
REVIEWS

Georg Hans Neuweg, *Könnerschaft und implizites Wissen. Zur lehr-lerntheoretischen Bedeutung der Erkenntnis- und Wissenstheorie Michael Polanyis*. Münster: Waxmann, 1999. 464p. 68 DM. ISBN 3-89325-753-5.

Michael Polanyi is hardly known in Germany today. His work outside of physical chemistry is not available in German, with the exception of *The Tacit Dimension* (available in a rather inexact translation) and the Eddington lectures (“Beyond Nihilism”). Language is not the only problem for his reception or lack thereof, however. There are at least two further problems which make Polanyi almost inaccessible to the German reader. One is his style of scholarship. Writing essentially for an English-language audience, he presents even his greatest breakthroughs as if they were common sense. German language readers simply do not know where to put him in intellectual history, unless they are very well trained philosophers. The other problem is that Polanyi wrestled with the problems posed and solutions found by the southwest German school of philosophy and sociology which is practically extinct, and does this, of course, implicitly. He even misleads the reader who is not too careful into believing that he is following the lead of Dilthey.

Neuweg’s book addresses the first problem splendidly. It is a very learned work (apparently his Habilitation, the “second book” required for a career in German language universities). The title gives the focus of the book: it is the expert and his or her implicit knowledge. In particular, Neuweg examines the importance of Polanyi’s theories for theories of teaching and learning. He relates Polanyi’s contributions to philosophy and psychological research. In particular, Neuweg discusses the work of Gilbert Ryle at length and relates it to Polanyi.

It is a little odd that an introduction to Polanyi’s life and work is given in the middle of the text (Chapter 8, 14 pages). It seems to this reviewer that Neuweg tends to overstate the importance of the tacit dimension and to underplay the importance of levels for his thought. For a systematic introduction, one going beyond theories of learning, it would have been worthwhile to at least hint at the links of Polanyi’s thought to the southwestern German school of philosophy and sociology (Windelband, Weber).

The book certainly does give the flavour of Polanyi’s work. It contains quite a few of Polanyi’s striking examples which are frequently so convincing that the reader does lose the argument they are supposed to prove. Neuweg places them in their systematic context. It is important to note that he is concerned with learning and teaching rather complex skills, such as those required in a profession, thereby going well beyond more simplistic models of learning.

This is the first major exposition of Polanyi’s work in German. It is to be hoped that the increased visibility and accessibility will lead to an awareness of this great scholar who was one of Germany’s leading scientists until 1933.

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Jeffrey Wattles, *The Golden Rule*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996. Pp. x + 257. \$19.95, paper. ISBN: 0-19-511036-6.

Wattles seeks to “erode our familiarity” with the so-called Golden Rule so as to assess its value as a philosophy of life (8-9). He does so by providing what he calls histories of the Golden Rule, beginning with Confucian teachings and ending with twentieth century western philosophy and theology. Although he does some cross-cultural work, the bulk of his summaries deal with western culture. Upon reading the history, he tells a story of an ethic rooted in ancient cultures that grows until criticized under the microscope of modernity, from whence some efforts to reclaim and rehabilitate the ethic have been made in liberal theology, psychology, ethics and phenomenology. While the bulk of this book is devoted to summary of what other people have said about the Golden Rule, Wattles does think that criticisms of the Golden Rule can be successfully refuted and that it can be a useful part of an ethic. The last section of the book thus contains his constructive ethic. An ethic of the Golden Rule, for Wattles, is at least religion-friendly. It is an ethic that understands that agents are people who are embedded in relationships and their socio-historical context. It takes the rule as what, at first, seems intuitively obvious but leads the person onto the pathway of intellectual, emotional and spiritual growth. It is thus an ethic of character development.

Although Wattles does not describe himself in these terms, he supports an ethic of character. He is to be commended for attending to the moral importance of imagination, empathy and our emotional capacities in general, themes that Polanyians will find congenial. He rightly recognizes that emotions are not enemies to be overcome, but resources for living well that need exercise and training, just like our intellectual powers. The book is clearly-written, effectively organized and impressively wide-ranging. If there are deficiencies, one might wish that he engaged more contemporary post-modern thinkers and offered less summary and more of his own critical analyses along

the way. Nonetheless, Wattles provides an excellent and useful resource for anyone interested in the Golden Rule that could profitably be used in upper-level religion and philosophy classes.

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WWW Polanyi Resources

The Polanyi Society has a World Wide Web site at <http://www.mwsc.edu/~polanyi/>. In addition to information about Polanyi Society membership and meetings, the site contains the following: (1) the history of Polanyi Society publications, including a listing of issues by date and volume with a table of contents for recent issues of *Tradition and Discovery*; (2) a comprehensive listing of *Tradition and Discovery* authors, reviews and reviewers; (3) information on locating early publications; (4) information on *Appraisal and Polanyiana*, two sister journals with special interest in Polanyi's thought; (5) the “Guide to the Papers of Michael Polanyi” which provides an orientation to archival material housed in the Department of Special Collections of the University of Chicago Library; (6) photographs of Michael Polanyi.

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 three issues of *TAD* each year.

Annual membership in the Polanyi Society is \$20 (\$10 for students). The membership cycle follows the academic year; subscriptions are due September 1 to Phil Mullins, Humanities, Missouri Western State College, St. Joseph, MO 64507 (fax: 816-271-5987, e-mail: mullins@griffon.mwsc.edu) Please make checks payable to the Polanyi Society. Dues can be paid by credit card by providing the card holder's name as it appears on the card, the card number and expiration date. Changes of address and inquiries should be sent to Mullins. New members should provide the following subscription information: complete mailing address, telephone (work and home), e-mail address and/or fax number. 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.