
REVIEWS

Pascal Engle. *Truth*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000. Pp. viii + 177 ISBN: 0-7735-2462-2 \$22.95, paper.

Pascal Engel's book is about truth. Or is it more about "truth"?

As Pascal Engel explains, much of contemporary discussion of the problem(s) of truth involves distinguishing between truth as a meta-linguistic concept (i.e., "truth") and truth as a substantive or metaphysical concept. Tarski was able to solve the infamous Liar Paradox by use of the concept of truth as a semantic predicate. When one says "this sentence is false," one is uttering a sentence in a meta-language which refers to a sentence in the object-language. Also, as Engel explains, after that distinction is made, the other problems concerning the concept of truth still remain unsolved. Basically, the other problems concern the relationship of language or thinking or mind or the disciplines to reality. Furthermore, Engel proposes his own solution, "Minimal Realism" to the problem.

I hope I have not misled you into thinking that this book is mainly intended to present a new philosophical theory of truth. Though the author does argue for his own theory of truth in terms of a minimal realism, his main intention is to present a critical survey of the current discussion of truth and realism. Furthermore, his area of concern is largely American and British philosophy with some brief comparisons to the discussion of truth by Continental philosophy and postmodernism. Given the arena of discussion that Engel chooses to frame the problems of truth and reality, we can fairly ask the following questions: Within this framework for discussion, does Engel solve the problem of truth? Moreover, does Engel adequately present the problem of truth as understood within the framework of discussion that he has chosen? Regardless of whether this framework is itself adequate for understanding the problems of truth and reality, has Engel adequately characterized the framework? If Engel has failed to adequately characterize the framework of discussion, is the framework that he presents to us a valid framework for understanding the

problems of truth and reality?

My questions on reflection concede too much to the philosophical assumptions of Engel and much of the currents in twentieth century philosophy and current philosophy. My questions assume that all thinking occurs within frameworks and that rational discourse is possible only within frameworks. Moreover, the very raising of my questions presumes a certain type of answer to the questions of truth and reality: truth and reality are largely defined, if not exclusively defined, by frameworks of thought and language. So, if there is to be a theory of truth and realism that seeks to explain the "...platitudeous sense that true statements correspond to the facts..." (p. 88), it must do so by responding to or arguing with the notion that thinking cannot cross or transcend frameworks. Indeed, his own description of the requirements for a theory of truth betrays his assumption that the basic issue of truth is to explain how we can operate with "truth" where thinking is apparently bound by frameworks:

...In a sense, everyone wants to conciliate our basic intuitions about truth within a single theory that would (a) be sufficiently neutral to account for the fact that our use of the predicate "true" is pervasive in many discourses and justifiably so, (b) be compatible with the ordinary logical behaviour of this predicate, (c) be compatible with the basic platitudes that we associate with truth and with common sense, and (d) cut enough philosophical ice to be worth calling it a *theory*... (p.87).

Alternative theories of language and thinking would produce very different requirements for a theory of truth. I want to give you two examples of theories that do not use the concept of framework to explain language and thinking, and so are not faced by the challenge of how to explain the talking and thinking that seems to cross the boundaries of frameworks:

Firstly, if we were to deny, along with Noam Chomsky, that thinking occurs within frameworks but rather assume that thinking at a fundamental level has a "deep grammar" and so

is universal, then the requirements for a solution to the problems of truth and reality would be very different. For instance, the parallel but different requirements for the problem of truth could be described as follows: (a) how different domains capture different elements of reality, (b) where we need to modify the ordinary uses of the word “true” to explain the uses of “true” in specialized domains, (c) where we need to modify the basic platitudes or common sense ideas of truth to explain the unusual dimensions of reality discovered by physics and mathematics, and (d) maintain a high degree of intellectual honesty.

Secondly, if we were to assume along with Karl Popper and Michael Polanyi that reality forms both the boundary condition for and the object of thinking and language, then again we have different requirements for the problem of truth. For Popper and Polanyi, we start with the problem of how we can have knowledge at all given the complexity of the natural world. Their solution is that we use the traditions developed by science to help us gain some foothold upon reality. For Popper, we use trial and error to correct those traditions and for Polanyi we use tacit knowledge to expand our traditions. Both agree that we begin with our traditions and that our traditions are conditioned by our interaction with the real world. For both philosophers, the parallel but different requirements for the problem of truth could be described as follows: (a) how different levels of reality are captured by different domains, (b) how we need to explain the different dimensions of truth, including the common sense version, (c) where we need to develop new conceptions of truth or reality to explain how we interact with the various levels of reality, and (d) maintain a high degree of intellectual honesty.

So far, I have not at all criticized Engel’s discussion of truth. I have merely described both how he approaches the problem of truth and how we could approach that problem in a different manner. Now I will criticize Engel’s discussion. He has every right to choose a framework for discussing the philosophical problem. He has every right to exclude other frameworks from his discussion. However, what he seems to be doing, especially when he makes brief comparisons to Continental philosophy and postmodernism is to imply that his discussion of truth covers the entire field of philosophy. He seems to be implying that there is nothing else to be said about truth.

I find this approach both arrogant and narrow. It is arrogant in assuming that mainstream (Anglo-American) philosophy, which Engel follows, is the only philosophy

worth bothering about. It is narrow in assuming that mainstream philosophy is not just one framework among others for exploring philosophical problems. It would have been more intellectually humble of him to define the scope of his study as to be bounded by mainstream philosophy and intellectually honest to admit that his solution—“Minimal Realism”—solves, at best, only one version of the problems of truth and reality.

It is extremely ironic that a philosopher so aware of the concern about frameworks and the philosophers who devote so much of their thinking and writing to explain, defend, or to overcome what they see as the problem of how frameworks limit thought and language, ignores the alternatives to his own chosen framework. I don’t know why he has chosen to ignore the alternatives to mainstream philosophy because he explicitly rejects one of the premises of both mainstream Anglo-American and postmodernist philosophy that language or the text is primary, and that everything else is a figment of the text. Engel is on the side of realism and against relativism. Moreover, he is on the side of truth as a norm. In his words, “...although minimal realism is a realism in the sense that there are verification-transcendent truths, truth is not a property that is ‘out there’ in the world, like tables, chairs or lakes. It is a property *of* propositions, of things that are thought, believed or known. In this sense truth is an epistemic *concept*, although truth is not an epistemic *property*” (p122). Therefore, “...Truth has substance because it is constitutively linked to belief, assertion and knowledge and because it is a normative property of our knowledge-seeking enquiries” (p. 147). Moreover, Engel seems to recognize the limits of his framework and recognizes his departure from his framework in advocating a substantive theory of truth and reality:

... analytic philosophy, at one stage of its evolution at least, has tended to isolate the analysis of such notions as truth, meaning, and content within the domain of a purely linguistic and conceptual investigation, and a number of contemporary conceptions of truth still bear the mark of this methodological turn. But the present analyses have not led us into that direction. On the contrary they have led us to consider the realist/anti-realist issues as being substantive as they ever have been (p.148).

So, the irony of Engel concentrating on the arguments and discussions of the analytic mainstream as opposed to looking at the side currents of philosophies that reject what Popper calls the “myth of the framework” is even greater

because Engel explicitly admits that the analytic “methodological turn” went off in the wrong direction.

I conclude with a quotation Engel uses from Bertrand Russell, who was one of the intellectual founders of mainstream Anglo-American philosophy, the stream that Engel swims with. But Russell seems to have been able to speak to multiple audiences. This quotation explains the problems of truth and reality that other streams of philosophy attempt to solve—how common sense thinking leads to developing theories that depart from common sense thinking, and how this conflict creates for us the problem of relating the two different realities—the reality described by common sense and the reality described by physics and the sciences as offshoots of common sense:

We all start from “naïve realism”, *i.e.* the doctrine that things are what they seem. We think that grass is green, that stones are hard, and snow is cold. But physics assures us that the greenness of grass, the hardness of stones, and the coldness of snow are not the greenness, hardness and coldness that we know in our experience, but something very different... Naïve realism leads to physics, and physics, if true, shows that naïve realism is false. Therefore naïve realism, if true, is false, therefore it is false. (p. 80).

Sheldon Richmond
askthephilosopher@sympatico.ca

Stefania Ruzsits Jha, *Reconsidering Michael Polanyi's Philosophy*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002. Pp. ix + 318. ISBN 0-8229-4165-1, \$32.00, hardcover.

Stefania Jha's book is exciting and exasperating, insightful and misleading – in short, a flawed gem. It's exciting because Jha eschews standard exposition and attempts a creative interpretation of what Polanyi accomplished. She makes extensive use of the Polanyi papers at the University of Chicago's Regenstein Library, and her ability to cite this material lends some of her fresh approaches an authority they would otherwise lack. But the book is also exasperating. Jha's writing style is frequently prolix and her articulation is often imprecise; the book is not an easy read. Perhaps largely because the book is based on several different articles she has published, a good bit of the material in many chapters is redundant. Jha is also not always careful to check the consistency of her usage of terms. So it is not fitting to recommend this book unambiguously. Yet there is

much in the work that will reward the patient reader

The book is divided into three parts: a biographical account of Polanyi's intellectual journey, an exposition of his philosophy, and what Jha calls “Neo-Polanyian Developments and Critique.” The introductory biography serves as a context in which Jha lays out several of the themes that she returns to again (and again) in subsequent chapters: the importance of the “judicial attitude” for Polanyi (17), the key role of intellectual passions in bringing unity to the mind's cognitive and conative functions (29), the place of *The Tacit Dimension* as Polanyi's most systematic statement of his philosophy (39), and the many-faceted role of truth as fact, ideal, and regulative principle (44).

The nature of the content in part two, identified as an exposition of Polanyi's thought, and part three, Neo-Polanyian Developments and Critique, is not as clearly distinct as the titles of the parts would suggest. In the first chapter of part two, Jha sets forth the schema that serves as her primary vehicle of both exposition and Neo-Polanyian extension. She claims that Polanyi successively developed three models of his theory of tacit knowing, and that these three models derive their basic insights from three distinct theoretical domains. There is, first, the Gestalt-Perception Model (53). Perception is a learned skill involving the integration of sensed parts into a coherent whole. The process of scientific discovery is but a strained and more inclusive version of perceiving. Jha names the second scheme of tacit knowing the Action-Guiding Model (55). Here existential and phenomenological sources are drawn upon to highlight the function of subsidiary factors guiding action and leading to meaning. Third is the Semiotic Model (60). Polanyi's reference to Peirce in KB 181 establishes this model: “A person A may make the word B mean the object C.” The from-to structure of consciousness, tacit inferences, and logical-ontological hierarchies are key notions within this model.

Jha's delineation of these three models is novel, but its helpfulness can be questioned in two ways. First, is it the case that Polanyi is influenced by the sources Jha lists? That Polanyi borrowed from Gestalt psychology is an uncontested fact. But the influences suggested in her second and third models need to be demonstrated. In chapter three Jha writes, “Merleau-Ponty's contribution to Polanyi's theory was his analysis of intentionality, the concept of the directed (vectorial) quality in knowing” (71). Now intentionality was a crucial notion for Brentano, Husserl, and virtually everyone in the phenomenological tradition. Two questions arise. (1) Did Polanyi appropriate the notion of intentional-

ity only from Merleau-Ponty? (2) Did Polanyi rely on any philosopher for the vectorial aspect of his thought? The archival evidence indicates that Polanyi read Merleau-Ponty only after Marjorie Grene discovered *The Primacy of Perception* in 1960 and urged Polanyi to read it. But surely both the vectorial quality of knowing and intentionality are central to Polanyi's emphasis on such issues as "the urge to make contact with a reality" (SFS 35) or the distinction between the subjective, the personal, and the universal (PK 300-303), emphases originating long, long before 1960. The vectorial aspect of Polanyi's analysis of scientific discovery seems inherently required in virtue of the subject matter; certainly any dependence on Merleau-Ponty can be ruled out.

I have similar reservations about Jha's claim that the thought of Dilthey and Merleau-Ponty "mark the conceptual points of departure of Polanyi's development of logic" (71). Nor can I find any place where Polanyi "expressed his debt to Dilthey's influence on the existential strand of his thinking" (fn 31, 274). Polanyi says that "while knowledge by indwelling is clearly related to Dilthey and existentialism, its extension to the natural sciences is contrary to these philosophies" (KB 156) and notes that Dilthey's work is "part of a great intellectual network which includes phenomenology and existentialism and . . . out of it has issued modern Gestalt psychology" (SM 102). A relationship to an intellectual network is not the same as indebtedness to an influence.

Before examining further any of the purported influences Jha suggests, it seems important to question the very notion that Polanyi derived any of his key insights from reading philosophers. My understanding is that Polanyi developed his distinctive views primarily by reflecting upon his experience as a scientist. This reflection was initially motivated by his opposition to social control of scientific inquiry and his admiration of the sort of spontaneous order, observable in capitalism and scientific societies, that was consistent with free inquiry. As he attempted to communicate his views to others, especially to philosophers, he found he needed to become more familiar with the Western philosophical tradition and articulate how his thought connected to that common heritage. Thus his comments about Merleau-Ponty, Dilthey, Peirce, Dewey, and possibly Kant seem to me better understood as attempts to communicate his own conceptions in the thought world of commonly understood or seemingly similar thinkers than as expressions of explicit or covert dependence on the thought of the persons he cites.

Jha calls her third model "semiotic," yet her exposition of this model has little or nothing to do with the explication of signs and their relations normally implied by the term "semiotic." Polanyi made reference to Peirce, but there is no published or archival indication that Polanyi ever studied or understood Peirce's semiology. As usually understood, semiology accepts the modernist notion of logic that stresses that logical relations are objectively and necessarily entailed whether or not an embodied thinker deduces the correct conclusion, except that semiology postulates these necessary relations to exist between signs rather than between propositions. Thus semiology often implies the kind of objectivism that Polanyi's whole project opposes; it hardly seems apropos to name one model of Polanyi's thought "semiotic."

Aside from her dubious ascribing of influence, it may be asked, secondly, whether Jha's separation of Polanyi's thought into her three models provides insights that cannot be found by reading Polanyi directly. The complexity of Polanyi's own overlapping structures (from-to structure of consciousness, integration of subsidiaries to form focal meaning, tacit-explicit) seems to be increased by Jha with yet more overlapping terminology. The overlap in her analysis is evident in that part-whole integrations are involved in all three of her models. Meaning is produced in all three models. Perhaps Jha's analysis would be better served if she talked about increasingly complex phases of Polanyi's epistemology much the way Marjorie Grene did in her 1977 article, "Tacit Knowing: Grounds for a Revolution in Philosophy."

A major objective of Jha is to trace "Polanyi's seldom-acknowledged debt to Kant" (206). Chapter four is devoted to this topic, but the theme is frequently revisited subsequently. Jha attempts to demonstrate that Polanyi is dependent on Kant's notions of aesthetic and teleological judgment, "mother wit," the shaping influence of categories, limiting knowledge to make room for faith, practical reason, and the moral person legislating for himself.

Jha claims that Polanyi's notion of universal intent is derived from Kant. In support of this claim, she cites the following passage from Polanyi: "While Kant's categories, by which experience of external objects is possible, reappear with me in the active knower participating in all live knowledge, in this case such a knower, responsibly legislating for himself with universal intent, is more like the moral person of the Second Critique and the *Metaphysics of Morals*" (KB 156). Jha goes on to say, "The *categories*

Polanyi indicated above are known in the form of the categorical imperative [formula]: ‘Always act in such a way that you can also will that the maxim of your action should become a universal law.’ The possibility of acting with universal intent means that our actions are not completely determined by empirical conditions, that we are free agents” (95-96). Aside from the fact that it is a bit jarring to leap from the categories to the categorical imperative, what is one to make of her claim?

First, it must be acknowledged that there is ample evidence that for many years Polanyi regarded Kant as a highly important thinker. In 1947 he wrote Koestler that to assume one is a scholar and yet not to have read Kant would be like visiting Egypt and not seeing the Pyramids (thanks to Martin Moleski and Phil Mullins for this and several other references from Polanyi’s unpublished papers). However, it is debatable how well he understood Kant. The Polanyian papers have many examples of Polanyi seeking to master Kant’s thought in his correspondence and discussion with Marjorie Grene during the 1950’s. In 1967 Grene threatened to hold up a sign in one of Polanyi’s lectures, “UNFAIR TO IMMANUEL KANT.” Yet it should not be assumed that Grene’s philosophical assessments are always superior to Polanyi’s. Polanyi valued the psychologically oriented Kant of the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, whereas Grene, like most of her philosophical contemporaries, valued the more logically oriented second edition. Polanyi took seriously Kant’s comments about an indeterminate mother wit at the root of judgment, and then he combined this understanding of judgment with a psychological sense of the a priori as designating established and relied upon insights used in the construction of heuristic accomplishments (in contrast to the second edition logical notion of the a priori as meaning universal and necessary). This explains what Polanyi meant in writing Grene in 1959 as follows: “[A]l a priori is to be understood (in the sense of the third critique) as rational operations which are entailed in . . . achievement” (281, fn 80). This is a provocative interpretation of one aspect of Kant, and Jha catches sight of it.

Second, the general notion that humans are protected from nihilistic relativism by their adherence to principles with universal intent is surely not a product of Polanyi’s study of Kant with Grene, for it is already found in his 1946 work, *Science, Faith and Society*. The term “universal intent” is not used so far as I am aware, but the general notion is evident in such statements as the following two. “The coherence of all men’s consciences in the grounds

of the same universal tradition is an integral part of my position” (SFS 82). “While we recognize that true propositions cannot be established by any explicit criteria, we do assert the universal validity of propositions to which we personally assent” (SFS 73). Whether Polanyi in his years before meeting Grene derived his notion of universal intent from Kant is an issue worthy of research.

Other of Jha’s claims of Kantian influence on Polanyi are not as convincing. For instance, she writes, “Polanyi inherited the premise of free will from Kant but did not analyze it” (242). Polanyi’s economic and political writings are replete with reflections on the importance of freedom to human existence without any hint of a dependence on Kant. The view that humans are free in some respects is manifest in ordinary (perhaps naïve) experience; it does not need to be rooted in some philosophical influence

In the sixth chapter, Jha avoids suggesting influences and instead compares Dewey’s instrumentalism with pragmatic and practical themes in Polanyi’s thought. She helpfully claims that it is with respect to the notion of individualism that Dewey and Polanyi differ most (175). Dewey’s method of inquiry emphasizes that individuals should seek freedom from constraining tradition yet also emphasizes the duty of individuals to serve society. Polanyi sees traditions as contributing to an individual’s calling and carrying the standards that guide free individuals toward spontaneous rather than obligated order.

For whom is Jha writing *Reconsidering Michael Polanyi’s Philosophy*? Her mentor at the Philosophy of Education Research Center at Harvard, where she worked as a research associate while writing her book, was Israel Scheffler, an epistemologist and philosopher of science with deep grounding in analytic philosophy. It often seems that Jha is trying to convince Scheffler and others with strong empiricist or rationalist leanings of the worth of Polanyi’s philosophy. A largely successful example of this attempt at explanation is found in her discussion of the interaction between Polanyi and Adolf Grünbaum in chapter five. And yet Jha does not engage contemporary analytic philosophers in conversation to persuade them of Polanyi’s significance. Neither does she engage those she several times mentions vaguely as Polanyi scholars – no article from *Tradition and Discovery* or *Appraisal* is cited, nor does she draw upon thinkers as diverse as Poterat, Allen, Sanders, Congdon, or Prosch (other than in connection with *Meaning*). The reason for omitting Polanyi scholars may be found in her belief (cited in fn. 26, 297) that they are “by and large theologians”

while her interpretation “keeps the spirit of science in view.” The book has copious notes, but they are largely citations that are historical in nature even though Jha intends to develop a Neo-Polanyian philosophy. The upshot of all this is that Jha seems isolated in her writing and doesn’t benefit from the work of those similarly trying to apply and develop Polanyi’s thought.

And how might Jha’s Neo-Polanyian philosophy be characterized? Jha does not make it easy to answer this question. Her critique is clearer than her re-conception. She is put off by Polanyi’s teleological ontology, which “leads to either an unwarranted anthropological conception or may encourage a theistic interpretation. In any case, he was incorporating a troublesome final cause or value in his modified evolution of ideogenesis” (225). She thinks he over-emphasizes the conative and affective dimension of thought. She is concerned that his philosophy never assumes the systemic coherence of an architectonic (although one must wonder about Jha’s claim that *The Tacit Dimension* represents Polanyi’s failed attempt at an architectonic). She thinks he unsatisfactorily mixes an ethics of duty with a teleological ethics. She is also concerned by what she terms his “analogical and somewhat obscure vocabulary” (233). These are among the most important problems that Jha seeks to remedy with her Neo-Polanyian philosophy.

One much stressed move in her Neo-Polanyian philosophy is to rely on the judicial attitude Polanyi mentioned in a 1937 letter rather than repeat Polanyi’s usual reference to personal knowledge (which sounds too subjective to her) or intellectual passions (too fully immersed in the conative) (206). Jha also favors making ethics an a priori practice more basic than epistemology, doing this somewhat in the mold of Levinas. This involves an empathetic openness to the other that Jha describes as a process of indirect from-at knowing in contrast to the usual from-to knowing Polanyi promulgates. Jha develops this notion in chapter seven in the course of describing her “Neo-Polanyian medical epistemology” (189).

In a way it is unfortunate that Jha chooses to use the term, found at several points in Polanyi’s work, “from-at knowing” to identify the significant Polanyian point she makes in discussing medical epistemology. As she acknowledges, Polanyi at one point says from-to and from-at knowing are equivalent (192). But in the same article that Polanyi equates from-to with the from-at (“Logic and Psychology”), he at another point treats them differently and thereby provides a springboard for Jha’s unnecessary and

confusing distinction. A patient is said to have a from-to awareness of such external objects as a cat, whereas a neurophysiologist examining the patient’s brain in the process of seeing the cat is said by Polanyi to have no experience of this integration; “he has an at knowledge of the body with its bodily responses at the focus of his attention. These two experiences have a sharply different content, which represents the viable core of the traditional mind-body dualism” (“Logic and Psychology,” 39). Polanyi is making a distinction between the internal process of knowing, an experience, and the external object that is known perceptually (in the example, the brain seen as object rather than functioning as the seat of subjectivity). Both sides of the dualism can be and usually are interpreted in terms of the from-to structure of consciousness. One looks at neurons just as one looks at a cat (the “to” dimension), but both the cat perceiver and the neurophysiologist perceive in terms of their indwelt subsidiaries (the “from” dimension). Polanyi’s dualism is not of the pernicious Cartesian type, that is, it is not a substance dualism. Neither is it a Kantian double aspect dualism, because mind as process and the material things mind knows exist at different ontological levels. Jha is reluctant to acknowledge this sort of emergentist dualism and seems to settle for the double aspect theory Polanyi discredits (239, but also see 241).

The valuable point Jha makes in her Neo-Polanyian medical epistemology is that Polanyian conceptuality provides a clear intellectual basis for treating patients both as bodies and as experiencers. The physician can focus on healing in a way that incorporates as subsidiaries external symptoms of disease, technological data, the patient’s reports of pain or state of mind, and so on (200). Thereby physiological and humanistic treatment can be integrated into a holistic approach on intelligible grounds.

Jha concludes her work with a sketch of a Neo-Polanyian ethics (see especially 253-254). I find what she says in this section stimulating if not always entirely clear. She wonders if Polanyi’s ethical embodied knowing has its roots in the Jewish tradition of ethical practice in contrast to Christian ethics that simply comes “from belief and telling about values, the commonly held Christian view” (235). While in the Orthodox and Catholic traditions there are strands that emphasize (Greek) contemplation, it is quixotic to think that Christian ethics is not centered on practice. At any rate, here is a sample of some of her creative re-conception:

In the neo-Polanyian ethics of tacit knowing,

moral principles are accessible to us *after* training our awareness (with the help of a mentor) by tapping into the subsidiary, so that we may make a responsible judgment with universal intent – all premised on freedom of the will. The ethics of tacit knowing is unlike Kant’s in that the judicial attitude is not severed from sensibility, is and ought, fact and value are linked rather than separated, and the empirical (fact) aspect is not relegated to a supplementary position. What is actually done is considered as a teaching tool for what ought to be done. (254)

Stefania Jha is to be commended for writing a book on Polanyi that does more than paraphrase his ideas. I find her present book to be stronger in its promise of things to come than it is successful in offering a consistently cogent reconsideration. But I salute the effort she obviously put into this work.

Walter Gulick
WGulick@msubillings.edu