

# “Recalled to Life”<sup>1</sup> : *Contact with Reality*

Esther L. Meek

ABSTRACT Key Words: Michael Polanyi; contact with reality; correspondence; indeterminate future manifestations; truth; progress; analysis; discovery

*A reengagement of my 1983 dissertation, this essay describes and amplifies the commitment to realism presupposed by Michael Polanyi’s alternative model of knowing, recommending its value for thought and life. The idea of contact with reality replaces an unworkable traditional notion of correspondence. Truth bears indeterminately on reality and thus its assessment is ultimately unspecifiable. We assess successful contact by our anticipation of the discovery’s indeterminate future manifestations (IFM Effect, the reality criterion) as well as the radicality of the integrative coherence achieved (the integrative criterion). Polanyi’s realism offers grounds for a critique of postmodernism. Alternative concepts of truth and progress as well as the value of the analytic method, are examined in light of the Polanyian model.*

In the course of his study of Michael Polanyi, Andy Sanders came across my unpublished 1983 dissertation on Polanyi’s realism, and has utilized it in support of his own theses.<sup>2</sup> His and others’ continuing references to the dissertation has kept it on the edge of Polanyian discussion, particularly in this journal. Until he and Phil Mullins came after me, I am embarrassed to say, I had no knowledge of this, having received no encouragement to publish from a heavily analytic philosophy department, and having been pregnant with a few unforeseeable implications of my own.

I appreciate Sanders’ invitation to rejoin the discussion. Because the need to explicate realism and truth has become, if anything, even more critical, and because some of you have found my formulations of Polanyi’s concepts helpful, I believe it will be useful for me to recapitulate my theses from that dissertation, making them more accessible to Polanyi enthusiasts.<sup>3</sup>

My brief synopsis is more a reengagement than a description. It will also serve to launch a few comments on recent works by others. Throughout the variety of topics here presented, I mean to defend Polanyi’s commitment to realism, to develop the concepts he suggested in order to recommend their value for thought and life.

## 1. Why resurrect a dated work on realism?

Whatever the other merits of that project, *Contact with Reality* offers perhaps the most exhaustive catalog of Polanyi’s comments concerning the real. I was fascinated by that aspect of his work and so attended with great care to it. At that time Polanyi’s emphasis on personal commitment gave him what little press he had, and that, “bad press”. It was deemed a pseudophilosophical offering. Classified as relativist, subjectivist, fideist, and psychologistic, his system would have been expected to contain little if any support for realism.<sup>4</sup> As a child of the thought of the early decades of this century, I was disturbed by the philosophical question, is there a world out there that we can be justified in claiming that we know?<sup>5</sup> Hence my fascination with Polanyi’s talk about reality and the fresh grounds upon which he said it.

Polanyi’s unprecedented approach also shed light on my everyday human experience in a way that the highly technical problems and proposed solutions of analytic philosophy did not. The Polanyian perspective

made it possible for me then to leave the formal debate of philosophy departments and journals, as my station in life compelled me to, and still do philosophy, by dint of living it. At least in ordinary living, he helped to allay my realist uncertainties.

In recent years, as I have been able to return to more formal philosophical pursuits, I still value Polanyi's approach to realism. For it has become apparent that Polanyi offered not only a definitive critique of and alternative to modern philosophy (before many others did, contributing to his unpopularity), but also an alternative to postmodernism as well. Popular consensus has only in the last decade shifted away from modernism. Its assumption that postmodernism offers the only alternative to modernism often goes unchallenged.<sup>6</sup> Polanyi, although not familiar with the fruit of the postmodernist worldview, nevertheless offered the *tertium quid* that people uneasy with the false dichotomy continue to explore. My driving concern to develop an epistemology compatible with the historic biblical tradition has involved me (and others) in exploring the Polanyian *tertium quid*, since neither modernism nor postmodernism does justice to biblical epistemic claims.<sup>7</sup> Polanyi's realism is just that ingredient in his philosophy that prevents its classification as postmodernist, and thus his realist theses retain strategic importance.

## **2. Something there to be discovered**

Hence the value of furthering the discussion about reality in Polanyi's thought. My dissertation contains four parts. The first introduces Polanyi's epistemology, drawing attention to the fact that Polanyi regards scientific discovery as the paradigmatic epistemic feat. Part II, entitled "Contact With Reality," documents and explicates Polanyi's realism, the reality statement (as I called it), the notion of contact with reality, and criteria of reality. Part III, "Polanyi and Realism in Contemporary Philosophy of Science," contains three chapters - on progress, truth, and contemporary realist issues - in which I examined the then-current debate, and related Polanyi's position to the positions of the participants. Part IV attempts to ground Polanyi's realism in its rightful bedrock of subsidiary, bodily indwelling, drawing on the complementary and profound insights of Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

No need exists to recapitulate Part I for this audience, except to say this: The very word, "discovery," implies something there to be discovered. With discovery as the central paradigm for knowing, realism arguably constitutes the linchpin of Polanyi's entire epistemology. In order to "save discovery" from elimination by modern philosophies, Polanyi had to profess realism and explore the act of contact with it. It turns out, as I have already noted, that the changes he persistently and courageously rings on the realist theme also save discovery from postmodern philosophies.

## **3. Independent Reality and Tacit Knowing**

Consider the following theses described in Part II of *Contact with Reality*. Reality exists independently of our knowing it. But, far from this rendering the question of its nature irrelevant to our knowing it, this is the very thing that forcibly compels the knower "not to do as he pleases, but to act as he believes he must." (PK 310)

Further, it is only in the context of the possibility of successful contact with reality that the essential features of Polanyi's structure of knowing make any sense: "We can account for this capacity of ours to know

more than we can tell if we believe in the presence of an external reality with which we can establish contact. This I do.” (KB 133) We know more than we can tell. The inarticulate always outruns the articulate. The explicit only exists by virtue of its grounding in the tacit. The subsidiary launches the focal. The kind of foreknowledge that leads to a discovery must be accredited. Polanyi rightly says that you can’t justify this most Polanyian aspect of his theory of knowledge without reference to both external and bodily reality.

A “clue,” for example, makes sense only in light of an as-yet unspecified focus. To deny the possibility of a truthful contact with reality - one that is successful even though (or perhaps precisely because) it is more (not less) than precisely specifiable - means you couldn’t call anything a clue, nor accredit the requisite heuristic feats that in fact any teacher, parent or scientist observes daily.

This realist assumption attends every stage of a discovery. (TD 69) Also, it alone accounts for the kind of tenacious passion that sustains a discoverer or learner, even in the absence of explicitly specified “facts.” (PK 7)

To acknowledge reality as existing independent of my knowing it may sound like a thinly veiled attempt to appeal to a “view from nowhere. But Polanyi nowhere denies that his use of “real” and “true” involve personal accreditation or the kind of normativity that pervades every single word we ever use.<sup>8</sup> The point is that reality is accessed, not obscured, only by accrediting personal, normative, embodied features.

#### **4. The IFM Effect**

If reality exists independently of our knowing it, then how can I know it? What tips me off to its presence? This is the part I love best - Polanyi’s “reality statement”: “We meet here with a new definition of reality. Real is that which is expected to reveal itself indeterminately in the future. Hence an explicit statement can bear on reality only by virtue of the tacit coefficient associated with it. This conception of reality and of the tacit knowing of reality underlies all my writings.” (SFS10)<sup>9</sup> The “indeterminate future manifestations” phrase led me to call it IFM Effect. (Meek, 1983, Chapter 5) Key characteristics of the experience include these: the manifestations are future, hence intimated rather than confirmed; they are infinite in number, indefinite in range; unpredictable yet systematic, expected to be unexpected; exceeding our understanding; appearing partially hidden. The IFM Effect authoritatively speaks for itself, attracting us to itself.

Polanyi’s unique IFM Effect renders his system truer to ordinary human experience. The idea of a gestalt-like pattern expresses aptly that reality is both coherent and inexhaustible, both temporally and spatially, and that it is always partially hidden but nevertheless partially anticipated. Always it will surprise us, not by inconsistencies, but by what I might call transforming consistencies. By dint of our unspecifiable foreknowledge of these outcomes, we can experience recognition even as we register surprise. The real so construed properly corresponds to the irreducible integration of particulars which is the cognitive act.

When reality is experienced as being pregnant with unforeseeable implications, it is impossible to devise a picture of reality or a verbal description that exhausts the subject matter and thus is completely true in an exhaustively specifiable sense. Nor do we need this simplistic idea of correspondence to be confident of the real; the IFM Effect regularly knocks us over in a way that makes us sure we didn’t contrive the experience ourselves. Nor do we want such a concept; the IFM Effect better expresses the humbling admixture of success and failure which characterizes any epistemic act.

## 5. Contact With Reality

Polanyi speaks rather of *contacting* reality: “truth lies in the achievement of a contact with reality - a contact destined to reveal itself further by an indefinite range of yet unforeseen consequences.” (PK 147) Polanyi also describes contact using metaphors such as bearing on, holding or grasping reality. I prefer the idea of grasping; it captures the flavor of the very human drive that vectors us outward continually in our world, which fuels the epistemic integration, which guarantees that the focus itself, once achieved, will only be a way station this side of the unspecifiable “beyond” toward which we always strive.

Polanyi stipulates that we lay hold of *an aspect* of reality. Never is it perfectly clear that we’ve got hold of the whole thing. The fact that we experience the IFM Effect in no way guarantees, for example, that the effect is caused by the thing that we think is causing it, under the description that we have attributed to it. Joseph Priestley, Marjorie Grene says, “the ‘discoverer of oxygen’, clung so resolutely to the phlogiston theory of combustion in its death throes, that he refused to admit it was ‘oxygen’ that he had discovered. He never believed in the existence of such a substance.”<sup>10</sup>

Truth as contact is never wholly specifiable or determinate. It will always have to be personally appraised. Contact preserves realism without requiring an unworkable correspondence theory. It corroborates just the tacit powers that Polanyi was concerned to champion. And it means that learning and discovery always retain their beguiling character: we need not suffer disillusionment from thinking no solution exists, nor will we ever abandon an enterprise because we have explained everything.

## 6. Criteria of Contact

Polanyi’s operational definition of reality lends itself to use as a criterion. How do we know that we have made contact with reality? While such an assessment is always a personal appraisal based substantially on less (more, actually) than specifiable features, we can nevertheless identify the aspects of our experiences that compel us to suspect the presence of some independent reality (comparable to sensing without seeing that someone else has entered the room, or sensing, in the dark, that you are near a wall). Experiencing the IFM Effect is an obvious criterion. I called this “the reality criterion.” An unspecifiable apprehension of indeterminate future manifestations signals contact. It relies on what I have termed a “prospective indeterminacy”: I sense future manifestations while they remain unspecifiable.

This is to contrast it with the other criterion of contact with reality, what I have called “the integrative criterion.” The other experience which compels us to believe that we have made contact with reality is the success of the epistemic integration itself. In explaining integration to my students, I always use as an illustration the experience of finding the pattern hidden in one of these Magic Eye pictures. Submitting to the authoritative promise and directions of its composer, the subject struggles gamely to focus beyond the surface of the page (whatever that means). After a fight of shorter or longer duration, depending on a number of factors, even the novice can see the pattern and actually recognize his own success. That wonderful, “Oh, I see it!” moment is a Polanyian one. The integrative act itself signals our success. The integrative criterion involves a “retrospective indeterminacy,” a comprehension of largely unspecifiable particulars that we’ve already relied on in achieving the integrative focus in terms of which they are transformed.

These two criteria of reality also infuse a uniquely Polanyian import into three other terms he uses to indicate contact with reality: coherence (the phenomenal aspect of tacit knowing), rationality (the semantic aspect

of tacit knowing), and intellectual beauty (the heuristic passions of the knower). Part II of the dissertation closes with an exposition of these concepts, as well as with my justification for not taking Polanyi's idea of an isomorphic correspondence (Sanders' term) between knowing and being as the central meaning of the ontological aspect of tacit knowing.

## **7. Engaging Analytic Philosophy: Progress**

Orienting Polanyi's contributions in the constellation of mainstream philosophical discussion constituted the task of part III of *Contact With Reality*. This interaction was essential for me to satisfy my philosophy department concerning Polanyi's credibility (the other stipulation was that Marjorie Grene, a one-time visiting professor, serve on my committee, because nobody in my department knew anything about Polanyi.). Part III corresponds in intent to Sanders' efforts. In the following paragraphs, I will allude briefly to the analytic discussions in the early eighties, while primarily developing Polanyi's position. I am grateful that Sanders and others continue to pursue a rapprochement with analytic philosophers, an effort of strategic importance.

Chapter 8 describes positions held then by Karl Popper, Imre Lakatos, Thomas Kuhn, and Paul Feyerabend concerning the prospect of progress, continuity, success and growth in scientific knowledge.<sup>11</sup> In particular, are successive scientific theories related commensurably (comparable rationally in light of independent standards) or incommensurably? Is scientific knowledge "additive" with respect to truth? It would seem that those who champion some form of realism would have to hold that truth is additive, theories are commensurable, and progress, success, and growth possible. To believe otherwise, apparently, would entail an antirealist position. While Polanyi's unqualified admission of features of the epistemic act which seem to support incommensurability in science - personal commitment, self-set standards, an irreducible integrative feat as the source of new truth - would indicate an antirealism, nevertheless he maintains vociferously that his is a realist position. Hence the apparent problem.

Popper popularized the attempt to express a rational format for testing two hypotheses for comparative superiority, with falsification as a determinative ingredient. Lakatos offered a more sophisticated version that took account of the fact that evidence is evidence generally by virtue of human decision; nevertheless he wished to defend the rational reconstructibility of scientific progress, as over against the "post-critical-mystical message" of people like Kuhn and Polanyi.

Kuhn and Feyerabend, by contrast, emphasized the more discontinuous aspects of the history of science, with a generally chipper attitude toward irrationalism or anarchism. The history of science, they felt, demonstrated the incommensurability of rival hypotheses. Both viewed the change from one paradigm to the next as a gestalt switch. Kuhn offered guidelines concerning how, nevertheless, holders of rival hypotheses may communicate and presumably reconcile differences. For Feyerabend, no switch could ever be conducted rationally. Rather, incommensurability replaced any realism with judgments of taste and subjective wishes. For each, "progress" in science only describes what goes on within the reign of a paradigm, and never the relationship between competing paradigms.

Polanyi speaks little either for or against progress in science, at least in the way it was construed by others. He explicitly corroborates the experiences which Kuhn sums up as evidence for incommensurability; in fact, he probably inspired Kuhn's position. Nevertheless, several features of Polanyi's thought support an optimism concerning growth in knowledge: the possibility of learning - it is possible to advance into the unknown;

the sense of a deepening coherence, the irreversibility of the integrative leap; the gradual extension of ourselves into the world; success over time in solving scientific anomalies.

Three things set his approach apart, allowing him to be bullish about progress even as he reconceives the notion. First, for Polanyi, the notion of progress toward truth must be construed as normative as much as it is descriptive. It is a transcending commitment, a moral task.<sup>12</sup> We are committed to pursuit of truth in principle as much as we are in fact. And rather than this rendering science antirealist, this normativity is just what fuels the scientific enterprise and precipitates its success.

Secondly, acknowledging the legitimacy of the indeterminate keeps incommensurability from swallowing up progress, or commitment from swallowing up realism. Progress in science, he says, “is determined at every stage by indefinable powers of thought.” Subtract the preobjective, embodied, functionally unspecifiable subsidiaries - easy to do because by definition we don’t focus on them as we use them, hard to do once you realize they make everything we call knowledge possible - subtract them, and personal commitment naturally seems arbitrary and advance into the unknown almost logically impossible (right, Meno?) This is just the feature of knowing that analytic philosophers, if they mark it at all, consider anomalous, lucky, or anarchistic.

From a Polanyian point of view, many positions such as Popper’s and Lakatos’s contain Polanyian features, as I show in this chapter. I generally find that a Polanyian “criticism” of just about any system involves, not so much out and out contradiction, but rather the addition of an insight that infuses a transforming consistency, bringing out the best in the “opponent’s” position - much as a discovery doesn’t so much contradict as transform previously held claims. Continuity, on Polanyi’s terms, should be construed less as additive and more as what we might call transformative. This is true of rationality, too. A Polanyian approach challenges old views of rationality. But the result is not irrationality, but profounder rationality, and one that accords better with a systematically inexhaustive world.

## **8. Engaging Analytic Philosophy: Truth**

Chapter 9 describes contemporary puzzles about truth, particularly the correspondence theory of truth. The success of a realist position appears superficially to require construing truth as correspondence to the real, rather than as mere coherence or workability or redundancy or performance. The question of truth turns out to blur several more specific questions: the question, what does “true” mean?, is different from the question, how does it get used linguistically?, and the question, “what experiences prompt me to use the word?”, and the question, “by what standards do I assess that something is true?” While the correspondence idea expresses what we think truth means, it is pretty useless as a criterion to direct my usage, requiring as it would, a view from nowhere, which is impossible. Theorists have labored to express just what a viable correspondence theory would say a truth is supposed to correspond to, and to articulate the essential role of a background theory in furnishing standards for assessing truth.<sup>13</sup>

In contrast to progress, commensurability, etcetera, Polanyi speaks of truth often (though he says little about correspondence). But because this system taken as a whole so transforms our understanding of knowing, it can be difficult to compare his position with that of others. I believe that his system addresses the difficulties, if only by showing us why such difficulties are unavoidable outside a fiduciary framework. But rather than such a fiduciary framework cutting us off from truth, it identifies for perhaps the first time the very features by which truth is accessed.

Truth is thought of only by believing it, says Polanyi. (*PK* 305) Thus, to say something is true is like endorsing a check. This is similar to positions held by Black, Ramsey and Strawson, except I do not believe Polanyi means to say that this is all that we mean when we use the word, true. (Meek, 1983, 187) Truth, he also says, is the external pole of belief. (*PK* 286) To say that *p* is true is to say *p*, with universal intent, never merely private intent. To say *p* is “true for me” is a contradiction in terms.

Why must truth be “personal” - where personal means, not private, not nonexistent, but a matter of accreditation as universal? Grene suggests it must be this way because we determine truth by relying ultimately on tacit powers.<sup>14</sup> Antirealists, typically, have not recognized the existence of tacit powers. When we know something, we will certainly still be unable to tell what all its implications are or even whether there is any admixture of error. To know something is to know more than we can tell; thus to know something is true is going to involve knowing more than we can tell. Because we cannot fully spell out all of a claim’s implications, even though we anticipate them, we cannot determine explicitly the claim’s truth. (Meek, 1983, 188) In addition to an inexhaustive indeterminacy in reality that always outruns our grasp, the very conception we employ to capture it itself contains indeterminacies. To Polanyi’s aphorism, “We know more than we can tell,” I always add, “We say more than we know.”

This is not a “poor substitute” for correspondence. It is a far more accurate description of the experience of truth we in fact have, where an idea of correspondence based on knowledge of a merely explicit sort simply is logically flawed.

The assessment of truth is an expression of normativity: Polanyi speaks of truth as the rightness of an action of mental acceptance. (*PK* 320-21) It involves reliance on self-set standards and a robust “background theory.” But these fiduciary aspects grow out of a foundation, reality as bodily experienced and subsidiarily held, never unaffected by our interpreted input, but never determined by it alone, not explicitly expressed in a way that captures it as we live in it, and never held to be unrevisable or mistake-free - contrast the standard stipulations of foundationalism in knowledge. (Meek, 1983, 203ff.) Normativity shapes but doesn’t prevent our immersion in reality.

Once the common reception of more-than-articulate experiences is acknowledged and taken seriously, what Polanyi says about truth makes good sense. A statement is true if it reveals an aspect of reality, if it achieves contact with reality, if it bears indeterminately on reality. (Meek, 1983, 192) This bearing is, by virtue of its indeterminacy, apprehended by our tacit powers. What makes us think that we are in touch with a reality external to ourselves? The criteria of reality, as we said before: the IFM Effect, and our integrative success.

Correspondence, in the sense of a picture-like representation, is both too detailed and too impoverished to accommodate the adequation of thought and things. Contact replaces correspondence. To say we lay hold of truth does not mean that we lay hold of the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Indeterminacy means that it is not contradictory to claim truth despite the unavoidable admixture or error. We may be better able, in days to come rather than now, to identify the respects in which a claim was true and those in which it proved false, but even this will itself be a personally accredited claim capable of revision.

If truth lies in indeterminate bearing on reality, then on the articulate level, we seek truth by justifying our beliefs as responsibly as possible. But we justify our beliefs not merely with reference to explicitly stated

“facts,” but also with reverence for the fiduciary features and powers on which any explicit assessment must rely. Justification itself never replaces or defines truth. It is always conducted “in the hope of truth,” as Grene says. (Meek, 1983, 207-8) Nor could truth as mere justification ever explain the very common experiences of learning, learning from our mistakes, and discovery.

We do have ordinary experiences that feel very much like what we might call correspondence. A kind of matching takes place within the course of a discovery. Our tacit foreknowing precedes a discovery, extending out in advance of our explicit knowledge, both as our creative intuition focuses on the unknown comprehensive entity and our creative imagination scrabbles in search of clues (whose significance can at that point be only tacitly grasped). As a result of this preceding of ourselves, when the “Oh, I see it!” moment finally arrives, we recognize it as matching or corresponding with the tacit conclusions already reached. Thus a discovery comes to us with the conviction of its being true. While the ins and outs of this experience would be very difficult to specify, Polanyi has done tremendous service to call attention to the queerness of “the sense of increasing proximity to a solution,” “clues,” and so on. And of course, even if we ever can specify it, the act itself would always be functionally unspecifiable. (Meek, 1983, 196)

## **9. Puddefoot and Polanyi**

In his article in this volume, John Puddefoot summons readers to redefine “true” and “real” in a way that removes traces of metaphysical realism, a doctrine which he calls arrogant, childish and irresponsible, that he believes has been invoked to support unjust violation of other persons’ free space, both verbally and in the devastations of actual war.<sup>15</sup> Given his concern, and the seriousness of the issue at stake, it is important to ask how Puddefoot’s claims comport with Polanyi’s realist theses as described here.

Puddefoot identifies metaphysical realism with the claim that reality and truth (as defined by a claimant) exist independently of all knowers. An appeal to its authority encroaches on another person’s free space. Puddefoot rightly asserts that a “view from nowhere” is inherently inconsistent. He rightly sees that when such an appeal is used, apart from alternative justification, to legitimate acts of human injustice, it is abhorrent. He rightly claims that such a view fails to recognize the human condition of knowledge as tied inseparably to the personal and the social dimensions of human experience, a condition of inescapable risk and responsibility in knowing. He rightly believes that Polanyi helps us recognize this aspect of knowing.

I would like to suggest, however, that Puddefoot is mistaken in thinking that the alternative he proposes (1) is the only alternative to metaphysical realism; (2) is the Polanyian alternative; or (3) escapes the same criticisms he levels at metaphysical realism, namely that it is societally dangerous, that it promotes epistemic irresponsibility and that it is internally inconsistent.

According to Puddefoot, we should see that knowledge must be ratified by communities of enquiry, and that truth should be reconstrued in terms of cultural accreditation, or currently advisable human action (section 1).

It should already be clear how Polanyi’s model offers an alternative to the false dichotomy of modernism and postmodernism. Contact replaces an unworkable correspondence, strengthening rather than weakening the case for realism by bringing to light the traditionally unnoticed epistemic realm of subsidiaries, a rich array of more-than-specifiable experiences. Puddefoot, while taking seriously what Polanyi said about the social

dimension of knowledge, overlooks other facets of the tacit coefficient we all embody. Puddefoot's alternative to metaphysical realism could be the only alternative only if one fails to see or accredit these other facets. It is a mistake to reduce the tacit to the political. I teach my child to objectify a certain item as a baseball, using a societally developed term and concept. But no tribal ratification or its absence could mitigate entirely the effect of her getting mashed in the face with one.

Already we see, secondly, that Puddefoot's theses are not exactly Polanyian. I am unclear whether for Puddefoot this is good or bad. The two positions obviously diverge: Polanyi, as we have seen, insists that his entire system presupposes that there is something there to discover, a reality existing independently of my knowing it. Granted, *we accept* personal knowing as a token of reality. Polanyi's profound insights compel a more sophisticated handling of notions of truth and reality. But that sophistication accredits the fiduciary in the pursuit of truth; it doesn't give up the pursuit.

Thirdly, I suggest that a political reinterpretation of truth actually shares with metaphysical realism the epistemic irresponsibility Puddefoot longs to avoid, for both positions seek to reduce truth to something exhaustively describable, that involves no personal risk. Many people today believe that it is self-evidently and universally wrong to risk violating someone else's space. To define truth in a way that might risk an intrusion would be intrinsically abhorrent. Yet the human experience regularly requires and appraises such risk. I intervened in my daughters' lives, for example, to insist on piano lessons as long as we were able to afford it. I refused to entertain complaints. Recently, I heard my youngest, now 12, tell someone that my policy "had worked," meaning that they all like music and recognize that they are skilled now in a way they would not have been had I not violated their personal space. I silently exulted, realizing that my responsible risk had paid off, but realizing, humbly, that it might not have. Such decisions are regular occurrences - the emergency room offers a hotbed of similar examples. Polanyi's view embraces the risk and responsibility of truth in a way that the proposed political reduction of it does not.

Nor is the proposed eclipse of truth any more likely to save lives, for it offers even less ground for intercultural interest, let alone respect. If another tribe's truth by definition has no bearing on my truth, no impetus remains for mutual acquaintance or restraint.

Most importantly, the proposal that truth be defined as tribally determined effectiveness fails because of unavoidable internal inconsistency. If this is how we define "true," then we must define "effective," and specify criteria for its assessment. But for a claim to be "effective," it must in some way have gotten it right about the world - there must be some successful contact, and intimations in light of which we gauge how we are doing. "Effective," or "worthwhile," Polanyi would say, are pseudosubstitutions for truth. The charges he leveled at positivism in "Science and Reality" also apply to a political eclipse of truth.

Puddefoot cannot avoid using evaluative language that presupposes a conception of an independent truth or reality. How do I decide whether I can trust a person or a tribe? Does my decision not involve assessing what they tell me against my experience? Oh, but my experience is tribally conditioned. Granted, but what I experience can be revised by me whenever I sense that it is mistaken. "Mistaken," a word that Puddefoot also uses, is one of those magic Polanyian words - explicable only if subsidiary, more-than-we-can-tell knowledge exists. And that sort of knowledge only exists if by it we grasp an unspecifiably rich reality. A political redefinition of truth can't consistently explain mistakes or their correction.

I believe that part of the solution lies in realizing that concepts of truth and reality often function normatively rather than descriptively. They are norms to which we aspire, which shape the enterprise which is our life; they are norms that we cannot eliminate no matter how hard we try. If we eclipse “truth,” we will find ourselves inventing another word for the same thing. *This* is the unavoidable risk of the human condition; we can only choose to act responsibly or irresponsibly. No attempted definition of truth will free us from the responsibility of asking, regarding any claim that appears to measure up, “Yes, but is it true?” For ultimately, truth lies in its indeterminate bearing on reality, and thus is ultimately unспецифически and fallibly determined.

## 10. The place of analysis

I wish also to comment on Sanders’ and Cannon’s interaction concerning whether a philosophical analysis of an analytic sort essentially obscures the Polanyian message.<sup>16</sup> Does an articulation of the subsidiary destroy it? Is the attempt to communicate Polanyi’s thought in the style of analytic philosophy essentially self-defeating? Cannon suggests an affirmative answer (Cannon, 1996-97, 22)

Sanders replies that a theory of tacit knowing need not and could not have the character of the tacit knowing itself. A theory should be explicit and thus susceptible of analysis, even if it is a theory of tacit knowing. While this is a helpful distinction, there remains a sense in which Cannon is still right. But for reasons neither of them has mentioned, the program of analysis can go forward even admitting Cannon’s concern.

Cannon is right in the sense that nothing ever is exhaustively expressed. If your goal is exhaustive articulation, it just will never happen, even if you are convinced otherwise. We need to remember that a statement, no matter how explicit or well articulated, always retains an allusive, evocative, aspect (call this the indeterminate bearing on reality, IBR!). Even the soundest specification of the theory of tacit knowing will bear this mark, and not because it is a theory about tacit knowing. Careful articulation never obliterates the IBR. Polanyi warned of the dangers of “unbridled lucidity”; but his own theses show that such a state of affairs never in fact pertains (*TD18*).

In fact, careful articulation, according to both Polanyi and experience, most likely serves to enhance this IBR, and to increase the range of our contact with reality. I have in mind Polanyi’s discussion of destructive analysis (*TD 19*). Subsidiary clues embraced within the integrative feat are, in reference to that feat, *functionally* unспецифически. Not all of them are intrinsically unспецифически. We can specify at least some of the subsidiaries. It’s just that to specify them is to focus on them and this destroys the first integration. But I think we have to refrain from interpreting the word, “destroy,” in an, of-course-we-would-never-want-to-do-that sense. The sense he means it to have is, of-course-we-would-never-want-to-do-that-permanently, and, of-course-you-shouldn’t-expect-a-reintegration-unless-you-stop-it. But experience teaches, as Polanyi knows, destructive analysis is a, perhaps the, key tool for learning. Would-be pianists think about how their thumbs cross under their fingers while doing scales; would-be golfers study in slow motion videos of Tiger Woods; would-be painters study techniques of water color. They do so, not to obliterate their talent, but to *extend* it. Analytic philosophy has brought a precision and sophistication to the discipline. We have gained much in the way of carefulness in our work, and also skill in exploring concepts and distinctions. This destructive analysis (*analysis*, please note) extends us into our world, as does any tool we have learned to wield with skill. The mistake Polanyi would have us avoid is rather a *fixated* destructive analysis - one which restricts knowledge to its result. But even this, as I have shown, where it is attempted, fails to neutralize the Polanyian features present.

## 11. Immersed in reality

In closing, a brief word about Part IV of the dissertation. While philosophical analysis may extend the range on which we contact reality, few analysts seem to explore the bodily rootedness of all thought. No amount of analytical articulation will make us feel what it is like to live in the subsidiaries as extensions of our body, even though it extends that experience. We know the subsidiaries truly as we live through them as an extension of our lived bodily experience. Hence the value of Merleau-Ponty's remarkable, very un-analytical "analysis" of what he calls perception. Any discussion of truth, therefore, will always in some measure fall short - not because there is no external world, nor because we're doomed to be separated from it, but because we are immersed in it.<sup>17</sup>

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Charles Dickens' phrase, expressing a major theme in his *Tale of Two Cities*.

<sup>2</sup> A.F. Sanders, *Michael Polanyi's Post-Critical Epistemology: A Reconstruction of Some Aspects of "Tacit Knowing"*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988; "Truth in the Fiduciary Mode: A Reply to Professor Emmet," *Tradition and Discovery* 15 (1987-89), 2, 27-33; "Criticism, Contact with Reality, and Truth," *Tradition and Discovery* 23 (1996-7), 3, 24-37. Esther L. Meek, *Contact With Reality: An Examination of Realism in the Work of Michael Polanyi*; Temple University, October 1983.

<sup>3</sup> University Microfilms #85-09387, Ann Arbor, Michigan,

<sup>4</sup> Sanders carefully responds to charges such as these in his 1988 book, according to Cannon, "Sanders' Analytic Rebuttal to Polanyi's Critics, With Some Musings On Polanyi's Idea of Truth," *Tradition and Discovery*, 23 (1996-7), 3, 20.

<sup>5</sup> See for example Bertrand Russell's *The Problems of Philosophy*, (1912 (Oxford, 1959)) Ch. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *Proper Confidence: Faith, Doubt and Certainty in Christian Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 74.

<sup>7</sup> I hope someday to show how Polanyi's structure of tacit knowing offers an undergirding and elucidation for the proposals of thinkers such as the theologian John Frame, in his *Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1987), and Reformed Epistemologists such as Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff.

<sup>8</sup> See Marjorie Grene's wonderful critique of Russell's protocol sentence, "This is red", *The Knower and the Known* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974), 160ff.

<sup>9</sup> Note that he wrote this in 1946. The claim remained with him, unrevised, for his entire writing career.

<sup>10</sup> *The Knower and the Known*, 147.

<sup>11</sup> For bibliographic information on these writers, see my dissertation.

<sup>12</sup> In my dissertation at this point I referenced Alasdair MacIntyre's work, "Objectivity in Morality and Objectivity

in Science,” and Grene’s response to it in *Morals, Science and Sociality*, the Hastings Center Volume III of The Foundations of Ethics and Its Relationship to Science, 1978.

<sup>13</sup> I discuss the work of several philosophers, including Strawson and Quine, *Contact with Reality*, 179-86).

<sup>14</sup> “Tacit Knowing: Grounds for a Revolution in Philosophy,” *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 8 (October 1977), 168.

<sup>15</sup> John C. Puddefoot, “The Trust Relationship,” this issue.

<sup>16</sup> Dale Cannon, “Sanders’ Analytic Rebuttal to Polanyi’s Critics, With Some Musings On Polanyi’s Idea of Truth,” *Tradition and Discovery*, 23 (1996-7), 3, 17-23; Andy Sanders, “Criticism, Contact With Reality and Truth,” *Tradition and Discovery*, 23 (1996-7), 3, 24-36.

<sup>17</sup> “Why can’t we check our beliefs against reality?” asks Marjorie Grene. “Not, as sceptics believe, because we can’t reach out to reality, but because we’re part of it.” “Knowledge, Belief and Perception,” The Andrew W. Mellon Lecture, Tulane University, Fall 1978.

## 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 and a table of contents for most 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; (7) the call for papers, programs and papers for upcoming (or recently completed) meetings.