

New Annotated Polanyi Bibliography:

An Interview with the Compiler Maben W. Poirier

ABSTRACT Key words: Michael Polanyi, Polanyi bibliography, Polanyi brief biography, Polanyi timeline. *Maben W. Poirier, compiler of the 423 page bibliography on Michael Polanyi published in 2002, comments on his bibliography project and the final product.*

Maben W. Poirier, *A Classified and Partially Annotated Bibliography of all Forms of Publications, Sound Recordings, Internet Documents, etc., by and about the Anglo-Hungarian Philosopher of Science Michael Polanyi.* Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, Inc. 2002. \$39.95 U.S./\$49.95 Cnd.

MULLINS: *Why did you take up a Polanyi bibliography project and when did you start on this endeavor?*

POIRIER: Maybe I should take up these questions in reverse order. I began actively to work on the bibliography late in December 1996. However, I had been, off and on, thinking of producing a Polanyi bibliography for quite some time prior to that. In fact, it was while engaged in doctoral research at McGill in the early 1970s that I realised the need for a Polanyi bibliography. There was in the 1960s and '70s, as there still is today, a strong desire on the part of social scientists to make the social sciences, and, in particular, political science, which I was studying (I was actually studying political philosophy with Charles Taylor), scientific, in the sense in which *it was felt* that the natural sciences are scientific.¹ The belief was and is that the natural sciences are the powerfully predictive disciplines that they are because of their reliance on the scientific method, and because of their systematic exclusion of any kind of personal biases in or contribution to decision-making in science. And so, if this strict reliance on method could be transferred to the social sciences in general, and political science in particular, then the social sciences, and especially political science, would also become powerfully predictive like the natural sciences, and specifically like physics.

I rapidly realised that those who would make the social sciences scientific in the way *that they presumed* the natural sciences were scientific were ideologues who did not know much, if anything, about the practices of the natural sciences and natural scientists. More to the point, I knew that in their endeavours to make the study of politics scientific, they were relying almost exclusively on a bankrupt understanding of scientific knowledge, which they obtained not from any practising natural scientist, but from so-called philosophers of science, who were more inclined, by reason of the positivist approach to which they were and are still devoted, to be ideologists of science rather than philosophers of science.

It was around this time that I read Polanyi for the first time. One of my teachers (not Taylor, although when I later raised Polanyi with Taylor, Taylor very much agreed that Polanyi was an important thinker) suggested that I read Polanyi. I was told that Polanyi might have something interesting to say about these matters, although the person making the suggestion did not quite seem to know how the pieces fit together. I obtained a copy of *Personal Knowledge*, and I soon understood that Polanyi was a crucially important thinker with deep roots in Plato and Platonic thought, ...a thought with which I had become fascinated as an undergraduate student while studying the writings of the great Austro-American political philosopher Eric Voegelin, ...a person for whom I still have great admiration. In fact, it was the similarities in the thought of these two thinkers (Polanyi and Voegelin) that fascinated me. As a result, I resolved to collect as many of Polanyi's writings as I could find, and so, I sought out a Polanyi bibliography, only to discover that there was none, or, at least, no published one,

at the time. It was then that I decided to produce my own, thinking that it would only be for private use, since I expected that eventually a major Polanyi bibliography would appear. And so, for quite some time, I worked with a very simple bibliography, which I housed in a notebook that I carried about with me everywhere I went.

There was also a very specific reason that caused me to undertake the Polanyi bibliography project in late 1996. Around 1995, Geoffrey L. Price of Manchester University (this is the same Geoff Price who wrote on Polanyi in the 1980s) and I began editing an Internet-based Eric Voegelin newsletter called *Voegelin—Research News*, which has been dormant for the past few years, but which is to be reactivated in the near future. Soon after getting to know Price, I discovered that he had published a bibliography of writings by and about Eric Voegelin, and I informed him of my interest in doing something similar for Polanyi. He immediately offered me his moral support, for which I was very grateful, and he described to me the beginnings of the Polanyi group in the U.K. around Joan Crewdson, Robin Hodgkin, Dru Scott, and many others. This was enough to get my Polanyi bibliography project under way. This eventually led to my obtaining, through the indirect assistance of Father Martin Moleski, S.J., a complete collection of all of the issues of the British Polanyi Society publication *Convivium*, ...one of the few complete collections in existence, I am told. I speak of Fr. Moleski's indirect assistance because Fr. Moleski put me onto Robin Hodgkin, and he, in turn, put me onto Richard T. Allen, who provided me with the complete collection of *Convivium* for the cost of postage. I think that I may even have contacted Joan Crewdson relative to this matter, and I also recall that Geoffrey Price did provide me with seven or eight numbers of *Convivium*, which he dug out of his attic. So I ended up with a few duplicate issues of some numbers of *Convivium*. I am, of course, appreciative of the help I received from all of these people, for there was a period of about eight months or so when I was despairing of ever seeing a single copy of *Convivium*.

It was also around this time that I contacted Richard Gelwick and you, informing both of you of my project, and Richard Gelwick immediately provided me with a complete collection of all of the back-issues, through its various incarnations, of what has become known to us all as *Tradition and Discovery*. This too I have to say was an act of generosity for which I am deeply appreciative. I have also to say that I sensed that Gelwick's and your support went well beyond providing me with a complete collection of *TAD*.

And so, by late 1998 or so, I had available to me complete editions of the two most important Polanyi publications, *Convivium* and *Tradition and Discover*. I should note here that I did make a number of efforts to include the contents of *Polanyiana* in the bibliography as well, and while some articles from *Polanyiana* are recorded in the bibliography, not all are, and this is because I was sadly never able to connect up with the editors of *Polanyiana*.

MULLINS: *Structuring a large bibliography is always a problem. Please describe the structure you used in your 423 page project. Tell us some of the problems and how you resolved them in determining that this structure was the most sensible?*

POIRIER: Yes, you are right in saying that structuring a large bibliography is not easy. To some extent the broad structure of the bibliography suggested itself. As I mentioned above, I had, over the years, collected a great deal of material by and about Polanyi, and I knew that it fell into three large categories, primary material *by* Polanyi, secondary material specifically *about* Polanyi, and tertiary material about some topic that is unrelated to Polanyi, but that mentions him by name in the course of discussing this topic. So I knew that I wanted broadly to organise the bibliography along these three lines, ...a task much easier said than done, as I was to learn, especially as it regards creating the division between the second and third categories. From the start, I also knew that I wanted

the bibliography to be annotated as much as possible, about which I will say more later. Of course, I also knew that I needed to have internal divisions within each of these categories. How best to make these internal divisions was really the major decision I took, I suppose, and that decision was not taken till after I studied a number of large bibliographies. The problem here revolved around the fact that internal divisions that might be appropriate for one section of the bibliography might not be appropriate for the other two sections. For instance, as one becomes familiar with Polanyi literature, it does not take long for one to notice that there are certain recurring themes in the literature. And so, one inevitably asks oneself if, in the structuring of a bibliography, these themes should in some sense guide the classification process. Of course, the problem here is in combining a themes based classification with a classification based on other equally worthy and more traditional criteria. This is a daunting task, which is generally not satisfactorily worked out unless one restrains oneself to a very limited number of themes. And so, one quickly realises that a themes based classification will not work in a large bibliography—although it may in a smaller one—because it rapidly leads to the proliferation of divisions within any given section of the bibliography, and some of these divisions may be especially arbitrary, as will the decision to assign particular entries to one division rather than another. And even if the divisions are not altogether arbitrary, it will inevitably be the case that many entries will have to be assigned to a number of these divisions, thus making for a very large manuscript, which is likely to be unattractive to a publisher. Therefore, for a number of reasons a themes based bibliography was ruled out very early on in the process. In the end, I opted for the divisions that you see in the bibliography—divisions based on entry types that are more traditional. I chose to order the entries in each division by date of publication, author's name, and entry title, in that order. This would allow the researcher to obtain a sense of the evolution of the Polanyi scholarship in the second category. However, I did break this rule to some extent by creating special divisions enabling me to gather together in one place reviews of Polanyi's principal works, obituaries, other bibliographies, etc.

Maybe one more point can be made here. There is a sense in which it might be said that there are two smaller bibliographies within the bibliography. What I mean is that I believe I have the only complete bibliography of everything that appeared in the U.K. Polanyi group's publication *Convivium*, which was published from 1975 to 1988 (see page 130 of the bibliography), as well as everything, up to 2000, that appeared in *Tradition and Discovery* and its predecessor publications. Unfortunately, I was not able, because of space constraints, to consolidate in separate divisions the entries for each of these publications. This was something that I would have liked to have done, and it is something that is still possible. And so, the *Convivium* and *TAD* entries are spread throughout the bibliography.

And then, of course, there was the whole problem associated with annotations. I handled annotations in a variety of ways. For many entries, I wrote a brief note that was designed to draw the attention of a researcher either to an earlier or later publications of an entry, or to the contents of an entry, or even to the lieu of original presentation of an entry. I early on explored the possibility of including abstracts from electronic database as annotations, and eventually that too was possible, once I had received permission from copyright holders. I have also to acknowledge here that there were some very generous individuals who wrote abstracts, when there were none, specifically for inclusion in the bibliography. This was very much appreciated, and I believe that I noted these too in the bibliography.

MULLINS: *There are, of course, several Polanyi bibliographies available. In fact there are so many that I have pondered for several years what sort of bibliographic note it might be sensible to add to the Polanyi Society's web site. I have about come to the conclusion that perhaps an annotated bibliography of Polanyi bibliographies would be a worthy addition.*

*The existing bibliographies were created at different times; some are more comprehensive than others. Some have particular interests. Please describe how your bibliography should be thought of in relation to some of these other bibliographies. I have in mind, for example, the following bibliographies that I suspect many scholars interested in Polanyi are familiar with: (1) Richard Gelwick did an early bibliography, published originally as part of his 1963 dissertation, but included in Langford and Poteat's 1968 collection *Intellect and Hope*. (2) Harry Prosch has a bibliography in his 1986 book, *Michael Polanyi, A Critical Exposition*. (3) At the end of the collection of Polanyi essays that Richard Allen edited and published in 1997 (*Society, Economics and Philosophy*), there are two interesting bibliographic appendices. One of these is an annotated primary bibliography that tries to sort out Polanyi essays that were published more than once with the same or different titles and some variance in content. The other tries to trace down and summarise essays that have not been republished anywhere. (4) Brownhill, Wigner and Hodgkin produced a bibliography which also included scientific papers as part of the 1977 Biographical Memoirs of the Royal Society. (5) There is an electronic bibliography of writing about or influenced by Polanyi on the *Gospel and Culture* web site (<http://www.deepsight.org/bibliog/abpolbib.htm>). I am not sure but I think that this was put together by Harold Turner and John Flett.*

POIRIER: Let me begin by observing that I am indebted in different ways and to different degrees to almost all of the compilers of bibliographies you list above, but I am especially indebted to Richard Gelwick and his bibliography from *Intellect and Hope*, which was, for a very long time, the only Polanyi bibliography publicly available to the Polanyi community. I cannot begin to estimate the number of times that I consulted it as a graduate student, and later, as a teacher. Prosch's bibliography was also useful to me, but for some reason, I consulted it less than Gelwick's, and I did notice a few discrepancies between it and Gelwick's, which were often resolved in favour of Gelwick's bibliography. Of course, neither Gelwick's nor Prosch's bibliographies are annotated. As for R.T. Allen's annotated bibliography, which came out while I was working on my bibliography, one cannot praise this work too much. While it focusses only on works by Polanyi, it is an absolute necessity for Polanyi scholars. As for the John Polanyi bibliography of his father's scientific papers, published at the end of the Royal Society memoir, I am, of course, aware of it, and I do have a copy of it. However, since I am not a natural scientist, and particularly since I did not intend to include any of Michael Polanyi's natural science papers and writings in my bibliography, I cannot say that I paid much attention to it. I did see the *Gospel and Culture* bibliography while working on my bibliography, but I cannot recall that it was very different from either the Gelwick or Prosch bibliographies.

Yes, it is true that there have been a number of Polanyi bibliographies over the years, but I think that mine is the only bibliography that brings together primary, secondary and tertiary works, that is heavily annotated in all three areas, that is indexed, and that contains a brief biography and a timeline. As I recall, all of the bibliographies you mention deal only with primary materials, and, except for Richard T. Allen's excellent bibliography of primary works, none are annotated.

I should maybe note at this point that my bibliography of primary works differs from Allen's, all the while recognizing that we are dealing with the same materials, and so, there is bound to be a great deal of overlap as regards cataloguing information. Allen did a splendid job of tracking down and comparing articles that were published more than once. I contented myself only with recording the fact that Polanyi published an article more than once by noting in an annotation either its previous or subsequent publication, and in cases when the piece was published anew with a different title and some new content, I often treated it as a new publication. I also think that I included in my bibliography one or two entries that I've not seen anywhere else. I recall including

in the primary section of my bibliography a B.B.C. transcription from the late 1940s having to do with “Ideas and Beliefs of the Victorians” in which Polanyi made a lengthy contribution. Never have I seen this piece referred to in a Polanyi bibliography. Now, while it may not, properly speaking, be viewed as a Polanyi publication of the sort that we are used to calling “a publication,” it was difficult for me to see how it could be excluded from the bibliography, or how it might be seen as a secondary piece.

That said, I hope that my focussing of secondary and tertiary materials will be appreciated, for I believe it to be important at this point in Polanyi studies to have a sense of the breadth of Polanyi scholarship, and maybe even a sense of the gaps within that scholarship. For instance, I cannot help but notice that Polanyi scholarship today is dominated (and I don’t mean to use the word “dominated” in a pejorative manner here) by theologians, or students of religion, who inevitably, and quite justifiably, have their own priorities, which carry them off in a direction that is very different from the direction that is apt to be the one of choice amongst political philosopher sympathetic to Polanyi’s thought, for instance. I say this not to criticise theologians and students of religion who are interested in Polanyi, but in the hope that a larger number of political scientists may come to know and appreciate the richness of Polanyi’s thought, and see it as relief from the all-pervasive ideological fog of scientism that engulfs contemporary political studies, ...a fog which, it seems, to its great credit does not affect the study of theology and religion.

As I indicated above, the social sciences in general, and political science in particular, at least, as it is expressed in North America, is in the throws of a very serious and debilitating disease that takes the form of ideological thinking that is undermining (many would say *has* undermined) the very possibility of the study of politics and society. It is in this state of ideological confusion because it subscribes to a view that completely misconstrues what is involved in thinking scientifically. The fact is that the quasi totality of North American political scientists, as distinct from political philosophers, submit themselves to the ideology of *scientism*, without even knowing that there is such a thing as *scientism*, and, inevitably, without so much as wondering whether they ought to submit themselves, or even wondering whether what they are submitting themselves to is correct and without cost. They simply assumes that because the great majority of the profession assents to the prevailing positivist understanding of what is involved in thinking scientifically, then the prevailing understanding must be correct. And so, from one generation of scholars to the next there is a compounding of error, and this is not because people think about these matters and choose the wrong course, but it is because the ideology of *scientism* is disciplining their thinking about political science today.

Of course, there is little hope of remedying this dismal situation, since that would require a critical thoughtfulness that is simply not present amongst many of the current members of the profession. However, a small minority of scholars do know that something is seriously awry when the study of politics is more interested in studying the study of politics rather than in studying politics. And so, it is as a corrective to the misguidedness that has taken over the discipline, and to some extent as an encouragement to those who know that things are askew, that an understanding of Polanyi’s thought would be of great benefit. For one thing, it would certainly lead, on a small scale, perhaps, to the reintroduction of truth about politics into the study of politics, and dissuade some from adapting pseudo-scientific methods and procedures to the study of politics in the mistaken belief that true scientists never inject themselves into the decision-making process in the natural sciences. In short, the current focus on being procedurally correct that consumes so much time and space amongst political scientists would be challenged, and it would again be possible for some, if not all, to focus on the reality that is politics.

The difficult ideological straits in which political science finds itself at the moment is well summed up

in a passage from a short story by Poe. Poe writes:

No man dared utter a truth to which he felt himself indebted to his Soul alone. It mattered not whether the truth was even demonstrably a truth, for the bullet-headed savans of the time regarded only the road by which [the searcher] had attained it. They would not even look at the end. "Let us see the means," they cried, "the means!" If, upon investigation of the means, it was found to come under neither the category [of deductivism] nor under the category [of inductivism], why then the savans went no farther, but pronounced the "theorist" a fool, and would have nothing to do with him or his truth. (Edgar Allan Poe, *Mellonta Tauta*, 1850)

Theologians and students of religion, who are interested in Polanyi's thought, may find this passage from Poe strange and maybe even out of date, but I assure you that it is not strange to thoughtful students of politics today. As a description of the attitude that prevails within political science departments, it resonates with a freshness that causes one to wonder if it was not penned recently. More importantly, it captures, like few other statements do, the dismissiveness of the ideologues within the political science profession. Regularly, scholars who are critical of *scientism* are dismissed by the ideologues, ...Poe's bullet-headed savans, as traditionalists, i.e., people who are not engaged in "cutting edge research," to use the favorite expression of the ideologists, and thus, are incapable of making any kind of serious contribution to the discipline, when, the truth is the reverse, and everyone who understands science knows that this is so.

Endnotes

¹ The love affair between North American political scientists and *scientism* dates from the 1930s, ...some might say a bit earlier. For an excellent introduction to this subject by someone who is not enamoured with this development, see Bernard Crick, *The American Science of Politics: Its Origins and Conditions*. Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1959.

Polanyi Society Membership

Tradition and Discovery is distributed to members of the Polanyi Society. *TAD* supercedes a newsletter and earlier mini-journal published (with some gaps) by the Polanyi Society since the mid seventies. The Polanyi Society has members across the world though most live in North America and the United Kingdom. The Society includes those formerly affiliated with the Polanyi group centered in the United Kingdom which published *Convivium: The United Kingdom Review of Post-critical Thought*. There are normally three issues of *TAD* each year.

Annual membership in the Polanyi Society is \$25 (\$10 for students). Subscriptins are due at the beginning of the academic year (September) to Phil Mullins, Missouri Western State College, St. Joseph, MO 64507 (fax: 816-271-5680, e-mail: mullins@mwsc.edu). Make checks payable to the Polanyi Society or, if paying by credit card, provide the card holder's name, the card number and expiration date. 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. New members should provide 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.