

On Reading Part IV of *Personal Knowledge*: a Finalism or a Simple Vision?

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In this paper I argue that there are good reasons for not reading the last part of Polanyi's book Personal Knowledge (1958) as the outline of a finalistic metaphysics, as proposed recently by Haught and Yeager, but rather as a modest speculative attempt to fulfill the requirements of a Gifford Lecturer, namely to treat of the relation between God and the world. Apart from the background of the writing of the book, I suggest that the predicament of theism in the contemporary antimetaphysical climate and Polanyi's emphasis on religious practice, rather than metaphysical theorizing, as the locus of meaning in his other writings on religion, support this reading as well.

1. Introduction

What is the nature and status of the “conceptual framework” that Michael Polanyi develops in the last part of his *Personal Knowledge*, especially in the final chapter “The Rise of Man”? Recently, John Haught and Diane Yeager suggested that it “outlines a significant religious metaphysics” from which a number of robust and fruitful metaphysical principles can be distilled.¹ According to them, the vision that Polanyi presented in Part IV is a deliberate attempt at theological renewal in which “the hierarchical vision of traditional metaphysics” is joined to “a cosmology of emergent evolution” (p.544).² They find it hard to see how *Personal Knowledge* could be read “as anything but a critique of Cartesian metaphysics from the standpoint of something other than Cartesian metaphysics” (p. 546). According to Haught and Yeager, the “implied metaphysical alternative” that Part IV has to offer, must be a robust metaphysics, a “finalism” as they call it, the distinctive mark of which is

that in order for life to have a chance of coming to existence at all, *nature must already be ordered* in such a way that random events can be stabilized into enduring open systems constrained by organizational principles whose presence cannot be accounted for by one more evasive appeal to the notion of chance (p. 561).

They then proceed to elaborate the main principles of finalism in the context of their critique of materialist evolutionism. Finalism suggests a conception of God as a “cosmic field which called forth all animate centers by offering them a[n] ... opportunity for making some progress of their own towards an unthinkable consummation” (*PK* 405). Taking this field as “the divine field of influence on the emergent universe,” Haught and Yeager call it “the metaphysical foundation” of the strivings of human beings and other active centers in response to that influence (p.548). They explicate and defend this teleological vision as a viable alternative to the prevailing materialist evolutionism that completely excludes human subjectivity and personhood. Ac-

knowledging that the theory of selection by reproductive advantage is a powerful explanatory device, they argue at length that it cannot explain the evolutionary process as a whole. Hence, it is entirely proper to introduce teleological factors into the explanation of evolution in the sense of Polanyi's proposals, which, as they rightly point out, are in no way conflicting with science but quite out of step with scientism (p.557). However, the viability of Polanyi's version of finalism "depends on the success of his more fundamental attempt to reestablish the cognitional stature of personal knowing." Though they do not pursue this issue much further, Haught and Yeager acknowledge that they must eventually give their consent to the concept of personal knowledge "if we are also to make room for any teleological factors in the emergent evolution of life" (*ibid.*).³

In sum, if Haught and Yeager are right, the closing part of *Personal Knowledge* offers an outline of a naturalistic theism or a natural theology, perhaps even a so far neglected argument from design *in nuce*. This, at least, is how I would understand the conjecture of "a cosmic ordering" that allows chaotic events to be stabilized into ever more complex levels of being.⁴ I agree that certain ideas of Polanyi may be fruitfully employed in the critical conversation with the advocates of scientism and that one might develop Part IV into a full-blown religious metaphysics. *Personal Knowledge* leaves the latter possibility open and I suggest that this openness was intended. Some might take this as a weakness, suggesting that Polanyi left us with an incomplete metaphysical system.⁵ In contrast, others may judge it a strong point that Part IV leaves much to be explored and many possibilities of sense to be discovered. They may not subscribe to the idea that metaphysical theorizing and system building is the proper aim of philosophy to begin with. Siding with the latter, my aim is to show that Part IV not only need not be interpreted or developed into a metaphysical theology on the lines envisaged by Haught and Yeager, but also that there are good indications not to do so. First, we are interpreting Polanyi's text in what Haught and Yeager rightly call "the contemporary antimetaphysical climate" (p.545f.). Whereas they recognize that in view of this climate, "we might be wise to leave it at that," they nevertheless proceed to uncover the "metaphysical principles" implied by Part IV as part of their own larger project in theological metaphysics. Second, *Personal Knowledge* as a whole and its closing chapter in particular, has a specific history that is relevant to the question of its interpretation. Third, Polanyi's other writings on religion, especially *Meaning*, are significantly different from the closing chapter of *Personal Knowledge*. Though it is common practice in the current postmodern climate to interpret texts independently of the intended meaning of their authors, I would nevertheless suggest that at least in this case the work as a whole might well be relevant to the interpretation of a part of it. If there is a natural theology or a naturalist theism implied by Part IV, surely the question whether it is consonant with Polanyi's other writings on religion, and if not, how the difference is to be explained, is relevant. To provide a background for addressing this question, let me start by giving a brief characterization of theism.

2. Theism

In its traditional or classical form, "theism" may be characterized as a philosophical theory built around a particular conception of a single, supreme and benevolent being. As Richard Swinburne puts it:

by "God" a theist understands something like a person without a body (i.e. a spirit) who is eternal, free, able to do anything, knows everything, is perfectly good, is the proper object of human worship and obedience, the creator and sustainer of the universe.⁶

As a metaphysical theory, theism is not the same as, and should therefore be distinguished from, systematic or dogmatic theology. To be sure, systematic theologies may be developing or employing ideas derived from

theological metaphysics in reflecting on the concepts embedded in a religious tradition or practice, but it is in no way incumbent upon them to do so. They may highlight different characteristics of the divine being than the ones that classical theism is typically concerned with, such as omnipotence, omniscience, all-goodness, *aseitas*, and the like. Whereas theists tend to focus on the logical and conceptual implications of the divine unity and transcendence, theologians need not follow them in this. The latter may wish to elucidate doctrines like, say, the theological doctrine of the trinity or the incarnation as part of the religious language and the tradition in which they participate. Again, whereas theists may be strongly concerned with questions regarding the intelligibility of God's agency in the world or with the compatibility of theology and science in general, theologians may wish to eschew such issues altogether. The latter may well hold that science and religion are very different cultural practices or forms of life and that the two should be kept distinct both for theoretical and practical reasons. That is not to say that both theists and theologians may not feel challenged by certain philosophical speculations about the religious view of life that completely fail to do justice to what that life is about. Theism may therefore be seen to overlap with, or to encompass, "natural theology" insofar as it seeks to argue the existence of God or to justify the coherence, plausibility, rationality or intelligibility of religious belief *vis-à-vis* philosophical extrapolations of the natural sciences, in particular the many varieties of reductionist scientism. Nevertheless, theism should be distinguished from the actual practice of religious faith. A person could, without any logical inconsistency, be a fully committed theist without participating in any form of religious practice. Finally, I would like to point out that it does not follow from these remarks that particular versions of theism may not influence systematic theology or that religious believers may not strongly be committed to certain theistic assumptions, say, about God's omnipotence.

In his account of the origins of theism, Ingolf Dalferth points out that the term "theism" first occurred in the preface of Cudworth's book *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* of 1678.⁷ Meant as a reply to what since the middle of the sixteenth century was called "a-theism," theism was of course not a completely novel set of ideas because it built on theological traditions of many centuries. A major factor that led to its development was the need to articulate a concept of God "that would reach beyond the idiosyncrasies of the opposing versions of Roman Catholic and Protestant Christianity."⁸ That need was pressing in view of the devastation caused by the religious wars of the seventeenth century.

Intellectually, theism was clearly parasitic on the atheist's rejection of the Christian conception of God. As there were (and are) many varieties of a-theism, there were (and are) many versions of theism as well. A main feature of them, from the Renaissance onwards, is the attempt to ground the scientific account of the world in terms of a natural and rational theology that argued as much as possible on the same premises of modern science and methodology that were held by their adversaries, the atheists and "freethinkers."

Modern science and methodology made all the difference. Whereas in pre-modern times the book of nature was a component chapter of the book of scripture, in modernity the reading of the book of nature became independent and a matter of mathematical calculation and experiment alone, as Galileo and Descartes had already suggested. As Dalferth shows convincingly, the scientific study of nature still worked from metaphysical premises such as the unity, regularity and intelligibility of nature, but these premises now became severed from their traditional theological justification.⁹ Consequently, theism flourished from the seventeenth to the eighteenth century as a sustained effort to bridge the widening gap by reuniting both books to a new, single metaphysical framework. However, all this was to no avail because, to put the familiar story all too briefly, enlightened modernity with its comprehensive scientific account made a reunification that had any plausibility in the eyes of the citizens of modern Western societies virtually impossible.

Leaving economical, social and political considerations aside, a number of factors contributed to this. First, the theistic proofs for God's existence turned out not to be decisive; not only could it not be proven beyond a reasonable doubt to all reasonable and enlightened men and women that God exists but the criticisms of Hume and Kant put their very viability into doubt. This alone meant a dangerous threat to the heart of the theistic endeavor. Second, theism was forced into the defensive also by the fact that the so-called "problem of evil" put the consistency and intelligibility of the theistic conception of God into question. In spite of valiant attempts, I think it is fair to say that yet no theologically and/or philosophically convincing solution has been found for this problem. Next, things became worse when morality became detached from its religious groundings by the relentless attacks of the nineteenth century critics of religion on the socially self-evident link between the liberal values of Western civilization on the one hand, and the God who was supposed to be their source and custodian on the other. The twentieth century demise of theism's close philosophical ally, epistemological foundationalism, created further embarrassment. For it became increasingly clear that all attempts to argue God's existence over against the cultured despisers of religion started, so to speak, from the wrong footing to begin with. Finally, with the appearance of alien, competing views of life within the wider culture, that is, with the appearance of both philosophical extrapolations from the sciences (scientism) and serious religious diversity, the predicament of classical theism became even more hazardous.

All this, of course, does not imply that metaphysical theism is false and I am not suggesting that it is. To the best of my knowledge, it has not been shown to be logically inconsistent or intrinsically meaningless. Nor is my aim to show that the Christian conception of God is (in)consistent or that theism is (un)reasonable, (ir)rational or (un)tenable in the light of this or that. Rather, my point is that if this brief historical narrative has even a grain of truth in it, the predicament of classical theism seems to be fraught with so many difficulties that it leaves us with no other choice than to comply with Theodore Jennings' remark that nowadays, under post-modern pluralist conditions, "theism has lost its context of plausibility."¹⁰ However, that would perhaps be too hasty, for the history of theism has not yet ended.

3. Process Theism

At this point, it might be objected that notably A.N. Whitehead, Charles Hartshorne, John Cobb, David Griffin and many other process thinkers have fundamentally revised classical theism. Contrast, to begin with, David Griffin's definition of the word "God" with Swinburne's classical conception:

"God" refers to (1) a personal, purposive being who is, (2) supreme in power and (3) perfect in goodness, who (4) created the world, and (5) acts providentially in it, who (6) is experienced by human beings, especially as the source of moral norms and religious experiences, and is (7) the ultimate guarantee for the meaningfulness of human life, (8) the ultimate ground of hope for the victory of good over evil, thereby (9) alone worthy of worship.¹¹

Some theologians would agree that process theism is in many respects superior to its predecessor - if only because it replaced the morality of the imperial model of God with the "the brief Galilean vision", and the barren notion of the impassionate mover by the picture of a passionate God who is "the fellow-sufferer who understands."¹² However, this is not to say that process theism is theology's best friend in all respects. Other theologians will not be impressed by Whitehead's allegations that creativity is an "ultimate" and "God ... its primordial, non-temporal accident" or that God and the world are totally interdependent in the sense that "he

is not before all creation but with all creation.”¹³ As these ideas imply fundamental revisions of the traditional doctrines of God’s omnipotence, of God’s absolute uniqueness and of the divine *creatio ex nihilo*, they may be seen to jettison, for example, the scriptural notion that the contingent world is wholly dependent on God.

However, let us not delve too deeply in the many intricate theological issues that loom large here. My point is that even though process theism may well be the most impressive revision of classical theism so far, it remains a paradigm example of a “grand metaphysics” that aims at a harmonization of science and theology within a larger metaphysical framework. Conceptually dependent on Whitehead’s metaphysics of creativity, it is a highly ambitious attempt to reconstruct not only the inadequate conception of God of classical theism, but even modern science itself. Let me give two examples to illustrate this. Recently, the process philosopher of religion David Griffin made a case for the *naturalistic* character of process theism.¹⁴ Classical theism employs a supernaturalistic God conception in that it allows for divine intervention in the normal cause and effect patterns. By contrast, naturalistic theism advocates a theory of divine agency that allows for divine action in the world *without* God’s interrupting or intervening in the natural course of things in any way. In order to make this intelligible, Griffin introduces the notion of a “God-shaped hole,” by which he means, “divine causation ... is an essential *factor in* [the normal causal] pattern.”¹⁵ Consequently, naturalistic theism employs a notion of the natural that *includes* “divine causation” as a matter of course. As divine causation or agency is commonly held to be a metaphysical notion, it follows by definition that the natural now comes to include the metaphysical.

A further example of this kind of theorizing, is what Griffin calls “panexperientialism,” his term for the idea that the ultimate units of nature are not vacuous or insentient but *experiencing* actualities.¹⁶ Following Whitehead’s categorical scheme according to which all actualities have experience, Griffin suggests with *gusto* that, for example,

The atom need not only be thought to consist only of its subatomic particles and the relations between them. It can be thought to involve, as well, distinctively atomic occasions of experience, more complex than the electronic, protonic, and neutronic occasions of experience.¹⁷

Must one be an advocate of objectivist scientism if one were to question the very intelligibility of these metaphysical notions of “causality” and “atom”? I don’t think so; and as these examples could easily be multiplied, I would suggest that process theism, like its classical predecessor, is a large-scale metaphysical cosmology, an ontology of becoming, which aims at a metaphysical “explanation” of the universe in Whiteheadian terms.

A further feature that classical and process theism have in common is that they cannot evade the issue of God’s existence. Process theism too must argue at some point the intellectual plausibility of the existence of God. In spite of the revival these arguments enjoyed with the help of modern symbolic logic in the seventies and eighties of the last century, they still fail to convince the atheist opponent. Still, Griffin’s conclusion on the cumulative basis of nearly a dozen such arguments is:

... [it can now be seen] that whereas there are many considerations that count against atheism, there are none that count against process theism. The truth of something like process philosophy’s naturalistic theism is *overwhelmingly* more probable than the truth of atheism¹⁸

Surely this is too bold to be plausible.

So, can there be in current Western culture, with its pluralism, postmodernism and distrust of grand metaphysics, a context of plausibility for process theism any more than for classical theism? Of course, theists think so. They might reply “Well, so much the worse for postmodern culture. We are not going to give up on our metaphysics - we held out against Hume for almost 250 years, we survived Nietzsche and his postmodern followers so far – and who knows, the tide may turn again.” Others, like the Wittgensteinian philosopher D.Z. Phillips, disagree. Referring to Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein he says:

... on the one hand we have a pious story, which says it has a message which every person stands in need of. On the other hand, we have philosophical cathedrals in which, it is said, the pious story must be read if it is to be a proper lesson. Kierkegaard argued that such cathedrals are marked for demolition. Wittgenstein called them houses of cards.¹⁹

Obviously, not even Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein will settle the issue. As Polanyi pointed out, systems of belief with a venerable history and a rich idiom display great stability. So let us leave here metaphysical theism and return to Haught’s and Yeager’s suggestion that Part IV of *Personal Knowledge* implies a particular version of it.

4. A Simple View?

In contrast to Haught and Yeager, I would like to suggest a different reading of the closing chapters of *Personal Knowledge*, one less richly metaphysical and, I think, more in line with Polanyi’s other work. First, we may recall that *Personal Knowledge* was based on, and developed from, the Gifford Lectures that Polanyi delivered at the University of Aberdeen in 1951-52. The aim of this still highly prestigious series of lectures which began in 1888-89, funded by the estate of Lord Gifford, is the promotion of the study of natural theology and in particular the diffusion of “sound views” regarding:

the true knowledge of God, that is, of the being, nature and attributes of the Infinite, of the All, of the First and the Only cause, that is, the One and Only Substance and being, and the true and felt knowledge (not mere nominal knowledge) of the relations of man and of the universe to Him, and the true foundations of all ethics and morals.²⁰

This robust declaration may give us already a clue to understanding the puzzling discrepancy between the “natural theology” implicit in Part IV of *Personal Knowledge* and the more phenomenological and anthropological approach to religion in his other work. In some way, his Gifford Lectures had to address the question of the relation between the universe, humankind, and God. For Polanyi, who was neither a systematic theologian, nor a philosopher of religion nor perhaps a devout religious believer, this must not have been an easy task. The history of the writing of *Personal Knowledge* bears this out. In the Acknowledgments, Polanyi tells us that subsequent work had not essentially changed his views so that “large parts of the lectures could be retained unchanged” (PK ix). However, some parts of the lectures had been reconsidered and amplified and, on the basis of Phil Mullins’ careful analysis of the correspondence between Polanyi and his friend and advisor J.H. Oldham, I think it would be a safe guess to hold that the last chapter of *Personal Knowledge* was one of those parts.²¹ Consider what he wrote his friend Oldham in the beginning of 1957: “I have still not been able to make up my mind about the concluding section so there are about 10 or 20 pages missing at the end.” Later that year he invited Oldham to give detailed criticism of the finished manuscript, indicating that he was dissatisfied with the book’s conclusion because, “Its closing pages are limp and not definitively formulated.”

In his reply, Oldham agrees that especially the concluding chapter seems, “the weakest and least well written chapter in the book” and he then goes on to advise Polanyi that his approach in the final chapter should rather be “We have declared our position. Let us now see how the theory and facts of evolution look in the light of the fiduciary philosophy we have espoused.” Rather than “an isolated addendum and after-thought,” Oldham urged Polanyi to make his critique of natural selection an integral part of a philosophical conclusion. Polanyi took this advice to heart for he promised his friend that he would “rewrite the last chapter altogether in the sense that you suggest.” Considering the result, he did this modestly, as a scientist concerned with, and with sympathy for, the religious form of life with its many pictures of a meaningful life in this world. Above all, he kept things simple by staying as much as possible within the range of common sense informed by science.

Part IV itself gives us some clues in support of this. Consider Polanyi’s pedestrian remark, noticed by Haught and Yeager as well, that he has “arrived at the opening of this last chapter without having suggested any definite theory concerning the nature of things” and that he will “finish this chapter without having presented any such theory” (PK 381). Polanyi then reveals his more ambitious purpose, namely “to re-equip men with the faculties which centuries of critical thought have taught them to distrust.” “All the book was meant to do”, he says, was to invite the reader “to use those faculties and contemplate thus a picture of things restored to *their fairly obvious nature*” (*ibid.*, my italics)

A similar kind of statement can be found near the end of his Terry Lectures where we are told that, “all I have spoken of presents a *single, fairly simple vision*. This part of the universe, in which man has arisen, seems to be filled with a field of potentialities which evoke action” (TD 90f., my italics). Notice, that the prestigious Terry Lectures (1905 -) at Yale University that were subsequently published as *The Tacit Dimension* have a somewhat different aim than the Gifford Lectures. The former are meant to address broader issues of religion and its application to human welfare in the light of scientific knowledge and philosophical insights, but Polanyi hardly even mentions these issues. Writing about the new traditionalism he is advocating, he only suggests that it might have implications for “religious thought.” Maintaining that modern man’s “critical incisiveness” must be reconciled with his “unlimited moral demands” and that “the enfeebled authority of revealed religion” cannot achieve this, he wants to reconcile them “first of all, on secular grounds” (TD 62).

In this light, I am inclined to read Part IV in a similar vein, that is, as a rather modest attempt to say how the appearance of the human mind in the world might be accounted for in terms of a common sense informed by science that is deliberately open to the possibilities of religious sense. Support for this, I suggest, is provided by his use of the concepts of God and of a field of force in Part IV. The word “God” is used explicitly only twice (cf. PK 380, 405) and it is left wholly to the reader to identify it with “a prime cause emergent in time” (PK 405). That it is the last word of the whole book must have been deliberate. Consider the last sentence of *Personal Knowledge*: “And that is also, I believe, how a Christian is placed when worshipping God.” Notice that this is not a confessional remark, for Polanyi is not saying that *he* is so placed. Rather, it indicates, modestly and perhaps somewhat reluctantly, the possibility of consonance between his scientific speculations and the possibilities of sense that the religious way of life may offer. Notice also that the clause “when worshipping God” points to religious practice rather than to theorizing about God.

The use of the notion of a field of force seems puzzling in the light of what I take to be his central concern: to re-establish a picture of a meaningful world in which human subjectivity and responsible personhood can openly be acknowledged as real features of that world. As this notion is derived from the natural sciences, the

question arises whether its employment in the context of Part IV may not be a violation of Polanyi's own rule that nonsense and self-contradiction, in short, deep confusion, will inevitably result "whenever a language that is apposite to one subject matter is used with reference to another altogether different matter" (PK 282). Notice how close this maxim comes to certain concerns of the later Wittgenstein, another philosopher who went against the tide. Wittgenstein held that the application of the rules of a particular language-game (say, science) to another (say, religion) leads to distortion and confusion.

There are further indications, both in *Personal Knowledge* and in other work, that seem to resist a reading of Part IV as an implicit Polanyian theism. First, we do not find any attempt on Polanyi's part to address the theologico-philosophical problem of evil or to prove the existence of God. As far as I know, the former is not even seen as much of a problem. The same goes for the latter. Taking religion as a different cultural system than science - though both rest on the common ground of human knowing - Polanyi tells us that "theological attempts to prove the existence of God are as absurd as philosophical attempts to prove the premises of mathematics or the principles of empirical inference" (PK 281f.). Again, this is a decisive move away from theism, which, as we have seen, has to take recourse to a robust natural theology in order to ensure the coherence of its conception of God and the plausibility of God's existence.

Second, Polanyi appears not at all concerned with the positivist and verificationist critiques of religion and theology of his days. Consider, for example, his remarks that, like truth or beauty, "God cannot be observed" (PK 279) and that "any scientifically convincing observation of God would turn religious worship into an idolatrous adoration of a mere object, or natural person" (PK 284). They clearly show that he, unlike theists, is not particularly concerned with the positivist critique simply because he is not in the grip of the scientism that they believe is the last word from the world of science. Unlike theists, he is not in the least inclined to defend or argue the religious case on their terms.

Third, Polanyi's account of religion as a "fusion of incompatibles" and of the Christian god conception as in some sense self-contradictory, does not point at theoretical unification but rather at the concreteness and particularity of religious life and practice. In *Meaning*, we are told that "... the idea that agencies existing outside the world and before its existence, but nevertheless operative on and therefore *in* the world, combines patent incompatibles" (M 125). Such an idea, he adds, is conceivable only by a feat of the imagination. Whether this means that God's "reality" is a figment of the mind rather than an "external reality" is a question I do not have to answer here. Let me just point out that it may well be the case that the alternatives are not exhausted by the all too familiar opposition of "external reality" and "internal reality."

Polanyi does not seem worried by this at all. In *Meaning*, religious practices are characterized as "a fusion of incompatibles" (M 153f.). Consider, for example, what he says about thanksgiving and Holy Communion: "How can it be meaningful to thank, for certain specific blessings, received by certain specific persons, the God of all, whose very essence is thought to be always to do what is best for all?" In addition, the ritual of Holy Communion is said to "bristle[s] with irresolvable incompatibilities." (M 154f.)

In knowing God, the subsidiary particulars and focus of attention are said to be incompatible as well:

God is a commitment involved in our rites and myths. Through our integrative, imaginative efforts, we see him as the focal point that fuses into meaning all the incompatibles involved in the practice of religion. However, ... God also becomes the integration of all the incompatibles

in our own lives. (*M* 156)

On the individual, existential level, we have the following examples of incompatibles in people's life:

These incompatibles include not only all the false starts and stops in our lives, the blind alleys, the unfinished things, the loose ends, the incompatible hopes and fears, pains and pleasures, loves and hates, anguishes and elations, the memories, the half-memories, the forgotten moments that meant so much to us at the time, the disjointed "dailiness" of our lives - in a word, all of our inchoate memories and experiences - but also the incompatibles that make up the whole stance of our lives: the hope that we may be able to do or achieve what we know we must do but which we also know we have not the power to do (*ibid.*).

I fail to detect much metaphysical concern in these pictures of religious practice. The emphasis is on imaginatively fused particulars in the context of practice and on experience that is structured, evoked and enhanced by participating in it. Concerning religion, I see hardly any concern on Polanyi's part for the ideal of the ultimate unification of knowledge, but all the more concern for the possibility of meaning in the concrete existence and experience of explorers. The very idea that religion is a matter of the integration of "incompatibles" will, I suspect, not be appealing to theists.

As they see it, things only appear to be incongruous: as soon as they are taken up into a larger theoretical framework these apparent incongruities turn out to be not incompatible at all. They can be harmonized, or, perhaps in accordance with the rules of Hegelian dialectics, be synthesized in some way at ever higher levels. However, this is not the direction into which Polanyi's ideas are pointing. On the contrary, the incompatibles can only be integrated into coherent and meaningful wholes at the level of the actual practice of the tradition in question, not at the level of theoretical speculation.

So far, in my case for not reading Part IV of *Personal Knowledge* as announcing the launch of a novel metaphysical system, I have tried to show that Polanyi was not aiming at any deep or grand metaphysics but at a "simple vision" that allows for new possibilities of meaning. This is not the reading of Haught and Yeager - they do not wish to contemplate Polanyi's picture "of things restored to their fairly obvious nature" but to go further by reconstructing it as a metaphysical theory from which foundational principles can be derived. In doing so, they are replacing "the simple vision" by a very different picture. Although the text as such allows for this, there are good reasons for caution, in particular in view of the current antimetaphysical climate, the predicament of theism and main features of Polanyi's other writings on religion that seem to focus on meaning and practice, rather than on theorizing. Why are human strivings and cravings in need of a metaphysical foundation if worship, that is, religious practice, do all the grounding that is needed - as Polanyi himself suggests in saying that "Christian worship sustains, as it were, a never to be consummated hunch" and that "Christianity sedulously fosters ... man's craving for mental dissatisfaction by offering him the comfort of a crucified God" (*PK* 199).

Let me add one final point to this. It would be a misrepresentation of Polanyi's endeavor to re-enchant the world by showing its possibilities of sense to say that it was fueled by theological or philosophical considerations only. At least as important were his social, moral and political concerns: a world devoid of meaning and value may yet again become a world in which people will not be witnessing a rebirth of meaning but rather its demise in the horrors that new tyrants of this world may bring.

Notes

This paper is a revised version of a public address delivered at the Polanyi Society Conference “Polanyi’s Post-Critical Thought and the Rebirth of Meaning”, Loyola University, Chicago, June 8, 2001. Abbreviations used in the text for Polanyi’s works: *Personal Knowledge* is PK. *The Tacit Dimension* is TD. *Meaning* is M.

¹ J. Haught and D. Yeager, ‘Polanyi’s Finalism’, *Zygon* 32 (1997), 543-566. Further page references are in the text.

² That Polanyi is advocating “the hierarchical vision of traditional metaphysics” is an interpretation that would need further support. For a different, non-traditional and epistemological construal of Polanyi’s hierarchies in terms of levels of cognitive structuring, cf. my *Michael Polanyi’s Post-Critical Epistemology*, Amsterdam 1988, p. 232.

³ This seems to suggest that the viability of finalism (metaphysics) depends on the theory of tacit knowing that is at the heart of the conception of personal knowledge (epistemology). Note, however, that at an earlier stage of their argument Haught and Yeager suggest that Polanyi’s advocacy of final causation and his critique of ontological reductionism and evolutionary theory, “constitute his warrants” for his critique of, and his alternative for, the ideal of objective knowledge (p.545).

⁴ By using the term “design”, I am not suggesting that there is any connection between Polanyi’s ideas and what is currently being advocated under the name “intelligent design.”

⁵ According to Richard Gelwick, “Polanyi’s metaphysical system is incomplete.” In my view this is no criticism, for he goes on to say that it is incomplete “because Polanyi saw the knower more as a theologian sees the worshipper than as the speculative philosopher sees the thinker.” See his ‘Science and Reality, Religion and God: A Reply to Harry Prosch’, *Zygon* 17(1982), 33

⁶ R. Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism*, Oxford 1977, p. 1

⁷ I.U. Dalferth, ‘The Historical Roots of Theism’ in: S. Anderson (ed.), *Traditional Theism and Its Modern Alternatives*, Aarhus 1994, p. 15

⁸ Dalferth, ‘The Historical Roots of Theism’, p. 42

⁹ Cf. Dalferth, ‘The Historical Roots of Theism’, p. 25

¹⁰ Cf. Dalferth, ‘The Historical Roots of Theism’, p. 42; see also Th.W. Jennings, *Beyond Theism: A Grammar of God-Language*, Oxford 1977, p. 30

¹¹ D.R. Griffin, *Religion and Scientific Naturalism. Overcoming the Conflicts*, Albany 2000, 90

¹² A.N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality. An Essay in Cosmology*, New York/London 1978, p. 342, 351

¹³ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, p. 7, 343

¹⁴ Griffin, *Religion and Scientific Naturalism*, p. 82ff.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 94; cf. also D.R. Griffin, *Reenchantment without Supernaturalism. A Process Philosophy of Religion*, Ithaca/London 2001, p. 139: “The term naturalistic theism ... means that the basic God-world relationship lies in the very nature of things.”

¹⁶ Cf. Griffin, *Religion and Scientific Naturalism*, p. 101ff.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 175f.

¹⁸ Griffin, *Reenchantment Without Supernaturalism*, p. 203

¹⁹ D.Z. Phillips, 'Introduction: Piety, Theism and Philosophy', in S. Anderson (ed.), *Traditional Theism and Its Modern Alternatives*, Aarhus 1994, p. 14

²⁰ <http://www.stfx.ca/people/wsweet/Giffords.html>, p.1, 17-4-2003

²¹ Cf. P. Mullins, 'Michael Polanyi and J.H. Oldham. In Praise of Friendship', *Appraisal* 1 (1997), p. 186f. All quotations in the remainder of this paragraph are from Mullins' article, which has numerous references to, and quotes from, the papers of Polanyi (Box 15) held by the Department of Special Collections of the University of Chicago Library.

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 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.