

# Tradition & Discovery

## The Polanyi Society Periodical

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# The Polanyi Society

# Preface

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This special issue of *TAD* on ethics was long in the making. Special thanks go to guest editor Paul Lewis for the hard work he put into pulling this together. Read his introductory essay "Towards a Post-Critical Ethic" on page 4 for a survey of what this issue holds.

On the opposite page, you will find the program for the November 2002 Polanyi Society meetings in Toronto. The major papers to be presented at these sessions should be available for downloading on the Polanyi Society web site (<http://www.mwsc.edu/orgs/polanyi>) by the end of October. Note that one session is again this year co-sponsored by the AAR Science and Religion group. At the Polanyi Society June 2001 conference, John Haught was a featured speaker; at the November 2001 annual meeting, there was a special session with Phil Clayton. This year in Toronto, one session is to be devoted to discussion with Ursula Goodenough. Clearly, the Polanyi Society has encouraged dialogue between those interested in Polanyi and some prominent contemporary thinkers writing about science and religion. But also this year we are reverting to our traditional pattern of including papers by members. Esther Meek and Richard Moodey, two members who have not previously presented at the annual meeting, sent in promising proposals; I am sure the Saturday session treating their papers will be a lively interaction of the sort many have enjoyed in the past.

This issue contains a flyer notifying members that renewals are due. Dues go up from \$20 to \$25 US this year. Although the Society membership cycle follows the academic year (i.e., dues are due in the fall), I have not succeeded in getting all members on this cycle. It would make our record keeping simpler if all dues were paid in the fall. If you have any kind of question about your standing, please write or e-mail me.

The Society is making an effort to increase *TAD* library subscriptions. For a while, we can offer a free copy of Andy Sanders fine book *Michael Polanyi's Post-Critical Epistemology* (whose price is about twice that of a subscription) to any library that does subscribe. Please work with your local institution to see if we can expand our institutional subscription list.

Phil Mullins

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

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# NEWS AND NOTES

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## 2002 Toronto Annual Meeting

The Polanyi Society annual meeting will be held in Toronto, Ontario on November 22 and 23, 2002. Please go to the Polanyi Society web site (<http://www.mwsc.edu/orgs/polanyi/>) for complete information about housing through the AAR/SBL. The November 22 session, co-sponsored by the Religion and Science Group of the AAR, will focus on a paper by Ursula Goodenough, a scientist and author of *The Sacred Depths of Nature*. The November 23 session will discuss papers by Esther L. Meek and Richard W. Moodey. The papers (which will not be read in sessions) will be posted on the Polanyi Society web site for downloading in late October or early November. Please note that the Friday evening session was not identified in the AAR/SBL Annual Meeting Program as a Polanyi Society meeting. The session is listed in the AAR/SBL Annual Meeting Program (Session AM 45 on page 180) using the title of Ursula Goodenough's paper, "From Biology to Morality with Polanyian Footnotes."

### Program

*November 22, 9:00 p.m. - 11:00 p.m. Westin Harbour Hotel, Pier 8 (Convention Level)*

Theme: From Biology to Morality with Polanyian Footnotes

Ursula Goodenough, Washington University

Respondents:

Nancy Howell, Saint Paul School of Theology  
Phil Mullins, Missouri Western State College  
Diane Yeager, Georgetown University

Discussion

*November 23, 9:00 a.m. - 11:30 a.m. Westin Harbour Hotel, Dockside II (Lower Level)*

"Learning to See: The Role of Authoritative Guides in Knowing"

Esther L. Meek, Covenant Theological Seminary  
Respondent: Paul Lewis, Mercer University

"Moral Passion and Moral Judgment: Polanyi and Lonergan on Ethics"

Richard W. Moodey, Gannon University  
Respondent: Vincent Colapietro, Penn. State

### Open Discussion

Business Meeting 11:30 a.m.

Chair: Marty Moleski

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**Please note the Polanyi Society's new web address: <http://www.mwsc.edu/orgs/polanyi/>**

### Electronic Discussion List

The Polanyi Society supports an electronic discussion group exploring implications of the thought of Michael Polanyi. Anyone interested can subscribe; contact Struan Jacobs (swjacobs@deakin.edu.au) who is the moderator. The address for the list is polanyi-list@deakin.edu.au

# Toward a Post-Critical Ethic

**Paul Lewis**  
**Guest Editor**

ABSTRACT Key Words: post-critical ethic, Michael Polanyi

*This essay is a brief introduction to four essays exploring the implications of Michael Polanyi's thought for ethics.*

Welcome to this special issue of *Tradition and Discovery*, one devoted to exploring the implications of Michael Polanyi's thought for a post-critical ethic. Devoting an issue to such a topic raises three important questions. The first concerns terminology. What is post-critical? While we can take as a truism the claim that we live in a post-modern age, we find little agreement about what the post-modern world looks like. Is the post-modern world a nihilistic, ultimately despairing world that gives up on ethics (that is how some read the continental deconstructionists)?<sup>1</sup> Is the post-modern world one in which we are destined to live in self-contained communities?<sup>2</sup> Is the post-modern world simply the modern world run amok, or is it one in which we find a synthesis of the best of both modern and premodern ways of thinking, feeling and doing?<sup>3</sup> Is the post-modern world all of the above? More? Where does "post-critical" fit in such a landscape? The second question concerns Polanyi's credentials as an ethicist. Can we appropriately call this physician-turned-chemist-turned philosopher an ethicist? The final question concerns the value of Polanyi's work for ethics. Can we learn anything useful from Polanyi, whatever we decide to call him? This issue of *TAD* proposes to explore these questions.

In the opening article, **Charles McCoy** takes on the first question most explicitly and situates Polanyi's life and work in the context of the Enlightenment's critical spirit. McCoy positions Polanyi as a post-critical thinker, rather than post-modern, in that he sees in Polanyi someone who appreciates the contributions of the Enlightenment (something many so-called postmodern thinkers are unable or unwilling to do) at the same time that he is able to acknowledge its shortcomings. Not content to simply situate Polanyi in the intellectual history of the West, McCoy goes on to survey three themes from Polanyi's work that might fruitfully inform a constructive, post-critical ethic. He suggests some of the implications for ethics found in Polanyi's ability to combine critical reason with a pre-critical vision, his understanding of the from/to structure of human knowing and his account of dwelling in and breaking out of the communities and traditions in which we find ourselves.

In the second article, **Diane Yeager** takes up our second question, i.e., "To what extent should we take Polanyi to be a moral philosopher?" Zdislaw Najder thinks that he makes a poor one, as Yeager recounts. Najder thinks Polanyi is, among other things, fuzzy on the meaning of morality and guilty of absolutizing his own culture. Taking these two criticisms as her beginning point, Yeager defends Polanyi's status as moral philosopher by offering an in-depth examination of moral inversion, the process whereby the passions that underlie morality turn in on themselves to produce vicious behavior. In the end, we see that Polanyi offers a rich account of the passionate nature of moral existence, as well as a complex account of both the promises and perils of one's own tradition.

The third and fourth articles address our third question by more directly taking Polanyian insights in constructive directions. **Mark Discher** draws on Polanyi's account of epistemology in order to help move along (if not resolve) debates between moral generalists and moral particularists. The former think that ethics proceeds by applying general principles to concrete situations. In contrast, the latter think that ethics must attend first and foremost to the details of individual cases. Discher finds instructive Polanyi's understanding of the process of scientific discovery, to which he likens the process of moral discernment.

In the fourth article, **Beth Newman** proposes a post-critical ethic that is built around the practice of hospitality. Like McCoy, she distinguishes Polanyi's post-critical views from those of the Enlightenment, but does so by focusing on one particular problem that the Enlightenment has, i.e., recognizing the giftedness of life. Building on Polanyi's understanding of the fiduciary character of knowledge, Newman puts Polanyi into conversation with other philosophers, theologians and novelists to explore how hospitality to others honors and builds on that neglected fact about ourselves.

In sum, we find in these essays different suggestions for how Polanyi's thought might be appropriated for ethics. Some draw from his epistemology and others his understanding of the passions. They do not, obviously, exhaust the contributions that Polanyi might make to ethics, but such was not the goal of this endeavor. Rather, we hope that these articles can be fruitful in stimulating conversation about and constructive appropriation of Polanyi's work for contemporary ethics.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>See, for example, Stanley Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996).

<sup>2</sup> Many infer this fate from Alasdair McIntyre's *After Virtue*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).

<sup>3</sup>. Albert Borgmann charts these two possible trajectories in his *Crossing the Postmodern Divide* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). The first he calls hypermodernism and the latter postmodern realism.

## WWW Polanyi Resources

**The Polanyi Society has a World Wide Web site at <http://www.mwsc.edu/orgs/polanyi/>. In addition to information about Polanyi Society membership and meetings, the site contains the following: (1) the history of Polanyi Society publications, including a listing of issues by date and volume with a table of contents for recent issues of *Tradition and Discovery*; (2) a comprehensive listing of *Tradition and Discovery* authors, reviews and reviewers; (3) information on locating early publications; (4) information on *Appraisal* and *Polanyiana*, two sister journals with special interest in Polanyi's thought; (5) the "Guide to the Papers of Michael Polanyi" which provides an orientation to archival material housed in the Department of Special Collections of the University of Chicago Library; (6) photographs of Michael Polanyi; (7) five essays by Michael Polanyi.**