

THE POLANYI SOCIETY



NEWS BULLETIN

VOL. III

FALL

NO. 1

Greetings:

This Newsletter comes to you in the midst of sad tidings. Michael is dead. This office has received word that he died on February 22, 1976.

While his death saddens us we, our society, our world are grateful for the creative contributions he has made. As we all know, his thought has only begun to effect our intellectual disciplines and has the potential to reshape society. Consequently, the full extent of the influence of this great man will not be known for many decades. So while we mourn his death, we look forward to the full realization of his contributions with anticipation and hope.

This issue of our Newsletter includes a report on the October meeting of the American Academy of Religion which sponsored a conference on the influence of Polanyi on theology. If any of you desire further details about the conference, contact Richard Geiwick, Stephens College.

Members of the Society will be pleased to know that we now have a counterpart in England known as "Convivium." We plan to stay in touch with each other for our mutual enrichment and support.

Again, this Newsletter comes with an apology for delays in publication. Numerous difficulties made it impossible to issue it at an earlier date.

We need information from all of you concerning your research. Please send materials to the Coordinator representing your area of study.

Sincerely,


Frederick Kirschenmann

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I. Report on October Meeting of the American Academy of Religion

Approximately 75 persons pursuing Polanyi's thought met at the American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting on the last weekend in October, at the Palmer House in Chicago. A number of these persons came to a celebration given by the University of Chicago press marking the publication of MEANING by Michael Polanyi and Harry Prosch. Professor Thomas Torrance of the University of Edinburgh spoke as a colleague of Michael Polanyi and as the newly appointed executor of Polanyi's papers. About thirty persons crowded into the seminar room to hear the participants (limited to 15 by rules of the academy) discuss "Towards a Post-Critical Theology: The Influence of Polanyi." Background papers selected and read before the seminar were organized around two issues: 1) foundations for a post-critical consciousness, and 2) implications for theology. On the first issue, Professor Thomas Torrance's paper "The Place of Michael Polanyi in the Modern Philosophy of Science" was the major center of concern. Torrance's paper, a monograph itself, is a chapter in a forthcoming book. Torrance shows that Polanyi's thought fits in with "lines of advance that derive particularly from Einstein, Bohr, and Godel, meets them at least at one of the points where they converge, and carries the advance farther in the most sensitive area, the nature and process of scientific discovery." With reference to Popper, Torrance shows that Polanyi's "steady emphasis upon inter-processes in scientific activity clearly differentiates his position from the 'refutationalist theory'." Professor Ian Barber of Carleton College responded to Torrance's paper with detailed criticisms of each section. While friendly to and among his general points were: Has Polanyi taken seriously enough the problems of verification in science? Does his emphasis on personal knowledge neglect the role of empiricism in science? What precisely does Polanyi mean by objectivity? How does Polanyi distinguish conflicting universal intents?

A large part of the session focused on Torrance's paper. Some of the questions raised were: Does Torrance's emphasis upon objectivity contradict the aim of Polanyi's philosophy? Torrance replied that we must be careful to distinguish between the objectivism which Polanyi's philosophy criticizes and the deeper objectivity in reality that Polanyi claims we know through personal knowledge. There was also extensive critical discussion around the limits of the natural sciences as a general model for knowledge. Some felt the emphasis was too individual and neglected the role of community and society as well as other languages and models.

Dr. Jerry Gill's paper, "Tacit Knowing and Religious Belief" (International Journal for Philosophy of Religion) also suggested the wider foundations for a post-critical consciousness pointing to the work of John Wisdom and the later Wittgenstein. He showed that there is a reasoning of an informal type, neither deductive nor inductive, but more like the tacit knowing of Michael Polanyi. The importance of this form of reasoning is that it shows the possibility of a religious knowledge or belief without it being subjectivist or a priori. Concluding the papers showing the development of a post-critical consciousness was Dr. Bruno Manno's "Michael Polanyi on the Problem of Science and Religion" (Zygon, March 1974). He showed the advent of post-critical consciousness in the way Polanyi's epistemology has overcome the subject-object dichotomy and

removed the barrier between science and religion.

The second major issue to be discussed at the symposium was "Constructive Implications of Polanyi for Theology." The allowance by the program committee of only three hours for the seminar, in place of the full day that was requested, severely restricted the development of this issue. In papers considered in this area, I argued in "Discovery and Theology" (Scottish Journal of Theology, 1975), that Polanyi's philosophy invites theology into a heuristic mission in which it can regard itself as a genuine science and that the nature of Christian worship, scripture and tradition share the same basic heuristic structure as natural science though offering a greater range of indwelling and participation. Dr. Robert Osborn in "Christian Faith as Personal Knowledge" (Scottish Journal of Theology, June, 1975) demonstrated a post-critical theology in his biblical application of Polanyi's philosophy. He showed how the knowledge of Christ is both an instance of personal knowledge and also an example of the logic of emergence. He also showed that the knowledge of Christ in the Church is an indwelling where Christ is objectively present calling humankind into unity with God.

Dr. Joseph Kroger in "Theology and Notions of Reason and Science: A Point of Comparison in Lonergan and Polanyi" (Department of Religion, St. Michael's College, Winooski, Vermont), contributed to both the topic of foundations of a post-critical consciousness and implications for theology. He added the important note that this consciousness is not entirely an innovation, but a conceptual reform, "one that adds no new resource but makes available a resource that was always there."

Dr. Donald Milavec in "The Transmission and Transmutation of Beliefs Based Upon the Scriptures" (St. Leonard's College, Dayton, Ohio), addressed the problem of understanding scripture in an exegesis of Jesus that today assumes the word of God is dependent upon a culturally conditioned person. Applying Polanyi's notion of apprenticeship and tradition, Milavec argued that the believer can see herself or himself in an uninterrupted causal chain reaching back to Jesus.

Also participating in the symposium were the following professors: Doug Adams, University of Montana; John Apzynski, St. Bonaventure University; Allen Dyer, Duke University Medical Center; Daniel W. Hardy, University of Birmingham, England; Frank Kirkpatrick, Trinity College, Hartford; Robert Palma, Hope College; Richard Prust, St. Andrews College; Gene Reeves, Wilburforce University; Loyal Rue, Luther College; Emero Stiegman, St. Mary's College, Nova Scotia; Alford Welch, Michigan State University.

Follow-up comments on the symposium have indicated the desire for a regular meeting at the Annual American Academy of Religion. The symposium itself revealed the need for a large range of discussions. There is difference among us on how to interpret Polanyi correctly. The particular uses of Polanyi's philosophy also vary greatly ranging from application in religion and culture, philosophy of religion and Christian theology. This variety within the academy of religion alone indicates the breath and vitality of Polanyi's thought. We are presently planning, then, for another meeting at the next American Academy of Religion session. There will be conditions for discussion, both of an informal kind by virtue of a social gathering as well as time for consideration of a greater variety of issues than allowed at this symposium. Look for further notices in this Newsletter, and also in the announcements of the American Academy of Religion.

Note of Appreciation

The Conference on Polanyi's thought sponsored by the American Academy of Religion, was made possible, in part, by the support of the following agencies:

The University of Chicago Press
The Wm. Eerdmans Press
The Stephens College Roblee Memorial Lecture Fund

II. Polanyi Papers to be Housed in Chicago

Magda Polanyi has informed us that Michael's papers are to be housed under the direction of:

Mr. Robert Rosenthal
Curator of Special Collections
The Joseph Regenstein Library
1100 East 57th Street
The University of Chicago
Chicago, Illinois 60637

III. Polanyi and Computers

The universal character of Polanyi's work becomes apparent, once again, as we discover that his thought has influenced yet another discipline -- computer science! M. Raymond Thomas, Laboratoire de Langues, Centre Universitaire, Marseille, France, has been good enough to share some of the aspects of his work, and Polanyi's influence upon it, with us.

A. Computer Assisted Instruction

A pilot program has been developed to teach first year English to French speaking adults, a subject that has our specialty in normal teaching for many years. We proved from a point of view that takes the importance of the tacit dimension of knowledge into account. Our method can best be described through the realization that language is a tacit performance known only through its explicit effects.

Based on this notion we have been able to use the present-day capacities of speech acoustical analyzers, coupled with computers, to assist students in the development of authentic English pronunciation. The method is just as useful for structural and semantic aspects of foreign languages. Bolt, Beranek and Newman, as well as IBM (interested in its application to foreign operations) have found the method particularly attractive.

The use of C.A.I. appears to be effective as well as financially efficient.

B. Toward a Rational Use of Computers

Polanyi's distinction between explicit and tacit aspects of human knowledge make it possible to develop a rational use of computers. His contribution here lies both in providing a theory that explains the practical use of computers and in making it possible to increase their availability.

Much effort has been devoted to making it possible for computers to use natural languages primarily for the purpose of translating materials into other

languages and to retrieve scientific information. These endeavors failed because they only recognized one of two aspects of language---the explicit. Whether described as context or presupposition, the tacit aspect of language has now been partly recognized, producing the opinion that natural language cannot be used by computers in any extensive manner because of the immense amount of undescribed information it is based on.

This new pessimism, however, is no more realistic than the prior optimism. There is a limited, definite, though large and most important aspect of natural languages that can most profitably be used by computers, namely the technical aspects of language. It is possible to group together (rationalize) all programming or technical subjects thereby dispensing with an enormous amount of repetitive, difficult and very costly human work.

This theory is now being tested on an IBM 360 installation at Nancy, France.

IV. Bibliographical Information

Polanyi, M. and Prosch, H., Meaning, The University of Chicago Press, 1975.

The core of this new volume is devoted to Polanyi's "explication of the sorts of meanings achieved in metaphors, poetry, art, ritual, myth, and religion." Accordingly, the book represents some new ground not covered in previously published works. Most of the work was first presented to the public in three series of lectures at the University of Chicago and the University of Texas from 1969-1971. The book concludes with a section devoted to the task of showing how the meanings established in science and achieved in the humanities can be harmonized by recognizing the existence of meaningful order in the world. The final chapter contains some especially creative ideas with respect to freedom, power, and a polycentric approach to the future.

Price, Geoffrey L., and MacLeod, Roy, "The Politics of Planning and the Problems of Science Policy - I, II, & III." Published by STSCON (Science in a Social Context Project). (To be published in the near future.)

Devoted to the debate between Michael Polanyi and J.D. Bernal in the 1940's concerning the legitimacy, or otherwise, of the planning perspective in science, in which the focus is on the disagreement in epistemology as they interrelate with the respective political philosophies.

Gelwick, Richard, "Discovery and Theology", The Scottish Journal of Theology, Vol. 28.

Pleads for the adoption of a heuristic posture, in doing theology, based on Polanyi's epistemology.

V. Conferences

"Convivium" is sponsoring a Day Conference on "Michael Polanyi and Education" to be held at the University of Oxford, Department of Educational Studies, 15 Norham Gardens, Oxford on Wednesday, 7th April, 1976.

The Conference will examine the influence of Polanyi's ideas on our

understanding of the learning process, and their implications for the development of science and educational policies.

Speakers at the Conference are as follows:

- 10 am R.A. Hodgkin, Esq.
University of Oxford
Department of Educational Studies Levels of Tacit Knowledge - the use of visual and active experience in acquiring tacit knowledge.
- 11 am Coffee
- 11:15 R.T. Allen, Esq.
Loughborough College of Education The Fear of Commitment and Disengagement
- 1 pm Lunch (Lady Margaret Hall)
- 2:15 Dr. R.J. Brownhill
Departments of Philosophy & Adult Education, University of Surrey Concepts of Political and Social Education
- 3:15 Tea
- 4 pm Dr. G.L. Price
Department of Liberal Studies in Science, Manchester University The Freedom of Science Debate and its implications for Higher Education Polciy

Anyone interested in attending the Conference should send in the form below:

TO: Miss P.B. Smart, 'Convivium', Department of Philosophy, University of Surrey, Guildford, Surrey, GU2 5XH. (Please return by March 25, 1976)

Name: _____ PLEASE PRINT

Address: _____

Michael Polanyi & Education Conference fee plus meals: £2.92
(Fee £1 Lunch £1.62 A.M. Coffee + PM Tea 30p)

Bed & Breakfast, if required, at Lady Margaret Hall: £3.50

Cheques to be made out to 'Convivium'. Total enclosed: £ _____

A map will be issued with receipt.

V. New Members

William R. Coulson
Center for Studies of the Person
1125 Torrey Pines Road
La Jolla, Ca. 92037
(interest in Art (esp. Music),
Religion)

Thomas Raymond
Les Peymians
Brignoles, France 83170
(Interest in Languages, Electronics-
Computer Programming)

Harold H. Kuester
1422 N.W. 19th Street
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73106
(Interest in Religion and
Philosophy)

James W. Stines
Department of Philosophy/Religion
Appalachian State University
Boone, North Carolina 28607

Donald W. Musser
1100 E. 53rd St. #1W
Chicago, Illinois 60615
(Interest in Christian Theology)

VI. Financial Statement: June 1, 1975 - Feb. 29, 1976.

Balance June 1, 1975	\$ 84.66
<u>Income</u>	
New Memberships	50.00
	<u>134.86</u>
<u>Expenses</u>	
Telephone	7.40
Materials & duplication	23.00
Postage	20.80
Secretarial Services	30.00
	<u>81.20</u>
Balance, February 29, 1976.....	\$53.66

2/1976

Please note Change of Address: Coordinator of Art Studies
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Asst. Professor of Religion and Art
Fine Arts Building, Room 304
University of Montana
Missoula, Montana 59801