as an explicit

content (as candidate for belief *that*). Those clue-like aspects of the theory are not (or at least not directly) a matter of explicit logical inference from the propositional content of the theory; they only come into play as we look not at the theory but toward that to which the theory points as we place our confidence in it, assimilating it to ourselves, extending our reach by its means. Thereby the theory functions in a mediational capacity (mediating our reach) rather than a representational capacity (picturing in the absence). Believing *in* here again is a relationship, a reaching out to make contact with hidden reality (a reality which of course is also meaning and value). Construing this believing *in* as simply assent to the theory's propositional content completely obscures this relational connection with reality which Polanyi brings to light.

For Polanyi, believing (*qua* believing *in*) as well as knowing (*qua* tacit knowing) are more fundamentally relational than representational. In consequence, "universal intent" is less a matter of "the intention to make only true factual statements" (to which Sanders seems to reduce it--see pp. 81, 67f) than it is the intention to connect with a reality recognizable in common to responsible inquirers, i.e., the intention to attain *truth*. Truth, for Polanyi, is thus more than propositional truth (on which Sanders almost entirely focuses his account); it is *the achievement of connection in the first person (for oneself) with, or rapport with, objective reality (qua recognizable in common to responsible inquirers), a fidelity to it that adheres to it, acknowledges it, and makes it known, appearances and others' unbelief to the contrary notwithstanding*. In that sense it is an impassioned transcendental ideal, summoning us to responsibility and transcendence. The Hungarian Revolution, which Polanyi praises so much, was fought for the freedom to pursue and attain truth in this sense, to come into rapport for oneself with what is real, not simply "to make only true factual statements." Of course, propositional truth was for the Hungarian Freedom Fighters as well as for Polanyi, a genuine and important concern; yet it was for them, as it should be for us, subordinate to truth in this deeper sense, a sense that by summoning us to transcendence is constitutive of our personhood (as something more than subjectivity).

I must hasten to add that this deeper, existential sense of truth is not absent from Sanders' account. He makes explicit reference to it on several occasions (e.g., pp. 52f, 148f). But its relationship to Sanders' central emphasis upon propositional truth is never made clear. Nor, in consequence, is Polanyi's radical challenge to the failure of 20th century mainstream philosophy to grant this sense of truth the recognition it deserves made clear.

## 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, Montana State University, Billings, MT 59101 (fax: 406-657-2037). Manuscripts, notices and notes should be sent to Phil Mullins, Missouri Western State College, St. Joseph, MO 64507 (fax: 816-271-5987 e-mail: mullins@griffon.mwsc.edu). Manuscripts should be double-spaced type with notes at the end; writers are encouraged to employ simple citations within the text when possible. Use M.L.A. or A.P.A. 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 of accepted articles; it is helpful if original submissions are accompanied by an electronic copy.

# Criticism, Contact with Reality and Truth

**Andy F. Sanders**

**ABSTRACT** Key Words: Michael Polanyi, tacit knowledge, dogmatism, criticism, Background, J.Searle, truth, contact with reality.

*Partly in reply to D. Cannon's critique of my analytical reconstruction of Polanyi's post-critical theory of knowledge, I argue that there are good reasons for not appropriating Polanyi's programme of self-identification and the confessional rhetoric which may be derived from it. Arguing that "post-critical" should not be identified with an uncritical dogmatism, I then go on to suggest that the theory of tacit knowing had best be elaborated further by drawing on the work of J. Searle and M. Johnson. Finally, I make use of E. Meek's account of the notion of "contact with reality" to highlight the Polanyian criteria of truth.*

## I. Introduction

Dale Cannon's musings on my account of Polanyi's theory of personal knowledge are challenging not only because they made me reconsider certain choices I made in expounding and reconstructing that theory, but also because he claims that my appropriation of post-critical epistemology in terms of analytical philosophy is in several respects misguided. As a consequence, my reconstruction is obscuring fundamental Polanyian insights. As I understand them, Cannon's objections to it can be summarized as follows:

- (1) It remains tributary to the critical (analytical) tradition by differentiating the content of Polanyi's epistemology from his style.
- (2) It fails to capture the significance of Polanyi's proposal for "a post-critical rhetoric for epistemology."
- (3) It misconstrues tacit knowing as representational and thus reduces it to a form of propositional knowing that (or believing that).
- (4) It fails to do justice to Polanyi's notion of existential or relational truth and thus leaves the relationship between propositional and relational truth unexplained.

Surely, these are no small charges. Obviously, my account leaves out certain aspects of the theory of personal knowledge. For example, I do not fully discuss ideas which are not directly relevant to my aim, namely, "to clarify and develop aspects of [Polanyi's] work *in connection with* some contemporary positions within analytical philosophy."<sup>1</sup> As Polanyi's own aims and motives are not the primary subject of my book, my concern is, rather, "with what he says, than with why he is saying it."<sup>2</sup> It is this restriction which I think gives rise to most of Cannon's misgivings. As will turn out, however, his critique is not only concerned with what is insufficiently accentuated or left out, but directed at actual elements of my account as well.

Part of my aim in this paper is to locate the source of our apparent disagreement. I suspect it arises from quite different conceptions of the task of philosophy and thus from different interpretations of Polanyi's endeavour, or, at least, from emphasizing quite different strands in it. Since Cannon's objections, for obvious reasons, are not worked out fully, I will strengthen them whenever this seems called for, even if this makes them more robust and severe than they may be intended.

Discussing the objections in the order given, I will argue against the first charge that critique has a vital role even in post-critical philosophy. Regarding charge (2), I will argue, first, that Polanyi's post-critical rhetoric can be developed in two directions, an existentialist and traditionalist one and, second, that I opt for Polanyi's traditionalism for epistemological reasons. Objection (3), I believe, is based on a misunderstanding of my position. In the last section, I will deal with (4) and Cannon's interesting and challenging proposal to conceive of Polanyian truth as relational and existential. I will not merely defend my own account of Polanyi's conception of truth, but I will also develop and strengthen it further.

## II. Tacit Knowing and Criticism

Cannon's critique seems to be motivated at least in part by certain misgivings about the adequacy of my analytical approach. This is not really surprising, for many strands of early analytical philosophy can be associated with the objectivist positions Polanyi was criticizing in the fifties and sixties. However, I believe that much of analytical philosophy (broadly so called) has moved away from logical positivist assumptions under the influence of (the later) Wittgenstein, Searle, Putnam, MacIntyre and others. In contrast, Cannon is clearly doubtful of analytical philosophy as a means of appropriating Polanyian insights. In his view, my reconstruction of the theory of personal knowledge not only leaves our "critical intellectual sensibility intact", but it also ignores Polanyi's fundamental challenge to the assumption underlying this sensibility, namely that "(in principle) one can unproblematically and neutrally specify a *propositional content* of any thought or intention which is then subject to critical reflection" (p. 22).

In connection with this double claim two complex issues can be raised. First, I take it that a neutral specification of a person's thoughts is problematic because these thoughts cannot be isolated from the context or the manner in which that person, so to speak, "has" this thought, the meaning it has for her. Second, Cannon also suggests that I have obscured two fundamental properties of tacit knowing, its being both unspecifiable and a-critical. Leaving the first issue for further discussion in the next section, the point underlying the second one seems to be that my approach includes a kind of pan-criticism: "because everything must be subject to critical reflection in the modern cartesian mode, *everything* is to be construed as a propositional content" (p. 22). According to Cannon, I remain trapped, willy nilly perhaps, in precisely the objectivist modes of thought Polanyi's post-critical enterprise is directed against. What to say to this?

To begin with, I would like to emphasize that I nowhere uphold, explicitly or implicitly, a comprehensive criticism which says that everything must be subject to critical reflection. Cannon's conception of analytical philosophy as aiming only at criticism seems overly narrow. In contrast, I see its goal as conceptual clarification and innovation, not in the hope of reaching allegedly "clear and distinct ideas" or some other sort of epistemic "foundation," but in order to resolve questions, perplexities and obscurities in our thinking.

What is wrong with a critical sensibility? As I try to give full credit to the essential characteristics of tacit knowing as both unspecifiable and a-critical and as I find myself agreeing with nearly everything Cannon has to say about the nature of tacit knowing, it seems that we are holding quite different views of the viability of critical analysis. Obviously, the possibility of such analysis depends on the specifiability of particulars. If tacit knowing were completely unspecifiable at all times, criticism of tacitly functioning particulars would be impossible. But of course, according to the theory of tacit knowing at least some things known tacitly within a certain context at a particular point in time can, at least in part, be specified (though not, of course, at the same time).

Cannon appears to acknowledge this when he rejects the view that tacit knowing “might not issue forth in, or in part be represented by, some propositional content, or be itself a making sense of and an upholding of some propositional content” (p. 22). Nevertheless, I think that he is to a certain extent playing down the importance of critical reflection and examination in mastering skills, in understanding and in discovery in general.<sup>3</sup> Consider his example of reliance on a scientific theory. On Cannon’s construal of the role of tacit knowing in scientific inquiry, we start by considering a theory critically, but come to rely upon it a-critically once we have recognized it as true. The theory is then relied upon “so as to put is into contact with ... reality” (p. 22). Accordingly, Cannon distinguishes between the mediating capacity of a theory (when relied upon confidently) and its representational capacity (when focally attended to as an explicit content).

As such the distinction is sound and I also agree that we cannot use, apply, or rely on, a theory and critically examine it at the same time. However, Cannon comes close to saying that tacit awareness and focal attention are not only mutually exclusive at a particular time, but also all, or almost all, of the time. It seems as if he is saying that once you have come to believe in a theory as true, paying attention to its particulars will easily destroy your confident reliance on it.

But what of the host of theories in the history of science which turned out to be mistaken, no matter how much they were relied on or how strongly they were believed in? Of course, no inquiry or believing is without risk, as Polanyi points out. But when we are told by philosophers of science, Polanyi himself included, that all our theories, even the best ones, are engulfed in a sea of anomalies, surely the element of risk (and error) should not be thought of lightly. It is not enough just to say that now foundationalism has collapsed for us, fallible humans, there is no other alternative than to go from where we are. The problem is not that there is no alternative but rather that there is a plurality of alternative theories, views and ideas, many of which are at odds with our own.

This problem only deepens when we consider the religious or secular world-views to which we are committed. Scientists may strongly believe in a scientific theory or think they are simply working on it, they may stake their careers on that theory or they may be more cautious. But where human flourishing and human destiny is concerned, the stakes may even be higher. A religious example in this connection is Johannes Climacus who, acknowledging that “[w]ithout risk, no faith,” admonishes himself that in order to keep the faith “I must ... see to it that in the objective uncertainty I am “out on 70,000 fathoms of water” and still have faith.”<sup>4</sup> Another example, involving a different kind of risk, would be Polanyi who, professing that all that we believe to be true and good may be totally mistaken (*PK* 404), nevertheless maintains “that we may firmly believe what we might conceivably doubt; and may hold to be true what might conceivably be false” (*PK* 312). Further examples could easily be multiplied. My point is that precisely because so much depends on what we are committed to, faith, whether religious or secular, and criticism should be seen as interdependent. In the words of Basil Mitchell: “Without faith in an established tradition criticism has nothing to fasten on; without criticism

the tradition ceases in the end to have any purchase on reality.”<sup>5</sup>

The epistemological issue here can be put in the form of a familiar dilemma. To put it crudely: should we minimize (the risk of) error or should we maximize truth? Of course, we would like to do both. But by minimizing error we run the danger of keeping truth out as well, whereas maximizing truth may well lead to taking all sorts of error on board. Foundationalist philosophers chose the first horn by trying to find a collection of incorrigible, indubitable, preferably even infallible basic beliefs on which the edifice of knowledge could be erected. In spite of all their attempts to minimize error, however, truth became progressively harder to come by.

As to the other horn of the dilemma, it seems quite natural to interpret Polanyi’s *invitation to dogmatism* (*PK* 268) as an attempt to break it. In a sense, it can be seen as an attempt to maximize truth while at the same time allowing for the possibility of complete error. Since the invitation plays a central role in the fiduciary programme, the question of how we should understand it is of vital importance. I will come back to this issue in the next section, but as far as the role of criticism is concerned, I think it would be misconceiving the invitation to think that it implies that criticism as such is the high road to self-doubt, scepticism, nihilism, and what not. On my account of post-critical philosophy, critical analysis is of vital importance both after the acceptance of some theory as true and while relying on it with an eye to seek for more truth or to improve our bodily and intellectual skills in general (provided that its results can be reintegrated into the original focal whole).<sup>6</sup>

As Cannon does not deny the importance of critical reflection as such, have I not been labouring the obvious? But then, again, what is wrong with a critical posture? Could the point of his objection be the extent to which my account remains focussed on certain particulars of the theory of tacit knowing? On this reading, his charge would be that I do not maintain the proper balance between analysis (attending to the particulars) and integration (attending from the particulars). Concentrating too much on particulars, the overall significance of the theory of tacit knowing gets obscured because it precludes the meaningful reintegration of those particulars. If so, an analytical approach and its concomitant “critical” and detached posture, might even be a case of what Polanyi calls “destructive analysis” (cf. *PK* 50ff.). This leads us to objection (2) which accuses me of failing to capture the true significance of Polanyi’s post-critical rhetoric.

### **III. A New Epistemological Rhetoric?**

According to Cannon, Polanyi’s post-critical insights require that “our very way of doing epistemology be changed” and that “[t]hings cannot simply go on as they have in the past” (p. 21). But what does he mean by that? Fortunately, we have a clue to what he is getting at refers to a passage where I defend Polanyi against Alan Musgrave’s claim that Polanyi’s epistemology leads to solipsism. In that context, I suggest that Musgrave is misinterpreting certain peculiarities of Polanyi’s style and I then go on to put the fiduciary formulation of the task of philosophy “into a more neutral mode of speech.”<sup>7</sup>

Recall that according to Cannon it is not possible to specify the content of a person’s belief neutrally. Extracting the content of a belief out of its proper context without reintegrating it, deprives it of its meaning. Applying this to my reconstruction of Polanyi, it may then be suggested that this is precisely what I am doing: making a split between the content of his ideas and their significance (as expressed in a particular rhetorical style).

Assuming that the significance of the theory of personal knowledge lies at least partly in its aims, we find them expressed in a frequently quoted series of passages. In many of them, liberation from objectivism and restoration of meaning and confidence are central. For example, liberation from objectivism is achieved by realizing “that we can voice our ultimate convictions only from within ... the whole system of acceptances that are logically prior to any particular assertion of our own ...”(PK 267). Accordingly, philosophy for Polanyi now becomes a *programme of self-identification*: “discovering what I truly believe in and ... formulating the convictions I find myself holding.”<sup>8</sup> In complete self-referential coherence, he then reports as his central convictions “that I must conquer my self-doubt”(ibid.) and “that I am called upon to search for the truth and state my findings”(PK 299). But then his programme of self-identification may become our programme as well. So the aim is also “to restore to us once more the power for the deliberate holding of unproven beliefs”(PK 268).

Langford and Poteat have interpreted these self-referential (personal) and summoning expressions in *Personal Knowledge* as a deliberately employed “confessional rhetoric” in the line of St. Augustine. According to them, “this form of confession is precisely the medium for seeking to appreciate how and who one is in order that one may more fully be so.”<sup>9</sup> Assuming that this somewhat resembles the new epistemological rhetoric Cannon is alluding to, what to think of it?

To begin with, I admit that I did not appropriate either Polanyi’s confessional rhetoric or the programme of self-identification. With the help of hindsight, let me try to explain why. In the first place, I took my audience to be mainly analytical non-Polanyians, that is, philosophers who at the time were at most dimly aware of Polanyi’s work, if not deeply suspicious of the curious mixture of its analytical, phenomenological, pragmatic and existential aspects (and possibly also of his status as a non-professional *philosophe*). Telling this audience in a straightforward way that epistemology after Polanyi cannot be done in the traditional ways any more, seemed to me a rhetorical strategy doomed to failure. In presenting Polanyi’s ideas to them in current analytical idiom and styles of reasoning, I tried to convey their intelligibility and plausibility in an indirect way.<sup>10</sup>

Further, it is obvious that the programme of self-identification does not fit well in the context of a reconstructive enterprise in epistemology. Analytical philosophy is neither a philosophy of life, nor does it “speak from the heart.” It has no programme for human flourishing and the most it can do by way of intellectual therapy is conceptual clarification and innovation. Nevertheless, even in retrospect, I still find myself reluctant to side with Langford, Poteat and, possibly, also Cannon, in taking the programme of self-identification as the central tenet of Polanyi’s post-critical philosophy. Notice, though, that this is not to deny that it is one of its tenets and that its further elaboration may be a perfectly legitimate post-critical undertaking.

Next, and more important, my reluctance is fueled by straightforward epistemological concerns as well. First, there is the serious issue of Polanyi’s invitation to dogmatism. Should we take it as a plea for existentialist faith and unconditional commitment, as a summons to a post-foundational traditionalism or, perhaps, as a neo-Wittgensteinian call for participation in groundless epistemic practices? On the first reading, it seems to me that straightforward dogmatism in combination with the program of personal self-identification will lead to a position which I find untenable. What I have in mind are policies and attitudes of sticking to one’s beliefs, theories and world-views in a “come what may” fashion, either by appeal to revealed or manifest truths (as in fideism) or to allegedly basic beliefs (as in full-blown or crypto-foundationalism). True is only what is (or may yet become) true-for-me or true-for-us; what is true-for-them, for “the others,” is of no concern, or, worse, a threat to my or our intellectual existence. One of the central theses of

my book is that this kind of dogmatism is untenable and irreconcilable both with Polanyi's fallibilism and with the possibility of criticism. Hence my proposal to read Polanyi's invitation as a methodological maxim, similar to C.S. Peirce's principle of tenacity, to stick to our traditions in the face of adverse evidence as long as this is reasonably possible or no better alternative is available.<sup>11</sup> Methodological dogmatism, as I call it, plays a central role in the traditionalist position which I then proceed to develop in Polanyi's wake.

A correlated worry is that the programme of self-identification coupled to the requirement to express only our own ultimate convictions "from within our convictions," may give epistemology an unduly "egocentric" twist. Polanyi recognizes this danger when he says that as soon as his fiduciary programme is formulated "it appears to menace itself with destruction ... for by limiting himself to the expression of his own beliefs, the philosopher may be taken to talk only about himself" (*PK* 299). To prevent the destruction, the theory of commitment is developed around the notions of responsible belief and universal intent.<sup>12</sup>

As Cannon rightly points out (p. 21), I am somewhat uncomfortable with the doctrine of commitment. I still believe that this doctrine can only fulfill its task properly if not only the personal, but also the cultural roots of tacit knowing are taken into account. The latter not as something additional to the personal, but rather as constitutive of it. For example, the standards in respect to which we as veracious inquirers hold ourselves responsible, must be self-set in order to function as such - otherwise they couldn't even be *my* (or *our*) standards. But they are not free floating and not just there to be picked out at will. Rather, they are embedded in the traditions, the histories and practices to which we have become affiliated, in which we participate and on which we are desperately dependent.

In sum, for an analytical philosopher, embarking on a confessional rhetoric in the line of an unqualified dogmatism, would amount to a major intellectual shift in allegiance. As a philosopher of religion, trained in the analytical tradition, working on the intersection of "reason" and "faith", I am only too well aware of, and perhaps too self-conscious about, the tensions between the two realms and the pitfalls awaiting those who think they can work comfortably in both of them at the same time.<sup>13</sup>

#### **IV. The Irreducibility of Tacit Knowing**

According to Cannon, "tacit awareness is not itself subject to critical reflection precisely because it is not representational (hence not propositional)" (p. 22). Having dealt already with the issue of criticism, we now turn to the claim that tacit knowing is not representational (and thus not propositional), but relational or existential. The relationality of tacit knowing is elucidated by a distinction between tacit knowing as fiduciary or personal *belief in*, and explicit (propositional) knowledge as objective or a-personal *belief that*.<sup>14</sup> Cannon rightly points out that although belief in includes belief that, it is more. Consequently, belief in (tacit knowing) cannot be reduced to mere assent to some propositional content on pains of distorting its essential characteristics.

I agree completely with Cannon on this point and I am therefore rather puzzled by the charge. I can only conclude that he is misreading my position entirely. First, from the fact that I am using abstract entities like propositions for the purpose of a presentation and elucidation of the theory of tacit knowing, it does not follow that particulars are in the nature of representations *if and when they are attended from or functioning as subsidiaries*. They may well be figurative, auditive, tactile etc., but I present tacit knowing in propositional terms for the purpose of elucidating the *theory* of tacit knowing. What better way is there to introduce and convey the epistemological status of tacit knowing

to analytical philosophers? Thus, propositional (re)presentation is primarily a useful means for clarification, not some covert ontological thesis about the nature of tacitly held particulars.

Further, it should be noticed that the theory of tacit knowing is itself located at a different level of description than particular instances of tacit knowing. Why think that a propositional representation of the *theory* of personal knowledge as such is mistaken or confused? Whereas on my account tacit knowing remains phenomenologically and psychologically ubiquitous and irreducible, surely the philosophical *theory* of tacit knowing is not itself tacit but explicit and thus susceptible to analysis, critical examination, defense, elaboration, and so forth.

Finally, and most importantly, I do give the non-propositional or quasi-propositional elements in all forms of knowing their due place. For example, in my reconstruction of the tacit component as involved in utterances of statements of fact, I emphasize the role of (and degrees of) emotions and feelings in order to clarify what Polanyi means by his all too brief remarks on the nature of assertions and truth. Later, in a broader context, I employ John Searle's thesis of the Background in order to lend further substance to Polanyi's conception of the tacit component as not only inherently personal and embodied but as socio-cultural or communal as well.<sup>15</sup> The central features of our Background capacities and stances can be listed thus: they are pre-intentional, nonrepresentational and they permeate a person's intentional Network. Hence, without the Background no intentionality, no directedness of consciousness and, I should add, no focal awareness and no explicit knowledge of any significance. Far from saying, explicitly or by implication, that tacit knowing is as such propositional, I am in fact construing it as a vast fund of pre-intentional, non-propositional stances and capacities.<sup>16</sup> This is precisely why I criticize Searle for suggesting that Polanyi's theory implies that rules which govern skills function unconsciously as representations.<sup>17</sup> This would reduce personal knowing how to a knowledge by description which, like reducing belief in to belief that, is indeed totally alien to Polanyi's endeavour.

Of course, nailing my colours rather tightly to Searle's mast might be a source of further misgivings. For instance, his thesis of the Background has been criticized by Mark Johnson who argues that it remains objectivist and that a viable theory of meaning should go beyond Searle's.<sup>18</sup> Although expressing firm agreement on the substantial points that all meaning is a matter of intentionality and that all meaning is context-dependent, Johnson criticizes Searle for taking the Background as preintentional and thus not as itself part of meaning. Consequently, imaginative phenomena or structures, like categorization, image schemata, metaphorical projection, metonymy, polysemy and semantic change, which Johnson sees as essential to meaning, come to fall outside the scope of adequate theory of meaning and understanding.<sup>19</sup>

In retrospect, had I been acquainted with Johnson's work in time, I would certainly have used it to amplify my account of the tacit component and to amend the notion of the Background. For Searle's earlier speech act theoretical account of meaning is indeed restricted to linguistic meaning, to be analysed in terms of propositional contents in certain intentional or psychological modes. In particular, I would have made ample use of Johnson's notion of non-propositional meaning, which is richer than Searle's theory as put forward in *Intentionality* (1983).

It should be pointed out, though, that Searle recently further elaborated his thesis of the Background in reply to various criticisms, especially in his *The Rediscovery of the Mind* (1992). In this book, he develops a theory of consciousness which comprises quite a few Polanyian concerns, such as the rejection of materialism, the irreducibility of consciousness, the view of consciousness as a natural biological feature, and commitment to truth of propositions without having any intentional states with those propositions as content. He still takes the Background as non- or

preintentional but he now assigns the Background a much broader role: it is now said not only to “enable” linguistic and perceptual interpretation, but also to “structure” consciousness (by moulding extended sequences of experiences into “narrative shapes” and “motivational dispositions”) and to “facilitate” certain kinds of readiness of the person and to “dispose” one to certain sorts of behaviour.<sup>20</sup> Whether this brings Searle closer to Johnson or not would have to be the topic for a separate paper, but I think Johnson is mistaken when he suggests that Searle’s demarcation between the intentionality of the Network and the preintentionality of the Background is fueled by foundationalist motives.<sup>21</sup> Characterizing the Background as “a bedrock of mental capacities ... that form the preconditions for the functioning of Intentional states,” Searle is using “bedrock” in the familiar Wittgensteinian sense which, of course, is anything but foundationalist.<sup>22</sup>

Where does all this lead us in respect to Cannon’s charge that I am reducing tacit knowing to a form of propositional knowledge? Again, whether or not there is more to the tacit component than can be covered by the Searlean Background, the latter is undeniably non-propositional, bodily rooted, and both person and culture relative. Surely this is enough for my epistemological aim, namely to show in terms intelligible to analytical philosophers that what is tacitly known is not irremediably private but also intersubjectively shared. So far my reply to Cannon’s third objection. Let us now see where this brings us in respect to the interpretation of Polanyi’s account of truth.

## V. Truth as Contact with Reality

Particularly important seems Cannon’s proposal to interpret Polanyi’s conception of truth primarily as “relational” in the sense of “relating to reality by making contact with it” (cf. p.23). According to Cannon, “relational” in this connection is opposed to, or at least more than, merely propositional truth on which he thinks my account is mainly focussed. Polyanian truth, according to Cannon, “*is the achievement of connection in the first person (for oneself) with ... objective reality (qua recognizable in common to responsible inquirers)*” . . . (p. 23). Propositional truth is subordinate to, and grounded in, this deeper, existential or relational sense of truth.

One way of replying to this would be to point out that an assessment of Polanyi’s ideas of truth largely depends on what an account of truth is supposed to achieve. Normally, it attempts to answer questions like: “What is (the nature or meaning of) truth?” (especially the correspondence and the semantic theories), “What are the criteria of truth (or falsehood)?” (notably coherence and pragmatist accounts) and “How do we use the words ‘true’ (or ‘false’)?” (as in the relatively recent non-descriptive or performative account).

Polanyi’s account of truth answers in varying degrees of detail each of these issues. In view of his robust realism, I think it is quite plausible to assume that he remains committed to the common-sense notion of truth as correspondence or fit with reality, a thesis with which Cannon seems to agree. Polanyi also offers an analysis of “what we can mean by saying that a factual statement is true” (PK 254) as part of his attempt to reinterpret the ideal of an impersonally detached truth in order “to allow for the inherently personal character of the act by which truth is declared” (PK 71). As I try to show in detail, his analysis comes close to P. Strawson’s so-called non-descriptive or performative theory of truth, according to which to say that a statement is true is not to ascribe a further property to it, but to endorse, or to express commitment to, its content. Finally, Polanyi also develops an interesting account of how in scientific inquiry truths can be recognized on a tacit level.

I am not sure how to fit Cannon’s notion of existential truth in this traditional way of questioning, but I guess

that I am not misrepresenting him by assuming that the notion of “contact” is closely connected to the issue of the criteria of truth and that the qualification “existential” concerns the meaning of truth.

As regards the criterial or contact sense of truth, I agree with Cannon that it is central to Polanyi’s ideas on truth and that propositional truth is derived from it. My own reconstruction of the criterial sense of truth, of intuitive contact with reality, and of the relations between truth, reality and beauty, is mainly confined to the context in which he develops it, namely the philosophy of science.<sup>23</sup> An extensive account of the notions of truth and contact with reality was already in the offing, namely Esther L. Meek’s dissertation on Polanyi’s realism.<sup>24</sup> Since Cannon refers to her work, let us have a closer look at her account of the experience of contact with reality.

According to Meek, for Polanyi “truth is a matter of contact with reality and as such is personally appraised.”<sup>25</sup> The conceptual connection between “truth” and “reality” is very close indeed for, as Meek points out, the criteria of truth just are the criteria of reality:

contact with reality is a *sine qua non*: without there having been contact with reality, there can be no truth. Truth has to do with reality, with the way things actually are. That is why the criteria of reality function as criteria of truth: they indicate successful contact, and contact is essential to truth.<sup>26</sup>

Arguing convincingly that if truth lies in contact with reality “it is the tacit component alone which enables the knower to decide what is true”<sup>27</sup>, Meek then goes on to clarify the nature of the criteria of reality. According to her, the two basic Polanyian criteria of reality, and thus of truth, are what she calls *the reality criterion* and *the integrative criterion*. According to the reality criterion,

we recognize successful contact with reality in the course of a discovery or other epistemic achievement because of the presence of intimations of indeterminate future manifestations (the IFM Effect), the feeling that the resulting conclusion will go on being confirmed in as yet inconceivable and surprising ways.<sup>28</sup>

The IFM Effect accompanies contact with reality and thus indicates the presence of truth to the discoverer. Whereas the intimations that make up the IFM Effect have a “prospective indeterminacy,” the integrative criterion consists of “retrospectively indeterminate clues.” According to the integrative criterion, “contact with reality has been successfully made if the epistemic achievement in question consists of “the comprehension of the coherence of largely unspecified particulars.”<sup>29</sup>

In Meek’s view, the reality criterion and especially the integrative criterion are basic because three further Polanyian criteria of reality, *coherence*, *rationality* and *intellectual beauty*, “develop out of [them].”<sup>30</sup> All three result from the integrative act of tacit knowing: experiences of coherence are linked with appearance, pattern and order (the phenomenal aspect of tacit knowing) and the experience of rationality is connected with meaningfulness (the semantic aspect). Intellectual beauty attaches to theories and is experienced in virtue of the coherence and rationality of those theories or as an accompaniment of the IMF Effect they exert.<sup>31</sup>

However, Meek warns us that successful contact reveals “*merely* an aspect of reality.”<sup>32</sup> Reality, according to Polanyi, is inexhaustive, and so contact with reality is always aspectual and inexhaustive as well. Consequently, to

attain truth is never to attain the whole truth and nothing but the truth, as Meek rightly emphasizes.<sup>33</sup> In this way truth as contact with reality is reconciled with Polanyi's fallibilism.

As an account of Polanyi's criterial sense of truth, Meek's account of how, according to Polanyi, truth can be recognized, seems to me perfectly sound and also an important complement to my own account.

## VI. Truth as Correspondence

Regarding our second issue, the meaning of truth, I already noted that Cannon and I agree that Polanyi upholds the common-sense notion of truth as correspondence. On my account, part of this is expressed in Polanyi's thesis that the structure of tacit comprehension parallels the structure of what is comprehended (cf. *TD* 33f.). According to Cannon, however, I am confusing the epistemological question of correspondence with reality with what he takes to be "the ontological question of the correspondence between the structure of tacit comprehension ... and the structure of the comprehensive entity which is its object" (p. 20). I certainly do not deny that Polanyi's thesis can be construed as an ontological one but, surely, the epistemological question is just the other side of the same coin.

Consider the following example which is built on an interesting proposal by Meek. She suggests that for Polanyi the notion of contact replaces the notion of correspondence. On her construal, in the process of discovery, tacit foreknowing precedes the discovery. When the explicit knowledge of discovery arrives, "we recognize it as matching or corresponding with the tacit conclusions already reached. Thus discovery comes to us with the conviction of its being true."<sup>34</sup>

Here is the example. When looking at a car in my vicinity, I am more or less aware of the characteristic features of that car, its being yellow, its having a certain shape, wheels, windows, and so forth. The car is in a certain sense "more" than that particular aggregate of features. Normally, when I have a visual experience like that, there is a yellow car in my vicinity. I can express my experience to you by saying "Look, a yellow Alfa Romeo Spider!" So far the ontology. What about the parallel structure? Obviously, I am not having something yellow, four-wheeled, etc. in my head or body. What I have in my mind/body is a visual representation of the car, jointly made up of all the particulars which happen to be relevant to that particular experience and of which I am more or less, or perhaps not at all, aware. As the car is "more" than its component parts, my visual representation is "more" than these subsidiaries. So far the parallel structure.

Now it seems to me that if there is not some sort of connection or "contact" between my awareness of the subsidiaries that make up my visual experience and the actual features of the car, my having that particular visual experience would become a complete mystery. Nothing depends here on the availability of intersubjective checking procedures, let alone on "independent access to reality," that is, access independent of our common conceptions of cars, colours, etc. On the contrary, it is precisely in and through the use of these conceptions that "contact with reality" is achieved. Thus, I uphold my claim that the ontological thesis of corresponding structures has epistemological import as well, and that the sense of correspondence meant by Polanyi is not one of mirroring (isomorphy or one-one correspondence), but a more loose one (homomorphy or analogy).

I am not sure whether this is what Cannon has in mind with his notion of existential truth, which, I take it, covers more than "what is true for me" or "what it means that something is true for me." This is important because it may be the way in which we learn to use the word "true", but it cannot be the whole story and so the traditional questions

reappear.

In retrospect, my analytical approach to Polanyi's theory of personal knowing leaves out certain aspects of his philosophy, in particular the programme of self-identification and the confessional rhetoric deriving from it. However, I show that there are solid epistemological reasons for caution and that "post-critical" should not be identified with an uncritical dogmatism. I also indicate how the current accounts of the nature and structure of tacit knowing could be elaborated further by drawing on, and extending, the work of Searle and Johnson. Finally, I make use of Meek's account of the notion of "contact with reality" to expound Polanyi's criterial sense of truth. In the light of this, I would not be surprised if Dale Cannon's misgivings are still largely intact. Still, what this exchange of views between proponents of quite different philosophical styles shows, I hope, is that the views of others do make a difference.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>I take "analytical philosophy" in the broadest possible sense, including most of Anglo-Saxon epistemology, philosophy of science (say, Popper, Kuhn, Lakatos, Laudan, Van Fraassen), philosophy of language (e.g., Wittgenstein, Searle, Putnam) and philosophy of religion (e.g., Ramsey, Mitchell, Hick, Mavrodes, Plantinga, Wolterstorff, Phillips).

<sup>2</sup>A.F. Sanders, *Michael Polanyi's Post-Critical Epistemology*, Amsterdam/Atlanta 1988, i

<sup>3</sup>Further evidence for this is his claim that according to Polanyi belief in (or tacit knowing by acquaintance), including trust, endorsement, accreditation, reliance, are all a-critical (p. 22). Notice, however, that Polanyi emphatically says that a competent judgement issuing in trust, endorsement and the like, is a mental act which cannot be improved *at the moment* of its making, since the person making it is already doing his best in making it (cf. *PK* 314). But this is certainly not to say that a competent judgement cannot be improved *after* it has been made.

<sup>4</sup>S. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, (eds.) H.V. Hong & E.H. Hong, Princeton, N.J., 1992, 204

<sup>5</sup>B. Mitchell, *Faith and Criticism*, Oxford 1994, 88

<sup>6</sup>Consider, for example, Polanyi's remarks that "an alteration of analysis and integration leads progressively to an ever deeper understanding of a comprehensive entity", "[a] skill too is improved by alternate dismemberment and integration" (*KB* 125) and "all manner of discovery proceeds by a see-saw of analysis and integration" (*KB* 129). Certainly, we are also warned that the performance of a skill can be paralysed if we focus our attention at its particulars (during that performance) or that "unbridled lucidity can destroy our understanding of complex matters" (*TD* 18, cf. *PK* 56). But just as the meticulous dismembering of a text can kill its appreciation, it "can also supply material for a much deeper understanding of it" (*TD* 19).

<sup>7</sup>Sanders, *Michael Polanyi's Post-Critical Philosophy*, 169

<sup>8</sup>The famous passage about the aim of *Personal Knowledge*: "to achieve a frame of mind in which I may hold firmly to what I believe to be true, even though I know that it might conceivably be false" (*PK* 214) clearly belongs to

this context as well. In a similar vein (regarding heuristic acts which involve a conversion) is “[i]t is a decision, originating in our own personal judgement ... to modify our intellectual existence, so as to become more satisfying to ourselves ... as a token of what should be universally satisfying”(PK 106).

<sup>9</sup>T.A. Langford & W.H. Poteat, “Upon First Sitting Down to Read *Personal Knowledge*’, in: (eds.) T.A. Langford and W.H. Poteat, *Intellect and Hope. Essays in the Thought of Michael Polanyi*, Durham, N.C., 1968, 18

<sup>10</sup>In a sense, Polanyi can be seen to do the same. He employs the jargon of analytical philosophy, for instance, in his accounts of the nature of assertions of fact (cf. PK 27ff.), of assertions of fact (cf. PK 253ff.), of belief (cf. PK 272ff.) and of truth-claims (cf. PK 305, 315). He also speaks of believing *p*, the sentence *p*, the function of the word “true’, and so on. Also, his account of truth is couched largely in the terminology used by analytical philosophers who were prominent at the time *Personal Knowledge* was taking shape (as, e.g., M. Black, B. Russell and A. Tarski). As a personal note I should perhaps add that, as an analytical philosopher of religion by training, the hard and time-consuming effort of elaborating and reconstructing Polanyi’s epistemology was also part of an attempt to make it intelligible and plausible to myself.

<sup>11</sup>See on this issue also my “*Tacit Knowing Between Modernism and Postmodernism: A Problem of Coherence*’, *Tradition & Discovery* 18 (1991/92), nr.2, 15 - 21

<sup>12</sup>There is some reason to doubt whether the doctrine of commitment (at least in the form in which it is presented in *Personal Knowledge*) is successful in avoiding this danger. Consider the way in which Polanyi answers the question whether a particular fact is true: “... my answer will be made with universal intent, saying what I believe to be the truth, and what the consensus ought therefore to be. This is the only sense in which I can speak of the truth, and though I am the only person who can speak of it in this sense, this is what I mean by the truth”(PK 316). This may not be solipsism, as Polanyi claims, but it certainly comes dangerously close to it. Why would he be the only person who can speak of the truth in that sense? Unless this sense is a purely private one, surely, we all can speak of it in that sense if we judge it to be the right sense.

<sup>13</sup>A recent example of a “confessional rhetoric” employed by leading American analytical philosophers of religion, is the remarkable collection *God and the Philosophers. The Reconciliation of Faith and Reason*, (ed.) T.V. Morris, New York/Oxford 1994.

<sup>14</sup>I suppose that Cannon uses the distinction between belief in and belief that precisely because it is part and parcel of the analytical tradition; see, for instance, H.H. Price, *Belief*, London 1969. Other well-known analytical distinctions which bring out the same point are those between *knowledge by description* and *knowledge by acquaintance* (Bertrand Russell) and between *knowing that* and *knowing how* (G. Ryle).

<sup>15</sup>The Background is defined as “a set of nonrepresentational mental capacities that enable all representing to take place.” The “deep”Background includes at least all of those capacities that are common to all normal human beings in virtue of their biological makeup (like, e.g., walking, eating, grasping, perceiving, recognizing) and preintentional stances towards the solidity of things, the independent existence of other people etc., whereas the “local”Background includes such things as opening doors, drinking beer from bottles and preintentional stances we take towards natural objects like cars, refrigerators etc. The Network is defined as the holistic complex of intentional

states such as beliefs, desires, intentions, hopes, fears, anxieties, anticipations, feelings of frustration and satisfaction. Any particular intentional state can only have the conditions of satisfaction that it does because it is located in a Network. Cf. J.R. Searle, *Intentionality. An Essay in the Philosophy of Mind*, Cambridge 1983, 141ff.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Sanders, *Michael Polanyi's Post-Critical Epistemology*, 171-181

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 176; see also Searle, *Intentionality*, 150ff.

<sup>18</sup> M. Johnson, *The Body in the Mind. The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason*, Chicago/London 1987, 187-190. I would like to thank Dr. Walter B. Gulick and Dr. Phil Mullins for pointing out to me the relevance of Johnson's book for the theory of tacit knowing. Notice that Johnson seems to connect the Searlean Background with Polanyian tacit knowing when he writes: "I am claiming that the so-called Background is merely that part of meaning that is not focused on in a given intentional act. It is that which is presupposed and is unquestioned as part of the context in which we grasp and express what we mean. It is background, relative to the foreground on which we are now focussing; but it is still part of the web of connections that constitute meaning" (189).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* 191f.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. J.R. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*, New York/London 1995, 130ff.: Searle too has incorporated elements of the theory of tacit knowing into his account of the structure of consciousness. Cf. his *The Rediscovery of the Mind*, Cambridge, MA/London 1992, on the Gestalt structure of conscious experience (132f.) and on the center-periphery distinction in attention (137f.).

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Johnson, *The Body in the Mind*, 187f.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Searle, *Intentionality*, 143

<sup>23</sup> Obviously, this restriction is not unimportant because it does not go without saying that the criteria of truth in scientific inquiry are the criteria of truth for all kinds of intellectual inquiry. Cf. Sanders, *Michael Polanyi's Post-Critical Epistemology*, 133-136, 145-150

<sup>24</sup> Cf. E.L. Meek, *Contact with Reality. An Examination of Realism in the Work of Michael Polanyi*, Ph.D. Temple University, October 1983. Unfortunately this dissertation was never published. It can be obtained through Universities Microfilms International, Ann Arbor, MI. 1985, 85-09387

<sup>25</sup> Meek, *Contact with Reality*, 192, 201

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 192f.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 193

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 101

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, 102

<sup>30</sup>Meek, *Contact with Reality*, 105, 113-120; they are not “qualitatively distinguishable” from them (113).

<sup>31</sup>Recently, J.W. McAllister advanced an extensive account of the role of beauty as an aesthetic criterion in science, especially in the assessment of theories and in times of revolution: *Beauty and Revolution in Science*, Ithaca/London 1996. McAllister defends the view that the aesthetic preferences of scientific communities are reached by inductive projections over the empirical performance of the theories they adhere to and that these preferences, as in the applied arts, are shaped in part “by habituation to the forms associated with success”(p.5). It would be interesting to compare, and evaluate, Polanyi’s adamant statement that “no scientific theory is beautiful if it is false”(PK 195) with McAllister’s quotations of Schrödinger, Sciamia and Einstein as scientists who ascribed beauty to theories but were at the same time dubious about their truth (p.69).

<sup>32</sup>Meek, *Contact with Reality*, 91

<sup>33</sup>Cf. *Ibid.*, 195, 206

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, 196

## 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.

# Polanyi on Liberal Neutrality

C.P.GOODMAN

**ABSTRACT** Key Words : pluralism, neutrality, dedicated community, universal ideals.

*This paper suggests that moral neutrality erodes the liberal practices which sustain a free society. It supports the Polanyian claim that a free society is the political arrangement which is best able to realise universal ideals.*

Liberty is the political orthodoxy of our age. Why? Because it accompanies the pluralism of modern society. Constant noted that during the French Revolution his contemporaries tended either to be Royalists, who because of their reverence for Throne and Altar sought to return to a feudal order, or Jacobins, who inspired by the ancient polis sought to establish a new republic of virtue. Both were content to enforce a comprehensive vision of the good life. Among our contemporaries, however, the desire for freedom - both economic and political - has undermined the intellectual respectability of alternatives to a free society. We are all liberals now. Does that mean that political debate has come to an end? Clearly not. There exists a plurality of liberal outlooks. We can, however, identify two broad tendencies. Classical liberals invoke a narrow definition of freedom and seek to decrease the power of the State. Welfare liberals invoke a broad conception of freedom and rely upon the State to increase opportunity. Does Polanyi contribute anything to this debate? In his early writings, he set out arguments exposing the limitations of central planning. His claim that the essential problem which faces any planner is the impossibility of any central agency being able to obtain the knowledge it requires for effective decision making influenced the classical liberal Hayek: it was Polanyi who coined the now familiar term “spontaneous order.”<sup>1</sup> Polanyi also supported the Keynesian analysis that interventions by the State into the general workings of a market order are necessary if we wish to promote full employment<sup>2</sup>. His contemporary political significance however does not derive from his support for various liberal causes, but rather from the extent to which his work addresses some current anxieties about the implicit nihilism of a society dedicated to moral neutrality.

Polanyi did not believe that a free society is an “Open Society.” He claimed that it is a society dedicated to promoting the ideals and practices associated with a liberal account of the good. He does not defend liberalism on the grounds that we have a right to pursue our own conception of the good, nor does he defend freedom as an end in itself. He defends it on the grounds that liberal virtues, such as tolerance and fairness, enable us to pursue universal ideals. His defence of liberalism therefore is not derived from a belief that the State ought to be neutral; it is derived from his recognition that what constitutes a good life is controversial. Unlike many Communitarian critics of liberalism he does not attempt to supply a comprehensive vision of the good. He simply observes that without a belief in universal ideals we lack the intellectual grounds to protect liberal freedoms. His polycentric vision of what it is to be a liberal society, in which the State tries to sustain general conditions for human flourishing but in which individual achievement is nurtured within the practices associated with a plurality of dedicated associations, tries to reconcile individual liberty and the pursuit of universal ideals. Polanyi also seeks to integrate private and public freedoms. While the first protects our freedom from the State, the latter relies upon the State to promote our liberty to realise a conception of the good.

The problem with a private conception of liberty is that it encourages an atomistic understanding of human flourishing. The problem with a public conception of liberty is that it encourages the State to impose a comprehensive vision of the good. Polanyi strives therefore to balance private and public freedoms by defending individual liberty via an appeal to transcendent ideals. Thus, while he believes that a State has political duties, he also seeks to limit its

powers. While he defends the claim that a liberal society is a dedicated society, he also seeks to encourage pluralism. Polanyi believed that a liberal society is made up of a plurality of “enclaves of freedom” which exist within the context of a society dedicated to pursuing universal ideals. In order to understand this claim, it is helpful if we look at the historical analysis which Polanyi provides in Chapter Seven of the *Logic of Liberty*.<sup>3</sup> Anglo-American liberalism, he suggests, was initially formulated in opposition to religious intolerance. In the *Areopagitica*, Milton asserts that we need freedom from authority so that truth may be discovered. To this, Locke added the argument that because we can never be sure of the truth in religious matters, we should refrain from imposing our views. Polanyi observes, however, that this latter argument carries with it the implication that we ought to refrain from imposing any belief which is not demonstrable.

But of course, ethical principles cannot be demonstrated: you cannot prove the obligation to tell the truth, to uphold justice and mercy. It would follow therefore that a system of mendacity, lawlessness and cruelty is to be accepted as an alternative to ethical principles on equal terms. But a society in which unscrupulous propaganda, violence and terror prevail offers no scope for tolerance. Here the inconsistency of a liberalism based upon philosophical doubt becomes apparent: freedom of thought is destroyed by the extension of doubt to the field of traditional ideals.<sup>4</sup>

According to Polanyi, the destructive implications of a liberalism secured by the argument from doubt was avoided in Britain and America by a reluctance to pursue philosophical premises to their logical conclusion. One way of avoiding it was to claim that ethical principles could be scientifically demonstrated. Locke himself pioneered such an approach by suggesting that good and evil can be identified with pleasure and pain, and that maxims of good behaviour are simply maxims of prudence. Because it was the pursuit of religious truth which was being protected from interference by the State, Catholics were discriminated against in Britain on the grounds that the Roman Church opposed free religious inquiry. Atheists were exempted from toleration on the grounds that they did not esteem religious inquiry. On the Continent, some intellectuals however began to take seriously the claim that moral standards cannot be scientifically justified, and many identified religion as an enemy of liberty. According to Berlin,<sup>5</sup> the failure by Enlightenment philosophers to secure a generally accepted foundation for moral values, together with the recognition by thinkers such as Vico and Herder of the existence of a plurality of human cultures, helped to prepare the way for a more pluralistic liberalism. It is clear, however, that pluralism does not in itself support the case for toleration. Only by suspending logic is it possible to deny that we could equally well argue that pluralism undermines the justification for tolerating alternative visions of the good. In *Fathers and Sons*, the Russian novelist Turgenev wrote about a new figure, the nihilist, who combined a rejection of moral values with a contempt for existing society. According to Polanyi, therefore liberalism needs to be able to defend the need for pluralism. His defence relies upon the assumption that it is possible to converge upon common moral beliefs. In the light of the moral disenchantment which has accompanied the progress of modern science, this may seem a dubious hypothesis. Polanyi, however, does not seek to derive our values from the structure of the cosmos. In his final work *Meaning*<sup>6</sup> he asserts that human values are what he calls trans-natural integrations. We create novel patterns of action and emotion. This does not make values arbitrary. Nor does it absent them from rational debate. Our value judgements are the product of long running disputes. What sustains these disputes is the belief that agreement is possible. It is this assumption, according to Polanyi, and not the assumption that a free society ought to be neutral about conceptions of the good, which sustains a liberal political order.

According to Polanyi, a liberal society is a society committed to the beliefs which uphold freedom. In their more recent attempt to provide a theoretical foundation for liberalism, John Rawls, in *A Theory of Justice*, and Robert Nozick, in *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, both defend the claim that a liberal State ought to be neutral about different

conceptions of the good.<sup>7</sup> Rawls interprets this neutrality as the demand that a State ought to strive to ensure that all its citizens are equally able to pursue their particular conception of the good. The rules governing a liberal State, he asserts, should be the rules we would adopt if we were pursuing our self-interest from behind a “veil of ignorance” which prevented us from having any particular knowledge about ourselves. Rawls claims that in this “original position” we would agree upon a concept of “justice as fairness” and a political order capable of delivering the greatest amount of liberty consistent with the liberty of others--tolerating inequalities of wealth only if they benefited the worst off in society. For Nozick, neutrality requires that no political action be taken which promotes any specific idea of the good. He asserts that individuals have various rights, such as the right not to have your liberty restricted, your person injured, or your property taken away from you without your permission. Nozick concludes that the best sort of State is one which has no other purpose than upholding and defending these individual rights. Rawls and Nozick therefore both claim that before contracting into a State, we can agree upon the rights we would want to enforce independently of any conception of the good. Both seek what Rawls has called “an overlapping consensus”--that is, a conception of justice able to command a universal allegiance within a society with a plurality of moral viewpoints.<sup>8</sup> Any defence of procedural rights however invokes a hidden conception of the good. It relies upon the assumption that rational beings are able to agree in practice upon a common set of political principles. According to Polanyi, a liberal society ought to defend only the possibility of agreement. The actual content of any consensus should evolve in accordance with the dynamics of open ended debate.

Joseph Raz claims that personal autonomy is an essential component of any liberal political practice. He also suggests that a defence of personal autonomy carries with it an endorsement of moral pluralism.<sup>9</sup> Is the rejection by Polanyi of an “Open Society” tantamount to a rejection of liberalism? John Gray identifies four general characteristics of a liberal political thought: individualism, egalitarianism, universalism, and meliorism.<sup>10</sup> Polanyi emphasises the importance of autonomous agency and opposes the establishment of an absolute source of authority. He is thus in harmony with both individualism and egalitarianism. It is clear however that he justifies individualism and equality not as ends in themselves, but as means in an extended quest to realise universal ideals. Polanyi defends a liberal society as the political order which is best able to promote human progress. He is thus in harmony with both universalism and meliorism. He does not, however, want to identify a set of universal rules; he seeks rather to encourage a liberal tradition. Polanyi thus defends freedom, but rejects the concept of freedom as an end in itself. He advocates universalism, but defends the need for an apprenticeship to the evolving practices of a liberal society. Are his arguments going to convince an opponent of liberalism?

When Polanyi began his philosophical work, liberalism was in retreat. He thus set out to defend liberal institutions and practices. A key argument is his claim that progress relies upon dispersed sources of innovation. Critics, however, might dispute his claim that liberty is the political framework which encourages most innovation, or they might deny his assumption that progress contributes to human flourishing. Although Polanyi rejects the possibility of securing an absolute source of truth, how exactly does he undermine those who claim to have reached such an understanding? He addresses this latter problem in his epistemological work. But what about the claim that progress undermines human flourishing? An opponent might claim that increasing understanding drains meaning from the world, because cherished beliefs are exposed as illusions. They might assert that pluralism replaces the order and meaning derived from a comprehensive vision of the good with the ephemeral lifestyles of a consumer society. The Polanyian response to this is clear. To the claim that liberalism does not encourage progress, he draws our attention to the limitations inherent in all forms of central direction. The more comprehensive the central direction, the more limited the scope for innovation. To the allegation that pluralism erodes all meaningful order, Polanyi makes it clear that a free

society is structured by the disciplines associated with a plurality of dedicated communities. More generally, he claims that a free society is not simply the product of abstract laws; it is sustained by the liberal practices which accompany those laws. He suggests that the illiberal excesses of the French Revolution were due in part to the adoption of liberal principles without the liberal practices through which such principles must be interpreted.<sup>11</sup> In response to the charge that freedom destroys more than it creates, it is clear that Polanyi believed that if we combine individual liberty with the plurality of local disciplines which accompany the pursuit of universal ideals, the demise of the illusions which derive from ignorance is more than justified by the freedom which liberalism gives us to discover more satisfying ways of life.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Polanyi has influenced a number of thinkers whose political writings are much better known e.g. F.A.Hayek, Paul Craig Roberts, and Michael Oakeshott. His most important political influence has been his part in drawing attention to the importance of the tacit in our economic and cultural life. See Don Lavoie *National Economic Planning: What is Left?* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), Paul Craig Roberts *Alienation and the Soviet Economy: The Collapse of the Socialist Era* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1990), Harwell Wells “The Philosophical Michael Oakeshott” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 55:1 January 1994, pp. 129-145.

<sup>2</sup>R.T.Allen points out that Polanyi argued that in times of depression there should be a lowering of taxes not an increase in government spending. Conversely when there is an inflationary boom the government should reduce the money supply by increasing taxation. See “Some Notes on Polanyi’s Economics” *Appraisal* Volume 2:2 October 1996, pp. 95-96.

<sup>3</sup>*The Logic of Liberty* (London: Routledge, 1951).

<sup>4</sup>Ibid. p. 97.

<sup>5</sup>See *The Crooked Timber of Humanity* (London: Fontana, 1990).

<sup>6</sup>*Meaning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).

<sup>7</sup>*A Theory of Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971) and *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974).

<sup>8</sup>See “The Idea of an Overlapping Consensus” in *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993) pp. 131-168.

<sup>9</sup>*The Morality of Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

<sup>10</sup>*Liberalism* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1986).

<sup>11</sup>“On Liberalism and Liberty” *Encounter* IV March 1955 pp. 29-34.

Many thanks to Bob Stern whose help and encouragement has sustained my quest to understand the work of Michael Polanyi.

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# Reviews

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Gregory Baum. *Karl Polanyi On Ethics And Economics*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996.

As an economist, I will hazard the guess that most of my brethren who have read a bit of Karl Polanyi (KP) are quite unaware that the more famous Michael Polanyi (MP) was his brother. I find this surprising, given many important parallels in their ideas. I should state at the outset that my own work as an economist has been largely shaped by the influence of KP.

The cultural separation of KP and MP might just reflect the rift between the social and physical sciences. But one expects more willingness to cross boundaries from those influenced by their ideas. It must be said that these boundaries were not explicitly bridged by either brother in his published writings. As far as I know, neither ever mentioned the other, despite maintaining what seem to have been close personal relations.

Gregory Baum's book does not mention MP. But its focus on the ethical and spiritual dimensions of KP's work opens up comparisons with MP. I am a student of KP, not MP, but I offer several points from Baum's book that suggest striking parallels between the two.

KP was definitely a partisan of the left. But he has been mis-interpreted (or mis-appropriated) by those on the left who see him too simply as an opponent of the market and all its associated civic institutions. On the contrary, a major thesis of KP's economic anthropology was that markets play an important role *within* most traditional societies, but not standing outside and dominating social life.

KP is best known for *The Great Transformation*, recently picked by the *Times Literary Supplement* as one of the

"100 most important books" for understanding contemporary Western society. While scathing on the anomie spawned by a global market "dis-embedded" from traditional and local social institutions, KP was absolutely *not* a critic of "bourgeois morality" in the sense of Marx.

Quite the contrary. KP saw the bourgeois civic tradition (das burgerliche Gewissen, in an earlier essay) as very much an obstacle to the reduction of human beings to money values. Bourgeois society is the nurturing soil that made the impersonal, self-regulating market possible. The extension of this market, however, can threaten to destroy personal community relations, destroying the market's own peaceful, well-ordered preconditions. Thus the market must be restrained by market society--this is KP's analysis of the "double movement" of capitalism. Baum writes:

This then is Polanyi's original argument: the longing of the bourgeois conscience transcends the possibilities of bourgeois society. What this conscience calls for is the creation of a transparent society that allows its members to estimate the effects of what they are doing and thus assume ethical responsibilities for their actions... According to Polanyi, there are no fixed laws that define the life of society. If it seems to people that such laws do exist, then the reason for this is that they have been successfully persuaded to see society in this way... The subject of history is responsible human beings (pp. 27-28).

KP's socialism was of a communitarian or Christian stripe rather than as a belief in central planning. Baum points out the ties between KP's thought and Catholic social doctrine. KP wrote an essay for a book entitled "Christianity and the Social Revolution." His essay, written in 1933, was entitled "The Essence of Fascism."

## Notes on Contributors

In this essay, KP warned that the spiritual virulence of Nazism is its offer to “relieve” the individual of personal identity. This is the antithesis of KP’s idea of community. According to Baum:

There does exist, Polanyi argues, a Christian concept of society... When Polanyi writes that the discovery of the soul is at the same time the discovery of society or that society is a relationship of persons, he offers a *personalist conception of society*, that is, a society characterized by cooperation and co-responsibility that recognizes the personal dignity and equality of its citizens (emphasis added, p. 33).

I offer these passages in hopes of provoking more work on the relation of the Polanyi brothers. Most of the work I have seen seems far too polemical. The ties between their work are formed by an extraordinary family full of lonely geniuses and courageous individuals, by their Jewish tradition of Christianity, and by a distinctly Austrian skepticism toward abstract formalization. These resonances are more important, I would argue, than any explicit political statements. Polanyians of either stripe should be able to understand that.

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### 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.

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