

Tradition & Discovery

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Preface

Please take note that this issue begins the cycle for membership renewal. You will also find (p. 5) the Call for Papers for the June 8-10, 2001, Polanyi Society conference at Loyola University, Chicago, on the theme "Polanyi's Post-Critical Thought and the Rebirth of Meaning. On the facing page (3) is information about membership renewal which is being combined with a fund drive to support the Chicago conference. Pay your dues and make a generous contribution--the Society badly needs to raise dollars to cover expenses of printing and mailing *TAD* and the conference. Inside the back cover (p. 47) is a mailer. For your convenience (and to jog your memory), colorful, separate loose sheets on the Loyola Conference and the membership renewal/fund drive have also been inserted.

This issue includes the program for the upcoming November 17 and 18, 2000, Polanyi Society meeting in Nashville (p. 6). The papers to be discussed at this event should be posted on the Polanyi Society web site (<http://www.mWSC.edu/~polanyi>) by the end of October.

You will find in this issue interesting discussions by Louis Swartz and Steven Grosby about Edward Shils' ideas. Shils was a close friend of Michael Polanyi, one of the readers of the whole manuscript of *Personal Knowledge*, as Steven Grosby points out. Polanyi influenced Shils and Shils influenced Polanyi. Several year ago, *TAD* carried both Stephen Turner illuminating obituary for Shils (22:2 [1995-96]: 5-9) and Shils' Kent State address (22:2 [1995-96]: 10-26). There is also in this issue David Kettle's reflections on the pervasiveness of "Cartesian habits" as well as James Hall's comments on his effort as a psychiatrist to link the ideas of Polanyi, C.G. Jung and the parapsychologist J. B. Rhine. Finally, my review article on Marjorie Grene's *A Philosophical Testament* tries to summarize Grene's philosophical stance and explore the relation of Grene and Polanyi.

Phil Mullins

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

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL/FUND DRIVE

In this issue (p. 4), there is a call for papers for an international Polanyi conference set for June 8-10, 2001 at Loyola University, Chicago. This is the largest single event ever sponsored exclusively by the Polanyi Society. Most previous major conferences have been smaller in scale or have been subsidized by generous institutions such as Kent State University. The Polanyi Society thus needs to raise the funds necessary to cover basic expenses of organizing the conference. The Organizing Committee is investigating several possibilities. One option is described below.

Membership dues for the Polanyi Society are regularly paid in the fall at the beginning of the academic year. The first issue of a new TAD volume normally includes the dues payment notice. This year you are invited to combine your dues payment with a contribution. In order to encourage you to “think generously,” you may get a first and second payment notice and/or an e-mail notice reminding you that it is time to renew. The chart below sets forth some “rungs” on the contribution ladder. We hope you will reach as high as it is possible for you conveniently to stretch. Unlike the Public Broadcasting System and National Public Radio drives in the US, we do not have Polanyi Society coffee mugs, book bags and other memorabilia to distribute to those who are generous. But for those who do stretch (at least the first 50), we can provide a copy of Andy Sanders’ very good 1988 (Rodopi) book, *Michael Polanyi’s Post-Critical Epistemology: A Reconstruction of Some Aspects of “Tacit Knowing”* (currently being sold by Amazon.com for \$47).

Donation Range	Designation	Acknowledgment
\$20-50	Associate	-1 year membership -Listed in gift acknowledgments
\$51-\$100	Friend	-1 year membership -Listed in gift acknowledgments -Copy of <i>Guide to the Papers of Michael Polanyi</i> (TAD 23:1[1996-97] or other old issues available).
\$101-\$500	Benefactor	-1 year membership -Listed in gift acknowledgments -Copy of Sanders’ book
>\$500	Patron	-3 year membership -Listed in gift acknowledgments -Copy of Sanders’ book

The Polanyi Society is presently applying for tax deductible status in the US. If that application is approved and we are allowed to provide a charitable donation letter, we will do so later in the year. Dues and donations can be sent by post, fax or e-mail. Credit cards donations are welcome.

SEE PG. 47 OR INSERT FOR MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL FORM

NEWS AND NOTES

Louis H. Swartz has published "Michael Polanyi and the Sociology of a Free Society" in *The American Sociologist*, 29: 1 (Spring 1998): 59-70.

Steven Grosby translated and wrote an introduction for *Theory of Objective Mind: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Culture* by Hans Freyer. This book was published by Ohio University Press in 1999 as a part of the Series in Continental Thought.

The next *Appraisal*/Polanyi Conference will held on Friday the 30th (5 p.m.) and Saturday the 31st (5 p.m.) of March 2001, at Hugh Stewart Hall, University of Nottingham. The special theme of the Conference will be Social and Political Philosophy and Problems but not all papers need be on that theme. The Conference is organized like a seminar, with a round-table discussion of the papers which will have been issued in advance. Papers can be exploratory and suggestive rather than finished. Revised versions will be considered for publication in *Appraisal*. The texts of all papers will be required by Jan. 31st 2001. They should be sent electronically on disk or by e-mail attachment, preferably as .rtf (Rich Text Format) files, or be cleanly typed, with a new ribbon, and with single spacing, for scanning. Send inquiries to rtallen@lineone.net or write R. T. Allen, 20 Ulverscroft Rd, Loughborough, Leics. LE11 3PU, England.

Robert K. Martin's article "Theological Education in Epistemological Perspective: The Significance of Michael Polanyi's "Personal Knowledge" for Theological Orientation of Theological Education" was published in *Teaching Theology and Religion*, 1:3 (October, 1998). His book *The Incarnate Ground of Christian Faith: Toward a Christian Theological Epistemology for the Educational Ministry of the Church* (University Press of America) was also published in 1998.

Struan Jacobs' article "Michael Polanyi on the Education and Knowledge of Scientists" was published in *Science & Education* 9: 3 (2000): 309-320.

Poul Thirup and **Peter Mikkelsen** have an article titled "Tacit Knowledge--An Epistemological Framework and Implications for Research in Doctors' Information Needs" in *Studies in Health Technology and Informatics*.2000:77; *Proceedings of Medical Informatics Europe 2000 Congress and GMDS2000*. Also available at <http://www.dnlb.dk/medmc/tacit.pdf>

A new edition of Michael Polanyi's 1951 book *The Logic of Liberty* was published in 1998 by Liberty Fund, Inc, 8335 Allison Pointe Trail, Suite 300, Indianapolis, IN 46250-1687. This book was a collection of essays written from 1943-1951 that Polanyi says "represent my consistently renewed efforts to clarify the position of liberty in response to a number of questions raised by our troubled period of history" (*Preface*). The new edition has a foreword by Stuart D. Warner (ix-xv) and a frontispiece that is a 1915 photograph of Michael Polanyi in military uniform.

Polanyi's Post-Critical Thought and the Rebirth of Meaning

Call for Papers

The Polanyi Society will sponsor a conference on the theme "Polanyi's Post-Critical Thought and the Rebirth of Meaning" on June 8, 9, and 10, 2001 at Loyola University, Chicago. This conference is an occasion to reflect on themes and possibilities found in Polanyi's thought twenty-five years after Polanyi's death in 1976. Chicago is an apt site for the conference, since interested participants will be able to access the archival Polanyi papers at the Regenstein Library of the University of Chicago.

Proposals are invited for papers that examine connections between Polyanian perspectives and those of other thinkers, schools of thought or domains of inquiry. Papers can explore prospects for post-critical thought. The following are some suggested general categories within which specific papers might be grouped. [Please do not think of them as a limit for submissions but as a springboard for your own reflections. The final program will reflect groupings adjusted in light of proposals submitted.]

Postmodernism and Post-Critical Thought
Polanyi and the Analytic Tradition
Polanyi and American Thought
Polanyi and Continental Thinkers

Polyanian Approaches to Conceiving God
Polyanian Links Between Religion and Science
Polanyi and World Religions
Polanyi and Education

Polanyi in the Light of Developments in Psychological Theory
The Tacit Dimension: Skills, Practice and the Subliminal
Personal Knowledge As True, Public, and Reasonable

Post-Critical Ethics
Polanyi's Axiology
Post-Critical Aesthetics

Polanyi's Antireductionism and the Logic of Emergence
Metaphysical Issues in Polanyi's Philosophy
Developing Polanyi's Notion of Meaning
Community and Conviviality in Post-Critical Perspective

Polyanian Responses to Pluralism
Polanyi's Social/Political Thought
Polyanian Foundations of Law
Polyanian Themes in Management

Putting Polanyi into Practice: Art, Artistry, and Audience

Polyanian Explorations in Economics

Proposals will be reviewed by a panel of jurors and should be no more than 250 words. The initial deadline for receipt of proposals is November 1, 2000. Those who do not meet the November 1 initial deadline can submit proposals before the final deadline of March 30, but priority consideration will be given to proposals meeting the November 1 deadline. Mail an electronic copy (preferred) to Phil Mullins at mullins@mwsc.edu. Paper copies may be sent to Phil Mullins, MWSC, St. Joseph, MO 64507. Proposals should include e-mail address (or fax number) as well as preferred mailing address and phone number of the author.

In addition to concurrent sessions with participants' papers, the conference will include several plenary sessions that are presently being organized. Included are the following: (1) an address by John Haught (Georgetown University), author of *God After Darwin*, (2) an address by Andy Sanders (University of Groningen), author of *Michael Polanyi's Post-Critical Epistemology*; (3) a panel discussion including Charles McCoy and Richard Gelwick (persons who worked directly with Polanyi) and Polanyi biographer Marty Moleski. Additional information about this conference will follow in future *TAD* issues and will also, along with the call for papers, be posted on the Polanyi Society web site (<http://www.mwsc.edu/~polanyi>).

Program For November 2000 Polanyi Society Meeting in Nashville

The program for the Polanyi Society annual meeting to be held in Nashville on November 17 and 18, 2000, is printed below. As in past years, papers will be posted for downloading (in October) on the Polanyi Society web site (<http://www.mwsc.edu/~polanyi>). The sessions will focus upon discussion and papers will only be summarized..

The location for the meetings will be the Opryland Hotel and Convention Center in Nashville; rooms are listed below and in Additional Meetings section of the AAR/SBL Annual Meeting Program. As in past years, Polanyi Society sessions are held in conjunction with the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion and Society for Biblical Literature. Because of pressure for space, these large umbrella professional organizations are now carefully monitoring hotel reservations. It is necessary to register for the AAR/SBL annual meeting to be eligible for hotel accommodations in one of the primary hotels near where meetings are held. However, anyone who is interested is welcome to attend the Polanyi Society meetings, whether or not they are attending the AAR/SBL meetings. There are, of course, many other hotels in the Nashville area. If you want information about registration for the AAR/SBL meetings (and information about selected nearby hotels), phone 888-447-2321 (US and Canada) or 972-349-7434 (other areas) or go to <http://www.jv-site.org>.

Friday, November 17, 2000—9:00-11:00 p.m., Opryland Hotel, Lincoln A

Discussion of *Resurrection Knowledge : Recovering the Gospel for a Postmodern Church*
W. Stephen Gunter, Candler School of Theology, Emory University

Gunter will review his book's thesis on the assumptions controlling modern scholarship on the resurrection and on his use of Polanyi's epistemology (\$13 Abingdon Press: ISBN: 0687071577).

Respondents: John Apczynski, St. Bonaventure
Robert Martin, Saint Paul School of Theology

Saturday, November 18, 1999—9:00-11:30 a.m., Opryland Hotel, Sevier B

“Wittgenstein and Polanyi on Concepts of the Person.”
Phil Rolnick, Greensboro College

Respondent: Charles Lowney, Boston University

“The Cardinal and the Chemist: Exploring the Intersection of Newman and Polanyi's Epistemologies”
Marty Moleski, Canisius College

Respondent: Joe Kroger, St. Michael's College

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Reflections on Shils, Sacred and Civil Ties, and Universities

Louis H. Swartz

ABSTRACT Key words: charisma, civility, desacralization, sacred, tradition, universities, Edward Shils, Michael Polanyi, Max Weber

This review essay, concerning three collections of Shils' essays published in 1997, focuses on Shils' assertion of the importance of charisma or the sacred in the ties that bind a secular society together and enable it to function as it does, asks why Shils did not accept Polanyi's views about intellectuals, and refers to aspects of the sacred attributed to universities and to our academic traditions.

I

Knowing of my interest in the relationship between Polanyi and Shils (e.g., Swartz 1998), Phil Mullins suggested that I write this short piece pertaining to three fairly recently published collections of Edward Shils' essays (Shils 1997a, 1997b, 1997c). Readers of *TAD* may be assumed to be aware of Turner's obituary of Shils, and of the posthumous publication of Shils' talk at Kent State concerning Polanyi on intellectuals (Shils 1995-96; Turner 1995-96). Both are worth rereading. One of my intentions in this essay is to pique and provoke further interest in Shils' writing. A second is to flag some questions about limitations of the influence of Polanyi on Shils, that bear further study. A third is to point to evidences of a contribution by Shils to sociological thought which I believe will be his most lastingly fruitful one, namely, his development of the idea of the power and importance of experiences and perceptions of the sacred in holding secular societies together and making them work as they do.

II

Not only does a current literature search show that Shils is still abundantly cited with respect to an amazing array of topics; he figures again in a current novel by Bellow (Staples 2000), and controversy continues concerning CIA funding of the Congress for Cultural Freedom in which both Shils and Polanyi played a part (Coleman 1989, 1999; Saunders 1999). Turner (1999) has recently published a thoughtful piece on certain aspects of Shils' contributions to social and political theory.

In addition to the Shils' essays contained in these volumes, I enthusiastically commend to your attention the informative, reflective introduction to "The Virtue of Civility" (Shils 1997c) on the antinomies of liberalism, and on consensus and collective consciousness, by Professor Grosby, and on "Edward Shils and the American University" (Shils 1997b) by Professor Altbach, as well as the shorter introduction to "The Calling of Education" (Shils 1997a), again by Professor Grosby. I have not undertaken to cover the same ground that they have most ably chosen to deal with. I have elected, for the most part, to emphasize still further components of Shils' thought. I should mention also that a valuable chronologically organized bibliography of Shils' published work is included at the end of the volume edited by Altbach (Shils 1997b).

III

Let me first comment on an obstacle to a wider appreciation of some of Shils' most basic sociological contributions. He preferred use of the essay style. Much in Shils' essays could not be documented by him, in the ordinary sense, because it depended so heavily on his own discernment, his own acute perceptions synthesized on the basis of his own judgment. Perhaps in part because he did not want to draw attention to his lack of citation of scholarly or scientific authority for many of the points he was making, he used very few footnotes. He was quite reluctant to cite his contemporaries, perhaps for fear of alienating some of his various intellectual friends for whom other friends were rivals. He even was stingy about citing his own work in the many cases where such citations, and cross references, would have proved very helpful to all readers but that small fraction thoroughly familiar with his extensive scholarly output. This paucity of self-citation and other citation has made adequate understanding and appreciation of his work more difficult, and has probably greatly inhibited a wider dissemination of his ideas, although he does have a loyal following with respect to particular facets of his production.

IV

Freud and Weber were among the prominent intellectuals of the early 20th century who believed that the sacred was disappearing from the world. Freud apparently thought that, aided by science and psychoanalysis, the gradual disappearance of such illusions would be a good thing (Freud 1927/1975). Weber thought that it was inevitable, that the process of rationalization – the inexorable spread of bureaucratic technical rationality to every sphere of life – would result in the *Entzauberung der Welt* – the disenchantment or desacralization of the world (e.g., Shils 1997c, pp. 245-264). Linking his analysis in part to Weber's concept of charisma, but greatly extending and elaborating that concept – to include, inter alia, the dispersion of charisma and variations in its intensity, and hence also to link these ideas with his own conceptions of center and periphery – Shils quietly and persistently asserted that without experiences of and attributions of the sacred, social life as we know it would be impossible. He included as a foundational element in his analysis Otto's (1917/1958) concept of the *mysterium tremendum* – universal human experiences of awesomeness in varying degrees.

Weber asserted that the world would become completely *entzaubert*. But it has not. The world cannot be in such a condition and still be a world of relatively stable complex societies. Charisma, experiences and attributions of the sacred, are not only disruptive and disjunctive forces, as Weber described them; in proper form, location and degree they are also essential for continuity and stability. Charisma inheres in all social ties, such as the primordial (e.g., ties of blood and to territory) and the civil (e.g., membership in a territorial society). It flows from the exercise of both traditional authority and rational-legal authority. As a matter of fact, the bare exercise of power itself evokes experiences and attributions of awesomeness.

Finally in this incomplete account, high social valuations of one type of activity rather than another, for example, giving high esteem in a post-colonial country to being a civil servant rather than to being an entrepreneur, a person whose career is economizing, involves attributing a kind of awesomeness to the one activity which the other lacks. One is closer to the transcendent than the other; an American example, until recently, would be being a university professor as opposed to someone engaged in business, mere buying and selling. All of this, too briefly recounted here, relates to the human need for meaning, which is, among other things, not only a need for order but, in varying degrees, a need to be in right relation with what are eventually

perceived to be the fundamentals of some larger picture.

V

The above analysis gives us an additional tool for interpreting other portions of Shils' work beyond that specifically treated in "Max Weber and the World Since 1920," a 1987 essay (Shils 1997c, pp. 225-267). (For a fuller account see Shils 1975, especially his "Introduction" plus the reprinted "Primordial, Personal, Sacred, and Civil Ties" [1957], "Charisma, Order and Status" [1965], and "Charisma" [1968].)

Especially rich is the 1958 essay "Ideology and Civility" (Shils, 1997c, pp. 25-62). Civility, a concern and sense of responsibility for the well being of the whole of society, is another of Shils' complex concepts that resists brief explication. Illustratively, however, Shils (1997c, p. 107) refers to "a spontaneous moral tendency in man, a need to be in contact with the ultimately true and right, a sensitivity to the sacred...." He says "[Tradition] establishes contact between the recipient and the sacred values of his life in society. Man has a need for being in right relations with the sacred" (id.).

The attachment to the sacred cannot be evaded in any society. All societies regard as *sacred* certain standards of judgment, certain rules of conduct and thought, and certain arrangements of action. ...At its highest level of intensity, the belief in the sacredness of an institution or a system of institutions is inimical to liberty because it is hostile, in substance and in form, to innovation, which is an inevitable consequence of a system of liberty. (Shils 1997c, p. 108. Emphasis in original.)

Hence, "A major task of liberal policy is to respect the sacred while keeping it at low ebb. This is one of the chief functions of the transmission of sacred beliefs through a loose tradition" (id., p. 109).

VI

But, with his assertions concerning the importance of the sacred in all human societies, including contemporary secular ones, Shils has exposed himself, and those who would follow his profound analysis, to several sorts of objections. (1) The least meritorious, but real nonetheless, has to do with the possible adverse reactions and concerns of secularist intellectuals who might fear that Shils' ideas signal giving respect to the non-rational or even the anti-rational factors in social life, thus undermining some hard-fought gains achieved by the Enlightenment. (2) The second is that this mode of analysis and commentary involves and requires great sensitivity and great good judgment. Routine talents will make a mess of it and swamp the literature with their assertions which will vary all over the lot. The method seems to require keen discernment and substantial wisdom, both being in short supply, both not easily nor reliably identified. (3) The third is that it "explains" that which Shils (and others much more broadly) oppose. It has a positivistic quality, a *relativistic* quality. All too easily it lends further strength to the view that all interpretations of the nature and the locus of charisma are equally worthy of our support.

VII

Indeed, this latter point seems to me to link up with some of the points made by Polanyi in his analysis of modern nihilism, also called moral inversion. Natural science has been interpreted as saying that values

don't exist: there is no grounding of values to be found in the natural order, the natural reality of the cosmos. This point gets explicitly affirmed by the nihilists. Shils' analysis does not address this directly, but the seeming relativism as to the profound and sacred values in Shils' analysis does not explicitly oppose this view, and by implication seems to support it. But, Polanyi says, humans have an irrepressible urge toward valuing, reinforced and given specific content and direction by Western culture, including Christianity and the millennialism described and analyzed by Norman Cohn. Hence valuing, in particular in the form of a perfectionism, are given powerful expression, but their normative content is somehow obscured and denied. These perfectionistic valuing are often expressed as "science," especially in the form of Marxism or the many modern derivatives whose Marxist inspiration is not recognized, or is conveniently forgotten.

It would be fundamentally helpful, Polanyi asserts, for people – especially intellectuals – to recognize that science is grounded in values and that it depends upon the responsibility and the fiduciary faithfulness of scientists. There is no disembodied knowledge which exists, has been discovered, preserved and maintained "out there" somehow, apart from our embodied perceptiveness and responsibility.

Central to this most prestigious of social institutions, modern science, is the embodied, committed responsible person carrying on within a Republic of Science of somewhat similar persons, supported and nurtured in a variety of ways by larger societies. For this Republic of Science to function, or to function best, we need free societies.

Why is it that a more widely shared awareness of these truths among "elites" and among the general populace would not be an inherently good thing – because closer to the truth than prevalent views typified, for example, by the dominant portion of what Karl Popper has to say about objective knowledge? Might not a fuller awareness of this basic truth about the fundamental importance of responsibility in questing after transcendent ideals such as Truth, Justice, Beauty and Tolerance (as elaborated by Polanyi in connection with his views about a free society) have the potential for a profound effect in interrupting some of the contemporary trends – including the bohemianism of intellectuals – that Shils repeatedly deplors? Why would Shils (e.g., 1995-96) never take seriously these ideas, which constitute a fundamental challenge to his own eventual stance of resignation and to the resignation of his hero Max Weber?

VIII

Bearing in mind the great importance of attributions of the sacred helps us to be aware of some of the most powerful themes in Shils' writings about higher education. The title of Shils 1979 Eighth Jefferson Lecture in the Humanities, "Render unto Caesar... : Government, Society, and the Universities in Their Reciprocal Rights and Duties" – a lecture containing a plea against intrusive U.S. Government regulation of universities, including mandates for affirmative action in faculty hiring – represented for Shils much more than a useful rhetorical device that happened to be grounded in Matthew 22. Shils was asserting the transcendent character of higher education.

The effort to achieve understanding of the order or pattern of existence constitutes a sphere which is as close as many of us can come to the sphere of the divine. The relationship between the sphere of science and learning and the sphere in which Caesar acts is my theme (Shils 1997a, pp. 177-178).

“The Academic Ethic,” technically speaking an international committee product (Shils 1997a, pp. 3-128), should in my view be seen as an advocacy document against those who would attribute no sacralty, or indeed no reality, to universities’ disciplined and disinterested search for knowledge, or who would see this as having less sacralty than various useful services, including political services, that universities might perform.

IX

Although I have resolved to limit the scope of this essay, rather than attempt an overview of the three 1997 collections of Shils’ essays, I cannot resist registering one loyal dissent on an important position taken by Shils concerning higher education. I will not be able to pursue this in detail here. Perhaps my dissent will provoke some readers to further explore this matter in Shils’ writings.

I greatly admire Shils’ work but at the same time am in substantial disagreement with some important portions of it. To take a central example, seen in major portions of two of the three collections under review, I believe Shils’ (1997a, 1997b) assertions that the research university as contemplated by Humboldt ought to be seen as an adequate synthesis of our great traditions of the cultivation, preservation and advancement of higher learning in Western societies, the “gold standard” for present manifestations of these traditions (as one of the editors has put it, see Altbach, in Shils 1997b, p. x) is profoundly flawed. The implicit argument might be said to be that to effectively oppose the destructive ideologies of the second half of the 20th century as these relate to universities and to intellectual life more generally, one has to promote what comes close to a simplistic monolithic counter-ideology, compressing into one ideal (the pursuit of truth) and into one form (the research university) the sacredness of the richly varied and somewhat contradictory higher education traditions of the West. I wonder!

Nevertheless, one of Shils enduring scholarly gifts to higher education consists in his addition, in important ways, to the relatively modest body of existing evidence that a first-class academic talent can find this subject area worthy of sustained attention and commitment. He helped to show that it is possible that contributions to this literature, by a citizen of what should be regarded as the international higher education community, can be of high intellectual quality. His work concerning universities, such as is collected in these volumes, especially Shils 1997a and 1997b, also helps establish a detailed groundwork for further thought and reflection in this area. The charisma attributed by academics themselves to a career devoted to scholarship and commentary concerning higher education usually has been low, as has been the charisma attributed to activities of academic citizenship pertinent to university-wide governance and self-assessment. Eventually perhaps, this part of Shils’ legacy may help in turning these things around.

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Further Reflections on Shils and Polanyi

Steven Grosby

ABSTRACT Key Words: Edward Shils, Michael Polanyi, Max Weber, *Entzauberung der Welt*, charisma, civility

These brief reflections extend the discussion of Louis H. Swartz review essay "Reflections on Shils, Sacred and Civil Ties, and Universities." I note the influence Shils and Polanyi had upon one another and comment on issues related to Shils's thought which Swartz raises in connection with material in three recent, posthumously published volumes of Shils's writings.

It is gratifying and appropriate that the work of Edward Shils should be appreciatively and thoughtfully reviewed in the pages of the journal of the Polanyi Society. Polanyi and Shils were in agreement on the existence of truth and the committed stance that it assumes; the nature of scientific investigation; liberty, tradition, and spontaneous order; the significance of conviviality; and much more. They stood shoulder to shoulder in their opposition to all forms of totalitarianism. Their friendship and, I think one can legitimately say, collaboration spanned four decades. There should be no doubt that, among those individuals whom Shils knew personally, three had a lasting influence on his thought: Robert Park, Frank Knight, and Michael Polanyi. There should also be no doubt that the thought of Edward Shils had an influence on that of Michael Polanyi, and not only in those areas that are fairly obvious such as intellectuals or the university. In the "Acknowledgments" section of *Personal Knowledge* (xv) Polanyi identifies Shils as one of the readers who read the whole manuscript before publication. There are pages of *Personal Knowledge* that, so it seems to me, indicate clearly the hand of Edward Shils, for example, pages 208,210-11. We know that around the time of Polanyi's Gifford Lectures, Shils had finished an eight hundred page-long draft of his unpublished *Love, Belief, and Civility* in which one can observe similarities in Shils's and Polanyi's understanding of a number of sociological problems.

I shall restrict the following, brief comments on Professor Swartz's review of these three posthumously published volumes of Edward Shils's writings to a few of those problems that Shils had not resolved to his own satisfaction before his death and which still confront those who wish to understand better the nature of human cognition and action.

As is well known, relatively early in his life Max Weber wrote about the *Entzauberung der Welt* in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. By the term *Entzauberung*, Weber literally meant the process of "demagicalization" of religion, the most notable example of which was the recognition by the Israelite prophets of a transcendental realm—the conceptions of the monotheistic deity and its laws—that was believed to be immune from human manipulation. Many scholars have subsequently interpreted Weber's analysis of *Entzauberung* to mean that human cognition and action have become entirely free from any reference to the sacred, the latter being a category (like "religiosity" or, indeed, "charisma", at least as developed by Weber and Shils) not free from the ambiguity arising from the phenomenological and sociological stance of Schleiermacher and his followers, including Rudolph Otto. As Swartz notes, Shils in his writings on charisma and its dispersion did not agree with these recent commentators and their attendant thesis of a ubiquitous secularization. Shils further thought, and I think rightly, that Weber's own views on the putative elimination of the religious orientation in human action in the modern world were productively ambiguous, indeed inconsistent. This ambiguity and inconsistency may be clearly observed in Weber's later and more mature writings on religion

and law: in religion, for example, the evidently persistent desire for redemption; in law, for example, the apparently inexpungeable antinomy between conceptions of formal and substantive justice.

The importance of this problem of the *Entzauberung der Welt*, and the latter's interpretation by the analysts of "modernity" to mean the secularization of a putatively homogeneous, modern world, for us today becomes manifest by shifting the locus of the discussion to whether or not human beings can live without "meaning". Edward Shils, as Swartz has also noted, did not think that human beings could do so. He thought that the mind's orientation to nonempirical, existential ideas about man's place in the universe was inexpungeable; it was what made a human being, human. This insistence on the mind's orientation to various nonempirical, existential meanings is the philosophical-anthropological significance of Shils's category of the center. To view Shils's famous distinction between center and periphery as merely ecological or sociological is to miss its significance. Shils, thus, thought that, in contrast to the currently fashionable philosophical naturalism, one element of the human psyche was necessarily metaphysical. It seems to me that, especially here, there is a convergence in the thought of Michael Polanyi and Edward Shils. I leave aside here such difficult philosophical problems as the epistemological status of the pluralistic orientations of the mind as understood by Shils¹, other than to note that he shared Polanyi's rejection of reductionism.

The thoughtless interpretation of *Entzauberung* under today's fashionable rubrics of "modernity" and "secularization" is the result of the tyranny of a particular tradition. It is that theoretical tradition of the analysis of human cognition, action, and society that draws a sharp historical disjunction between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, between, in the idiom of political philosophy, the so-called "ancients and moderns". Subsequent facts—above all, the persistence of religion, nationality, and ethnicity—have rendered this theoretical tradition obsolete. The categories of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, and the orientation of the mind and action that they imply, should be viewed as overlapping one another in various ways from one historical period to another, and from one civilization to another.

Professor Swartz has understandably raised the problem of whether or not there is a relativism implicit in Shils's analysis of charisma. This is an important problem deserving of further reflection and discussion. I have already alluded to a certain conceptual ambiguity of the category. Shils addressed this ambiguity by differentiating the qualitatively distinct objects of transcendence from transcendence per se. In this necessarily brief exchange, I limit myself to a few observations regarding Professor Swartz's concern. First, Shils agreed with Weber that scientific knowledge could not disclose the meaning of cosmic and earthly existence that was inescapable in human life, including even in the pursuit of scientific knowledge. He thought that this pursuit assumed a metaphysical stance and required, in Polanyi's terms, a fiduciary passion. Second, Shils thought that the orientations of the mind were pluralistic; that is, they could not be reduced to one. This philosophical-anthropological recognition of a pluralism of the *geistige* orientations of transcendence of the self is not necessarily to be equated with relativism. Nevertheless, these observations contribute to Swartz's concern, especially insofar as they may rightly be understood to imply qualitatively different loci of charismatic attribution. However, such loci, so it seems to me, are unavoidable consequences of the freedom of the mind.

Is it not also the case that this openness of the mind—call it what one wishes: freedom, creativity—is the presupposition of the civility, the capacity for disinterestedness, that is necessary for a pursuit of a common good and, in turn, for the existence of liberal democracy? One can, of course, be passionate about, take an interest in, being disinterested. It would be worthwhile to consider the different ways the assumptions of Shils's understanding of civility overlap with a number of assumptions held by Polanyi—a consideration

furthered by Professor Swartz's rightly reminding us to ponder the relation of the works of Polanyi and those of Shils.

Notes

1. See, for example, Shils's essays "Personal, Primordial, Sacred and Civil Ties" and "Center and Periphery" in Shils (1975), and "Ideology and Civility" in Edward Shils (1997) *The Virtue of Civility: Selected Essays on Liberalism, Tradition, and Civil Society*. Edited by Steven Grosby. Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund.

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Annual membership in the Polanyi Society is \$20 (\$10 for students). The membership cycle follows the academic year; subscriptions are due September 1 to Phil Mullins, Missouri Western State College, St. Joseph, MO 64507 (fax: 816-271-5680, e-mail: mullins.mwsc.edu) Please make checks payable to the Polanyi Society. Dues can be paid by credit card by providing the card holder's name as it appears on the card, the card number and expiration date. Changes of address and inquiries should be sent to Mullins. New members should provide the following subscription information: complete mailing address, telephone (work and home), e-mail address and/or fax number. Institutional members should identify a department to contact for billing. The Polanyi Society attempts to maintain a data base identifying persons interested in or working with Polanyi's philosophical writing. New members can contribute to this effort by writing a short description of their particular interests in Polanyi's work and any publications and /or theses/dissertations related to Polanyi's thought. Please provide complete bibliographic information. Those renewing membership are invited to include information on recent work.

Three Explorers: Polanyi, Jung, And Rhine

James A. Hall

ABSTRACT Key Words: Michael Polanyi, Carl Jung, J. B. Rhine

This brief essay reflects on my encounters with Polanyi, June and Rhine and tries to link some elements of their thought.

Three men from vastly different fields have greatly influenced my thinking: Carl Jung, Michael Polanyi, and J. B. Rhine. Jung died in 1961, the same year that I graduated from medical school, two years after I met Rhine, and four years before I met Polanyi during the second year of my psychiatry residency at Duke. I met J. B. Rhine through a mutual friend while I was in medical school. Rhine's parapsychology lab was just across the street from the east campus at Duke. Its proximity to the hospital was one reason I chose Duke for my residency.

I first met Polanyi at a conference sponsored by the Department of Religion. Polanyi was the James B. Duke Distinguished Professor, having been nominated by Bill Poteat in the Religion Department. My first impression of Polanyi was that of a kindly gentleman patiently trying to explain his ideas to a pack of intellectual wolves more interested in demonstrating their ability to sniff out questionable chinks in his thinking than in understanding it. A few years later I had the same impression at a conference sponsored by Perkins School of Theology, SMU, for the process theologian Charles Hartshorne.

Almost instantly, I saw the relevance of Polanyi's central concept of focal/tacit knowing as supplementary to psychiatry's central concept of conscious/unconscious and to parapsychology's inability to find a mechanism for the transmission of telepathy. I accordingly arranged for Polanyi to present at a weekly Grand Rounds meeting of the psychiatry department, expecting that it would provoke a lively debate. I was to be disappointed. Not only was there no lively debate, there was not a single question or comment. It was as if the silence were saying, "Yes, but so what? What do your ideas have to do with *me*?" The theologian Huston Smith encountered a similar lack of response when he brought Polanyi to MIT.¹

Shortly after the Grand Rounds meeting, J. B. Rhine invited me to accompany him to one of Polanyi's public lectures. I expected that J. B. would sense the possibility that intrigued me – that in telepathy there might be no "transmission" of information whatsoever (for that would be a process requiring energy). Telepathy might, alternatively, be conceived as a shift in focal/tacit boundaries that allowed information ordinarily known only tacitly to appear focally in consciousness, though perhaps in symbolic form. Could a shift in focal/tacit boundaries require no energy consumption? But instead of the appreciation I expected, Dr. Rhine had an immediate antipathy to Polanyi's thought for reasons that I still do not understand.

Rhine and Jung met once and carried on a correspondence from 1935 until 1951. Rhine's work was important to Jung, and may have given him courage to publish his thoughts on synchronicity.² Recently, physicist Victor Mansfield and others have advocated a clearer separation

of synchronicity and psi phenomena (psi phenomena are telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition—i.e., ESP--plus psychokinesis).³

Polanyi suggests three criteria that make a problem worthy of scientific interest: intrinsic interest, measurability, and systematic relevance.⁴ Deficiency in one of these factors can be compensated for by richness in another. Parapsychology, for instance, if based only on laboratory tests, which must be winnowed by elaborate statistics, would not evoke the intrinsic human interest it does were it not for impressive anecdotal reports. Likewise psi events (if one takes them into account) rank high in systematic relevance. It seems to me that, if psi is considered “real,” then any theory that fails to allow for psi is fatally flawed. In the thirties, J. B. Rhine evolved the largely laboratory and statistically-based science of parapsychology out of the older field of psychical research. Psychical research began in 1882 with the founding in England of the Society for Psychic Research, soon followed by a sister society in America, the American Society for Psychic Research founded by William James and others. These societies were founded in order to use accepted scientific tools in investigating phenomena that were left out in formulating the reigning causal-materialistic paradigm of most scientists. This paradigm ignores as “anomalies” data that challenge the basic assumptions of the paradigm, an attitude that causes most scientists to ignore Rhine’s work.⁵ This attitude should most properly be referred to as “scientism.”

The field of parapsychology, though using accepted scientific methods, is generally ignored by other branches of science because its findings do not fit within the reigning causal-materialistic paradigm. The conviviality of scientists usually stops at the borders of parapsychology. Yet, put bluntly, either the phenomena studied by parapsychology are real or the usual statistical tools of scientific research are flawed. Although they can be influenced by various factors – such as “degree of consciousness” – psi effects appear resistant to ever being brought under conscious control. Psi, therefore, is unlikely to ever have any “practical” value. As I read him, Polanyi was open to parapsychology and felt that mainstream science is denying it a fair hearing because it raises fundamental doubt about mainstream science’s basic assumptions.⁶ Polanyi clearly does not consider parapsychology a pseudoscience as he does, for example, Azande thinking.⁷ In discussing Azande beliefs, Polanyi points out that their paradigm cannot be challenged within the Azande system of thought. An outside critic is eventually reduced to asserting that the Azande paradigm is untrue. Similarly, observations that cannot be explained away as fraud, error, or poor technique must be fitted into the dominant paradigm, perhaps modifying it, or rejected as “pseudoscience.”

As Polanyi amply demonstrated, “meaning” arises when observations (usually called “facts”) are seen in reference to a particular framework. The framework itself is chosen by the observer, but is usually chosen unconsciously. Before Polanyi noted the hopeless task of the “Laplacian mind” to make all knowledge explicit, Gödel demonstrated that it is impossible to construct a system of thought that explains, within the system itself, the necessary existence of the system.⁸ At the start of any system, some a-rational assumptions must be made. This means that all knowledge is personal knowledge and what we call “objective” knowledge is simply personal knowledge held with “universal intent.” It might be mistaken, particularly if the framework to which observations are referred is mistaken. Thus all knowledge, even “objective” knowledge, is held at the knowledge holder’s risk. It might prove to be mistaken if the “world” to which it is referred is not the ultimate world accessible to human intelligence.

These three men, all explorers, were contemporaries for much of their lives, as shown by their birth and death dates: Polanyi (1891-1976), Jung (1875-1961), Rhine (1895-1980). Polanyi knew of Rhine's work (see references in note 6 above) and certainly knew of Jung, though he had virtually no interest in psychoanalysis (except Freudian psychoanalysis as an example of dynamo-objective coupling, moral inversion⁹). I know of no evidence that Jung knew of Polanyi's work; but Jung was appreciative of Rhine's work and carried on a long correspondence with him, largely of Rhine's initiative. Rhine met both Jung and Polanyi but seems not to have been significantly influenced by either. Rhine's significance lies primarily in establishing parapsychology as a science, though a poorly accepted one. I shall deal no further with Rhine but will deal with comparing Polanyi and Jung, particularly in their attitude toward psi phenomena.

Polanyi wrote nothing focused on psi, but he was open to it, as some of his writings show (see references in note 6 above). By 1963, Polanyi had further developed his central concept of focal-tacit knowing and was less sure that scientists' ability to perceive as-yet-unrecognized Gestalten in nature was mediated by ESP.¹⁰ Jung was very interested in psi both theoretically and personally.¹¹ I will now compare Jung and Polanyi along other dimensions.

Polanyi and Jung have long been dominants in my thinking. I have often found Polanyi's thought illuminating of Jung's,¹² but this is my first attempt to compare the work of the two thinkers. The central terms for Polanyi are "focal" and "tacit" (or "subsidiary") awareness, Polanyi's nearest approximation to "unconscious.." When it can easily be made focal, tacit awareness may approximate the psychoanalytic "preconscious." Jung's "complex" centers about the terms "conscious" and "unconscious," divided by Jung into personal unconscious and collective unconscious (in his later work, "objective psyche"). I find it useful to compare these central terms in a 2x2 table: conscious (Cs) unconscious (Ucs) top to bottom and tacit (T), focal (F) left to right, this produces four cells:

Cs-T (I)	Cs-F (II)
Ucs-T (IV)	Ucs-F (III)

Quadrant II is our ordinary waking consciousness. Quadrant I contains elements in consciousness of which we ordinarily have only subsidiary awareness (eyeglasses, microscopes, and telescopes are examples.) Quadrant III represents such things as dream "consciousness," which is unconscious only in comparison to the consciousness of Quadrants I and II. Quadrant IV, both tacit and unconscious, is the absolute unconscious, known only by inference from its derivatives, which are always symbols pointing to a reality unknowable in itself.

Polanyi's chief concern, in my opinion, is to demonstrate that all knowledge is held by personal commitment. What is called "objective" is simply personal knowledge held with "universal intent," the belief (possibly erroneous) that anyone considering the same "facts" from the same viewpoint will see them the same way. Jung's chief concern is the transformation of the ego under pressure from the unconscious, the center of which is the Self (a term also used to mean the totality of the psyche, both conscious and unconscious.) Jung calls this process *individuation*.

Both Polanyi and Jung affirm the importance of maintaining a firm grounding in consciousness, although Jung emphasizes the need to shift the center of consciousness toward (but not to) the archetypal Self. In terms of the diagram, this would be an asymptotic approach to the midpoint where all four cells meet. For both, meaning may be seen as the relation between what is consciously (focally) perceived and the (largely unconscious/tacit, subsidiary) framework to which it is referred. The choice of this framework or context is only in part volitional. Polanyi speaks of finding clues to more coherent entities than those presently perceived. Jung speaks of archetypal patterns that, as long as they are unconscious, influence one unawares.

Both Polanyi and Jung were focused on paradigm shifts, but Polanyi concentrated more on shifts in the ruling scientific paradigm, Jung more on the personal sense of “I”, though in his post-1944 work he dealt more with cultural and transpersonal factors.

Polanyi’s chief contributions to understanding the human mind are:

1. His demonstration that all thinking, even scientific thinking, involves an irreducible element of personal commitment and passion.
2. Anything that is in focal conscious awareness can potentially be unpacked into its tacit components, which may be conscious, unconscious, or both.
3. The concept of dynamo-objective couplings, developed around repression of innate religious strivings, is a model of neurosis applicable when any important feelings are denied. Of the two major examples that Polanyi used, Communism and Freudian psychoanalysis, the former is discredited and the latter, in my opinion, is waning. This suggests that dynamo-objective couplings, though extremely enduring,¹³ are less enduring than more open systems.
4. The analysis of machines (*PK*, 328-331) can be applied to the structure of the mind. The over activity of complexes can cause the breakdown of higher-level ego functions but cannot explain the emergence of those functions.

Jung’s chief contributions toward understanding the human mind are:

1. The ego, to which all known things are referred, is itself a specialized organ of a more comprehensive personality which Jung calls the archetypal Self.
2. There is an innate dynamism toward centroverson of the personality. There are lesser forces pressing for deintegration but integration > deintegration.
3. Archetypes are universal patterns underlying consciousness. They are a competing hypothesis (along with cultural diffusion and ESP) for explaining the occurrence of similar patterns in cultures widely separated in time and space (and in dreams.) The building blocks of the mind are complexes, some of which are pathological. Complexes consist of personal material arranged about an archetypal core.
4. Jung’s theory of synchronicity concerns evidence that interior/subjective is ultimately the same as exterior/“objective” connected by meaning into one world, a *unus mundus*.

Though seeming impossible to harness for “practical” purposes, psi’s ultimate utility may be its ability to discriminate between theories according to whether they allow for it. Of the three men who have most influenced my own thinking, two, Jung and Rhine, explicitly found psi phenomena important. The third theoretician, Michael Polanyi, was open to psi, but he did not write on that

subject.

Perhaps the greatest contrast between these three thinkers is in the area of religion and spirituality. Polanyi focused on how a worshipper must “indwell” the forms and rituals of an already-established religion like Christianity in order to appreciate it.¹⁴ Rhine considered parapsychology to be “the basic science of religion.”¹⁵ Religious thinkers generally have ignored parapsychology. Jung was interested in numinous experiences, which he conceptualized as experiences of the archetypal Self, the origin and core of the ego. From Jung’s perspective, religions are priestly and theological elaborations of the numinous experiences of individuals like Jesus, Paul, Buddha, Mohammed, etc., but he repeatedly acknowledges that he is working with the actual phenomenology of the psyche and is not making metaphysical statements.¹⁶

I pose the question, “Does the universe point beyond itself? It is an interesting question. I do not know the answer. Certainly the causal-materialist universe that most scientists call “the universe” clearly does point beyond itself. But their “universe” is constructed by leaving out certain observable and well-studied phenomena. Whether the universe as it is potentially knowable is another question entirely. Let us *try* to find the answer.

We shall doubtless fail. Polanyi’s focal-tacit knowing and Alfred North Whitehead’s distinction between the primordial and consequent natures of God and Jung’s view of the ego as a specialized organ of the archetypal Self and Rhine’s failure to harness ESP to conscious ego control suggest that we shall never unpack all the inexhaustible mysteries of the universe of which we ourselves are an infinitesimal part.

One thing is clear, however: in any “Society of Explorers,” Polanyi, Jung, and Rhine qualify as charter members.

Notes

¹ Huston Smith, personal communication 11/23/99.

² Jung’s basic discussion of synchronicity (a term he coined) is (1978) “Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle,” in his *Collected Works*, Volume 8. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

³ Victor Mansfield, Sally Rhine Feather, and James Hall. “The Rhine-Jung Letters: Differentiating Parapsychological from Synchronistic Events.” *Journal of Parapsychology* 62: 1 (March 1998): 5-25,. See also Victor Mansfield,. “Distinguishing Synchronicity from Parapsychological Phenomena: An Essay in Honor of Marie-Louise von Franz,” (part 2 of a two-part article), *Quadrant*, XXIX: 1 (Winter, 1999).

⁴ *PK*, 135-136 .

⁵ Against great resistance, the Parapsychological Association was accepted as an affiliate of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

⁶ *PK*, p. 166. *SFS*, pp. 35-38 and 60. These are all concerned with ESP.

⁸ Ernest Nagel and James R. Newman. *Gödel's Proof* (New York: New York University Press, 1986)

⁹ James A. Hall, "Polanyi and Psychoanalysis." *Tradition and Discovery* 18:2: 5-9.

¹⁰*Science, Faith and Society* was originally published in 1946. In 1964, it was reprinted by the University of Chicago Press. The reprint include a new introduction by Polanyi titled "Background and Prospect" which was written in Dec. 1963 (pp. 1-17). This new introduction reflects on the 1946 text in terms of all the other things that Polanyi has published. Here he notes that early he was interested in how one can tell what things not yet understood by science are capable of being understood. This is a good problem that after working out the dynamics of tacit knowing he is less willing to discuss in terms of ESP:

The testing hand, the straining eye, the ransacked brain, may all be thought to be labouring under the common spell of a potential discovery trying to emerge into actuality. I feel doubtful today about the role of extra-sensory perception in guiding this actualization. But my speculations on this possibility illustrate well the depth that I ascribe to this problem (14).

¹¹Jung saw parapsychology as confirming his notion of synchronicity. He found important the loud reports from the bookcase on his first meeting with Freud, which lasted thirteen hours Jung found significance in the splitting dining room table and bread knife. Dr. Rhine kept a picture of the fractured breadknife on the wall of his Parapsychology Lab while it was housed on the Duke campus. These events are discussed by Jung in his autobiographical *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*. ed. Aniela Jaffe, trans. Richard and Clara Winston. Revised edition (New York: Vintage Books, 1965).

¹²James A. Hall, "Polanyi and Jungian Psychology: Dream Ego and Waking Ego," *Journal of Analytical Psychology* 27 (1982): 239-254. James A. Hall, "Pseudo-Objectivity as a Defense Mechanism: Polanyi's Concept of Dynamo-Objective Coupling," *Journal of American Academy of Psychoanalysis* 12:2 (April 1984): 199-209. James A. Hall, "Polanyi and Psychoanalysis." *Tradition and Discovery* 18:2 (1991-92): 5-9.

¹³James A. Hall, "Collective Shadows: Why They Endure" *The Archetype of Shadow in a Split World*, ed. M. A. Mattoon (Einsiedeln, Switzerland: Daimon Verlag, 1987): 113-133.

¹⁴ Harry Prosch, *Michael Polanyi: A Critical Exposition* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1986) summarizes as follows:

The convert, he [Polanyi] said, surrenders 'to the religious ecstasy' that the 'articulate framework of worship and doctrine' evokes and 'accredits thereby its validity.' This, he added, is 'analogous to the process of validation' in art. It therefore seemed to him to be the 'religious ecstasy' evoked by the whole framework of our religion which 'validates' our religious thought, rather than our ability to 'verify' our thought by reference to some intuitive contact with some reality pre-existing independently of our discover of it. God 'exists,' he held, 'in the sense that He is to be worshipped and obeyed, but not otherwise; not as a fact — any more than truth, beauty or justice exist as facts. All these, like God, are things which can be appreciated only in serving them.

This language is in sharp contrast to the way in which he had already written in that book about the referent of science. He had said scientific theories claim 'to represent empirical reality.' (250).

¹⁵J. B. Rhine, "Parapsychology and Religion," *Journal of the Texas Society for Psychical Research*, (1976-77): 9-22.

¹⁶"Psychology can only approach the subject [faith] from the phenomenological angle, for the realities of faith lie outside the realm of psychology." C. G. Jung, 1940/54, "Psychology and Religion: West and East," *Collected Works*: 11: par. 296.

Cartesian Habits And The ‘Radical Line’ Of Inquiry

David Kettle

ABSTRACT: Key words: Michael Polanyi, indwelling, paradigmatic knowledge, Cartesian habits of the imagination, primary intention, responsiveness, ‘radical line’ of inquiry, regress, inter-animation, receptivity, critical appraisal, direction.

Cartesian habits of the imagination, thought to be abandoned when Michael Polanyi’s theory of knowledge is embraced, may persist unrecognised and distort interpretation of this theory. These habits are challenged by a ‘radical’ reading of Polanyi which consistently finds a paradigm for knowledge in lively research. It is argued that this is rooted in an intention which is at once and irreducibly receptive and critical, and which gives rise to the ‘radical line’ of inquiry. In this setting, Cartesian dualism arises when quieter knowledge, falsely represented to itself, becomes instead a paradigm for knowledge.

It is a familiar claim that Michael Polanyi’s theory of knowledge offers a persuasive alternative to Cartesian epistemology. This claim seems straightforward at first sight. However, Cartesian habits of the imagination - by which I mean habits which are taken to have origins in Descartes, although they cannot necessarily be identified with him - are closely woven into the fabric of our thinking where they may often be active in unacknowledged ways.¹ It may therefore happen that when we describe the contrast between Polanyi’s account of knowledge and the Cartesian account, we do so unwittingly in terms which rely still upon Cartesian habits of the imagination. To another who recognises this, we shall appear not yet to have grasped the radical challenge Polanyi presents to Cartesianism. Famously, Marjorie Grene questioned whether Polanyi himself grasped this.² In this paper, I wish to probe residual Cartesian habits of the imagination and to challenge them with the radical meaning of Polanyi’s work.

I shall begin by describing Cartesian habits of the imagination, and then note how Polanyi’s account of knowing challenges these habits with the primacy of indwelling. I shall then demonstrate how Polanyi may nevertheless come to be read in terms still governed by Cartesian habits of the imagination. Finally, I shall pursue some arguments and imaginative strategies which address this situation in the hope of evincing more surely, disclosure and embrace of a radical Polanyian stance.

The Cartesian Imagination

In Cartesian thinking, a particular spatial image rules our imagination. This is the image of ourselves as *looking on at the knowing subject as in every instance a determinate reality set among the realities of the world*. This image offers a picture of the act of knowing, of the knowing subject, and of what is known, as such. Our habitual reliance on this image lies at the heart of Cartesian thinking.

When this image rules our imagination we habitually conceive the act of knowing in a particular way. We picture an individual knowing subject before us on the one hand, and something (or someone) real known on the other hand, and the act of knowing as putting the former in touch with the latter.

There is also a suppressed, tacit dimension to this picture: within it, we place ourselves apart from the knowing subject and what is known alike so as to look at one and then at the other, side by side before us. In so doing, tacitly we place ourselves, on the one hand, *apart from the knowing subject* before us, in our act of viewing this subject themselves; while in the act of viewing what is known, we place ourselves, on the other hand, *apart from the act in which it is known by the knowing subject* before us. Expressed in an alternative way, on the one hand, we *step back from participation with the subject* in his or her viewing; and, on the other hand we *allow ourselves direct observation* of what is known apart from his or her act of knowing it. In addition, as we place ourselves apart both from the knowing subject and from the act of knowing, we place ourselves tacitly in a wider space outside both of the knowing subject and of what is known, each of these being separate within this space from the other and from ourselves. This tacit view is, we might note, fundamental to the primacy of doubt in a Cartesian outlook.

Now this tacit view is problematic. For should we advert consciously to ourselves as we tacitly place ourselves here, we shall now be guided by our ruling Cartesian image tacitly to place ourselves a 'second step back'. In this development, whereas we had tacitly placed ourselves apart from the knowing subject, we now see ourselves precisely as having been ourselves a knowing subject; and whereas we had, in the act of viewing what is known, tacitly placed ourselves apart from the act in which it is known by a knowing subject, and viewed it apart from this act, now we see that we have viewed it precisely in the act of ourselves knowing it. This reveals a self-referential inconsistency in the ruling Cartesian image. This inconsistency will generate an infinite regress if we attempt repeatedly to 'step back' and advert to our new tacit self-placement.

This tacit dimension of our self-placement is however systematically suppressed in Cartesian dualism: we simply look on at the knowing subject and at what is known, side by side over against each other within an assumed wider space. In particular we suppress the question of this our 'looking on at' as itself a knowing, and of ourselves as knowing subjects. This suppression is central to Cartesian habits of the imagination.

The Polanyian Challenge

Polanyi claims that all knowing is personal. It is attained through an act of indwelling in which our attention is directed from largely unspecifiable clues in our subsidiary awareness, towards a focus which embodies and integrates these in a coherent meaning. This is the structure of knowledge both in the case of symbolic representation and in the exercise of a skill (*PK, Chapter 4*). It also opens up a way of understanding the shared context of knowledge and skill within a particular, historical community of learning (*PK, Chapter 7*).

In Polanyi's account of knowing, the Cartesian habit of thought in which we imagine to step back and view the knowing subject, on the one hand, and what is known, on the other, from a wider space is challenged in the following ways:

- (1) We can no longer view ourselves *as knowing subjects*. Our awareness of ourselves *as subjects* cannot be focal, but rather remains always subsidiary; we know ourselves in our indwelling.
- (2) We cannot view *that which is known* apart from the act in which it is known personally, for it is hidden apart from this act. It emerges from hiddenness precisely within personal knowledge, in the hints and clues which

spur personal inquiry towards such knowledge and which find unexpected confirmations.

(3) We cannot step back from the knowing subject and that which is known *into a wider space* from which to view them. Rather our self-placement is one of immersion in experience through which hidden meaning invites us in ‘exciting intimations’, engrossing and beguiling us, and evincing from us a passionate effort responsibly to understand. Within this experience-filled ‘space’ and through responsiveness, we come to knowledge through indwelling. Such knowledge cannot be viewed from a wider space; rather such knowledge itself represents the space which we indwell and fill. Indeed, Polanyi suggests that our personal being itself may be thought in such terms: our knowing and being, he says, are co-extensive.³

In these ways, Polanyi’s account of knowing confronts and challenges Cartesian habits of the imagination with the primacy of indwelling.

A Cartesian Reading of Polanyi

Nonetheless, Cartesian habits of imagination may persist in our thinking and secretly shape the way we interpret Polanyi’s account of knowledge. This can happen quite unacknowledged because, as we have seen, the tacit dimension of self-placement, which is challenged by Polanyi’s account, is systematically suppressed in the Cartesian imagination, and may remain so even now as we interpret him.

How will such a ‘Cartesian’ reading of Polanyi look? Characteristically, it will involve taking Polanyi’s two categories of what we *rely on* (as clues in our subsidiary awareness) and what we *attend to* (in our focal awareness) and conceiving these by analogy respectively with *the knowing subject* and with *what is known* - as these are viewed in the Cartesian imagination. That is to say, we place ourselves apart from both what the knowing subject *relies upon* and what he/she *attends to*, looking at one and then the other, side by side before us, and viewing the act of knowing as linking the two. Thus, on the one hand, we place ourselves apart from the particulars which lie in the subsidiary awareness of the knowing subject, in the act of viewing these particular themselves. On the other hand, in the act of viewing that which is known by the knowing subject, we place ourselves apart from the act of knowing in which these subsidiaries are integrated by the knowing subject into that which lies in his/her focal awareness.

Such an interpretation of Polanyi begins in Cartesian fashion by picturing the subsidiary clues to a focal meaning as, in every instance of such meaning, a determinate reality set among the realities of the world. Now this might seem quite insupportable given Polanyi’s description of such clues as ‘often largely unspecifiable’. But, on the other hand, there are cases of knowledge where it is possible readily to specify those clues which find their integration in a focal meaning. It is these cases which lend plausibility to a Cartesian reading of Polanyi. Take, for example, our recognition of a written word through an integration of the letters of which it is made up. In such cases as this, it seems only too plausible for us to view the concrete act of understanding as an instance of attending *from one thing* (in this case, letters) *to another* (in this case, a word) in which what a person attends *from* and what he or she attends *to* are familiar to us conceptually apart from the concrete act of knowing in which these (in this case as an alphabet and a vocabulary) are combined. In this way, the concrete act of understanding gets interpreted by reference to a prior conceptual framework (such as alphabet and vocabulary).

By appeal to cases such as these where clues are specifiable, the Cartesian reading of Polanyi assumes that clues are always determinate and in principle specifiable. In other words, it assumes that (on the one hand) the particulars which serve as clues in a person's subsidiary awareness can always in principle be conceived apart from this function, even though as such they do not have the meaning which they have when functioning concretely as clues. And it assumes (on the other hand) that what is known in a person's focal awareness can be conceived apart from his or her concrete knowledge of it. In this way, the act of knowing which integrates clues into a focal meaning is seen as achieving a contingent relation between two distinct conceivable entities or sets of entities, each belonging to a prior conceptual framework which the onlooker brings to the viewing of this act.

Expressed formally, this understanding of focal and subsidiary begins from the recognition that in certain given cases, that which lies in our subsidiary awareness and is constitutive of meaning can be specified as a set of particulars X and attended to focally. Thus there are particulars X which can be in our attention either in a focal or a subsidiary way: we can either look *at* X or *through* X. When we look *through* X, our focal attention is upon something else, Y. Or again, we can pay focal attention *either to X or to Y*.

When Cartesian habits of imagination produce this dualistic understanding of focal and subsidiary, then Polanyi's statement that all knowing is by indwelling gets understood by reference to this, resulting in the appearance of the familiar regress which haunts Cartesianism. For it now appears that given any X in our focal attention, there is another X1 which we attend through in this moment. Similarly when we advert to X1 itself, there is another X2 which we attend to in this moment, and so on in infinite regress. This regress is generated by a false reading of Polanyi's account of knowledge which is grounded in the very Cartesian habits of imagination which his account challenges. In a broad sense, we may say that Polanyi's account is read here by indwelling/relying on the Cartesian account, and therefore reproduces the self-referential inconsistency inherent in the Cartesian account, whereas Polanyi's account should be read by indwelling Polanyi's account itself, in self-referential consistency. The question now arises, how can we break this hold of the Cartesian imagination even upon how we interpret Polanyi? What arguments can we use? What appeals can we make to the imagination?

Knowing 'From Inside': A Parable by C. S. Lewis

We are given a lead, I suggest, in a short paper by C. S. Lewis titled 'Meditation in a Tool-shed'.⁴ In this Lewis recounts his experience of standing in a dark tool-shed into which there shines a sunbeam, bright with specks of dust floating in it. He moves so that the beam falls on his eyes. Now he no longer sees the dark shed, or the beam itself: he sees the sun, framed by the leaves of a tree and by the crack above the door through which the beam strikes.

Lewis contrasts the experience of looking *at* the beam and looking *along* it. He finds here an analogy for two ways of knowing something. In modern thinking, he says, knowledge is understood exclusively in the former terms. The only authentic knowledge of something is that which we have from outside, not from within. And yet, he points out, there is a self-referential inconsistency here: in any given instance, we can step aside from the act of looking 'at' something and analyse this act itself as an act of looking 'along' - so that it becomes itself an act which we now look 'at', with the effect of suspending its status as knowledge for us. What is needed, says Lewis, is that in any given instance we should be open to both kinds of knowledge.

The theme of Lewis' discussion here is the sunbeam and its character as something which yields distinctive knowledge when it is known 'from inside', that is, by looking along it. There is an evident parallel here with what Polanyi calls knowing by 'indwelling' and with the directional character of our attention from subsidiary to focal, from proximal to distal. My interest in recounting Lewis's meditation, however, is rather to draw attention to the peculiar character of that which Lewis sees by looking along the sunbeam, and of the viewpoint from which he sees this. With respect to the former: that which he sees through the beam - that is, the sun framed by tree leaves - *can be seen only by looking along the beam*. There is no possibility of looking at it by standing apart from the beam and looking at it from elsewhere in the shed. With respect to the latter: the viewpoint from which Lewis sees the sun in no way accounts itself for how it appears to him. It is not, for example, a viewpoint chosen beforehand which brings its own *perspective*; in itself, it tells us nothing about what is to be seen by looking along it. Rather, that which is seen through the beam *accounts entirely for the beam and the meaning it has as that within which this can be viewed*.

Looking along the sunbeam, then, models a situation where not only *the act of knowing* but also that *from* which we attend and that *to* which we attend in this act can be known *only within this act*. Moreover, what is known here is not to be thought of as located within but hidden from the 'wider' world represented by the tool-shed; rather *it belongs to a larger sphere than can be known from elsewhere in the 'tool-shed' world*. By analogy, there may be personal knowledge which cannot be viewed by 'stepping aside' in Cartesian fashion because it opens on to a world larger than that into which we imagine here to step back, and which is hidden from the latter. Here we find renewed, Polanyi's radical challenge to our Cartesian habits of the imagination which persist in how we interpret Polanyi himself.

How can we understand more fully the Cartesian imagination as actually inhabiting a smaller world than that which Polanyi presents to us? How does this smaller world come to present itself to us, in Cartesian habits of the imagination, as the larger world? How can we understand the activity which Cartesianism counts as 'knowing from outside' as at root a special case of a more general 'knowing from within'? To answer this, we must return to the situation where Polanyi finds a radical paradigm for all knowing.

Knowing 'From Outside' As A Particular Case Of Knowing 'From Within'

Polanyi finds a paradigm for all knowing in our knowledge of a good problem. He writes:

the efforts of perception are evoked by scattered features of raw experience suggesting the presence of a hidden pattern which will make sense of the experience. Such a suggestion, if it is true, is itself knowledge, the kind of foreknowledge we call a good problem. Problems are the goad and guide of all intellectual effort, which harass and beguile us into the search for an ever deeper understanding of things. The knowledge of a true problem is indeed a paradigm of all knowing. For all knowing is always a tension alerted by largely unspecifiable clues and directed by them towards a focus at which we sense the presence of a thing - a thing that, like a problem, embodies the clues on which we rely for attending to it.⁵

Comparing such lively research with knowledge in general, Polanyi writes 'Research is an intensely dynamic inquiring, while knowledge is a more quiet research. Both are ever on the move, according to similar principles, towards a deeper understanding of what is already known.'⁶ And again, 'While the integration of clues to

perceptions may be virtually effortless, the integration of clues to discoveries may require sustained efforts guided by exceptional gifts. But the difference is one of range and degree: the transition from perception to discovery is unbroken.⁷

Polanyi makes a somewhat comparable distinction between knowledge which entails deep or less deep indwelling. He traces in these terms the difference between knowledge of a work of art or of a person, and observation as practiced in the natural sciences. Both involve indwelling, he says; the difference is only a matter of degree: 'indwelling is less deep when observing a star than when understanding men or works of art'⁸ Polanyi also says that indwelling is less deep when formulae are used in a routine manner than when, during their use, the theory to which they belong is contemplated and enjoyed.⁹

With regard to a Cartesian interpretation of Polanyi, the key issue arising here is the relation between attending *from* and attending *to*. We may begin by noting that, on the one hand, in Polanyi's account of lively inquiry we do not start with particulars which we rely upon in advance in order then to conduct inquiry. Inquiry does not depend upon our indwelling or relying beforehand on certain given clues. Rather, we might say that inquiry *is* an act of indwelling, within which clues first come to light. This paradigmatic act of indwelling can therefore be understood as rooted in and inseparable from an intention of receptivity towards indeterminate reality and towards whatever there is here to be indwelt as a clue in the first place. On the other hand, inquiry is not directed in the first instance at focally *identifying* clues, which then become for us the occasion of an act of indwelling for the first time. Rather, inquiry always *already involves indwelling*, and it is within this that clues arise for us, precisely through their operation *as* clues.

These considerations can be restated by reference to what we attend *to*. On the one hand, our act of attending *to* does not depend upon our indwelling or relying beforehand on certain clues, and arise for the first time only once such indwelling is in place. Rather it is *as* we attend, that clues to what we are attending *to* come to light for us; and they are guided and corrected as clues by this continuing attention. This paradigmatic act of attending *to* can therefore be understood as rooted in and inseparable from an intention of critical appraisal of indeterminate reality and of whatever is here inviting our attention. On the other hand, our reliance upon clues does not wait upon an act of attention *to* these, in which we identify them as clues. Rather, attention *to* is always already *through* these.

It is in this way, as we pay attention - in the very full, personal manner of lively research - that there form together, the clues which we attend *from* and that which we attend *to*, in essential relation to each other.¹⁰ The contents of our subsidiary and focal awareness can be described as mutually inter-animating or even as mutually constitutive. It is this setting which gives 'attending *from*' and 'attending *to*' their most lively, paradigmatic meanings, together, and between them defines a '*from-to*' direction which we might call *the 'radical line' of inquiry*.

The label 'radical' here signifies that this '*from-to*' line is not to be understood merely as one line among others within some already known space - despite the Cartesian habit of conceiving all lines in this way. Rather this is the line arising as the *from-to 'direction'* of inquiry is generated in the first place; it is the line which opens up in the first place a space known in the depth of '*from-to*' engagement as we give ourselves in the primary intention of radical enquiry.

It is important to stress the integrity of that primary intention in which this is rooted. As a stance of openness or responsiveness to (indeterminate) reality,¹¹ this primary intention is at once receptive and critical. We cannot reduce this to an alternation between two kinds of intention. Rather, the two ways of attending represented by 'relying on' and 'attending to' arise out of this intention, as reality is engaged. To describe this intention as irreducible is not to deny that both in discovery and in the progressive deepening of understanding of a comprehensive entity, there is typically what Polanyi calls 'a see-saw of analysis and integration'.¹² It is rather to insist that each of these is guided by its immediate relation to the other, which is to say, by the whole represented by these two taken together.

It is necessary to emphasise this point because we tend habitually to think of receptive 'relying on' and critical appraisal or analysis as two strictly alternative stances. And, of course, in many instances, in obvious ways they are. On the other hand, there are instances where these two can by no means be separated out. Rather, criticism is pursued precisely from within an action, and 'relying on' is precisely the means of attentive, conscious exploration. Take, for example, when we test a tool: we *test* (critically) *whether* it is a good tool by *trying* (receptively) *to* use it to good effect. The lively research which Polanyi identifies as paradigmatic for knowledge is among such instances where trusting and testing are inseparable, and rooted in an irreducible primary intention at once of receptivity and critical appraisal. And it is here, as I have said, that trusting and testing, receptivity and critical appraisal find their most lively, paradigmatic meaning.

We might note here that it is not always clear that Polanyi himself follows consistently his own designation as paradigmatic for indwelling, the cases of lively research and of deepest indwelling. For example, in his discussion of 'dwelling in and breaking out' (*PK*, p.195ff), he seems to draw a *contrast* between indwelling and lively research. In relation to the former, he speaks of indwelt conceptual frameworks as 'screens' between ourselves and things which we observe and manipulate through them. In relation to the latter, he says that as we 'break out' of such indwelt frameworks in 'phases of self-destruction', we have 'direct experience' of contents in an 'intense if transient moment of heuristic vision'. This is hardly to present indwelling as paradigmatic for research or knowledge.¹³

To note this, only spurs us as we now identify how primary intention gives rise in certain situations to one particular experience of knowing among others which may then capture and distort our imagination and in so doing generate the false Cartesian paradigm for knowledge. Let us begin by recalling what Polanyi designates 'quieter' research, and 'less deep' indwelling. These arise when, active in lively primary intention, we find that the vital inter-animation between subsidiary and focal subsides, and the former settles into an established meaning which is not significantly developed in the course of further attention. Now, whereas this meaning has arisen in the first place in intrinsic relation to what is focal and so to the whole, it appears in practice to subsist independently of these. It can now be employed as an acquired habit of understanding or skill. Such habitual or uncritical reliance upon meaning may occur in our reliance upon a familiar conceptual framework, category, or research methodology. It may be found when we use these to probe something critically, without allowing the practical possibility that our encounter may open this meaning itself to new developments. In this case, what we attend *from* and *to* lose their primary character as that which we attend *through* from one to the other in primary attentiveness. Now, what we attend *from* functions as a presupposed meaning, a screen or grid coming between us and reality,¹⁴ or a horizon which hides from us its own original setting within an act of lively inquiry. And what we attend *to* becomes merely the critical question of the instantiation or otherwise of a concept. Taken together with other such questions, this generates the logical spaces¹⁵ within which we conceive distinct objects or properties within the horizons of presupposed meaning.

The Cartesian development now arises when this experience of routine knowledge, *as this is understood within such knowledge itself*, is taken as a paradigm for all knowledge - including for our knowledge of ourselves. That is to say, knowledge is understood in terms which unreflectively presuppose, and remain within the horizons of, established meaning. The knowing subject is now seen alongside what is known, and these two are seen together supposedly within a wider space. The act of knowing is now pictured as connecting the knowing subject and what is known - a line, as it were, between them. However, this entire picture - the referents which constitute the knowing subject and what is known, and our tacit self-placement over against them - presupposes established meaning; and at the level of meaning, we have by no means stepped aside from the act of knowing; rather, we remain within it, we lapse into it as we lapse into habit. Nor can we step out of this by adverting to this presupposed meaning; for in the attempt to do so, we shall continue to rely precisely upon such meaning. We shall therefore merely replicate the existing dichotomy between the subject we imagine to view and the meaning from which we view it, thus setting up the familiar self-referential Cartesian regress.

The truth hidden from this Cartesian viewpoint is that its world is actually smaller than the world which is engaged within lively inquiry and knowledge. It is smaller because it has arisen within and is limited by established meaning, and has no access to the larger world in which such meaning itself remains alive to enlargement through deep indwelling. In order for such a larger world to be recovered, presupposed meaning must be restored to its original setting within the primary intention of knowing, where tacit knowing may come alive again in the inter-animation between what we attend *from* and attend *to*. And this requires abandoning the Cartesian stance of detached 'looking on', and entering anew *into* the act of vital knowledge. It requires that we give ourselves to looking 'along the beam' (to recall C.S. Lewis's parable) of inquiry and knowledge at its most lively - to indwelling the 'radical line' of inquiry.

Indwelling and the Primacy of 'Direction'

The challenge which this account offers to Cartesian habits of the imagination is also embodied by what we might now call *the primacy of direction* in knowledge. Expressed briefly, *all specifications of what we attend from or attend to are relative to each other within our primary responsiveness to reality, in which we explore what most fully constitutes the 'radical line' of inquiry or fundamental 'from-to' direction which is constitutive for all knowledge and inquiry.*

This relativity is reflected in the multiplicity of accounts which can be given, with regard to any given conversation in which we are engaged, of the *from-to* direction of our attention. We could be described as attending from the sounds of the other's speech to the meaning which these sounds embody; or as attending, as we listen, from questions in our mind to their possible answers. In more technical philosophical terms, we could be described (employing Wittgenstein's language) as attending from or relying upon the 'grammar' of our speech to its empirical content; or perhaps (employing J. L. Austin's language) as attending from the performative force of speech-acts to their content. All of these descriptions may suggest themselves at once with regard to a single conversation, even one of the briefest kind.

For a 'Cartesian' reading of Polanyi, this multiplicity of accounts is problematic. Any one account of what we attend *from* and what we attend *to* must exclude other accounts, just as we can only stand in one place, and look at one point, at a given moment. We can then in principle step aside and look on at what the knowing subject attends *from* and attends *to*. However, seen in a 'radical' Polyanian context, any particular account of

what we attend *from* and *to* is itself an act of specification which takes place *within* the setting of our primary intention and is relative to this. Alternative accounts are therefore not mutually exclusive but rather describe possible alternations *within* that primary intention.

We are helped to picture this by the case when a series of such accounts is ordered by logical priority - that is to say, in the case where we may be described variously as attending from S1 to S2, or from S2 to S3, or from S3 to S4, and so on. One such case is the series *referent, predication, truth, and import*, each as the possible object of our attention. Suppose, for example, that a neighbour says to me 'That tile is a bit odd'. I respond by attending 'from' his roughly pointing arm as I identify his *referent* as a particular tile on the roof of my house. At the same time, however, I attend 'from' this referent as I attend to his *statement as a predication*: what does he mean by 'a bit odd?'. Again, I attend 'from' his statement as I attend to its *truth*: is he right? And finally I attend 'from' this truth - namely, the oddness of the tile, to which he draws my attention - as I attend to its *import*: has he done well to point this out, because something needs to be done about it? Each aspect of my act of knowing here is subsidiary for me as I attend focally to the next. However, all are contained in my primary intention which is at once receptive to 'owning' or attending *from* all of these, and critical in evaluating each within the whole. It is as I attend in this way *through them all*, that I either come to appreciate fully what my neighbour says, or else find that one or another aspect of what he says stands out as problematic within the whole, and invites special attention.

Such attention through a series of questions is in some ways analogous to the act of peering through a microscope at a translucent organism and adjusting the focal plane to bring different parts of this to attention within the whole. The analogy is of course a limited one because it places the knowing subject outside of every focal plane, and because there is no integral requirement to view any given focal plane relative to the others. This opens the door again to a Cartesian reading, in which we imagine to step aside and look on at the knowing subject and what is known. By contrast, in the knowledge for which this is an analogy, the knowing subject is embodied precisely in his/her indwelling the 'radical line' of inquiry, within which there arise all the terms of the series, in a world which unfolds not by 'stepping aside' from this but precisely by critical immersion in it.

This picture of paradigmatic inquiry as attending in the *direction* constituted by inquiry and knowledge at their most lively defeats the Cartesian habit of imagining to look *at* that which the knowing subject attends *from* and attends *to*. It represents a radical reading of Polanyi which consistently follows through his identification of lively research as a paradigm for all knowing, and which finds this rooted in a primary intention which is at once receptive and critical.

Notes

¹ My concern in this paper is not with the meaning and intention of Descartes' epistemology understood in its original setting, insofar as this can be ascertained, but with habits of thought or ways of picturing things which have commonly been associated with Descartes and which are widespread and are taken for granted to the point of being almost invisible to us all. The question how far Descartes is to be held responsible for these developments is not a question I shall discuss in this paper. It has been pointed out that in this and other regards my paper echoes themes of William Poteat. I certainly share his concern to challenge a pervasive, regnant Cartesian 'picture' which falsely privileges routine theoretical knowledge (or in Poteat, the formalised, 'atemporal' rationality associated especially with mathematics); and I share his interest in the how this distorts

the relation between that which is logically antecedent and logically consequent. See Poteat, *Polanyian Meditations*, Duke University Press, 1985.

² Marjorie Grene, 'Tacit Knowing: Grounds for a Revolution in Philosophy', *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, Vol.8, No.3, October 1977, pp.164-171, p.169.

³ Michael Polanyi, 'Knowing and Being', in Polanyi, *Knowing and Being: Essays by Michael Polanyi*, ed. Marjorie Grene, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969, pp.123-137.

⁴ C. S. Lewis, 'Meditation in a Tool-shed', in Walter Hooper (ed), *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, Eerdmans, 1970.

⁵ Polanyi, 'The Unaccountable Element in Science', *KB*, p.117.

⁶ Polanyi, 'Knowing and Being', *KB*, p.132.

⁷ Polanyi, 'The Logic of Tacit Inference', *KB*, p.139.

⁸ Polanyi, 'Tacit Knowing', *KB*, p.160.

⁹ Polanyi, *PK*, p.196.

¹⁰ An example of this process (but one which depends upon the existence of an already used but unfamiliar language) is given by what Polanyi calls a 'dual act of sense-reading': 'An unintelligible text referring to an unintelligible matter presents us with a dual problem. Both halves of such a problem jointly guide our minds towards solving them and will in fact be solved jointly by the understanding of the object referred to and the words referring to it. The naming of the things and of the terms designating them is discovered at the same time' ('Sense-Giving and Sense-Reading', *KB*, p.189). Polanyi's reference to 'both halves of the problem' should not be taken to mean that we are engaged here merely in seeking a correspondence; we may be guided here to 'see' something for the first time as we name it.

¹¹ A 'stance of openness or responsiveness' must bear connotations here both of Polanyi's reference to our innate restless, exploring activity (*PK*, p.132) and his account of heuristic passion (*PK*, p.142-4).

¹² Polanyi, 'Knowing and Being', *KB*, p.129.

¹³ It is true that Polanyi goes on to describe this moment of 'breaking out' in terms reminiscent of indwelling: such contemplation, he says, 'pours us straight into experience; we cease to handle things and become immersed in them', which brings 'complete participation of the person in that which he contemplates' (*PK*, 197). Moreover, he can speak of the 'indwelling of the Christian worshipper' - 'potentially the highest degree of indwelling that is conceivable' - as indwelling despite that fact that he describes this as 'a continued attempt at breaking out' which is 'fulfilled most completely when it increases this effort to the utmost' (*PK*, 198-199).

When he now describes this as resembling ‘the heuristic upsurge which strives to break through the accepted frameworks of thought, guided by the intimations of discoveries still beyond our horizon’ (*PK*, 199), we seem to be right back with his description of lively research - except that there guiding intimations lead us precisely to *indwell clues*, rather than to *break out of indwelling*. A ‘radical’ reading of Polanyi, I suggest, restores the former ‘grammar’ of indwelling as paradigmatic, so that the ‘breaking out’ which Polanyi describes is actually *a renewal of indwelling at its most vital*.

¹⁴ This corresponds to Polanyi’s understanding of indwelling a ‘screen’ in *PK* p.197. See note 14 above.

¹⁵ I follow Karl Heim’s terminology in Karl Heim, *God Transcendent*, (eng) Nisbet, 1935.

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Electronic Discussion List

The Polanyi Society supports an electronic discussion group exploring implications of the thought of Michael Polanyi. Anyone interested can subscribe; send a query to owner-polanyi@lists.sbu.edu Communications about the electronic discussion group may also be directed to John V. Apczynski, Department of Theology, St. Bonaventure University, St. Bonaventure, NY 14778-0012 E-MAIL: apczynsk@sbu.edu PHONE: (716) 375-2298 FAX: (716) 375-2389.

Vintage Marjorie Grene: A Review Essay on *A Philosophical Testament*

Phil Mullins

ABSTRACT Key Words: Marjorie Grene, Michael Polanyi, person, ecological epistemology
*These reflections summarize major themes in Marjorie Grene's **A Philosophical Testament**. I also highlight Grene's comments on her many years of work with Polanyi and try to draw out some connections between Grene's thought and that of Polanyi.*

Marjorie Grene, *A Philosophical Testament*. Chicago and La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1995. ISBN 0-8126-9287-X (pbk). \$18.95.

Introduction

Grene notes in her 1995 book *A Philosophical Testament* that she at first thought she would title the book “Persons”:

When I first thought of writing this book, in fact, I meant to call it *Persons*. But then it turned out to be about a cluster of other topics, focussed especially on matters related to the problem of knowledge, and bringing in a lot of what professional philosophers call necessary conditions for our ways of knowing, or claiming to know, but not very directly about the concept of the person as such. Still, ‘persons’ is the title I thought of for this concluding chapter. Now I’m not sure why. I’ve rambled on about evolution, and reality, and perception and symboling and heaven knows what (173).

Grene gives here a brief but fair summary of topics covered in her book, written in her mid eighties. Altogether her book is not tightly focused on a philosophical account of the person, it does treat the topic broadly, as she suggests, and insightfully by addressing a number of related topics that have interested her in her long career. This book also reveals a number of things about the person of the author. I found charming and informative what she terms her ramblings but I know that others (see Ward’s discussion in *Appraisal* 1:1[March 1996]: 44-49) have not been so impressed. I suspect that I found *A Philosophical Testament* a very good book for three reasons: First, I know something of the importance Grene played in shaping Michael Polanyi’s philosophical thought and her reflections here shed some further light on these matters. Second, like many others, I have certain indelible memories of Grene’s formidable persona, which comes through even in print. Finally, her philosophical conclusions here are interesting and seem to me to be quite an insightful account of the person worked out within a general framework akin to that of Polanyi. The first two of these matters are worth substantial initial digressions, since they help place Marjorie Grene, and lead to the third matter, the substance of her book.

Polanyi’s Appreciation of Marjorie Grene

Grene’s role in Polanyi’s life and thought is given clear voice in the “Acknowledgements” section of

Personal Knowledge:

This work owes much to Marjorie Grene. The moment we first talked about it in Chicago in 1950 she seemed to have guessed my whole purpose, and ever since she has never ceased to help its pursuit. Setting aside her own work as a philosopher, she has devoted herself for years to the present enquiry. Our discussions have catalysed its progress at every stage and there is hardly a page that has not benefited from her criticism. She has a share in anything I may have achieved here (*PK*, ix).

Further testimony is abundant in the collection of letters (the Polanyi-Grene correspondence) in the archival Polanyi Papers in the University of Chicago's Regenstein Library. For many years, Polanyi clearly relied on Grene to direct him through the twists and turns in the history of Western philosophy and to help him see his own ideas in this context. A 4 September 1960 letter that Polanyi dubbed a "violent appeal" designed to evoke reaction from Grene amply illustrates this. After musing about the bearings of what he termed "two kinds of knowing" on traditional philosophical problems and asking what Grene thought of some books he had recently read by Pieper, Gilson and Langer, Polanyi put his case this way:

All this goes to say: You (Marjorie) are a philosopher, intent on finding out how things stand and you accept the framework of dual knowing; you have all the knowledge of philosophy, past and present that I lack—what is your reason for leaving this enormous body of thought unleavened by the new insights which you share with me?¹

By her own account (188), although she simultaneously worked on many other things, Grene worked with Polanyi from 1950 until the late sixties. It was not merely generous hyperbole when Polanyi pointed out at the beginning of his *magnum opus* "She has a share in anything I may have achieved here" (*PK*, ix). In fact, the correspondence with Grene strongly suggests that she has a share in many of the range of fruitful Polanyi publications in the decade after *PK*, including those Polanyi essays selected for inclusion in the volume Grene edited, *Knowing and Being*.

Grene's Persona

I candidly admit that I remember Grene fondly, although I cannot quite shake the image of her as a volatile brilliance best admired from a distance. In the handful of times I have seen her in person, she was always at once remarkable and somewhat terrifying. As a graduate student, I recall watching her wittily and incisively slice up some of her younger philosopher friends, John Searle, Charles Taylor and Hubert Dreyfus, who dared to push a point she made in a public lecture. I remember once interviewing her in the early seventies about her work with Polanyi. Things went well until I mentioned my interest in theology and that unleashed her tongue. She did not like the fact that Polanyi took an interest in religion and got mixed up with theologians. But then she also had many sharp things to say against professional philosophical inquiry and philosophers. Some gems in fact are in *A Philosophical Testament*:

In my experience, the professionalization of fundamental questions so often leads to triviality, that I hasten to neglect what, as a kind of professional, I suppose (or others suppose) I ought to read (176).

Most philosophers, I have found, live in a philosopher's room, where all apertures have been hermetically sealed against reality and only recent copies of a few fashionable philosophical journals are furnished to the inhabitants (176).

Last but not least, I recall Grene's *tour de force* performance on April 12, 1991 at the Kent State University Polanyi Centennial Conference. I remember wondering if my own knees would shake when I stood up in a full auditorium at Kent State to pose the first question after her excellent paper analyzing the use of "subjective" in *Personal Knowledge* (see *Polanyiana* 2:4/3:1 [1992]: 43-55 or *TAD* 23: 3 [1995-96]: 6-16).

I expect my few personal experiences with Grene are not atypical for encounters with this gruff but passionate and insightful philosopher who had so much influence upon Polanyi. Certainly the pointed prose in *A Philosophical Testament* suggests the volatile brilliance of its author remains intact.

Grene's Philosophical Testament

In her book, Grene points out that she taught at twenty institutions in her career, thirteen years at University of California, Davis being her longest tenure at any one (1). Her extraordinarily brief (about 350 words) biographical sketch in the "Introduction" (she says that the "'story of my life as a philosopher' would be rather dreary"[4]) tells of a life of in and out of academe. It has been a life in which both her strong stands and fiery temperament as well as prejudice against women philosophers were obstacles, a life in which she reports that "most of my time was taken with marriage, family and farming" (5).

A review of Grene's many publications suggests that as a philosopher she might identify herself as a historian of philosophy and a philosopher of biology. While I expect Grene would acknowledge these special interests, she generally describes her philosophic interests as epistemic: "I have got myself entangled with epistemic questions in the context of questions about what persons can do. . ." (4-5). The first three chapters of her book are gathered under the rubric "knowing." Chapter 1 in *A Philosophical Testament* directly treats epistemic questions in terms of "the traditional problem of the relation of knowledge to opinion and of the role of perception in knowledge" (90). Grene argues that the assumed categorical difference between knowledge and belief, running through the Western philosophical tradition since Plato, is problematic: we must correct the presumption that knowledge is necessary and universal and belief is contingent and parochial, and that the two have no connection with one another. As an alternative, Grene argues, we must "look at the knowledge claims we make and see how they are structured if we take them, not as separate from, but as part of, our system of beliefs" (15). Ultimately, here is where she comes out: "Knowledge is justified belief, rooted in perception, and depending for its possibility on the existence in reality itself of ordered kinds of things, including the kind that claims to hold justified beliefs" (26-27). Along the way to this conclusion, Grene discusses both the nature of justification and truth. She articulates a thoroughly historical and bodily account that she links to Polanyi:

We have abandoned the search for knowledge in Plato's sense—a grasp of truth indefeasible and unconnected with our bodily being—and we admit that we are destined to seek, gropingly but not unreasonably, the best clues we can find to the truth about any question that concerns us. Whether it is perception, inference, imagination, or authority that guides us depends both on the kind of question we are asking and on our capacities and our training in the appropriate disciplines or areas of common life. That's the best we can do with the

problem of justification—and it's not too bad. There are philosophers who can help us articulate this general kind of view: Merleau-Ponty or Polanyi, for example(16-17).

For anyone who has read *PK* carefully, there is no question that Grene's opening chapter directly addressing epistemic questions is one sympathetic to Polanyi's positions. One of the more interesting aspects of the chapter and the larger book is to note how much she roots knowledge in perception and how much she links Merleau-Ponty's treatment of perception and Polanyi's discussions:

The artifactual devices we interiorize as we learn our way around a given discipline or acquire a given skill, however theoretical, are themselves alterations of, tinkering with, perceptible, embodied things as much as we ourselves who do all this tinkering are animals finding our way through reliance on our integration of sensory inputs in a perceptible and therefore intelligible habitat. As there is no sharp cut between belief and knowledge, so there is no sharp cut between perception and belief. Perception is both primordial—the most primitive kind of knowledge—and pervasive: the milieu, on our side, within which we develop such information as we can obtain, such beliefs as we can articulate, concerning the places, things and processes among which we live, move and have our being. That is, I think, something like what Merleau-Ponty meant by “the primacy of perception.” It is also the necessary foundation for Polanyi's doctrine of tacit knowing (25).

In Chapter 2, Grene moves on to Kant, a figure about whom she has written much in her career. What she offers are both criticisms of Kant and a clear acknowledgment that Kantian themes still form her starting point for philosophical reflection. As a modern, she gives up Kant's distinction between phenomenal and noumenal: “The distinction between appearances and things in themselves in the radical way Kant made it now seems untenable; there is not such an unbridgeable gap between what appears to us and what there is”(31). She suggests Kant needs a richer sense of the interpretative nature of perception:

Kant seems to have entertained no concept of tacit knowing. We have either simple affection (being affected by . . .), which is not cognitive, or the function of judging, which is. As I have already suggested in my first chapter, that division is unfair to perception, which is already cognitive and, indeed, the foundation of, and model for, all knowledge (35).

In an amusing biographical aside, Grene points out that her life as a farmer reshaped her early reaction to Kant:

Whatever the reason, there it was: agricultural duties and critical philosophy didn't mix. It was like being bereft of one of one's senses. And when I could read Kant again, later on, it was perhaps the immersion in farm life that made my rereading even more radically realistic than it had been when I had come to the Analytic first, as an agriculturally naïve student of philosophy(35).

What ultimately Grene proposes is to transform key Kantian claims:

But what if the T. U. A. [transcendental unity of apperception] were, neither on the one hand a mere fact that . . . , nor on the other a self-knowing, thinking substance such as Descartes claimed to have discovered by the Sixth Meditation, but something more ordinary: a real,

live, breathing, perceiving, exploring *animal*, destined to see, and find, its way in a real, existent, challenging, but up to a point manageable environment? (42).

All in all, however, Grene thinks Kant got many important things right or partially right: “What remains in all this of Kant’s laboriously elaborated argument? Three essentials remain, it seems to me: the active role of the knower in making experience objective, the inexhaustibility of the known, and the indissoluble connection between knower and known” (44).

The final chapter in the first section of *A Philosophical Testament* is “Beyond Empiricism” which offers Grene’s comments on the English philosophical tradition and especially Wittgenstein. It is really only Wittgenstein in whom Grene sees a glimmer of hope. The rest of the English tradition since Hume has been, in one way or another, in her view, locked into subjectivism. Wittgenstein’s turn to language was an effort to get beyond this subjectivism and Grene contends his interest in “family resemblances” really was a move toward appreciation of the inarticulate. But she finds even it too formal:

... we ought to overcome our fascination with purely explicit, formal systems. If thought can deal only with what can be made precise, it can deal with nothing. It is not so much vagueness as the kind of flexibility inherent in the practice of a skill, linguistic or otherwise, that must be acknowledged if we are to make sense of things, or to accept the sense of things (62).

If you think this criticism sounds Polanyian, you are correct; Grene is quite forthright in giving Polanyi his due and she does so in a way that sheds interesting light on both Polanyi and Grene:

Even the most esoteric and theoretical disciplines involve this less than—or more than—explicit ingredient. That is the thesis Michael Polanyi struggled to give voice to both in *Personal Knowledge* and in *The Tacit Dimension* and some of his later essays. It seems paradoxical to try to articulate the significance of the inarticulate, but that is what the concept of tacit knowing was intended to do. And this effort, I think, was convergent with the spirit of Wittgenstein’s family concept, although, admittedly, Polanyi never had the faintest glimmer of such a convergence, nor did I at the time I was working with him. Indeed, he thought all those other people were ‘positivists’, and one couldn’t tell him otherwise. Come to think of it, it was what appeared to me a knock-down refutation of positivism that first appealed to me in Polanyi’s early essays into philosophy (in his Riddell lectures, *Science, Faith and Society*, first published in 1946). And as I have already confessed, during the reign of Wittgenstein I had no idea, either, what the fuss was about (though I did know it wasn’t positivism!) (63).

Grene thinks that Wittgenstein’s interest in “forms of life” was his most important idea: “Indeed some notion akin to the concept of a form of life, or mode of living, needs to be applied to our reflections on human activity in general, to rituals, customs, ways of apprehending reality like science, the arts and so on and on” (63). She comments, however, that “form of life” could have been a productive starting point but she does not think any Wittgensteinians really took off, as they might have, from this notion to develop a philosophy of the person as alive in an environment. In her own words, what Grene has always struggled to articulate is an “ecological epistemology” (26):

It should also be clear by now that both the justified belief formula and the thesis of the primacy of perception must be understood in a realistic sense. We dwell in human worlds, in cultures, but every such world is itself located in, and constitutes, a unique transformation of, some segment of the natural world, which provides the materials for, and sets the limits to, its constructs (26).

Or as she later puts the matter, in terms of a focus upon the living biological and social person: “To be alive, however, is to be somewhere, responding somehow to an environment, and in turn shaping that environment by our way of coping with it. To study human practices, including language, as forms of life is to study them as activities of the particular sort of animal we find ourselves to be” (63-64).

The second unit of Grene’s book shifts from “knowing” to “being” and the first of three chapters in this section compares “being-in-the-world” in Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, all figures she has written about previously. Grene is, on the whole, discouraged by Heidegger and Sartre’s discussions, but she argues that Merleau-Ponty provides a brilliant account of perception and bodiliness that she claims is a parallel to Polanyi’s discussions.

In the course of her discussion of Heidegger, some interesting historical details about Grene’s own career are relevant. After finishing an undergraduate degree in zoology in 1931, she went to Freiburg as an exchange student and attended Heidegger’s lectures; the next year, she was at Heidelberg studying with Jaspers. After returning home in 1933, Grene took an M.A. and a Ph. D. in philosophy at Radcliffe, but returned to Denmark in 1935-36 to study Kierkegaard when she could not get a job.

I had written a hasty and atrocious dissertation on *Existenzphilosophie*, in order to get out quickly and get a job, but for women in those days, and especially in the depression, there were none. Indeed, when I had passed my final orals for the doctorate I was told: Goodbye; you’re a bright girl but nobody gives jobs to women in philosophy.’ It seemed reasonable then, for the moment, to go on, or back, to Kierkegaard, though I had little if any sympathy for that particular gloomy Dane (5).

A year later, she managed to get a teaching assistant position at the University of Chicago in order to participate in Carnap’s research seminar. Eventually, she became an instructor at Chicago and taught there until, as she bluntly puts it, “MacKeon had me fired in 1944” (5). It is at this point that Grene’s years on the fringes of academic philosophy, as a busy farmer and mother, first in Illinois and then, in 1952, in Ireland, begin. Grene’s firsthand experience with Heidegger led eventually to her writing about Heidegger. She admits that when she studied in Germany, she was taken with Heidegger but that quickly changed:

By 1934, . . . I was thoroughly disillusioned with all these ‘deep meanings’. It was out of necessity—or sheer historical contingency, which is a kind of necessity—that I returned to Heidegger’s work and to literature in some ways akin to it, in other words, to what is called continental as distinct from analytical philosophy. Since I had studied with Heidegger, and the following year with Jaspers, I was asked to write about these people when they came into vogue among us after the war. And since I had lost my job and was tied down by farm and family so that I couldn’t wander off looking for another position, I thought I should do

whatever I was asked to do that was in any way philosophical, in order not to get lost altogether from any contact with my profession. Every time I wrote about the stuff, I said, 'Ugh, never again' (68-69).

About Heidegger and his discussion of being-in-the-world, Grene offers a little praise, but not very much: Heidegger's discussion, Grene sees, as making a "move against the *cogito* as the starting point of philosophy" (71) and he appropriately stresses the pervasiveness of the hermeneutic circle (73) but Heidegger is a contorted "jungle of noologisms"(71). Worse than the arbitrary and unintelligible style is the fact that Heidegger's human being "is as disembodied as any Cartesian mind could be" (77) and the fact that there is a "deep connection between that account and Heidegger's undoubted Nazism or fanatical German nationalism. . ." (77-78). It is true, I suppose, that she is somewhat more sympathetic to the early than the late Heidegger whose writing she simply dubs "appalling nonsense" (69)! Grene is only a little less harsh with Sartre's ideas about being-in-the-world and, more generally, with *Being and Nothingness*: "Like Hume's *Treatise*, it is one of the transcendent works of our philosophical tradition which show how, given inadequate premises, a particular movement of thought works itself into an impassable dead end"(79). But, as I have noted above, Grene thinks Merleau-Ponty is an enormously important thinker who, like Polanyi, tries to redirect the philosophical tradition. She did not study Merleau-Ponty until 1960-61, after she had been working with Polanyi on *Personal Knowledge* (1958), but when she did read *The Phenomenology of Perception* what she found was a companion piece to *Personal Knowledge*: ". . . Merleau-Ponty's book seemed to me to convey the same message, but in the opposite order, and in a language that I could both understand and use (or so it seemed at the time)" (69).

Grene's several page discussion of Merleau-Ponty's approach (she approves but does not want to call it "phenomenology" since she finds that movement is thoroughly unrealistic) and conclusions are very insightful. I found it of interest that she links Merleau-Ponty not only to Polanyi but also to Erwin Strauss, Kurt Goldstein and Helmuth Plessner's philosophical anthropology, All of these figures she identifies as reformulating philosophical problems on a post-Cartesian basis. Most of these figures (plus a few others) are also mentioned in Grene's correspondence with Polanyi in the early sixties (see Grene's letter of 19 January, 1963 in Box 16 , Folder 1). In 1963, Grene advised Polanyi that she had a hunch that there is a "literature of a new theoretical biology-cum-animal psychology, which is consistent with and supports your epistemology," but that this literature lacked some basic Polanyian philosophical distinctions and has not "(1) incorporated epistemology into the new biology or (2) founded the new biology on an epistemology adequate to it, let alone; (3) generalized both the former to a comprehensive ontology. I don't think you have yet finished doing either. So please get on with it!!!" (Grene letter to Polanyi, 19 January, 1963, Box 16, Folder 1).

Polanyi apparently read Merleau-Ponty, possibly at Grene's suggestion, for references to his work begin to appear in Polanyi's writings in the early sixties. The new introduction (dated December, 1963), "Background and Prospect," to the University of Chicago reprint of *Science, Faith and Society* identifies *Phenomenology of Perception* as a book that analyzes "perceived knowledge on the lines of Husserl" and "arrives at views akin to these I have expressed here" (*SFS*, 12). The most extensive comment about Merleau-Ponty is in Polanyi's "The Structure of Consciousness" (first published in 1965, but also included in *Knowing and Being*, 221-223). But Merleau-Ponty (along with Husserl who Grene despises) is also mentioned approvingly in "The Logic of Tacit Inference" (first published in 1966, but also included in *Knowing and Being*, 55-56). *The Phenomenology of Perception* and some other Merleau-Ponty essays, Grene says in *A Philosophical Testament*, provide ". . . the most effective account so far of what it is to be in a world: to be a person living his (her) life in

the odd fashion vouchsafed us by the contingencies of global, biological and human history” (80).

Grene’s fifth chapter “Darwinian Nature” shifts from “being-in-the-world” to biological being. This chapter, her most dense, is what she calls “a very crude and overabstract run at what we might mean by ‘Darwinian nature’ as our habitat” (106). In the course of her discussion in this chapter, it becomes clear how Grene came to work in philosophy and biology. Grene came back to the study of biology and thinking about evolution twenty years after she was an undergraduate because, in 1950, she met Michael Polanyi and found a congenial spirit:

Michael Polanyi, a distinguished physical chemist turned philosopher, had come to lecture at the University of Chicago and though I was marooned on the farm I managed to hear one of his lectures. As I remarked earlier, I found his argument against positivism thoroughly convincing; in fact I thought he had found the very refutation of that movement that I had been unable to articulate twelve years earlier in Carnap’s seminar. So when he asked me to help him with the preparation of his Gifford lectures—the work that would be published in 1958 as *Personal Knowledge*—I was delighted to do so. It seemed to me that if I had any talent for philosophy, the best I could do with it in my isolated situation would be to help Polanyi in his struggle, as he called it then, “to articulate the inarticulate.” I remember his telling me this as we walked a bare eroded field . . . on our Cook County farm. One of the jobs he set me soon thereafter was to look up heresies in evolutionary theory, specifically critics of the evolutionary synthesis, which was then, if one takes the centennial year of 1959 as its apotheosis, in its chief period of flowering. And once I started reading that literature I was unable to stop (91).

Grene says Polanyi, even though a physical chemist, “wanted to look at the processes of science as efforts of living creatures to achieve, as he put it, ‘contact with reality’ ” (92). She found an interesting tension between this approach and Aristotle’s deductive approach to science and this sparked her interest in Aristotle’s biology. Meanwhile, she notes that in reading the evolution literature, she learned “some lessons about Darwinism” (92) She came to believe “a balance of structure and alternation are needed to produce any episode in evolution, much less the sweep of the whole history of life on earth” (94).. The emphasis upon form has sometimes been almost totally repressed by the Darwinian emphasis upon change. Grene provides a long and detailed discussion of the role of chance in Darwinian nature. She emphasizes the importance of mutation or chance variation in evolution (since something must be heritable) and she points out parallels between modern biology discussions and responses to chance in the ancient philosophical tradition. Repeatedly, Grene emphasizes that her philosophical thinking has steadfastly sought to place humans in an evolving nature. Her probing of biology has always aimed to discern what difference biology makes in what can be said about human capacities. For Grene, philosophical questions about the nature of freedom emerge from within the Darwinian frame: “. . . it does appear that different organisms differ in the extent to which they can learn from experience. And it is that space for learning, and, where there are traditions, like ours of speaking our strange languages. . . it is that space for learning or tradition that sets the stage for freedom” (99).

She also works out ways to emphasize responsibility within the context of her steadfastly naturalistic (but not reductionistic) vision: “. . . a human being is a biological individual capable of becoming a responsible person thorough participation in (or as one unique expression of) a culture” (107). She argues that human knowledge is fundamentally orientational, since in essence it is concerned with knowing one’s way about in

the world. And she believes “the most significant epistemological consequence of an evolutionary metaphysic” is “an unwavering and unrepentant realism”(110).

All in all, “Darwinian Nature” is an interesting chapter that makes clear how Grene’s study of biology has refined her philosophical commitments, and particularly her commitments about persons. For those who know of Grene’s irritation with Polanyi (and Polanyians) for his positive comments about religion, this parting note on religion at the end of her discussion of nature is striking:

Admittedly, once we find ourselves as natural beings at home in a Darwinian nature, fundamentalist Christianity or any other literal and dogmatic belief in a Transcendent, All-Powerful Maker and Lawgiver with a Mind somehow analogous to ours (or to which ours is somehow analogous) must wither away. But are willful ignorance and superstition identical to reverence and the impulse to worship something greater than ourselves? There is grandeur in this view of life, Darwin wrote at the close of the *Origin*. Again, perhaps this was only meant to placate his readers as well as his wife; but I doubt it. A sense of the vastness and the vast variety of nature must have impelled the work of natural historians like Darwin and still drives the efforts of many working biologists in many different fields. Such an attitude is not wholly alien, I should think, to religiosity at its best. Given the manifold self-delusions and fanaticisms supported by organized religions, I am no longer sure the game is worth the candle, but at least one can deny the crude Provinian thesis: Darwin in, religion out. It ain’t necessarily so, though at this juncture I wouldn’t like to say what is so in this context. By now, the Philo of Hume’s *Dialogues* seems to me the safest guide in the philosophy of religion (111-112).

The last chapter in the unit of *A Philosophical Testament* on “being” is Grene’s discussion of realism which she titles, borrowing a note from Merleau-Ponty, “The Primacy of the Real.” Several of the quotations above make clear that Grene finds it important to affirm realism, but this chapter clarifies exactly what sort of realist she is. She acknowledges that she once called herself a “comprehensive realist” (114) but has given up this terminology because it is ambiguous. The shape of Grene’s realism is, of course, contoured by her steadfast focus on humans as living creatures embedded in an environment:

Things and events impinge on us one way or another through our senses, and that includes, of course, cerebral mediation of incoming information as well as our social-linguistic reading of it. From the beginning—even prenatally, it now appears—human individuals constantly, or recurrently, notice and interpret impacts from things and events both outside and inside their own bodies (115).

She defines her realist position as built on two theses: human beings exist within a real world and are surrounded by it and shaped by it and human beings are real. These fundamental affirmations she says are essentially an effort to get beyond the subject-object split and the split between in-here and out-there which “makes nonsense of a world that is living, complicated, messy as you like, but real. I am myself one instantiation of that world’s character, one expression of it, able also, in an infinitesimal way, to shape and alter it” (114).

Grene organizes much of her discussion in this chapter as a critique of philosopher of science Arthur Fine’s attack upon realism. She argues that Fine and many other philosophers of science often presuppose too

narrow a notion of knowledge as explicitness. She regards much of philosophy's discussion about realism as an in-house debate about "scientific realism." Much of this debate is misguided because of formalistic suppositions about knowledge. Something like Polanyi's from-to account of knowledge is needed, Grene contends. The debate in philosophy also goes awry because of philosophy's long-standing erroneous ideas about perception. This goes back to the early empiricists and Grene has a whole later chapter on perception, which articulates what she sees as an alternative to the philosophical tradition's views. She also says that social anthropology can be helpful for restoring a richer realism focused around living beings.

The final unit of Grene's book includes three chapters that she locates under the rubric "coping." These chapters are about "how we manage. As natural beings made what, or who, we are by the givens of a culture, how does each of us, as a responsible person cope with the world around us, including, of course, our peers of the human world?" (173). The opening chapter in this unit is "Perception Reclaimed: The Lessons of the Ecological Approach." Here Grene focuses on explicating the ideas about perception of J.J. and Eleanor Gibson whose ecological approach she sees as complementing Merleau-Ponty's account of the primacy of perception. Grene contrasts the Gibsons' account with what she regards as the standard account that is rooted in empiricist philosophy's view of perception way back in Locke, Berkeley and Hume:

. . . experience does not appear to be constructed out of little bits, whether pleasures, pains or bits of this-hue (or taste or smell or sound)-exactly-here-exactly now. Berkeley, and Hume after him, did honestly believe, it seems, that experience is built up of such little mental atoms, and their belief has lingered in later theories of perception, both in philosophy and psychology. Yet surely it is arbitrary and unnecessary to dissect experience in this abstract way (134).

According to Grene, the Gibsons don't make a strong distinction between sensation and perception and this leads them to take a more relational and biological approach. They think of perception not in terms of sense data and cognized images but in terms of particular organisms in particular environments. Grene argues that perceptual systems have developed through evolution as systems that worked effectively to pick up information essential to the lives of the animals in question. Grene likes the Gibsons' views because they stress "the exploratory activity of the perceiver" and show "the primary perceptual process is already cognitive—and I think one could argue further that all cognition is, in the last analysis, at least in part perceptual" (141).

Where Grene takes this ecological approach to perception ultimately links up nature and culture in the human world:

. . . as human reality is one version of animal reality, so human knowledge is one species-specific version of the ways that animals possess to find their way around their environments. Granted, our modes of orientation in our surroundings are peculiarly dependent on the artefacts of culture. Culture mediates between ourselves and nature, and given the multiplicity of cultures, we appear, so far as we can tell, to possess, or to be able to acquire, a very much greater variety of paths of access to reality than can members of other species. Now culture, and the artefacts of culture, are of course of our own making and in the last analysis we accept their authority only on our own recognizances. But culture, rather than being a mere addendum to nature, a fiction supervenient on the naturally induced fictions of perception—culture, on our reading, while expressing a need inherent in our nature, is itself

a part of nature (144).

Grene's eighth chapter is a foray into philosophical anthropology; here, making heavy use of figures like Peter Wilson (*The Promising Primate*), she sets forth her basic ideas about "coping" through human use of symbols (which, after Wilson, she terms "symboling"). Through language, the products of language and ritual, human groups set forth and enforce a particular system of symbols and symbolic behavior which makes a group distinct. As symbol users, we are the creatures who promise; we pledge in the present to certain behaviors in the future. Symbols allow humans to take on social roles and create social spaces and, in turn, to be shaped by them:

Other animals of course have 'houses' and territories; other animals of course assume various social roles. Ants, for example, build whole cities, and act as foragers, guardians or garbage collectors, as the case may be. But we systematically construct such places and such roles, and are constructed by them, through the activities of symboling that make our particular society—and thereby our particular selves—the societies and the selves that they historically proclaim themselves to be (164).

The human lifestyle is distinguished from the life forms of other kinds of organisms in that it must be characterized in terms of "systematic self-creation" (165). Grene comments upon pluralism and relativism at the end of her discussion. She admits that she finds it "unlikely that there is one great system of standards adherence to which defines humanity" (167). But Grene thinks that Polanyi's ideas about commitment rescue one from the horns of the dilemma occupied by skepticism and absolute dogmatism. She claims that her position (and that of Polanyi) is different than "careless relativism" (168):

And the difference is that we know that we hold our beliefs, as indeed, the Azande do theirs, responsibly and with universal intent. Given such self-knowledge, further, we can school ourselves to approach other cultures with understanding while recognizing our own allegiance to our own. From within our own system of ritual, myth, and language we can describe and appraise the practices of others. Indeed, it is one of the characteristics of our particular tradition that, within limits, we are able to do this—as well as to appraise and amend some features of tradition in which we ourselves were reared. It is our own self-constitution as a society—or a sub-society—capable of criticizing and amending our own fundamental beliefs that makes possible the development of disciplines like anthropology or history. Literary genres like the novel or any major style in painting or sculpture also depend, I should think, on the same capacity for self-distancing—but always from within the nexus of standards or beliefs to which, as members of this society, we stand committed (168-69).

Put in another way, what Grene is pointing to is the paradox of self-set standards as she acknowledges:

We enter into obligations which compel us—not biologically or physically, but personally and morally—to act as we do. The intellectual passions that drive the life of science, the aspirations that compel the artist to paint or write or carve or build or compose: all these strivings express commitments, obligations to fulfil demands made on us by something that both defines and transcends our particular selves. . . . the point is to recognize what Polanyi called the paradox of self-set standards. We accept with universal intent principles or patterns

of behavior that we have at one and the same time both happened to develop and enacted as responsibly our own (169-170).

Greene's last chapter, "On Our Own Recognizances" tries to "face the question, how each of us responsibly takes up the burden of shaping those natural and cultural parameters into a particular life history" (174). She emphasizes the choices that persons make as a center of action: "To be a person, in the sense in which we human beings consider ourselves persons, is to be the center of actions, in such a way that we are accountable for what we do. Even if we are not accountable, as Augustine was, to God, or, as every actor is in a public context, to the law, we are accountable to ourselves." (176).

But Greene is careful not to overdraw the sense in which choices are perceived as ambiguous, weighty and wholly resting in our hands: "... just recognizing the compelling character of our most significant decisions leads me to question the adequacy of the 'could have done otherwise' formula to capture the peculiarity of human agency or action" (178). What she is searching for is a way to speak about human choice in terms of transcending (but certainly not Transcendent) ends:

... I want to avoid the inward turn of reading agency, or responsible personhood, in terms of consciousness, or, to cite Wittgenstein again, in terms of "secret inner somethings". What I want to stress even in the individual is not anything inward, but something like an ordering principle, a center of responsibility to principles, or ends, or causes, something beyond myself to which I owe allegiance (178).

Greene argues that a sense of obligation is fundamental not only to ethical decision making but to the quest for knowledge and this seems to be central to being a person in the strong sense of that term:

I do want to accept from Kant the notion of obligation, or, in Polanyi's terms, of commitment, as a necessary, and even central, ingredient of our existence as persons. To act freely, as a responsible center of decision and performance, is in some sense to give oneself, of one's own accord, to some principle or task or standard that obliges one's obedience or one's assent (181).

Her effort to sort out exactly what constitutes a person turns, in the end, to her own person. Surely this last note in her book, if not the whole book, is vintage Greene:

When I am asked what my speciality is in philosophy, I stammer and say, 'Oh, well, this and that.' I admitted earlier that while I was semi-, or better, about ninety percent detached from my profession, I did a lot of jobs I was asked to do because I thought that if I refused any offers with any professional respectability I would disappear altogether. But I think I also suffer from a tendency to run at this and that and fail to stick with it. Self-knowledge is difficult; I don't know. It's also boring; I don't much care. For the moment, at any rate, this is the best I can do at seeing, or saying, how the question, what it is to be a person, was involved in such work as I have been doing over the years, and decades" (188).

As I suggested at the beginning of this review, *A Philosophical Testament* is not a conventional philosophy book with a concise, tightly woven argument. It is a wonderful wandering through her life's work

as Marjorie Grene sought to clarify her own convictions about what a person is. Perhaps this effort comes close to Polanyi's definition of philosophical reflection in *Personal Knowledge*:

I believe that the function of philosophic reflection consists in bringing to light, and affirming as my own, the beliefs implied in such of my thoughts and practices as I believe to be valid; that I must aim at discovering what I truly believe in and at formulating the convictions which I find myself holding; that I must conquer my self-doubt, so as to retain a firm hold on this programme of self-identification (*PK* , 267).

Notes

¹ Polanyi letter to Grene 4 September 1960 Box 16, Folder 1 Papers of Michael Polanyi, University of Chicago Library. Quoted with permission of the University of Chicago Library, Department of Special Collections. Future citations to this archival material will be in parentheses by box and folder number.

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, and (8) selected short writings of Michael Polanyi

Submissions for Publication

Articles, meeting notices and notes likely to be of interest to persons interested in the thought of Michael Polanyi are welcomed. Review suggestions and book reviews should be sent to Walter Gulick (see addresses listed below). Manuscripts, notices and notes should be sent to Phil Mullins. Manuscripts should be double-spaced type with notes at the end; writers are encouraged to employ simple citations within the text when possible. MLA or APA style are preferred. Abbreviate frequently cited book titles, particularly books by Polanyi (e.g., *Personal Knowledge* becomes *PK*). Punctuation and spelling may follow either British or American standard practices. Shorter articles (10-15 pages) are preferred, although longer manuscripts (20-24 pages) will be considered.

Manuscripts normally will be sent out for blind review. Authors are expected to provide a hard copy and a disk or an electronic copy as an e-mail attachment. Be sure that electronic materials include all relevant information which may help converting files. Persons with questions or problems associated with producing an electronic copy of manuscripts should phone or write Phil Mullins (816-271-4386). Insofar as possible, *TAD* is willing to work with authors who have special problems producing electronic materials.

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