

# Beyond Epistemology to Realms of Meaning

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*Ultimately Michael Polanyi moved from theorizing about reality in terms of three overlapping frameworks of analysis (personal knowing, evolution/ecology, and tacit knowing) to a yet more comprehensive framework of interpretation: meaning construction. An analysis of the dimensions of embodied, symbol drenched meaning construction suggests that the modernist tendency to tether reality to epistemological analysis be replaced by an exploration of three interpenetrating ontological regions: experiences of existential meaning, cultural forms of meaning, and external reality. In support of this view, I make reference to earlier expressions of my work, utilize illustrations from philosophical history, and address comments from my critics.*

The present article is the latest item of discourse in an ongoing conversation about the nature of Polanyi's understanding of realism. Phil Mullins initiated the dialogue in a paper that was presented to the AAR in 1991 and, after revisions, was eventually published as "Polanyi's Participative Realism" (*Polanyiana* 6 (1997) nr.2). I offered a critique of some aspects of that paper at the Polanyi Society meeting held in 1998 in Boston in conjunction with the World Congress of Philosophy. My critique evolved, in the process of two revisions, into a constructive proposal that was published in *Polanyiana* 8 (1999), nr.1-2 as "The Meaningful and the Real in Polanyian Perspective" (hereafter MRPP).<sup>1</sup> When the articles in this issue of *Tradition and Discovery* critique my position, they are referring to claims articulated in MRPP.

My task in this article at hand is as follows: I will summarize key positions from MRPP, but I will do so in part by referring to modernist and recent philosophical developments which illuminate why I take the approach that I do. Then I will respond to the constructive proposals and the criticisms of my work offered by the other authors in this issue. The ongoing conversation of which this article is a part gives encouraging signs of advancing discussion of Polanyi's thought beyond the attack on objectivism, so important in Polanyi's time, to an engagement with leading intellectual issues of our own time.

## 1. Modernist Construals of Reality and Three Polanyian Frameworks of Analysis

Michael Polanyi's thought is perhaps best known for the way it takes on and shows the falsity of objectivist accounts of knowledge which express modernist construals of reality. Characteristic of modernism is the view that claims about reality must be demonstrated with logical certitude before they are acceptable. Descartes, properly regarded as the archetypal modernist, refused to accept any claims that were not clear and distinct, that were dubitable. The three metaphysical ultimates that he identified through his method of doubt — God, mind and matter — encompass all of reality. But in practice, only matter was of ongoing systematic interest to Descartes. Matter, or extended being, was seen as knowable through science, for only matter is empirically accessible and available to mathematical analysis. The heritage of Cartesian philosophy, developed by such empiricists as Locke and Hume and continued into recent Anglo-American empiricism, was that an immaterial mind was set over against material reality, the repository of object truth. Philosophy's task was to provide the insight into the foundations which demonstrated how knowledge of the real through science was possible.

To retrace the well known arguments Polanyi uses to demolish the objectivism characteristic of modernism would be to rehearse the obvious. What is not so obvious is that Polanyi employed three overlapping frameworks of analysis to combat objectivism – overlapping, but clearly distinguishable. The first two of these frameworks are set forth in *PK*, whereas the third is rooted in *PK* but emerged most explicitly in his works published immediately thereafter.

The first framework of analysis is that of personal knowledge. Polanyi denies that there is any distinction in kind between statements of belief and statements of fact. He therefore acknowledges before it became a philosophical truism that empirical claims are theory-laden. All our knowledge is personal, although “the degree of our personal participation varies greatly within our various acts of knowing” (*PK* 36). The personal element in our knowing involves being passionately concerned for the truth as well as taking a propositional attitude of universal intent toward what we believe and claim (see *PK* 300). We are committed to it as being true, and we strain our intellectual resources so that we may adequately articulate the truth of our insight. We are not alone in making most of these claims, for our commitment to the truth of what we are claiming, whether it be a matter of scientific, artistic or humanistic content, arises out of our involvement in a community of those with shared interests, a community of interpretation. Personal knowledge is passionate and convivial.

The second framework of analysis, worked out in some detail in *MRPP* because it is not as well known as personal knowledge, is Polanyi’s version of an evolutionary and ecological perspective. In Part IV of *PK*, Polanyi explains how it is that humans developed the capacity for personal knowing. His evolutionary and ecological framework of analysis shows how human knowing is a late product of evolutionary change. Life was responsive to its surroundings first through morphological and vegetative structures. Next an active-perceptive level of knowing evolved, and then finally the human symbol using level of knowing (which Polanyi discusses most fully in *PK*, Ch.5). Throughout his analysis, Polanyi speaks of the rise of gradually more complex living centers having interests of their own (feeding, reproducing, surviving, etc.). In order to survive in the midst of an excess of competing life forms, organisms had to be able to respond immediately to environmental signals which bear upon their most urgent interests. Any and all living things privilege mechanisms that utilize environmental signals and resources to fulfill these interests through responsive (and often integrative) acts. Such acts are primitive forms of meaning construction. Consequently, from an evolutionary perspective, meaning construction has from primeval times been in deep and, I would claim, causal contact with reality. To be sure, that causal connection is only to a very partial aspect of the immensely complex real world, the aspect that bears on the organism’s interests. And the causal connection is frequently mediated through a translation process, which, as it gets increasingly complex, allows for a greater range of possible errors.

The third framework of analysis Polanyi develops is that of tacit knowing. I agree with Jha (section 3a) that this is an innovative epistemological notion. Personal knowing, having arisen primordially out of stimulus-response mechanisms, utilizes inarticulate skills and autonomic functions gained by evolutionary ancestors. Articulate (symbol using) systems of thought overlie and often obscure the many sorts of bodily skills humans possess. But our tacit skills are essential to conscious acts of knowing. They are carried out in a from-to structure of consciousness whereby we think from subsidiary materials to explicit objects of thought. All our knowing is embodied. If an individual forgets the embodied character of knowing and attends only to the ideas expressed or the linguistic symbol systems in which they are formed, that person may well

fall prey to some sort of objectivism, a stance which Polanyi has so forcefully shown to be fallacious.

Perhaps most interpreters of Polanyi find the first framework listed above most congenial to their own way of viewing the world. In showing that all forms of knowing – humanistic, artistic, religious, scientific, etc. — are personal in nature, Polanyi effectively countered the reductionistic dismissals of religion, art, and the humanities promoted by the logical empiricists and other objectivists of his day. But in our time, objectivists are a threatened species, in some part due to the power of Polanyi’s arguments. The reigning mode of thought among postmodernists and many others today (including most of my students) is relativism: all views are but matters of opinion.

I find neither objectivism nor relativism to be adequate viewpoints. That facet of Polanyian thought espousing personal knowledge is of more help in dealing with objectivism than with relativism. Protestations that one is affirming a claim with universal intent do little to persuade a skeptic that such intent is warranted. One of my overarching aims in MRPP was to demonstrate that objectivism and relativism represent components of Polanyi’s from-to framework of consciousness, components which are incomplete when taken by themselves. Relativism derives from emphasizing in isolation the necessary Background factors involved in knowing (the “from” dimension). Objectivism results from focusing alone on what is known (the “to”), as if knowledge were not constructed.

So did Polanyi ever bring these three frameworks into greater unity? Yes, but the process was gradual. His notion of personal knowledge softened the standards involved in judging what constitutes knowledge. Previously, the very term “knowledge” carried with it a bias toward objectivism. It suggested that the knower possesses a high degree of certainty about what is known. At mid-century, analytic philosophers were wont to ask obsessively, “How do you know that p?” Then, “How do you know that you know that p?” Finding the foundation for certainty and avoiding infinite regresses proved not only elusive but impossible.

Wittgenstein, Quine, and many others gradually put an end to this self defeating quest within the analytic tradition for epistemological certainty and empirical foundations associated with knowledge claims. I find Polanyi’s inclusion of evolutionary, embodied and psychological perspectives on knowledge gives his thought a richness often lacking in analytic discourse. That richness gradually led him to recognize that scientific knowing, his original paradigm of all knowing, is but one species of more comprehensive mechanisms for interacting with reality. In relation to human consciousness, the more comprehensive term Polanyi chooses is “understanding” (see *SM* 20).<sup>2</sup> More comprehensive yet, though, is the creation of meaning, a characteristic of all that lives, which Polanyi made the center of his unified thought.

## **2. A Fourth Polanyian Framework of Analysis and the Status of the Real**

So it is that toward the end of his career Polanyi increasingly explored meaning rather than knowledge. The common connotations of the two terms, meaning and knowing, suggest that meaning is a more comprehensive term. Even though personal knowledge is a more encompassing notion than (objective) knowledge, still it is a stretch to talk about a dream of conquest, a trance state, or even preferring chocolate to vanilla as examples of personal knowledge. But one can talk about each of these states as involving certain configurations of meaning. Therefore, he embraced the creation of meaning as basic to his philosophical quest.

A brief review of several characteristics of the creation and nature of meaning (especially human

meaning) as I understand it (expanding on Polanyi's thought) would be in order here. First, meaning is the product of integrations which create a dynamic unity out of subsidiary particulars. In its primitive evolutionary forms, meaning primarily initiates response or action; in its human form, it may engender inert types of consciousness as well as action. Second, human meaning is experienced by a person; it is not some preexisting feature of the world. Linguistic meaning, which is the only notion of meaning employed by many linguists and analytic philosophers, is parasitic upon the experiential notion of meaning (existential meaning) articulated here. Language is an example of what I call cultural forms of meaning, objective precipitates of meaning in use. Third, human meaning is created in the from-via-to structure of consciousness, in which the "via" stands for the symbols evoked to mediate sensations of interest into perceptions, or feelings of interest into thought. The "from" dimension of consciousness is the felt, embodied aspect of the Background. The "from" dimension supplies content and intentionality to our thought. Meaning itself, that which is produced by integrations, may be imaginal, representational, or embedded in activity. But how is meaning related to reality?

Polanyi's language about reality is indebted to his scientific background in general and his complementary goals of countering instrumentalism and supporting scientific realism in particular. The following quotation is characteristic of his thought influenced by this basic (and relatively early) motive for describing personal knowledge:

An empirical statement is true to the extent to which it reveals an aspect of reality, a reality largely hidden to us, and existing therefore independently of our knowing it. By trying to say something that is true about a reality believed to be existing independently of our knowing it, all assertions of fact necessarily carry universal intent (cf. *PK* 311).

The notion of reality implicit in this quotation can be called the "independent existence criterion" because it states that the real is that which exists apart from reliance on human consciousness. Our empirical statements are true to the extent to which they correspond to a noumenal reality whose ontic fullness cannot be fully captured by any proposition. Polanyi's statement expresses a representational view of empirical knowledge, a view denounced by Rorty, most famously in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Derrida, Foucault, and many others. It's a view which I, however, find to be warranted provided that it is properly protected against false objectivism through such distinctions as primary versus secondary qualities and especially provided that its scope is limited to certain types of empirical claims. Such qualifications allow us to recognize the fallacy involved in saying: "That apple is red," because we know that redness is a property of human experience and not an objective property of the apple skin (although the property of reflecting light of a certain wavelength is an objective property). Moreover, Polanyi's correspondence notion of truth is necessarily fallibilist because one cannot jump out of one's skin to ensure there is an acceptable correspondence between one's proposition and the entity being referred to.

After Polanyi began investigating meaning construction, another way of construing reality began to be prominent in his thought.

[M]inds and problems possess a deeper reality than cobblestones, although cobblestones are admittedly more real in the sense of being tangible. And since I regard the significance of a thing as more important than its tangibility, I shall say that minds and problems are more real than cobblestones (*TD* 32f.).

In stating that degrees of reality are functions of significance, Polanyi quite dramatically shifts his notion of reality away from the independent existence criterion. In MRPP, I called this second approach to reality Polanyi's "significance criterion".

Polanyi uses a third criterion of reality, one that states that those things are real which "we expect to reveal themselves in unexpected ways in the future" (*TD* 32). I called this the "revelatory criterion," but Esther Meek perhaps more felicitously entitles this the IFM ("indeterminate future manifestation") Effect.

Now I believe that a significant cause of disagreements concerning Polanyi's notion of reality is that the IFM Effect applies both to independently existing things and significant things which may be mind dependent. One of my basic claims in MRPP was that the IFM Effect is better understood as a measure of important experiences of meaning than as a marker of the real. I argued that reality and meaning must not be collapsed into a whole, for the sort of reality referred to by the independent existence criterion is then imperiled because important differences in sources of conscious content are plastered over. Empirical signals, although accessed in thought by language, have an independence that is different in the way they impact ongoing consciousness from the way that non-empirical conceptuality impacts it. This point is at the very heart of my objection to Mullins' meaning/reality holism, which levels ontological differences.

At this point, the ground is prepared to highlight three notions of reality which seem inadequate to me. First, I reject an inclusive notion of the real in which anything that is tangible or conceptual – anything that is meaningful – is said to be real because it is existent in some way. "On this notion, quarks, colors, cars, unicorns, UFO's, even nothingness, all have some sort of existence and therefore reality" (MRPP 8). But this inclusive notion of the real has no discriminatory power. The crucial distinctions between reality and illusion as well as reality and appearance are lost because everything is real. Meaning/realism holism has tendencies toward this undifferentiated notion of reality. I propose using the term "existent" to indicate the encompassing notion of what is, and restrict "reality" to mean those entities which satisfy the independent existence criterion as qualified above.

I would like to point out - but only to disqualify - a second, related usage of "reality". "Reality" may be used (confusingly, I think) as an honorific term. This usage occurs when something is called "real" because it is seen as valuable. Beauty and truth are sometimes said to be real because they are valuable. Ugliness and falsity must then also be real. But should we return to Platonism? On the other hand, should we say values are merely subjective preferences? I'll address this issue in the next section, but for now I'll just warn against conflating value and reality.

A third problematic notion of reality targets the IFM Effect used as a criterion of the real. It seems insufficient to say that the capacity to produce an effect is a guarantee of the reality of the source of the effect. Delusions, daydreams, and artifice can all produce effects. Certainly they are existent in the broad, non-discriminatory sense of reality, but if they are without qualification accepted into the realm of the real, the distinction between reality and illusion is undermined. One could account for illusions with terms like "imaginative reality," but I would note that Polanyi never systematically differentiated domains of the real, whereas he did analyze many types of meaning. I agree with his approach: when distinguishing domains, it is cleaner to dispense with the language of reality and instead use the language of meaning.

Although I strongly support the wisdom of Polanyi's shift in his later years to an investigation of

meaning construction, it should be noticed that two of the three notions of reality I have just rejected are uses suggested by Polanyi. His significance criterion is an expression in heightened form of the honorific sense of the real. And I have already indicated why I find his IFM Effect to be problematic in indicating what is real. In defense of my rejection of these criteria as adequate markers of the real, I can only say that my aim is greater clarity in use of language. The ten indicators of the real which I cited from Polanyi (MRPP 22) do not cohere in a consistent vision. One of the reasons for the multiple views is that Polanyi's thought was in process and these indicators of the real are taken from different contexts. But those of us who want to use Polanyi's thought constructively must clarify potentially ambiguous reference if our thought is to communicate successfully and no doubt we'll go on to create our own set of ambiguities. The manner in which we try to resolve them will no doubt reflect our reading of what is needed for current thought in the light of previous successes and failures in intellectual history.

### 3. An Historical Excursus

The current discussion about how best to understand reality and meaning in relation to Polanyi's thought mirrors analogous debates from times past. Three precursor debates in philosophical and theological history stand out for me as especially auspicious. The contrasting philosophical perspectives I will examine are Plato and Platonism vs. Aristotle, realism vs. nominalism, and Leibniz vs. Kant. I'll also take a sideways glance at deconstructionism. I believe a Polyanian position can help resolve the issues at stake in these encounters, and I'll also attempt to indicate how that resolution contributes to my position as expressed in MRPP.

Plato's considered notion of reality seems to be the following view, articulated in dialogue form by the Eleatic Stranger:

I suggest that anything has real being, that is so constituted as to possess any sort of power either to affect anything else or to be affected, in however small a degree, by the most insignificant agent, though it be only once. I am proposing as a mark to distinguish real things, that they are nothing but power (*Sophist* 247E).

Interestingly enough, this view has much in common with the IFM Effect. Plato goes on to call reality "the sum of things" (249D), and indicate that both the changing world of the senses and the changeless world of the Ideas are real. Here Plato correlates "reality" with the all encompassing notion which I find unsatisfactory because it has no discriminatory power.

Platonism (which I consider to be the tradition which arose from taking literally some of the likely stories Plato told) argues for the objective reality of Ideas (especially of value terms). The Ideas were seen as prior to and determinative of individuals. This view postulated the sensory world as a sort of shadowy duplicate of the world of Ideas, and it effectively challenged any cumulative attempts to learn about the world through the senses. Aristotle rejected the Ideas as having some sort of privileged ontological status. All knowledge of the world is ultimately derivative from sense perception for Aristotle. Ideas are abstractions from that which we sense, that which is most real. To be sure, our knowledge is made possible because the ideas we have abstracted actually exist in the sense object. In acknowledging the significance of the sensible world, Aristotle provided intellectual justification for the subsequent advance of science.

The contrasting perspectives of Platonism and Aristotelianism foreshadow the contrast between the medieval

debates between the realists and the nominalists. Augustine is the most important mediator of Platonistic thought to the debate. In Augustine's view, God and the Church are realities which have far greater ontological weight than individual persons; they are realities, wholes, in which persons participate. Indeed, God is the source of Ideas, including the Idea of God. But when all Ideas are immediate and *prima facie* inspired by God, how does one determine the adequacy of conflicting Ideas? Moreover, how does one support the ontological priority of language, given our knowledge of the fluid nature of language and the multiplicity of linguistic/cultural worlds?

The medieval realists concerned themselves above all else with metaphysical essences, for such universals were believed to provide a window onto transcendent reality, and comprehension of this realm was crucial to one's eternal salvation. The nominalists agreed with Aristotle in claiming that knowledge is irreducibly particular and that language and words are but abstractions from sense experience. Universals are simply linguistic signs. This did not lead the nominalists at once to the study of nature. Rather their concern shifted to determining the contents of revelation, particularly as expressed in the scriptures. But it opened the way for voluntaristic individualism which challenged the authority of the Church, grounded in realism, and prepared the way for scientific exploration of reality.

The debate between realists and nominalists is replayed in an interesting way today in deconstructionism. Derrida privileges language in apparent agreement with medieval realism, yet in agreement with nominalism he denies that words relate to essences. In fact, he thinks language does not reveal the real in any reliable way. Meaning is seen as arising from the network of differences between signs, but such meaning is always provisional and open to layers of interpretation. Through his denial of the priority of presence and his critique of logocentrism, Derrida in effect creates a crisis with respect to any possible knowledge of the real. But in affirming the provisional nature of language and its decentered meanings, Derridean deconstruction also creates a crisis of meaning, for to him meanings are fleeting – they provide no basis for programs of action or even for sustained critique.

The Polanyian interpretation of meaning and reality I support can be clarified through comparison and contrast with the foregoing positions. I take as my model Abelard's view, often called conceptualism, which forges a mediating position between realism and nominalism. So too I affirm important aspects of both realism and nominalism. Conceptualists agree with nominalists in rooting the origins of language in abstraction of similarities from sense experiences, but conceptualists state that the resultant concepts denote something real as a condition or state of things rather than an essence. Like the nominalist or conceptualist, I want to affirm the priority of sense experience over language with respect to knowledge of the real. But like the realist or the postmodernist, I also want to affirm the active contribution of language (and associated use of analogies, tropes, etc.) to the construction of human meaning. This is why I expand Polanyi's from-to structure of consciousness to a from-via-to structure in which the "via" acknowledges the crucial role of language or other symbols in the construction of human meaning.

Values are examples of cultural forms of meaning, that is, objective precipitates of experiences of meaning. Some cultural forms of meaning are physical (airplanes, toothbrushes, gardens), some imaginary (the infamous Mickey Mouse example from MRPP, the Holy Grail, Dante's Inferno), some practices (Sanders provides such examples as marriage, elections, duties), some symbolic (language in particular), and so on. It might be said that my basic ontological regions are experiences of existential meaning, cultural forms of meaning, and external reality. Humans participate in these regions, in respective order, psychically,

socially, and physically.

I see values as special expressions of language which play a major role in expressing interests, directing thought, and guiding action toward rich consummations of existential meaning. The manner in which value terms are used indicates the extent to which they participate in reality. "That garden is beautiful" may be primarily descriptive or prescriptive in intention. If the former, its meaning points out features that exist apart from our knowing them (the independent existence criterion of reality). At once the statement would be experiential (an expression of existential meaning), a cultural form of meaning capable of communicating to others, and a designator of a real feature. It would be like an empirical term. If used in a non-descriptive way, perhaps prescriptively (implying "You ought to like such a garden") or to ingratiate oneself with the gardener, the value term expresses a mind dependent meaning, and as used it would better be termed a meaning than a reality.

With the later Polanyi, I assert that the analysis of meaning construction and meaning use provides the standpoint, broader than epistemology, for comprehending what and how humans can understand. Cultural forms of meaning cluster in particular realms according to their function. Some realms of meaning rely first on sensation, other realms have their existence strictly through language and other forms of symbolism. If care is taken to ensure that the linguistic worlds into which we are socialized are connected in experience to the empirical world, we can assert, contrary to deconstructionism, that meaning is generally reliable and reality is knowable.

The next instructive philosophical conflict to be considered centers on the contrast between the views of Leibniz and Kant. Leibniz's rationalist worldview regards mind-like monads as "persons" within which the reality of all other monads is mirrored thanks to the pre-established harmony created by God. Within this mirroring the content of sense and reason (thought) are equally present to consciousness. Leibniz and his disciple Wolff considered sensation to be a confused, indistinct form of consciousness in essential continuity with the greater clarity characteristic of thought. Within the realm of the monad, only two principles are necessary to explain and clarify the specific content of consciousness: the principle of contradiction and the principle of sufficient reason. Each principle can be used indiscriminately to assess the contents of consciousness, and since clarity and consistency are taken as marks of the real, so the presumption of Leibnizians is that transcendent, logically coherent metaphysical knowledge is, if anything, more reliable than sensory knowledge in determining the nature of the real.

Kant was awakened from his "dogmatic slumbers" by Hume not only to counter Humean skepticism, but to oppose Leibnizian dogmatic metaphysics. For Kant the difference between sensation and thought is not a matter of clarity but a matter of different origins.

The philosophy of Leibniz and Wolff, in thus treating the difference between the sensible and the intelligible as merely logical, has given a completely wrong direction to all investigations into the nature and origin of our knowledge. This difference is quite evidently transcendental. It does not merely concern their [logical] form, as being either clear or confused. It concerns their origin and content. (*Critique of Pure Reason*, A44-B 61)

Sensory knowledge, in which sensation is organized by the forms of intuition and the categories of understanding, is different in kind and in validity from metaphysical "knowledge" which is based only on Ideas

or other forms of non-empirical conceptuality. Through the understanding, we comprehend empirical reality as it appears to us. Through metaphysical concepts unrestrained by critique, we enter a world of transcendental illusion. Thus sensibility relates us to the real world in a way that thought alone need not. Leibniz's privileging of clarity and consistency obscures comprehension of what is real. Consider the difference between a unicorn and a bandicoot. Most Europeans and Americans will have a clearer concept of the unicorn, but that does not make it more real.

My chief difficulty with semioticians, including Peirce, is that they basically follow the lead of Leibniz in making thought and logic the basis for ontological claims. Kant's important distinction between inner and outer sense is eliminated. Certainly our perception and how we use it are theory-laden, but that does not mean we are trapped in a homogeneous world of thought (signs, language, theory) as semioticians, idealists, post-modernists, and other pan-linguists are wont to claim.

Polanyi's post-critical thought is sometimes thought to oppose and transcend the critiques of Kant. But as I have argued elsewhere<sup>3</sup>, Polanyi's use of "post-critical" is primarily meant to oppose those who, like Descartes, think that doubt or skepticism provides a reliable road to knowledge. Polanyi criticizes Kant for using doubt in a search for certainty (see especially *PK* 269-272), but it should be noted that Kant advocates doubt be used against uncritical dogmatism rather than utilizes it as a methodological principle in the manner of Descartes. Surely Polanyi countenances such usage of doubt when scientists examine a new theory. Polanyi's negative comments about Kant's regulative principles (cf. *PK* 307) seem to be based on a misunderstanding of Kant's intended usage of this term. Polanyi states that one could treat regulative principles as true either in the face of thinking them false or while actually believing them to be true, and he sees problems with either approach. But Kant advocates using regulative principles to organize thought in those situations where systemic structure rather than truth is at stake or where it is impossible to know whether something is true or false. Otherwise, Polanyi's references to Kant are not very wide ranging and are generally positive (see *KB* 156; *M* 52, 87, 200 for instances of benign references; see *KB* 39, 68 for instances where Polanyi misinterprets Kant). All of this is to say that Polanyi should not be seen as opposed in principle to Kantian thought. As a matter of fact, Kant's views are far more congenial to Polanyi than Leibniz's thought is.

#### **4. Reviewing Reality Again**

In MRPP, I highlighted Polanyi's view that human meaning is built upon a long evolutionary history of responsive immersion in reality. Our senses, I argued, must necessarily have developed in ways which provide accurate data regarding the real objects and activities that bear on our survival. Our primitive ancestors must have been ensconced in a unified world where stimulus and response prevailed. But meaning making crossed an important threshold in relatively recent evolutionary history. Humans developed the ability to symbolize experience, and human meaning was born.<sup>4</sup> Different possibilities can be simultaneously envisioned. This gives rise to freedom. But it also fractures the formerly unified world. Because humans can symbolize themselves, self consciousness results. Moreover, what is symbolized can be objectified and solidified in numerous ways. Momentary flashes of existential meaning may be memorialized in words, actions, or created objects and so take on objective status as cultural forms of meaning. In this way, the world of meaning making gains complexity and public existence.

I have been arguing that we ought to limit our reference to reality to what is gained through our sure relation to the external world provided (at least indirectly) by the senses. To be sure, we have, as self-conscious

individuals, no unmediated and pure access to sensation. We have seen that human meaning making arises within a from-via-to structure of consciousness where sensation enters consciousness at the “from” dimension and must be structured by thought at the “via” dimension before it can be considered as meaningful perception at the “to” dimension. Nevertheless, that which is known most directly as real impacts us with the power of independent existence through our sensation. My suggestion in MRPP was that we restrict our language of reality to this sensory material, and we label all that which we experience at the level of full human consciousness or above as meaning.

My critics have convinced me that tethering the term “reality” so tightly to sensation runs too deeply against deeply embedded usage to be wise or even feasible. Against my intentions, it may lead to an unwarranted dualism that creates more problems than it solves. The crux of the issue is how to understand the ontological status of cultural forms of meaning. For the sake of discussion here, let’s distinguish two types of cultural forms of meaning.

First, let’s consider those cultural forms in which meaning is intertwined with empirical reality. Some meanings have been developed through practical or formal testing so that they accurately display broad aspects of reality that are not immediately known through sensation:  $F=ma$ , today’s exchange rate between dollars and the yen, and the function of organelles would be examples. In some cases, material has been shaped by human action and exists as a real artifact: a hairbrush, a sea dike, and a jet’s contrail are illustrations. But there are a plethora of meaningful objects or events whose reality or plausibility is in dispute; we’ll examine some of these shortly.

Second, there are many symbolic worlds, creations of human meaning construction having no empirical exemplification. Jokes (“There was a traveling salesman”), fairytales, and daydreams are clear examples in this category, but so are Kantian Ideas, which by definition are incapable of empirical exemplification (the transcendental Ideas of God, self, and world; normative Ideas like truth, beauty and goodness; practical Ideas like freedom, necessity, and harmony).

In MRPP, I argued that it made most sense to regard these two types as meaningful products of human construction, but to restrict the appellation of reality only to sensory aspects of whatever was being considered: the plastic of the hairbrush rather than to the particular function of the object. No doubt that is too restrictive a way to designate what is real, but it is no easy matter to determine a fitting boundary for discussion of the real. There are many admixtures of the empirical and the meaningful where what is real is a matter of contention. Thus William Alston argues for the acceptability of direct, non-sensory experiences of God. In these mystical experiences, God simply appears as God; God is not merely interpreted as manifest within or beyond perceptual experience of objects or events. But might not an Azande likewise perceive a person carrying out certain suspicious activities as a witch? The person and the activities are both empirically evident. Are the perceptions of God and a witch both real? Are they real only to a given community of interpretation? If so, are we then not conceding “reality” to be a relativistic or honorific term? This is not a concession Polanyi ever makes so far as I am aware, and it is not a concession one needs to make so long as reality is grounded reliably in sensation prior to human interpretation. Avoidance of such relativism is the major reason I restricted the term “reality” so tightly in MRPP.

The independent existence criterion of reality stands for me as the essential criterion. But how helpful is this criterion? A hairbrush but also “ $F=ma$ ” and arguably a beautiful landscape seem to exist

independently of our knowing them. So does a witch for the Azande. Notice, however, that Polanyi's independent existence criterion is said to pertain to empirical statements. According to this criterion, then, that is real which is grounded in and makes reference to the world known through our senses. On this basis, one could say that a hairbrush is real qua hairbrush because not only the plastic exists apart from our thinking about it, but so does the empirically manifest function of brushing hair. A scientific law like  $F=ma$  can be called real on similar grounds; physical objects can be measured to act in accordance with the formula. The status of beauty, God and a witch are more difficult to resolve, and key to a determination of how each is best categorized is both a precise definition of what one means by each term and regard to how the term is used.

I understand "beauty" to be a normative, prescriptive term that is appropriately applied to certain harmonious affordances (to use J. J. Gibson's term) which are empirically evident. The Kantian Idea of beauty is not itself perceptible, and therefore the concept beauty itself would be meaningful rather than real, but empirical objects manifest the sort of harmony called beautiful independently of our knowing them. These beautiful relationships or patterns are therefore real (even though which manifestations are truly beautiful will likely be an irresolvable subject of debate). Similarly, if I define God as a spiritual being, a creator transcending yet also existing immanently within the world, and not directly capable of being perceived (and this is not the place to debate with Alston), then I would have to say "God" is a highly meaningful term, but also that God is no more (and no less) real than beauty, truth or goodness. Yet if God is understood as the creator of the world, then evidences of God's reality are ubiquitous. Still, the gap between creation and a creator must be bridged by a leap of faith because the world need not be seen as created, but only as existent.

Is a witch real? If by "witch" one means a person with magical powers to produce desired results, then such powers are not empirically evident, and a witch cannot be regarded as real. But one could infer from certain events in the world that they must have been caused by a person with magical powers, and through a leap of faith the witch could be regarded as real. However, it should be noted that the plausibility of this inference is suspect because of what we know about such psychological features of human existence as the dynamics of suspicion, defensiveness, and projection, as well as what we know of the limits of human capability with respect to magical powers.

Finally, another characteristic of reality mentioned in MRPP ought to be stressed in addition to the independent existence criterion. Reality is inexhaustible and indeterminate (*KB* 79). Consequently, competing claims about reality insofar as it is mixed with meaning are often irresolvable. There is no technique or algorithm available to adjudicate between claims so as to arrive at uncontested conclusions. "There is no incorrigible access to reality; all our knowledge of the real is fallible" (MRPP 9).

The upshot of all this is that it seems reasonable to speak of the reality of the cultural forms of meaning insofar as they manifest an empirical component that is determinative of what they are. But I must also say that the issue of where to draw the line between reality and meaning is not of great concern once the honorific aspect of reality is eliminated and the effect of how we use language is recognized. The frameworks of meaning production we bring to each statement about what is real influences what aspect of the real we target. The structures, sources, and backgrounds we utilize in the "from" dimension of the from-via-to structure of consciousness plus the conceptuality we employ at the "via" dimension all contribute to the meanings we generate. The variations in quality of life we experience is not so much due to what sort of objects, real or imaginary, we engage as it is due to the way we construct and indwell meanings. Zest and joy in life come not from our involvement with what we certify to be real but from our participation in what is

meaningful, including truth, beauty, goodness, justice, and God.

## 5. Reaction to Other Accounts of Polanyian Realism

Together the seven papers comprising this issue of *Tradition and Discovery* present a variety of positions which are diverse enough to make me wonder if Polanyians truly do represent a community of inquiry, to use Sanders' term. Certainly the diversity is sufficient to underscore how many factors feed into our personal Backgrounds to contribute to strikingly different interpretations of the same body of work.

To be sure, these essays do not represent simply attempts at exegeting Polanyi's work. John Puddefoot is explicit that his paper develops implications of Polanyi's work, and my articles derive from a philosophical position, highly influenced by Polanyi, that is not fully expressed in any one place, but partially emerges in a number of writings. It is a tribute to the fecundity of Polanyi's thought that such interesting perspectives on meaning and reality are fostered by it. I'm grateful to the contributors to this issue, especially Mullins, Sanders, and Cannon, for the care they've devoted to critiquing my work.

While I'm grateful for the critiques, that doesn't mean that I agree with the substance of all that's written. I continue to feel that Phil Mullins undermines the embodied character of knowing and meaning (his "polyvalent aspect"), which requires a situated knower experiencing specific content, with his abstract characterization of real entities as being "preeminently signifiers". As an embodied person continuously involved in meaning making, I am most immediately impacted by reality through the witness of my senses, and I can rely upon scientific and practical generalizations that have been tested against the sensed world, but beyond that one enters into conjecture. While Mullins appropriately notes that "a god's eye view is impossible for humans who are bodily or incarnate knowers," speaking of real entities as signifiers or signs (and then moving on to talk about what they signify) and saying that real things are marked by power (here recapitulating the point made by Plato quoted earlier) moves awfully close to such a view.

Mullins rejects my proposal that sensation provides direct access to the reality in which we at any moment dwell. He counters my position by stating, "Sensation provides mediated and not direct access to real entities. All our access to reality comes to us as we integrate that in which we dwell." My claim is that perception, not sensation, provides mediated access to reality, because "sensation" refers to that content upon which perception relies. To become perception, sensation must first be schematized, and then to communicate what we perceive, it must be cast into language. These latter two processes add possibilities of interpretive error not found in sensation alone; we may then see the wavy lines on the hot road in the distance as water. In saying that I make the relatively error free sensory contact with reality into a metaphysical claim which grounds my thought, Mullins misunderstands the true starting point for my philosophical view — although I want also to acknowledge that Mullins generally understands my views well. The experiencing of meaning in its many varieties, existential meaning, is my beginning point, a point I believe Polanyi arrived at late in his career when the infirmities of age made it difficult for him to develop and articulate fully the implications of this novel beginning point. A more complete rendering of this beginning point than has already been provided will be found in sections II, III, and V of MRPP as well as elsewhere in my writings.<sup>5</sup>

Why do I insist on the comparative veridicality of sensation? Without doing so, then meaning loses its bearing in the world. Science at best becomes accepted on instrumental grounds: it seems to work, but not necessarily because it is true and based on confirming sensations at some level of analysis. Then discussions of truth are likely to be decided on political grounds, much as Puddefoot suggests. Relativism then reigns, and

the most powerful advocates for a position win the day, even when discussing scientific matters. This sort of situation is precisely what Polanyi fought in pre-World War II Russia, when the needs of the state dictated scientific research and influenced perceptions of truth. I am not claiming that the reliability of our senses is the only bulwark against relativism, but it is an important one. Mullins' claim that "all our access to reality comes to us as we integrate that in which we dwell" seems to overvalue ordinary states of human consciousness and understress the important questions of where we get what we integrate and how reliable is it. Some access to reality (e.g., scientific knowledge, our everyday practical knowledge) is provided by the integrations producing human meaning, but "man" is not the measure of all things. Here I reiterate the point Kant makes about the important issue of the sources of our knowledge against Leibniz's rationalism.

Since my beginning point is with experiences of existential meaning, then it most certainly is not accurate to characterize it as a reductionistic type of ontology. Mullins seems to suggest that my prime concern is with "clarifying the parameters of primitive causality or articulating an ontological scheme of existents." I see my comments about reality and sensation as representing an impure sort of transcendental argument. I reflect upon the conditions which make meaning making possible, but I do so in terms of ideas provided by many sorts of disciplines or perspectives, including the visions of personal knowledge, the evolutionary and ecological perspective offered in *PK*, Part IV, lessons from philosophical history as suggested in section 3 above, and the investigations into the character of tacit knowing that Polanyi provided.

Further insights into the nature of experiencing existential meaning can be obtained by entering into conversation with points raised by Dale Cannon and Andy Sanders. Probably my position is closer to that expressed by Cannon than that described by any of the other authors. We both find reference to Kant helpful in interpreting Polanyi, although I would not concur that Cannon's points a) – d) in section 5 of his paper is a full or accurate depiction of problems in Kant's thought, and I'd have some other quibbles as well. But I appreciate the way Cannon stresses the importance of commitment in our acts of knowing, though we also need to back away from blind commitment in order to analyze our thought dispassionately. I think it important to recognize that dispassionate analysis is still undergirded by a motivating passion or commitment to find the truth. I'd prefer to use, with Sanders, the term "truth" rather than Cannon's "transcendent reality," for the latter phrase tends to support the honorific notion of reality, as when he speaks of reality as a "sacred, impassioning ideal" (section 3). Not everything we're excited about or seek to know is real.

Cannon underscores how the committed individual is motivated by the lure of reality, which involves "her participation in, her connection with, that which transcends her subjectivity" (section 2). He creatively interprets Polanyi's discussion of submission to ideals of human greatness as involving "a transcendence of human subjectivity from its passive, given state to a responsibly impassioned state of responsible personhood" (section 3). At this point, Cannon shows how fact, value and a sense of the real (I'd prefer "a love of truth") are conjoined in the framework of responsible personhood. Sanders develops a somewhat similar view. This position has many of the key elements I ascribe to strong experiences of existential meaning, but it perhaps does so in a more direct and fetching manner. Nevertheless, there are aspects of my understanding of experiences of existential meaning which I think enrich the conversation, so I will outline my notion briefly. My thought about these matters has been influenced by Polanyi and Prosch's *Meaning*, but also by many other sources, particularly Robert Neville's explication of thinking as a valuing activity as discussed in *Reconstruction of Thinking*.<sup>6</sup>

Experiences of existential meaning take place within the from-via-to structure of consciousness.

They involve thinking about and/or acting upon issues about which we care, and thinking and/or acting so as to achieve goals associated with these issues. We thereby arrive at meanings which satisfy us in felt ways. Much of our conscious activity is carried out along routes which are routine, and in such cases our emotional involvement, our level of care, falls below a threshold of notice and is an example of what Cannon calls passive subjectivity. In dramatic cases of existential meaning, however, our existence is enlivened by feelings of engagement and vigor, and life is felt to be intrinsically meaningful.

What are some typical events involved in such experiences of existential meaning? Typically we find that we include values that matter to us, fundamental interests, in our integrations. The scope and depth of our integrations increase, and we feel connected (we are connected) to an increasing range of persons, ideas, and issues that we care about. Scientific investigation which flows along a gradient of increased meaning, to use Polanyi's language, is an example of a process manifesting existential meaning. So might be a romantic interlude or successful business transactions. It is important to see that we don't just will ourselves into such experiences. They are supported by certain personal or social practices in which we dwell. The pleasure of the satisfactions we experience evokes our increased passionate participation in our project and pulls us into new opportunities to enjoy the satisfactions associated with the problem solving meanings we produce through integrations.

At this point, a rather significant difference seems to arise between my take on the world and Cannon's. He wants to distinguish our personal, extrinsic sense of value from the intrinsic meaning that objects possess. "Polanyi's idea of the meaningfulness of real things is a matter of intrinsic meaning, as opposed to extrinsic or derived meaning" (section 4). Cannon thus speaks of our meaningful comprehension of comprehensive entities and the intrinsic meaning these entities have. My issue with Cannon here is not so much a conceptual one as a terminological one. Just as I want to avoid equivocation in talking about reality both as describing what is and as something valuable for human life, so I want to avoid talking about meaning both as a human creative process/experience and something inherent in real entities. Minds and problems are far more complex than stones, and they afford opportunities for much richer experiences of existential meaning. But I find it confusing to say they are either more real or more endowed with intrinsic meaning. I would propose that Cannon's "intrinsic meaning" be replaced with "intrinsic richness".

The discussion of values and richness provides a nice segue to Sanders' article. The highlight for me among its rich layers of interpretation occurs in section 4. I find much that is compelling about Sanders' discussion of Polanyi's implicit axiology. To parcel out a core notion of goodness in the cognitive, aesthetic, moral, and spiritual realms of meaning into corresponding ideals of truth, beauty, justice, and charity seems to me an inspired move. While I have usually regarded them as guides to more fulfilling meaning creation, Sanders does not shy away from discussing the ontological status of these ultimate values. Because they "originated in human culture," he writes, "[u]nlike natural entities, these values are not independent, but they may be said to have a relative independence and thus objectivity in that they over-arch a large part of human culture" (section 4). I quite agree with this analysis; I too see such values as having an independent, objective status within human culture and in an individual's life. So despite these values being examples of Kantian Ideas, which by definition are not real, according to the independent existence criterion, they should still be seen as real. Can the apparent conflict be resolved?

Where do the Kantian (or Platonic) Ideas, ideals incapable of empirical exemplification, come from? According to Kant, Ideas develop out of and express the legislative and system-creating thrusts of reason as

it seeks unity in thought and action.

This Idea lies hidden in reason, like a germ in which the parts are still undeveloped and barely recognisable even under microscopic observation. . . . Systems seem to be formed in the manner of lowly organisms, through a *generatio aequivoca* from the mere confluence of assembled concepts, at first imperfect, and only gradually attaining to completeness, although they one and all have had their schema, as the original germ, in the sheer self-development of reason. (A 834-5, B 862-3)

The image Kant uses is suggestive. Ideas lie embedded within us, and out of our interactions with the world they are increasingly drawn out of us. It is but a small step beyond Kant to think of the Ideas as having evolved within human nature and culture as guides not only to surviving but for thriving. Their intellectual expression as Ideas may be but the external pole of an indwelt thrust toward fittingness and rightness. If so, then the way each of these Ideas may be applied is largely a cultural, communal matter, but the rational core of these Ideas would be universal, that is, inherent in all human existence. In sum, Ideas could be affirmed as being real because they are grounded in human nature, but simultaneously as transnatural integrations bringing into ideal order the diversity of our experiences.

There are at least two important implications of this view. First, it provides a way of escaping the fragmentation of reality into many separate communal enclaves. Second, it again alerts us against falling prey to traditional epistemological and ontological ways of conceiving reality. Values need not be seen simply as matters of intellectual idealism as Plato and Kant were prone to do, but the way they function in language should be examined, as should their possible status as bearers of reality in an embodied sense and/or as indicating real patterns in empirical reality.

At least as important as explicit value terms in guiding our behavior, however, are our interests, which indeed may influence the making of meaning at least in part through values. But the ways we make meaning are diverse not least because of the capacity of consciousness to roost in many levels and take many perspectives. Catherine Elgin illustrates these points well: “What we notice is a function of our interests. Things we overlook in one frame of mind another renders salient. Emotions are sources of salience.”<sup>7</sup> Elgin, building on Nelson Goodman’s thought, brilliantly shows how our minds are able use diverse materials – metaphors, works of fiction, emotions – to increase our understanding of (in contrast to our knowledge of) our incredibly multifarious world. Especially fertile in helping humans understand their world is the symbol-creating and utilizing activity Elgin calls exemplification, the process of taking something as an instance of something else:

Exemplification’s epistemic contribution has little to do with justified true belief. . . . An exemplar is vindicated not by what backs it up but what it brings forward. . . . Experiments and pictures, paint samples and fabric swatches, inform by means of exemplification. Being nonverbal, such symbols are neither true nor false. . . . An illuminating exemplar need not even affect belief. Its cognitive contribution may consist in augmenting one’s conceptual repertoire, refining one’s discrimination, honing one’s ability to recognize, synthesize, reorganize, and so on (Elgin 1996, 182f.).

If one combines insight into how exemplification dynamically extends traditional epistemology with an appreciation for the protean quality of language when viewed historically, one is less inclined to rely on traditional epistemological categories like warranted true belief, and one is more inclined to highlight the

importance of human meaning making. Polanyi's "ontological equation" questioned by Jha falters before the process of exemplification. Similarly, my concern to distinguish the real and the illusory is diminished.

One strategy for reasserting more stable traditional notions of epistemology and ontology in an unstable world is to embed them in certain coherent social groupings for certain periods of time. Sanders makes this move by arguing that "acceptance of, and striving towards these ultimate values in action and judgement is feasible for a knower only in virtue of her affiliation to a community of inquiry" (section 4). I want to affirm with Polanyi that there is a very important social component to knowledge, but I find several problems with any move to tie reality to the reciprocal inquiry exhibited in a community of inquiry. There is real merit to this suggestion when regarding the production of knowledge within the sciences and some other academic disciplines; this of course is precisely why Polanyi emphasized this approach in *SFS*. But how far ought this model be extrapolated? Most people develop their understanding of the real informally through participation in many communities: involvement in the church, at work, at home, in leisure activities, etc. If one properly objects that these examples are not basically communities of inquiry, and the results of such informal attention to reality are questionable, then one must still ask if the alternate is a form of scientism, of undue reliance on a small group of "experts". It seems preferable to be more inclusive by talking of traditions and communities of meaning construction.

Of course the most basic problem of talking about a communal definition of reality is the relativism it expresses, as indicated earlier. Again Sanders: "what counts as 'real' is relative to a particular tradition of of inquirers" (section 6). If so, then we are again stuck with an inability to distinguish reality and illusion. Benge and its powers are real. Dialectical materialism is a description of reality. Anything is real if a person or community believes it so. The shared human capacity to sense a common world and test hypotheses offers a better alternative. I continue to stand by the independent existence criterion for knowing an inexhaustible, complex reality.

In addition, Sanders' spectrum of the real, shading from the natural to the biological sciences to "social and cultural entities" (end of section 3), does not work for me. In stating that the latter are "even more real in that they require a larger degree and range of dwelling in subsidiary particulars (including feelings, emotions, stances, belief, etc.)," Sanders seems to commit himself to saying that nightmares, an engrossing video game, Pentecostal praise, and experiences while under the influence of stimulants are among the most real things there are. The spectrum works far better in describing meaning than in describing reality.

I truly appreciate the care with which Sanders examined my thought in section 5. I have benefited from his suggestion that I defined reality too narrowly in MRPP, although I am not sure the adjustment I made in this essay is broad enough to satisfy him. But I must also say that I felt he forced my thought into a pre-existing category of thought rather than fully took account of its novelty. I sound like – good God! – a logical positivist on Sanders' rendering: the empirical world alone is real and all else is emotive. His statement that my position "implies that, for example, God may be more richly meaningful than Santa Claus, but both would still be less real than a stone" is not inaccurate, but it gains its apparent punch only through use of an honorific notion of reality. In contrast, maybe I have too honorific a notion of meaning, except that my notion of meaning acknowledges that meaning is value drenched through and through. His interpretation does not even begin to understand how seriously I take dynamic experiences of meaning or acknowledge that I insist reality and meaning interpenetrate one another. But, through his prodding, I hope I have made my position clearer.

Finally, I offer a couple of brief comments on Puddefoot's article. His critical attitude toward ontological schemes as disguised recipes for totalitarianism reflects a viewpoint most commonly found among postmodernists like Emanuel Levinas and Mark Taylor. But all the essays collected in this issue articulate a stance of fallibilism with regard to epistemology and ontology, so where is the threat here? Doesn't a plausible demonstration of what exists and what can be known offer better protection against extremism than a nihilistic stance which in its cynical disregard for theories of reality or morality is free to argue for violence, authority, and other tokens of totalitarianism? I simply cannot agree that metaphysical realism is totalitarianism in disguise (cf. his section 5).

Moreover, Puddefoot seems less than fair to Cannon in criticizing his claim that "truth and reality . . . are sacred, impassioned ideals" (section 3). Puddefoot admonishes Cannon by saying that "passions inspired by absolute dedication to truth and reality – or our version of them – are as "inspiring" to devotees of their totalitarian manifestations as they are to others with whom we are more sympathetic" (section 3). But Cannon admits as much and protects his view by contrasting a totalitarian frame of mind which "results from a comprehensive failure to differentiate map from territory," with commitment to the transcendent ideal itself in a way which is open and vulnerable to having expressions of that ideal called into question.

Be that as it may, I think Puddefoot's claim (end of section 3) that Polanyi's "supreme achievement lay in eliminating the boundary between epistemology and ontology" is a provocative and interesting insight. Of course, Puddefoot sees the political realm as the basic category from which to proceed, whereas I argue for experiences of existential meaning as the best starting point. I hope by now that the latter comment is happily redundant.

### Endnotes

1 MRPP is also available for a limited time on the Polanyi Society Website:<http://www.mwsc.edu/~polanyi/>

2 At the very least Polanyi's movement from an emphasis on knowledge to understanding seems consistent with a similar move made by Quine as he sought to naturalize epistemology (see Quine's "Epistemology Naturalized," in: *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays* (New York: Columbia Univ. Pr., 1969, 69-90). More strikingly, Charles Taylor sees Polanyi's development of the dynamics of tacit knowing as subsidiary to explicit knowing to align Polanyi closely to Wittgenstein and Heidegger as thinkers who transform modernist epistemology – see Taylor's *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995, 68-70).

3 See my "An Unlikely Synthesis: What Kant Can Contribute to a Polanyian Theory of Selfhood," *The Personalist Forum* 9 (1993), 81-107. For an interpretation of Kant's thought that suggests that he, like Polanyi, moved increasingly toward ideas akin to meaning as his thought matured, see my "The Creativity of Intellect: From Ontology to Meaning. The Transmutation of the Sensible and Intelligible Worlds in Kant's Critical Work," *Ultimate Reality and Meaning* 17 (1994), 99-108.

4 In MRPP I make clear my dependence on Susanne Langer's distinction between signal and symbol. While I am critical of one aspect of Peirce's thought, I also recognize that his sophisticated understanding of signs could be very useful if set in the context of an embodied knower. Peirce's "index" and "icon" are approximately equivalent to Langer's "signal," and the two use "symbol" in roughly the same way. Terence

Deacon's *The Symbolic Species* (New York: Norton, 1997) appears to offer a helpfully updated version of Langer's work (even though Langer is not referenced) and to fit harmoniously into the Polanyian evolutionary perspective, as indicated by the subtitle of the book: *The Co-evolution of Language and the Brain*.

5 In "Archetypal Experiences" (*Soundings* 64 (1981), 237-266) I set forth some of the grounds for understanding existential meaning. "Reconnecting Geertz's Middle World" (*Soundings* 71 (1988), 113-153) provides a more explicit account – see especially pp. 143-146. In "The Thousand and First Face" (in: (ed.) Daniel C. Noel, *Paths to the Power of Myth: Joseph Campbell and the Study of Religion*, Crossroad, New York 1994, pp. 29-44) I explore existential meaning in relation to religious life.

6 I find much in Neville's thought brilliant and stimulating. Unfortunately, my one article on Neville ("Neville's Projects of Reconstruction and Recovery: How Firm a Foundation?," *American Journal of Theology and Philosophy* 16 (1995), 199-208) is critical rather than appreciative in nature. Others in recent years who have decisively influenced my understanding of the life of existential meaning include Albert Borgmann, Jerome Bruner, Henry Bugbee, Alastair MacIntyre, and David Strong.

7 *Considered Judgment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 149.

## 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.

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