

# Tradition & Discovery

## The Polanyi Society Periodical

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# The Polanyi Society

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## Preface

This *TAD* was guest edited by Society President Wally Mead. For the June 2008 Polanyi Society conference at Loyola University, Mead organized and moderated a very interesting panel discussion on William Poteat and Michael Polanyi. The panel was composed of former students and a former colleague. Interestingly, there was also another paper proposal on Poteat from an Irish scholar. Wally Mead has pulled a revised version of all of this material together as a special issue that should be of interest to any Polanyi student who has also come across the writing of Bill Poteat. Since Wally provides an introduction to the essays here, I will say no more about this rich material. I call your attention to News and Notes and the Call for Papers for 2009. The October 2008 issue was the first in the membership renewal cycle. While some dues have come in during the fall, the Society needs to do a better job of collecting dues and donations this year because the 2008 Loyola Conference was more expensive than anticipated and we have already begun putting together funding for a 2012 conference. Additionally, expenses for printing and mailing *TAD* continue to increase. So please read and heed the notice below.

Phil Mullins

**REMINDER: if you have not sent in 08-09 academic year dues/donations to the Polanyi Society, please take a moment now (1) to read and complete the inserted flyer; (2) to make out a check or credit card debit authorization, using the form; (3) insert all materials into the postage paid, self-addressed envelope (US domestic only) and drop it in the mail. You can, of course, as an alternative send credit card information by e-mail to the following address: mullins@missouriwestern.edu.**

*Tradition and Discovery* is indexed selectively in *The Philosopher's Index* and *Religious and Theological Abstracts* and is included in the EBSCO online database of academic and research journals.

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# NEWS AND NOTES

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## Polanyi Society: Treasurer's Report 9/1/07-8/31/08

Beginning Bal. checking \$4,365.73

### Income

9/27/07	Memberships, gifts	\$2,000
3/27/08	Membership, gifts:	\$2,500
4/21/08	Membership, gifts:	\$4,000
5/30/08	Scott CD	\$7,885.59
6/3/08	Membership, gifts:	\$9,000
6/20/08	Loyola refund:	\$ 210

Total Income \$25,385.59

### Expenses

9/12/07	TAD: 33#3:	\$ 784.30
12/10/07	AAR Reimbursement/Gulick:	\$ 320.00
12/11/07	R.Allen Loyola travel:	\$ 837.82
4/23/08	TAD: 34#1, 34#2:	\$ 1,303.67
4/23/55	AAR 08 room deposit:	\$ 55
6/4/08	Loyola # 1/Rmbse Mullins:	\$ 1,901.61
6/20/08	Loyola Peck Hnrrium/Trvl:	\$ 600
7/7/08	Loyola R.Allen Hnrrium/Trvl:	\$ 564
8/28/08	Loyola#2/ final payment:	\$14,170.01

Total Expenses \$20,481.41

### SUMMARY:

A. Beginning Bal. savings	\$ 4,365.73
B. Income:	\$25,595.59
C. Expense	\$20,536.41
D. 8/31/08 Bal.	*\$9,424.91

\*Includes Scott CD (\$7,885.59/with interest of \$385.59)

### Post 8/31/08 Notes

10-14-08 Purchase new Scott 2% CD: \$7,885.59  
10-31-08 Checking Balance: \$967.09

### Expenses

11/15/08 TAD 35#1, supplies \$429.84

### Income

MWSU account: approx \$3000 pending transfer;  
08-09 dues and donations are coming in each week.

Jere Moorman, Treasurer

## Polanyi Society Travel Fund

For students and others requiring assistance to attend the Society's meetings held in conjunction with the AAR and the APA, Eastern Division, limited funding may be available. Society members are urged to inform worthy candidates that this assistance is available. Those interested in this funding, as well as those who know of potential candidates, should contact Walter Mead (wbmead@comcast.net) and see the information on the Polanyi Society web site (<http://www.missouriwestern.edu/orgs/polanyi/>). Also anyone able to contribute to the travel fund should contact Mead.

## WWW Polanyi Resources

The Polanyi Society has a World Wide Web site at <http://www.missouriwestern.edu/orgs/polanyi/>. In addition to information about Polanyi Society membership and meetings, the site contains the following: (1) digital archives containing all issues of *Tradition and Discovery* since 1991; (2) a comprehensive listing of *Tradition and Discovery* authors, reviews and reviewers; (3) the history of Polanyi Society publications, and information on locating early publications not in the archive; (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 Polanyi; (7) links to a number of essays

by Polanyi as well as audio files for the McEnerney Lectures (1962) and Polanyi's conversation with Carl Rogers (1966).

**Minutes of the Polanyi Society General  
Membership Meeting  
Palmer House Hilton, Chicago, IL  
November 1, 2008**

1. The meeting was called to order by Wally Mead at 11:00 A.M.

2. The following were elected to the board unanimously on a motion by David Rutledge and Paul Lewis: Dale Canon, Wally Mead, Diane Yeager, and Phil Rolnick (replacing Dick Moodey who recently resigned).

3. The three amendments detailed in the 10/31/08 Minutes of the Board were adopted unanimously on motions made by Jere Moorman and David Rutledge, Phil Mullins and Tony Clark, and Paul Lewis and Tony Clark.

4. General discussion topics: (1) Planning is beginning for a 2012 summer conference like the conference in June 2008; (2) Should the Society create a Polanyi Society Speakers' Bureau? (3) James van Pelt (Yale Divinity) is organizing a Science and Religion speakers' series that may include something on Polanyi. (4) Potential funding initiatives: insert a dues self-addressed, postage paid return envelope in *TAD*; approach selected foundations for funding needs. (5) Projects on indexing of *TAD* and getting *TAD* into libraries continue. Jere Moorman volunteered to remind members to pay their dues.

5. Discussion of the 2009 meeting in conjunction with the annual AAR meeting in Montreal: (1) Invite Charles Taylor (McGill); (2) Address a topic such as family resemblance between Merleau-Ponty and Polanyi (or ask a figure like Taylor or Jerry Gill, who has written on both figures, to address this topic); (3) Invite a graduate student or graduate students to discuss their research (send a call for papers to graduate schools and

put together a special issue of *TAD* intended for graduate students and put it online or send it to graduate programs); (4) Explore the topic "Polanyi and comparative religion"; (5) Given the March, 2009 re-publication of *The Tacit Dimension*, invite papers on the topic "Re-reading *The Tacit Dimension*."

6. The meeting adjourned at 11:50 AM.

Marty Moleski, S.J., Secretary

### **Submissions for Publication**

Articles, meeting notices and notes likely to be of interest to persons interested in the thought of Michael Polanyi are welcomed. Review suggestions and book reviews should be sent to Walter Gulick (see addresses listed below). Manuscripts, notices and notes should be sent to Phil Mullins. Manuscripts should be double-spaced type with notes at the end; writers are encouraged to employ simple citations within the text when possible. MLA or APA style is preferred. Because the journal serves English writers across the world, we do not require anybody's "standard English." Abbreviate frequently cited book titles, particularly books by Polanyi (e.g., *Personal Knowledge* becomes *PK*). Shorter articles (10-15 pages) are preferred, although longer manuscripts (20-24 pages) will be considered. Consistency and clear writing are expected. Manuscripts normally will be sent out for blind review. Authors are expected to provide an electronic copy as an e-mail attachment.

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# 2009 Polanyi Society Meetings—Call for Papers

In 2009, Polanyi Society meetings are tentatively planned in conjunction with both the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion and the American Philosophical Association, Eastern Division.

## **Call for Papers for Polanyi Society Meeting at the American Philosophical Association, Eastern Division**

The APA, Eastern Division meeting normally falls in the week before New Year's Day. Due to publication deadlines, this call for papers was assembled before the late December 2008 Polanyi Society meeting at the APA, Eastern. It is anticipated that those attending will discuss a 2009 meeting. Such a meeting may have one or two sessions. If you are interested in giving a paper or participating in the 2009 meeting, please write to Walter Gulick ([WGulick@msubillings.edu](mailto:WGulick@msubillings.edu)) for details about the outcome of discussions at the 2008 meeting. Gulick welcomes proposals of up to 500 words in length (full-length papers may also be submitted for consideration) on any topic of interest. The deadline for proposals is April 1, 2009; inquiries before that date are encouraged.

## **Call for Papers for Two Sessions at the American Academy of Religion**

The AAR will be meeting in Montreal, Canada, from November 7-10, 2009. It is likely that the Polanyi Society meetings (two sessions) in Montreal will be scheduled for the evening of November 7 and the morning of November 8. Proposals for papers (up to 500 words in length) should be sent to Paul Lewis ([lewis\\_pa@mercer.edu](mailto:lewis_pa@mercer.edu)) by April 1, 2009. Inquiries before that date are invited.

At the 2008 Polanyi Society general membership meeting, there was a lively discussion about topics for the 2009 meetings (see Minutes on page 4). After this meeting, the Board of Directors agreed to implement a plan to devote either one or two sessions of the 2010 meeting to a program featuring the work of graduate students interested in Polanyi. For the 2009 meeting, the following potential topics were put forth by members present: (1) Invite Charles Taylor (McGill) to give a talk or treat connections between Taylor's and Polanyi's thought; (2) Address a topic such as family resemblance between Merleau-Ponty and Polanyi (or ask a figure like Taylor or Jerry Gill, who has written on both figures, to address this topic); (3) Explore the topic "Polanyi and comparative religion"; (4) Given the March, 2009 re-publication of *The Tacit Dimension*, invite papers on the topic "Re-Reading *The Tacit Dimension*." It should be emphasized that these topics were suggestions; paper proposals on other topics are encouraged and will get full consideration.

# **A Symposium Encounter: The Philosophies of William Poteat and Michael Polanyi**

**Walter B. Mead**

**ABSTRACT Key Words:** William Poteat, Michael Polanyi, concepts, perpetuating intellectual legacies, transcendence, returning to primal principles, Enlightenment, spatial/temporal, visual/aural, static/tensional, dynamic, indeterminate future manifestations, tacit/explicit, retentive/preentive.

*Participants have known Poteat as teacher or colleague or author over various periods of time and assess him according to these various relationships. Polanyi is given less attention largely because he has been less difficult to understand. Poteat's approach is the more radical because he attempts to take the implications of Polanyi's thinking further. Central to comprehending the nature of their differences are an understanding (1) of their different perceptions of transcendence and (2) of the contrasting groundings they provide for reality.*

## **Backgrounds of the Participants**

The seven contributors to the journalistic symposium featured in this issue of *Tradition and Discovery*, were all participants in a special meeting of the Polanyi Society held June 13-15, 2008, at Loyola University, Chicago, in celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of Michael Polanyi's *magnum opus*, *Personal Knowledge Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (hereafter designated as *PK*). Since William Poteat was one of a relative few philosophers to recognize, early-on the philosophical genius of Polanyi - having discovered some of Polanyi's initial writings as early as 1952 and, during a visit with him in Manchester, England, in 1955, having examined, upon Polanyi's request, a typescript draft of *PK* (later described by Poteat as the occasion when his own thinking began to take on "deeply interiorized Polanyian motifs") - it seemed fitting to give some attention at this conference to the relationship between the thinking of these two exceptionally seminal minds.

The six essays that follow, by Gus Breytspraak, Ron Hall, Dale Cannon, Diane Yeager, Jim Stines, and Bob Osborn, are adapted from the presentations they made in a panel discussion at that meeting. The final essay, by Kiernan Cashell, was presented independently as a paper at the conference. Five of the six panelists were students in Professor Poteat's Religion or Philosophy classes, seminars, or independent studies as undergraduates and/or divinity students or Ph.D. candidates for various periods between 1964 and 1974. All five enjoyed an on-campus and personal student/professor relationship with Poteat for three to six years. The sixth panelist, Bob Osborn, by contrast, knew Poteat only as a colleague, from the time Bill arrived on the Duke campus in 1960, teaching in the same Divinity School or Department of Religion continuously with Bill until he retired in 1987. Indeed, they continued, on occasion, to cross paths with each other right up until Poteat's death in 2000 - a total of some forty years. Yet, as we shall read in his essay, Professor Osborn asserts that, ironically, he (like his colleagues) who knew Bill the longest, also knew him the least.

As a participant in the panel (although only as moderator), I alone never taught with Bill nor sat as a student enrolled in his class. However, I must qualify that statement. I came to the Duke campus in the fall of 1960 as a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Political Science, the same semester that Poteat arrived on the campus. About midway through my three years of study there, I began to hear from some of the graduate students

in Religion about this new professor who had thoroughly captured their attention and elicited their enthusiasm. I think it was during my last year at Duke that I finally managed, about mid-semester, to sneak into a corner of his seminar room. I was certain that a great mind was at work there as I heard the professor allude, both masterfully and excitedly, to the insights of a philosopher by the name of Derrida and another by the name of Merleau-Ponty - but, having had not the slightest introduction previously to phenomenology, I found it all passing at some considerable altitude well over my head. I might as well have slipped into a lecture on quantum physics. That was my one and only “classroom experience” with Professor Poteat.

Since my interest in Political Science was from a philosophical perspective, after completing my formal studies and beginning my teaching career, I soon found the opportunity to gain a considerable appreciation of phenomenology, particularly as represented by Merleau-Ponty. But it was not until some time later, after I'd delved fairly thoroughly into Polanyi's works and come to value his insights (by bad timing, he was brought by Poteat and Tom Langford to Duke the spring semester of 1964 following the summer I departed from Duke), that I finally began to read Poteat's works. It was probably in the early 1980s that I read Poteat's chapter in *Intellect and Hope* (Duke University Press, 1968) and about 1988 that I was captivated by his *Polanyian Meditations* (Duke University Press, 1985).

Indeed, it was my letter to Poteat expressing my delight at the development of his own insights in that book that started a decade-long period of the most stimulating correspondence - his letters often lengthy and hand-written on legal pad sheets, eventually filling several inches of a file drawer. Soon after my correspondence with Bill on *Polanyian Meditations*, I'm sure that it was upon his recommendation that the editor at the University of Missouri Press, asked me to referee his manuscript, *A Philosophical Daybook*, regarding its suitability for publication, which occurred in 1990; shortly after that, the same request from the same publisher regarding Stines' and Nickell's collection, published in 1993, and, in the meanwhile, Bill was passing to me later drafts of his final book, *Recovering the Ground*, which I then refereed for the SUNY Press and was published in 1994. It was a wonderful way to become acquainted with Bill's thinking.

Our correspondence was by no means limited to matters raised by his writings, but sometimes were prompted by my writing efforts, and often simply by “quotidian” (a word he loved to use) reflections and life experiences shared by one or the other of us. These communications, at first by postal mail, later partially by e-mail, together with a few direct visits with him, including a couple days while he and Patricia had residency in Athens during her university presidency there, represent some of the most gratifying intellectual interchanges of my entire career.

Ireland-based Kiernan Cashell, is the only participant in this symposium who has had no personal contact, either inside or outside the classroom, with Poteat. He draws his impressive understanding of Poteat's contributions entirely from studying his writings. I find this encouraging to the extent that this provides evidence that Poteat's influence has spread beyond his personal circle of former students and colleagues. But such evidence is limited: few others outside this “circle” appear to have familiarized themselves with Poteat's contributions. Recent efforts to find a remnant of Bill's legacy at Duke in regard to current faculty familiar with him or his ideas and, therefore, potentially interested in establishing an archive of his letters and papers there, have proved fruitless. Further, there has been no attempt on behalf of those appreciative of Bill's thinking to establish an association, similar to the Polanyi Society, to perpetuate his legacy. However, there have been a number of former students of Poteat and a few of his former colleagues who, as members of the Polanyi Society, have brought their Poteatean insights to bear through their participation on panels and as authors of related

articles in *TAD*.

## **Poteat's Insights: More Difficult to Communicate Than Polanyi's**

Perhaps these are the means one can most realistically rely upon, at present, for the dissemination and - hopefully - the perpetuation of his ideas. This was my chief consideration in recommending to the Polanyi Society Board the inclusion of Poteatean scholarship in last summer's program. Some members of the Society will recall that Bill was the featured guest at the 1993 Annual Meeting of the Polanyi Society in Washington, D.C., and that Jim Stines guest-edited a follow-up, six-participant symposium issue of *TAD* (v.21, no.1, 1994-1995). Several other articles relating to Poteat have appeared in the pages of *TAD* over the years. Stines, together with James Nickell, also made a major contribution toward perpetuating Poteat's influence by co-editing an extensive collection of Bill's essays in *The Primacy of Persons and the Language of Culture* (University of Missouri Press, 1993).

But, whereas there is considerable evidence of Polanyi's influence having passed, however modestly, beyond the first generation of his students, there is scant evidence of this in regard to Poteat. This may well be, in part, due to the limited amount of writing that Poteat himself did, relative to Polanyi. Whereas Polanyi produced about a half-dozen books and approximately 130 published articles on social and economic theory and philosophy, Poteat wrote only 3 books and about 30 published articles. Further there is an impressively scholarly collection of secondary literature about Polanyi and his philosophical thought: approximately 18 books and a couple hundred articles (the majority of these in *TAD*). By contrast, there are no secondary books, of which I am aware, on Poteat's contributions, and only, perhaps at most, two dozen articles. Among those of us who have been beneficiaries of Bill's insights, there is reason for us to be concerned about this legacy being effectively passed on. Many of those who brought his ideas into their classrooms and writing have, like Bill, passed on, and many of the rest of us are becoming well accustomed to being beneficiaries, as well, of senior discounts.

## **Poteat's More Radical Approach**

It struck me that the participants on the summer panel charged with relating Poteat's to Polanyi's thinking, and vice versa, for the most part - as is reflected in their contributions to this *TAD* symposium - ended up speaking of Poteat more than they did of Polanyi - indeed, as I have done, so far. I suspect there are several explanations for this. First of all, most of us, as members of the Polanyi Society, have already spent a lot of time discussing and developing Polyanian ideas; bringing Poteat into the discussion provides us with a new opportunity. Second (and I suspect this goes a long way toward explaining the greater difficulty incurred in perpetuating Poteat's insights), it has been my impression that most of us have found it more difficult to understand Poteat's ideas than Polanyi's, even though some suggest that they don't find Polanyi an "easy read." Poteat, himself, claims that he takes Polanyi farther, and deeper, into his thinking than Polanyi, himself, does; that he "radicalizes" Polanyi by laying out the implications that are inherent - unknown to Polanyi - in his own thinking.

Particularly in regard to the theological implications of Polanyi's thought (which Polanyi admitted he had dealt with about as far as he was equipped to do), Poteat perceived himself, in the course of being true to his own Christian understandings, as a radical threat to what was generally perceived as Christian "orthodoxy." Here I cannot resist relating an anecdote recently told to me by Jim Stines that had been originally told to him by Poteat (and that I have failed to persuade Jim to include in his essay so that I wouldn't have to). It seems that

one of Bill's theologian colleagues in the Religion Department at Duke exclaimed to Bill one day that, to the limited extent that he could make any sense of Bill's teaching, he could not detect how it had anything to do with the teaching of the Christian faith, as he understood it.

Thereupon Bill resorted to parable, telling his colleague about a country parson who, one day, was called upon by a frantic mother to rescue her young child who had fallen through the seat opening in her outhouse. The pastor hurried to the scene and took upon himself the obviously unpleasant task of pulling the child out of his unspeakable predicament. Upon viewing (as well as registering through other senses) the [excrement] (not the word used by either Bill or Jim) that coated Junior from head to toe, the pastor turned to the distraught mother and advised, "Well, I suppose you could try to clean up your child, but I suggest that you would probably be far more successful, and it would certainly be far easier, for you to start all over again." Such was the condition into which Bill perceived Enlightenment thinking (including theology) had fallen, indeed, Western thinking from the Ancient Greeks on; and such, to his thinking, was the radical nature of the only cure sufficient to deal with it.

### **Different Treatments of the Transcendent**

Adding to the difficulty that Poteat perceived as inherent in the task of a radically reformed way of thinking, and therefore to the difficulty of communicating his manner of thinking, was the enigmatic manner in which he often expressed himself. For example, while acknowledging his "deeply interiorized Polanyian motifs," he disclaimed being a "Polanyian." Indeed, Kieran Cashell, in the final essay in this symposium, makes a convincing case that Poteat's thought was thoroughly inspired by Polanyian ideas and marked by Polanyian concepts. Still, it is obvious that, in order to develop further what, according to Professor Poteat, were implications of Polanyi's concepts - implications of which, as we have noted, Polanyi himself was unaware, Poteat had also to go beyond Polanyi by creating his own concepts.

Polanyi's concepts, although a decided advance, did not permit him to break completely free of the essentially spatial, visual, and static categories that had inhered in Western thought from its very beginning, and that were exacerbated by the linear literacy of the Enlightenment. In fact, it is precisely the temporal, aural, and dynamically tensional dimension of Poteat's innovative concepts that provide not only the radical genius of his contribution to the processes of both knowing and being, but also - by their very innovative nature - confront the inheritor of Enlightenment habits of perception with the difficulty of grasping his radically challenging insights.

I've encountered numerous individuals who, having assured themselves of finally having comprehended Professor Poteat's dynamic mode of thought, and indeed in many instances having been assured by Poteat himself of their having achieved this, suddenly experienced their mentor's sharp rebuke for "falling back into the old Enlightenment habits." Around 1997, when I had nearly completed a lengthy essay in which I attempted to schematize Bill's understanding of his key concept of "mindbody" in its "protensive" dynamics by utilizing the, admittedly spatial, concept of a circle, with its center, radius, and circumference (see my "William H. Poteat's Anthropology: 'Mindbody in the World'," *The Political Science Reviewer*, v. 27 [1998], pp. 267-344.), he lavished probably the most extravagant praise I've ever received for having grasped another's thought. Bill, it turned out, had no problem with the utilization of spatial images as long as they were understood as metaphors. In fact, his writings are filled with references to a mindbodily "radix," or "center," thereby implying the image of a circle.

However, in the final stage of drafting my essay, when I turned from mere exposition to partial criticism, suggesting that some of his fundamental concepts did not allow him to incorporate in his thinking a sense of true transcendence and, in particular, an acknowledgement of a Divine Being, his rebuke was as sharp as it was, at this point, unexpected. It turned out that, according to Bill, I had finally and unwittingly succumbed, along with the rest of modern, Western culture, to the attractive madness of the Enlightenment mode of thinking. What surprised me even more was that Bill, in his effort to vindicate himself from my suggestion that his concepts did not allow him to acknowledge the reality of a God, proceeded to recite a major portion of the Nicene Creed, thereby proclaiming his unreserved embrace of all its principle affirmations. I shared this latter part of Bill's rejoinder, at the time, with Jim Stines, who quotes it in his essay. (It turned out that Jim, too, was still puzzled over a similar experience with Bill, shortly after having received from him the highest accolades for his and Jim Nickell's publication of Poteat's collected essays.)

After Jim's much more recent sharing with me of Bill's parable of the child who fell into the outhouse toilet, it occurred to me that I would have liked to have had the chance to ask Bill, "How on earth does one 'start all over again' by starting with the Nicene Creed?!" It seems that the point Bill was attempting to make here was that, in this instance, I had completely failed to see that his radical reconceptualization of the mindbody (or self) in relation to its Divine radix, or its primal core, had retained its full faithfulness to the primal principles of Christianity. But, again, it seems to me that much of what he claimed to embrace in his lengthy excerpting from the Nicene Creed were a long way from what one can convincingly claim to be the primal principles of the faith, that is, of early first-century Christianity.

In short, I've never been able to reconcile some of Poteat's key concepts - not to mention, his rare, if ever, discussion of his personal faith and his equally rare witness of this through public worship - with this sudden, unqualified affirmation of Christian orthodoxy. Some have puzzled over what appears, to them, to be a gap between, in this instance, Polanyi's occasional affirmation of Christian principles in his philosophy, on the one hand, and the absence in his life of either consistent personal affirmation or consistent relationship to a community of worship, on the other hand. However, I have argued elsewhere (in an unpublished paper, "A Polanyian Resolution of the Age-Old Conflict Between Faith and Reason," presented at the Annual Meeting of the Polanyi Society, November 17, 2006) that this inconsistency was not due to the deeper implications of his thinking. It, rather, appears to have been an instance of some of those deeper implications of which, according to Poteat, Polanyi himself was not aware, and - most ironically, in this instance - of which Poteat himself appears to have been unaware!

But, despite my failure to reconcile Bill Poteat's apparently far more blatant self-contradiction on this matter, I think I've been more successful, after years of puzzlement, in finally coming to comprehend his avoidance, within his scheme of thought, of the concept of "transcendence" (and, therefore, his sharp response to my criticism of him, which employed this concept) - even while allowing for the other metaphorically-employed, spatial concepts. It finally occurred to me that, for Poteat, unlike the concepts of a "circle" and its "circumference," "radius," and "center," the concept of "transcendence" or "transcending" was apparently too radically spatial in its suggestion of a reaching "out There" to allow for a convincing and mere metaphorical construal. And it was apparently in this sense that Poteat thought Polanyi had come to belie his promising beginning in *Personal Knowledge*.

## **Contrasting Grounds of Reality: A Primal Radix vs. Indeterminate Future Manifestations**

The radical insight of Polanyi's epistemology, Poteat agreed with Polanyi, was well expressed in his epigrammatic formula, "I know more than I can tell." In other words, our epistemological grounding is what we tacitly dwell within and from which we tacitly draw in all our articulations and understandings. For Poteat, this grounding of all that we can come to embrace with some degree of certainty, lay deep within us, and not in some transcendingly distant "Beyond." And it is to be encountered by our silent listening to, and reverential probing, or "retrotending," into this radical center, or "radix," of our concrete experience of being in this particular circumstance, in this particular moment in time, and in this particular place. This, to Poteat, was quite the opposite of an abstract and spatially outward "transcendence." Apparently, to Bill's thinking, in my criticism of his thinking, I had over-extended the applicability of an inherently and inextricably spatial metaphor.

And, likewise, it appears to me that this was the sense in which Poteat felt that Polanyi had suddenly abandoned, idway through *PK*, the concrete, "mindbodily" grounding that, up to that point, he had provided for his, until then, brilliant and radical portrayal of the process of discovery and knowing. Bill was specific in locating what was, to him, the clearest indication of this surprising and sad epistemological reversal, on page 192 in the 1964 Harper Torchbook edition of *PK*, where Polanyi asserts that

logical antecedents derived from the prior acceptance of their consequents are necessarily *less certain* than the consequents. It is clearly unreasonable, therefore, to regard these antecedents as the grounds on which we accept their consequents. (Emphasis mine.)

One's basic assumptions, which Poteat insists we come upon only by a deep probing into, and indwelling within, the mindbodily radix, are /less/ certain than the explicitly elaborate abstractions we derive from them?!! Polanyi himself had asserted, up to that point, that it was our tacit indwelling, our reflective journey into the depths of ourselves, that grounded our thoughts and that provided us with the intimations by which our "neat" conclusions were challenged, forcing us often to "break out" of these elaborate and often long-held world-views and theoretical constructions.

As far as I know, Poteat never confronted Polanyi with what appears to be a clear inconsistency in his thinking. In all fairness to Polanyi, I'm inclined to think that, had he done so, Polanyi would have done some rephrasing, or some re-contextualizing, of that statement, because it is clear to me that the dominant theme that Polanyi maintains throughout not only *PK*, but also in his *The Tacit Dimension* and, indeed, throughout the extensive body of his epistemological literature, is one of a primary reliance on, and a trusting of, one's tacit intimations – to be sure, while still subjecting the trustworthiness of our initial intimations to a testing by our encounters in the empirical world of experience, as well as by the durability of the generalized conclusions to which we have been thereby guided. In other words, the process of discovery and knowing to which Polanyi introduces us is a *dialectical* process, an only partially articulable back-and-forth process between, on the one hand, an opening and attuning of ourselves to awarenesses, themselves a product of largely inexplicable inner processes of assimilation and synthesis and an equal openness, in the sense of a "reaching outward" to, on the other hand, our developing, but far more explicit and articulable, awarenesses and understandings of our larger world. Polanyi described this as a "from - to" movement: *from* an indwelling of our internalized awarenesses, we move *to*/ experience that of which we can be aware only from our involvement with the external world.

Polanyi, in asserting that “We know more than we can tell,” was suggesting that there’s an important, inner- but tacit – reality to which we should be attuned. Poteat referred to this as the “radix” at our innermost core of our awareness and being. Polanyi also said that “We tell more than we can know,” implying by this that, as we give such articulation as we can to bring both our inner awarenesses and our more tangible, or “outwardly” focused experiences to a more comprehensive explicitness, we tend to discover more and more implications in our articulations than we had expected, or “known,” when we initially articulated them. In fact, Polanyi offers the very insightful proposal that we measure the reality of a thing (which could be an idea) by its anticipated fecundity – in his terms, by what we have experienced, or at least anticipated, as its potential to manifest itself in terms of “indeterminate future manifestations.” In this sense, he says, “A person is more real than a cobblestone.”

Poteat, with the heavy emphasis he placed upon one’s “primal” awareness and the generative potential of such awareness, which we discover in the depths of introspection, at the very inner core, or “radix” of our being, feared that Polanyi, especially when his statements (such as the one we have quoted) occasionally placed more emphasis upon “consequents” than upon “antecedents,” had lost a sense of the balance that needed to be maintained in what Polanyi had himself, earlier, characterized as a “from - to” dialectic. Whether or not we agree with Poteat that Polanyi had lost this balance in his thinking, the real genius of Poteat, to my thinking, is his determined effort to eliminate the stark dichotomy of the “inner-self” and the “outer-world,” and therefore the split between mind and body generally assumed in Polanyi’s understanding of the processes of both knowing and being. Instead, in Poteat’s thought “mind” becomes merged with “body” (in his central concept of “mindbody”) and knowing comes to constitute the very essence, or meaning, of being. In fact, Poteat goes beyond the mere merger of concepts and, if you will permit me a neologism, further “dynamizes” our understanding of both what it means to know and what it means to be.

However, to accomplish this, Poteat realizes that we must replace the Modern/Enlightenment vestiges of spatiality that he perceives as still inhering in Polyanian concepts (despite Polanyi’s success, for the most part, in moving beyond modernity’s blinders) with concepts more suggestive of temporality, exemplifications dominantly visual with those that are more aural. Therefore we find Poteat speaking in terms of a tensional dynamic, using such words as “pro-tensive” and “retro-tensive” and alluding often, both in his seminars and in his writings, to the musical medium. Just as within the musical progression of a melody involving a series of notes, C, G, and E, our appreciation of the melody must entail our sense of the G note anticipating (pro-tending) the E that follows it, even as it still recalls (retro-tends) the C note that preceded it, and so on; thus we come to know the meaning of words within a sentence, sentences within a paragraph, our present experiences generally in the larger context of past and future (anticipated) experiences.) This temporal dynamic, indeed, might well have been employed by Polanyi to provide fuller illustration than was allowed by his more spatial concepts to his own insistence upon the active role of the knower in the process of knowing. I am quite certain that Polanyi would have welcomed a conceptual move in this direction. In 1972, when Professor Polanyi was aware of his declining mental capability, he invited Bill to assist him in drafting his final work aimed at pulling together the strands of his reflections. Bill was initially agreeable to the invitation, but because of the pressures of his academic schedule at Duke, finally declined. One can only wonder about the salutary impact that Poteat might have had upon Polanyi’s formulations, had he been a participant in this final collaboration.

Still Poteat, himself, often employed spatial illustrations of his dynamic approach. In reflecting upon both the conversations I’ve had with him and his writings, I’ve puzzled for years over the sometimes dominating references he has made to the graphic and plastic arts, wondering, for example, how he could perceive in the spatially two-dimensional paintings of Cezanne, or even in the spatially three-dimensional sculptures of

Moustakas the temporally pre- and retro-tensive dynamics of the creative process. Only recently did it finally occur to me that he viewed works of art not simply as finished products and, also, even with viewed as “finished,” not objects separate from the viewing subject. In regard to the latter, I discovered in his unpublished essay on Cezanne Poteat’s sense of being “drawn into” the painting. One found oneself walking on Cezanne’s depiction of a winding path, allowing the viewer, in a sense, to be ‘indwelt’ by the entirety of the landscape, and to progressively appreciate, successively, the ever-changing perspective offered at every step along the way. And, from listening to Bill’s experience of watching Moustakas at work, sculpting a chunk of marble in his studio, gradually giving it human form, I became convinced that even when Bill viewed the finished sculptures, his mind’s eye still saw the marble dynamically taking form as the skilled artist pro-tensively imagined the finished form, but also modifying the image of that imagination as he retro-tended a vast array of tacit intimations suggesting both the possibilities and the limitations of the material with which he worked.

When I used to speculate on matters of this sort, I’d usually end up sending Bill a write-up of my reflections, to get his always-ready reactions, sometimes a few lines of my reflections provoking several pages of treasured response. Now I turn to those who sat far longer than did I in his seminars. I’ve found that I could always rely upon them, both to raise interesting questions of their own about the exciting thoughts of this enigmatic mind, and to provide an array of insightful responses. So, let us now turn to them, then to one who – along with other colleagues – found that, among peers, he was pretty much a “loner” – not even sharing his enigmas, and finally to one whose relationship to Bill was only as a reader – still an *appreciative* reader – of his works.

## Notes on Contributors

**Gus Breyspraak** ([gus.breyspraak@ottawa.edu](mailto:gus.breyspraak@ottawa.edu)) received his B.A. from Southwestern-at-Memphis (now Rhodes College), where he learned of Poteat from Jerry Gill, who encouraged him, as a Political Science major growing increasingly committed to Philosophy and Religion, to go on to Duke. There, as a Divinity student from 1967 to 1970, he took classes from Poteat, including graduate seminars from him during his final year in the Divinity School. Subsequently, as a graduate student from 1970 to 1973, he pursued further studies with Professor Poteat, served as his teaching assistant, took a preliminary exam in Religion and Culture, and wrote his dissertation under his guidance, finishing in December of 1973. Gus then taught in Duke’s Department of Religion, which Poteat chaired from 1973 to 1976, and even then continued to attend some of Poteat’s seminars. Since leaving Duke, Gus has been on the faculty of Ottawa University in Kansas City, Kansas, where he currently serves as Director of Graduate Studies and Professor of Social Ethics.

**Dale Cannon** ([cannodw@wou.edu](mailto:cannodw@wou.edu)) entered the graduate program in Philosophy at Duke University in Fall 1965. A year later, he transferred to Duke’s graduate program in Religion so that Professor Poteat could be his advisor. In Fall 1967, he began his dissertation research in areas relating to both Religion and Philosophy including Poteat’s field of Religion and Culture. He left Duke in Fall 1968 for a teaching position at Skidmore College while completing his dissertation, which he successfully defended in June 1969. A year later, he taught at the University of Virginia. He is currently Professor Emeritus at Western Oregon University, where he taught philosophy and religious studies. He is on the Board of Directors of the Polanyi Society. His articles have appeared in numerous journals, including the *International Philosophical Quarterly*, *PRE/TEXT*, *Tradition & Discovery*, *The Personalist Forum*, *The Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, *Polanyiana*, *Appraisal*, and *Buddhist-Christian Studies*.

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# Polanyi's Role in Poteat's Teaching Cultural Conceptual Analysis: 1967-1976

Gus Breytspraak

**ABSTRACT Key Words:** William H. Poteat, Michael Polanyi, cultural conceptual analysis, modernity, teaching. *The influence of Michael Polanyi on William H. Poteat's teaching from 1967 to 1976 was apparent but not paramount. Cultural conceptual analysis as taught and practiced by Poteat during this period included Polanyian texts, themes, and concepts, but drew extensively from other major conceptual innovators who provided radical alternatives to key cultural conceptual commitments of modernity. This was the period roughly between the completion of *Intellect and Hope* and the writing of *Polanyian Meditations*.*

For my contribution to this discussion, I thought that, for those who knew Poteat's thought only through his books if they knew his work at all, it would be most helpful for me to address the influence of Polanyi on Poteat's teaching.

Teaching was Bill Poteat's calling. It fundamentally shaped his thinking, writing, and unique way of being-in-the world. See the examples in his writings, acknowledgements, and dedications for confirmation of this. And Bill's teaching certainly shaped those of us who had the privilege of studying with him.

I picked the period of nine years from the fall of 1967 to early 1976 when I was around him (as a divinity student, doctoral student, teaching assistant, dissertation advisee, and beginning teacher in a Religion Department which he came to chair during that period). Others on the panel were there for at least part of that time, and I hoped my recollections would generate some helpful comparisons with the experiences of others in order to clarify what Polanyi had to do with Poteat's teaching.

This was the time between the editing of *Intellect and Hope* (*IH*, 1968. Bill had just put *IH* to bed, having undoubtedly burned much midnight oil going over every word of that important volume in Polanyi studies) and the beginnings of *Polanyian Meditations* (*PM*, 1985). He tells us in the introduction to that major Polanyian work that *PM* burst forth in a graduate seminar in the Spring of 1976 when he promised to write a five page handout so that he could get the students to stop taking notes:

To deflect the seminar's attention from note-taking in order that instead the expectant faces of its members might be allowed to work their maieutic magic upon my only half-formed and emerging thought, I promised to commit to writing for future distribution what I felt I was about to say. A few days later I sat down to write the promised handout, beginning with a passage from page 160 of *Personal Knowledge*, supposing it would run to perhaps five legal-size mimeograph sheets. Three months and twenty-four thousand words later I had long since forgotten the handout and was well underway in the writing of *Polanyian Meditations: In Search of a Post-Critical Logic* (8).

While one could reasonably expect from *IH*, *PM*, and his later writings that Polanyi would have been the dominant influence on Bill's teaching, it is my argument that Bill was NOT primarily "teaching Polanyi" nor

was he primarily “teaching from Polanyi” in this period. Instead I argue Poteat was teaching a method of “cultural conceptual analysis” (CCA) - a way of doing Religion and Culture - in which Polanyi was only one ally and example.

While preparing this presentation, I remembered a file drawer with about a foot and a half of folders from my Duke years. So my remarks today are based *not only* on the foggy recollection of an aging professor in his early 60’s remembering events in the late sixties – I actually had some primary sources to work from in reconstructing Polanyi’s influence on Poteat’s teaching.

The paper that resulted from this exercise runs more than 40 minutes. I have shared it with the panelists. I can only share a few sections in my time this afternoon.

## **Poteat in the Classroom**

You may not know that, prior to discovering Polanyi in the early fifties, William H. Poteat, was born in 1919, grew up in China as a child of American Baptist missionaries, graduated from Oberlin and Yale Divinity School, and wrote a dissertation at Duke titled “Pascal’s Conception of Man and Modern Sensibility” in 1950.

In my view, this dissertation is much more important than Polanyi for understanding/explaining what Bill was up to in teaching when I studied with him. It was a huge project that treated developments in early modernity from Renaissance painting through political theory.

E.A. Burtt, Whitehead, Temple, along with Bill’s analysis of primary sources (my notes stress Descartes and Pascal) contributed to discussions of mathematics, method, and metaphysics, the bifurcation of nature, the exteriorization of sensibility, mechanism, technical reason, modernity’s alternation between pride and despair, and the consequent unintelligibility of man.

This was philosophical anthropology on a grand scale, and plenty of gold ore was uncovered for refinement in future years.

While you can find in it some anticipation of Polanyian themes, there is a much broader and deeper agenda being set that I think Bill was still working on in the period under review.

My first class with Bill was Christianity and Culture 16 (CC16), a required first-year course for Duke Divinity students who had had some exposure to philosophy in their BA. This was a close reading of one book each by Marx, Darwin, Freud, and B.F. Skinner. We were required to write 300 word “arguments” each Friday (plus or minus 2 words). Learning to recognize a central conceptual problem and deal with it in a short argument was a crucial skill. But learning how deeply my own thinking, and the thinking of the wider culture, had been shaped by the conceptual commitments underlying Marx, Darwin, Freud, and Skinner was revelatory.

In the lively class discussions, we could not think and argue our ways out of the very perspectives we were trying to oppose as Bill played an incredibly skilled dialectical devil’s advocate. Philosophy majors like Ron Hall and Larry Churchill were the stars in delivering incisive fast pitches that Bill would blast out of the park, always in good humor, as he continued to demonstrate how we were all Skinnerians, Marxists, Darwinists, and Freudians even, sometimes especially, when we tried to argue with them. Bill could also take the stammerings of confused participants such as me and help us find our voices as we began at least to recognize the hazards

in the dangerous waters of modernity's Cartesian conceptual hang-ups, objectivist obfuscations, and dualistic dead-ends.

Polanyi was not assigned and was rarely introduced explicitly as a contributor to this enterprise. My notes contain many references to Ron Hall, but only one marginal note about Polanyi. Surely Polanyi was in the background—we did spend several weeks trying to convince an Azande-like Poteat that he should adopt scientific horticulture as we learned about arguments and changing one's mind. Perhaps Polanyi contributed to Bill's analysis of the conceptual commitments at stake in the impact of evolution on modernity, but my notes are more about the conceptual innovations around the contingency Christianity introduced into Western thought that allowed the move from Aristotle to Darwin, the Exodus event as radically different from the Greek cosmos, and other differences in Semitic and Greek concepts. With B.F. Skinner, perhaps Polanyi was closer to the surface: I find notes on experiments in subception and arguments that what we have with Pavlov's dog is "an active center seeking to maximize meaning rather than a S-R response machine."

But this was not a course about Polanyi, an introduction to Polanyi, or one taught from Polanyi's perspective. Apparently, there is an unpublished paper Bill wrote about teaching Religion and Culture which discusses the method to this dialectically maddening and thrilling experience: "I found, for example, that while tacitly, by an acritically-received cultural inheritance, they were Marxists, Freudians, Darwinists, neo-behaviorists, or what have you, their explicit professions were different from and incompatible with these views, even though this was almost never recognized by them" (*Primacy of Persons [POP]*, p. 4). Nickell and Stines draw from and comment on this approach the Introduction to *POP*: "*The comprehension of such contradictions, as the world has known since Socrates, is an exercise in therapy in the best sense of that word*" (4-5).

In 1967, Bill's appointment was primarily in the Divinity School. Along with CC16, he taught electives on "Religion and Tragedy" and "Religion and Art." The information I have about those courses shows little influence of Polanyi. There is certainly no Polanyi in the 11 page bibliography on religion and art he distributed, including among the 42 books under the heading "Selected books dealing with aspects of the intellectual history and characteristic sensibility of modernity." This is an obvious place for Polanyi, but there is no reference to his work. And remember this area of art and Western culture was his intended focus when he went to Greece on sabbatical in 1968.

Regular graduate seminars were offered: Existentialism, Religious Language, and one that often used *Personal Knowledge*.

Merleau-Ponty, Wittgenstein, Hannah Arendt, Kierkegaard, and Polanyi were the core of Religion and Culture and Bill's approach to cultural conceptual analysis. Seminars with vague titles allowed Bill to assign them and/or others he wanted to examine: Piaget, Ricoeur, Elizabeth Sewell, Walker Percy, George Steiner, Joseph Church. The method of cultural conceptual analysis he was teaching us used these big five as we learned to think in ways that began to liberate us from our critical, objectivist, Cartesian proclivities and claim post-critical voices.

We didn't really "learn about" the thinkers we read so closely. On more than one occasion when asked about "research expectations for papers," Bill proclaimed: "Anyone caught doing research in this course will be summarily shot!" We were instructed to go for "the jugular"—the core conceptual commitments through which these radical thinkers broke through or failed to break through the impasses of modernity, the ways their understanding of knowing, being, acting, perceiving, speaking, learning, and teaching broke out of the

conceptual dilemmas and dead-ends that were destructive of what Stines and Nickell chose to call their book, *The Primacy of Persons*.

His advisees would then apply this perspective to a problem or a thinker, and the range was incredible. Dissertations were written on Erik Erickson, Walker Percy, Elizabeth Sewell, social theory, literature, philosophical issues and thinkers, and, sometimes theology. Polanyi might be central to that effort, as he was in my attempt to show Polanyi as an alternative to the Sociology of Knowledge. But he was not always the central figure and sometimes was not even involved in dissertations written under Bill.

Bill Poteat moved from the Divinity School to the Department of Religion about 1970. When Tom Langford became Dean of the Divinity School, Bill was appointed chair of the undergraduate Religion Department, a major change professionally and a new stage from which to display his considerable gifts. So there was a lot going on—including complications in his personal life. I don't think he wrote much in this period apart from essays that came out of his teaching.

I suspect that during these nine years between finishing *IH* and beginning *PM*, Polanyi's thought was always around as Bill taught, lectured at Texas and Stanford, spent time in Greece and arranged an exhibit of Moustaki's work at Duke, etc. But Polanyi was often not in Poteat's focal attention in teaching, nor do I find evidence in my notes, his writing, or my recollections that Polanyi offered the predominant or over-arching perspective from which he taught and engaged in cultural conceptual analysis.

Of the 10 courses that I took under Professor Poteat, of which I have some record, only one had Polanyi (*KB*) assigned. Only *The Tacit Dimension* is on the reading list of 18 books for the Religion and Culture preliminary exam I took under Bill in January, 1972. My notes indicate Polanyi appeared in discussions where his concepts were helpful, but Polanyi does not seem to be the platform, framework, or focus of attention that often.

What was the method – what was Bill doing – what were we trying to learn to do?

The term I have come to prefer, “cultural conceptual analysis,” is not really history of ideas, not exactly philosophy, not “religion and culture” in any of the various ways that phrase is often used.

In the unpublished essay “Religion and Culture as I See It” quoted by Stines and Nickell, Bill writes that he thinks of culture “not as a certain form of social order or a system of practice or as physical artifacts, but as a repertoire of concepts, models, metaphors, analogies, images, picturings, myths, and stories shaping the life of a people.” (*POP*, 11) Cultural conceptual analysis was Bill's method for recognizing, analyzing, and dissecting modern culture in this sense and providing therapeutic alternatives for the problematic status of the human in modernity's developing conceptual configuration.

It's cultural because it is deeper than any specific articulations or disciplines. Charles Taylor talks about “social imaginaries” and “cosmic imaginaries” in ways that remind me of Bill. But unlike Taylor's endless summaries of intellectual history, Bill somehow could get to the core conceptual commitments of the underlying logic of modernity more directly. He was somehow digging into the level from which ideas, theories, articulated frameworks emerge, but pulling forth the basic models, metaphors, concepts that emerge again and again in modernity. They are far in the background – on the horizon – yet these cultural conceptual commitments shape – and in many cases in modernity mis-shape – our understanding and even our lives. So discovering them, seeing

how they are driving us and driving us mad, is very much like analysis in that can be therapeutic.

“Analysis” in this approach brings to mind at least two associations: ordinary language analysis and analysis in the Freudian tradition. Some of Poteat’s tools, tricks, even content, came from the former. Bill’s incredible classroom riffs may have drawn from Wittgenstein, Austin, Wisdom, and others more often than I recognized, untrained philosophically as I was. Many comparisons could be made with the Freudian meaning of “analysis,” including the “therapeutic” dimension mentioned by Stines and Nickell and cited above.

The best written examples of cultural conceptual analysis would be the introduction to *IH* and the essay “Persons and Places.” This seminal essay, which is in *POP*, was one that Bill *did* distribute to classes – at least as early as 1968. It is not dependent, explicitly or tacitly, on Polanyi in my reading. The *IH* essay Ron Hall comments upon in his reflections (“Myths, Stories, History, Eschatology and Action: Some Polanyian Meditations”) is also up there among the best examples of Poteat’s cultural conceptual analysis, in that case cultural conceptual analysis working with Polanyi’s innovations.

Knowing how much he had invested in Polanyi, I may be underestimating how important Polanyi was for Bill’s teaching during this period. If I could travel back in time I might find much more attention to and reliance on Polanyi. I certainly find a lot of Polanyi in his three books written after this period, and to edit *IH* he must have been immersed in Polanyi at a depth most of us will never attain.

One note I found would suggest that much of my attempt to represent Poteat is likely wrong. It was at the end of some clarification of confused arrangements sent out for the Dutch Creek Falls Symposium in 1974 by a member of that group, a gathering of former students of Bill’s that occurred in the mountains of North Carolina each summer for about 6 years. The group’s focus was often on the teaching challenges we were finding early in our careers. Bill’s participation in this ongoing convivial order of his former advisees and others who became interested in his approach to religion and culture exemplifies his commitment to teaching. The note addressed to a list of 40 members of the diaspora, probably from Ben Ladner because it is signed with a large “B,” stated: “Furthermore, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that you don’t know what the hell’s going on, neither do I. Neither does Stines, neither does Gus. So there!! Prayerfully, B.”

*Addendum:* In the discussion that followed our panel presentations, Dave Rutledge recalled that Poteat did offer a seminar on *Personal Knowledge* in 1971. There were other courses during this period of which I don’t have records, and they may have emphasized Polanyi. Interesting as well was Diane Yeager’s report that Bill gave her a copy of *Intellect and Hope* and inscribed it for her when she arrived for graduate study in 1971 thus emphasizing the importance of Polanyi for what she was beginning. My point is not that Polanyi was unimportant in Poteat’s teaching, but that cultural conceptual analysis as taught by Poteat was much more than Polanyi. I know I did not read Polanyi thoroughly until my dissertation research.

Ron Hall’s contribution to this panel, which I read only after writing mine, confirms my point above about “analysis” and provides important insights into the origins and impact of Wittgenstein and ordinary language analysis in Poteat’s approach to cultural conceptual analysis. Students more familiar with that tradition might have seen even more of this influence in Bill’s teaching than I could. I suspect this influence went far beyond mere content and, indeed, shaped the basic ways he engaged students, asked questions, identified and approached problems, and led classroom and seminar discussions in his inimitable style.

# Poteat's Voice: The Impact of Polanyi and Wittgenstein

Ronald L. Hall

ABSTRACT Key Words: Wittgenstein, Polanyi, Rush Rhees, D.Z. Phillips, Laplace, Hannah Arendt, Maynard Adams, language games, voice, meaning, use, direct/indirect, Duke, Chapel Hill, philosophy, family resemblance, personal, deep blue, formal/informal, conversation.

*The focus of these remarks is on the impact that Personal Knowledge and Philosophical Investigations had in shaping Bill Poteat's philosophical voice. Of the two works, I claim that, for good or ill, it was Personal Knowledge that had the more profound influence on Poteat. Of course, both sources had profound influence. What makes Personal Knowledge more profound is that his use of it, at least in those early years, was more indirect than his direct and explicit use of Wittgenstein's ideas. Following Bill's lead, there is much that Polanyians can learn from Wittgenstein and vice versa.*

1958, fifty years ago, was a big year. It was an especially big year for Bill Poteat. That was the year Michael Polanyi's *Personal Knowledge (PK)* was published. And this was just on the heels of the publication of another book that would become almost as near and dear to Poteat as *Personal Knowledge*, namely, Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations (PI)*.<sup>1</sup> In these remarks, I want to focus on the impact that *PK* and *PI* had in shaping Bill's philosophical voice.

Of the two works, I claim that, for good or ill, it was *PK* that had the more profound influence on Poteat. Part of what I mean in saying that the influence of *PK* was more profound than the influence of *PI* comes from noting that Poteat's use of Polanyi, at least in those early years, was more indirect (to use Kierkegaard's term, also one of Poteat's prior and also profound mentors) than his direct and explicit use of Wittgenstein's ideas.

What proved for Poteat to be very important is Wittgenstein's concept of a language game. But more generally, I want to suggest that Bill's early way of indirectly appropriating Polanyi's thought, that is, as not mentioned, or at least as not at the focus of his philosophical meditations, has much to offer those who find Polanyi's work instructive. While I acknowledge that in the later writings of Poteat, the use of Polanyi was more explicit, I would say that even here, Poteat's work is better described as Polanyian rather than a study in Polanyi's philosophy. While it took me a long time to come to this, after a dissertation on Polanyi's philosophy, and after trying to teach courses in his thought, I now think that Bill's early indirect use of Polanyi has merit worth noting and which Polanyians should welcome. This early indirect use of Polanyi, use without much mention, is highlighted in Bill's essay in *Intellect and Hope: Essays in the Thought of Michael Polanyi (IH, 1968)* entitled "Myths, Stories, History, Eschatology and Action: Some Polanyian Meditations."

In the first sentence of this essay, Poteat says that he will "...talk about man and language from a perspective opened up to [him] by the writings of Michael Polanyi" (*IH, 198*). And then in a footnote to this he says: "It is impossible to give specific references in the Polanyi corpus which, thus examined out of context, could yield the views I am here developing. It is the impact of the corpus as a whole which has educed these meditations."<sup>2</sup> Consistent with this remark, Michael Polanyi is (barely) mentioned again in the remainder of this quite lengthy essay.<sup>3</sup> Wittgenstein, by contrast, is not only mentioned more directly, especially his idea of language as a game, but it is the perspective of *PI* that seems to be of focal interest in Poteat's vision of how words and persons are internally connected and how stories, history and myth are to be understood. It is not an accident

that during this period many thought of Poteat as an ordinary language philosopher, a thought supported by a spate of publications that focused on language, or better, on the later Wittgensteinian conception of it.<sup>4</sup>

As you may or may not know, Poteat started his teaching career in the philosophy department at Chapel Hill. This was a period just after Bill graduated from Yale Divinity School. [I mention in passing that at Yale Poteat encountered a Kierkegaardian scholar who was himself later to come under the influence of the later Wittgenstein; that scholar was Paul Holmer. Poteat was not unduly influenced by Holmer, I think, but was taken by Kierkegaard. Bill once told me that Holmer stopped him on campus as he (Poteat) was clutching a copy of *Either/Or Vol. I* close to his breast and said to Bill: “there is nothing in that book.” As Poteat’s students know all too well, Poteat thought otherwise.] While at Chapel Hill, Bill steeped himself in philosophy and was intrigued with the impact of modern philosophy on modern religion and culture. During this time, he took a Ph.D. in Religion at Duke and wrote a dissertation in which Pascal and Descartes were compared and contrasted, Pascal coming out on the better end of this comparison. In 1958, things changed for Bill. According to Maynard Adams, a long-time colleague and friend of Bill’s and a fixture in the Philosophy Department long after Bill left to teach at Duke, it was in this year that Bill Poteat found his philosophical voice.

Maynard, who was my own mentor in my Ph.D. program at Chapel Hill, told me that in 1958, just after the publication of Wittgenstein’s *PI*, that the philosophy faculty at UNC had a discussion group to read this new book and evaluate these radically new ideas about language. I can’t say much more about the details of this discussion group except to say that Maynard told me that he knew at this point that Bill Poteat was going to be a very good philosopher. And of course I think this was an understatement.

The idea in *PI* that I think impressed Poteat more than any other was Wittgenstein’s notion of language games; Poteat was especially impressed by the diversity of language games within ordinary language. This is clearly seen in his essay in *Intellect and Hope*.

As I interpret it, Poteat took over from Wittgenstein this idea that concepts derive their meaning from their use in particular language games. Each game has a peculiar grammar or logic. Although there is much overlap in these games, there is not just one fundamental logic or grammar that underlies all of them. Ordinary language is not a language game, but consists of various languages games. As he puts it, Wittgenstein’s view is that language, or better speech, is

comprised of a variety of language games, governed by constantly changing and seldom specified, sometimes unspecifiable rules, played with ever-evolving counters, and among which the only relation which obtained was that of a ‘family-resemblance... When Laplace said of God: ‘I have no need of that hypothesis,’ he was in a way making an important Wittgensteinian remark. The language games of ‘physics’ and ‘chemistry’ have no use for the concept of ‘God.’ ...And obviously, ‘hearts’ no more belongs to poker than to bridge; nor does it belong exclusively to cardiology (*IH*, 207).

Like Wittgenstein, Poteat claims that every concept gets its meaning in relation to its grammatical environment, the central feature of which is the occasion of its use.

To see how this works, Poteat says that concepts like “person,” “happen,” “action,” “decision,” “choose,” and so forth have a different meaning because they have different uses within the different language games of myth, stories (including arts like drama, novels, and so forth) and histories. Moreover, there are different senses of myth, the classical and the eschatological. Poteat sometimes refers to these different games as articulate

forms, forms that have logical environments; he says, in perfect allegiance to Wittgenstein, “No concept is logical-topography neutral” (*IH*, 227). He concludes by saying: “Every such form depends upon and has no stronger legitimation than its grounding in its living use among men” (*IH*, 251).

While it is fascinating to trace the differences between the grammar of the language game of history and the language game of the cosmos as Poteat does (a contrast often assimilated to the contrast between Jerusalem and Athens), I must turn to the bearing of all of this on the impact of Polanyi in the shaping of these Wittgensteinian ideas. At the very beginning of the essay, Poteat lets us know that while he is making use of the Wittgensteinian concept of language games, he has his reservations about this model. He says: “There may be a Wittgensteinian fly-bottle waiting behind his own illuminating injunction: ‘Don’t look for the meaning of a word, look for its use’, into which we may heedlessly fly” (*IH*, 210). And without further ado, he warns us not to fall into the following trap:

In all our preoccupation with words as tokens or tools, as having this or that ‘use’ according to rules—specified or implicit—like balls, rackets, bats [and so forth] or as occupying this logical neighborhood, we are in danger of being misled by the notion of meaning as use—*when this is taken exclusively in conjunction with the language-game model*—misled, that is, into overlooking the user, a *conditio sine qua non* of something’s having a use. The kinds of relations I may have to the words I may use cannot be exhaustively displayed in terms of the language-game analogy, or any other single analogy (*IH*, 210).

Polanyi is at work here in shaping Poteat’s acknowledgement that the language-game model is incomplete without persons who play these games, who inhabit the words with whatever personal backing that they give to them, along with whatever meaning these words are taken to carry. We must not forget that there are different ways of saying and different ways of reading what is said, as well as different logical environments. As Kierkegaard might say, these different ways of sense-giving and sense-reading include the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious use of words. Or as Polanyi and Poteat might put it, all saying is personal, even when it is “impersonal.”

But let me end with two brief remarks. First I note a criticism of Wittgenstein’s language-game model by one of Wittgenstein’s students, namely, Rush Rhees. I think Bill would have welcomed this criticism for it continues his worry about the liability of Wittgensteinians to overlook just what Polanyi brings to the table, to wit, the indispensable albeit informal role of user in the use-model of meaning.

In a kind of apostolic succession, Rush Rhees, who was Wittgenstein’s student, passed the wisdom he got from his master on to his student, D. Z. Phillips. And no doubt students are in the best position to criticize their teachers, devoted to them, and knowing them as they do. In any case, Rhees’ criticism of Wittgenstein that I now pass on comes via its telling to me by Phillips.<sup>5</sup>

Rhees says that Wittgenstein never got completely over the formalism that characterized his early period in his *Tractatus*. In that early work, Wittgenstein was concerned with logical form as the parameter that determines all of the possible things that can be said. In this respect he was thinking about language as bounded by rules in the way that the game of chess is so bounded. Because chess is such a formal system, it makes perfect sense to speak of all of the possible moves in the game. In principle, all such moves could be programmed into a computer like Deep Blue. But Phillips says that Rhees thought that in *PI* Wittgenstein’s idea of language as consisting of a family of games did not abandon completely the notion that language is such a formal system. As such we might be led to think that in Wittgenstein’s model of language as a family of games it would make sense to calculate

all the possible moves within a particular language game. But Rhees is, I think rightly, unhappy with this model of language. To remedy this, Rhees suggests that we can find a better analogy for language, a less formal analogy, if we substitute the model of a conversation for the game model.

Let me defer to Phillips' own words: "Rhees notes that Wittgenstein's emphasis on 'following a rule,' 'continuing a series,' 'going on in the same way,' have their natural home in the context of playing a game or operating within formal systems. They are not at home, on the other hand, if we think of our innumerable daily conversations" (Phillips, 104). One can be a chess master but not a master of conversation in the same sense. Indeed Rhees' point is that conversations proceed informally—by way of improvised responses we might say.

It is here, I think, that we arrive at Poteat's reservation about the game analogy and why he thought it needed to be supplemented with Polanyi's emphasis on the role of the person (or the user) in the use-model of meaning. And I suspect that both Poteat and Polanyi would be much more sanguine with Rhees than Wittgenstein on just this point. Moreover, I think Polanyi might well have welcomed the idea of science as a conversation as opposed to a game, and surely Poteat would have welcomed the idea of philosophy as a conversation. And like all conversations, the give and take among the participants proceeds in ways that are essentially informal and grounded in nothing more or less than the ongoing personal judgments of the participants who conduct it. Indeed, I have no doubt that both Polanyi and Poteat would resonate with the idea of life itself as a conversation as opposed to a game.

Finally, I register one final observation. To my mind Poteat saw in *Personal Knowledge* something more profound than Polanyi himself saw. And he was able to see this thanks to the insights he gained from Wittgenstein. Those insights center on the issue of meaning. Poteat found his voice in awakening (I might even say re-awakening) to the fact that voice is the paradigmatic figure of meaning for human beings. (I say that this might have been a re-awakening to note my sense that Bill's childhood was shaped by the voice of his father's sermons, a voice that perhaps never ceased to resound in his bones.) So then, while Polanyi's focus was on knowledge, Poteat's was on meaning and hence on language and voice. Yet in the end, Poteat might well agree that he and Polanyi were unified in their convictions not only that all knowledge is personal but that all meaning is personal as well.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> I might also note that it was in 1958 that another great book was published (and right here in Chicago at that), a book that was destined to become canonical in Poteat's philosophical library, namely, Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition*.

<sup>2</sup> Poteat repeats this idea that he is relying on a perspective opened by Polanyi in the opening of part two of the essay (*IH*, 215).

<sup>3</sup> In an exceptional remark, Poteat brings Polanyi's ideas explicitly to bear, but again in almost a passing way as follows: He says that the relation that speakers bear to their words has an active-passive quality that "...parallels Polanyi's tacit-explicit, subsidiary-focal, proximal-distal, attending to-attending from dichotomies..." (*IH*, 199).

<sup>4</sup> See for example three essays all published in 1959: "Birth, Suicide, and the Doctrine of Creation: An Exploration of Analogies" (*Mind*); "God and the Private I" (*Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*); and "I will Die: An Analysis" (*The Philosophical Quarterly*).

<sup>5</sup> *The Problem of Evil and the Problem of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press 2005). Hereafter cited in parenthesis by page number as Phillips.

# Polanyi's Influence on Poteat's Conceptualization of Modernity's "Insanity" and Its Cure

Dale Cannon

**ABSTRACT** Key Words: William Poteat, Michael Polanyi, Soren Kierkegaard, critique of modernity, cultural crisis of modernity, post-critical, irony, self-abstraction, double-reflection, re-duplication, indirect communication, dialectical communication, contemporary gnosticism, contemporary nihilism, post-critical logic, post-critical reasoned inquiry.

*My intent is to paint in rather broad strokes Bill Poteat's intellectual agenda, as I came to understand it, and how Michael Polanyi fit into that agenda for Poteat alongside other major intellectual mentors. Bill's agenda was to expose critically and, so far as possible, to counter the fateful consequences of what he called the "prepossessions of the European Enlightenment" regarding human knowing, human doing, and human being. Although his work involved conceptual analysis, the nature of this conceptual-archaeology was far more profound than what usually goes by the name "conceptual analysis" or "cultural conceptual analysis." In effect it sought first to bring to light how the conceptual resources by which modern intellectuals reflectively consider anything, fatefully result in a state of self-abstractedness – indeed, a kind of culturally constituted insanity – that loses touch with the actual, concrete object of one's concern, with one's actual concrete self, and with the wellsprings of one's intellectual passion and creativity. Second, Bill sought to cure this cultural insanity, person by person, by ushering his students and readers into re-placement of themselves into themselves, in possession of themselves, within the concrete context of their embodied personhood. Poteat called attention to the way that our powers of reflection quite systematically forget their contextual rootedness in this (multi-leveled) cultural matrix and, beneath that, in our lived bodies – ultimately in our personhood. Polanyi served to assist Poteat (and his students) in this endeavor, I believe, as much as, or more than, did any other of Poteat's several intellectual mentors.*

My first direct encounter with Bill Poteat was in a graduate course he taught in Existential Philosophy in Fall Semester 1965. This was my first term at Duke as a graduate student in philosophy. The following Fall Semester (1966) along with one other student I did a tutorial in Polanyi's *Personal Knowledge* with Poteat in his home in Chapel Hill. I had not really begun seriously to read Polanyi for myself until that Fall. I finished my residency at Duke in June of 1967, receiving my PhD in June 1969, with a dissertation supervised by Poteat, entitled "Mastered Irony: The Point of Entry into a Post-Critical Epistemology." The title makes explicit reference to ideas of both Kierkegaard and Polanyi, though it did not involve a serious exposition of either thinker; it was not *about* either Kierkegaard or Polanyi, though it did employ several of their insights, conceptual innovations, and arguments. Rather, it centered on *identifying and overcoming the inherent self-abstracting tendencies of modern modes of intellectual reflection* (encapsulated in the phrase "the ironies of the modern mind"). As I think about it now, this focus very much coincides, in large part, with Bill Poteat's own agenda as I have come to understand it.

How different and apparently incompatible Polanyi and Kierkegaard seem, especially when read as authors or intellectual systems unto themselves – an approach Poteat definitely discouraged his students from taking! That Polanyi and Kierkegaard are not only compatible but in certain respects profoundly complementary and even convergent is characteristic of the sort of unprecedented creative contribution that Poteat brought to Polanyi studies: Both Polanyi and Kierkegaard in certain basic respects were getting at the same crucial issues.

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The intellectual journey that led me to Poteat and Polanyi has some bearing on my account. Out of high school I began with an undergraduate career-oriented major in physics and mathematics. My focus shifted to philosophy by the middle of my second year of college. I came to recognize later that what motivated the shift was an increasing preoccupation with and philosophical puzzling over the consequences for our understanding of ourselves that were the result of the rise and coming to cultural dominance of what was supposed to be modern scientific understanding of the world. (These consequences I inchoately sensed then, and more clearly believe now, to be more on the order of deep confusions and disorientations – misunderstandings of ourselves – than they were displacements of older, ignorant, pre-scientific understandings by newer, enlightened, scientific understandings.)

I completed a double undergraduate major (physics and philosophy) via an extra year (including a year in Europe), which landed me an NDEA Title IV Fellowship in Philosophy and Philosophy of Science at Duke’s Graduate Philosophy Department. By the end of my first year at Duke (1965-66), I realized that no one in Duke’s Analytic-dominated Philosophy Department was interested in working with me on the larger questions that motivated me in philosophy. By then I had had two courses with Poteat and had come to realize that working with and under Poteat was exactly what would most permit me to follow and support me in following what I felt to be my intellectual calling. That led me to transfer to Duke’s Religion Department to work directly under Poteat with a special focus on Polanyi’s thought. Polanyi’s own pilgrimage from physical chemistry into philosophy, and specifically his breakthrough to post-critical philosophy, became a paradigm for my own intellectual pilgrimage – one that led me not away from my own personal and sub-cultural roots but to a recovery and re-appropriation of those roots.

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Bill Poteat’s own intellectual agenda was set well before meeting Polanyi. It was largely set with his 1951 Duke Ph. D. dissertation (completed in 1950), entitled “Pascal’s Conception of Man and Modern Sensibility.” Though the dissertation was ostensibly about Pascal, it was really about what Pascal sought to be about – namely, identifying, combating, and overcoming the self-abstracting, self-alienating, person-occluding tendencies inherent in modern modes of reflection from the Renaissance forward but particularly of the sort epitomized in Descartes.

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Poteat titled his last book, *Recovering the Ground: Critical Exercises in Recollection* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1994). There he repeatedly calls attention to the fact that the exercises in recollection that he sets out for his reader are not about recovering the ground but are exercises specifically designed to recover the ground, to return his readers (and himself) from being lost in self-alienated abstraction, to return them to their concrete mindbodily selves. This was the dominant theme of Bill’s intellectual calling and career: to counter a fundamental bias built into and taken for granted in modern, critical modes of reflection – that is to say, third-person, non-reflexive “thinking about” things (including thinking about oneself). He deliberately seeks to identify and set out a different mode of reflective inquiry (I should say, different modes) and with different purposes than what is customary – because the customary modes of reflection in modernity (and most of post-modernity) all alienate us from ourselves and the world in common between us. That is to say, Bill sought to point the way to a mode of reflective inquiry which returns us again and again to our embodied selves (before God) and within the common world (participating therein in common-sense-making).

Bill Poteat was concerned to have his students and his readers learn what was involved in and engage in what Kierkegaard identified as *double-reflection* for the purpose of *re-duplication*. The point of double-reflection is not only to concentrate or focus on the content of reflection (“the what”) but to become aware of and track how it is with us personally in our actual lived, existential relationship to that content (“the how”), of which normally we are oblivious. Why? For the sake of bringing our reflective understanding into alignment with our lived relationship within whatever it is we are thinking about, and vice versa (re-duplication). Why? To overcome the manifold ironic contradictions, both comic and tragic, that pervade our lives as modern intellectuals just beneath the surface.

Thus Poteat sought to have us existentially *doubly-reflect* on the intellectual tools (“the how”) with which we think about and reflect upon the world and our concerns (“the what”), seeking to call attention to the cultural means/ language/ metaphors/ assumptions/ pictures we unthinkingly rely on to reflect on the world and discover how they are not neutral at all. They skew our take upon the world and abstract us from ourselves. This work at times looked like conventional conceptual analysis – and to a great extent it was – but it always had a deeper purpose and agenda. For example, we can suppose we hold explicitly to an anti-Cartesian metaphysical view but without realizing it we more often than not continue to rely on and reinforce Cartesian ways of construing the world. Poteat sought to call attention to the way that our powers of reflection quite systematically forget their contextual rootedness in this cultural matrix and, beneath that, in our lived bodies. Polanyi served to assist Poteat (and his students) in this endeavor of double-reflection for the sake of re-duplication, I believe, as much or more than did any other of his mentor-authors. At least Polanyi did so for me – in large part precisely because of Polanyi’s standing within the natural sciences and his showing how a scientist could reflect upon the work of scientific inquiry and reflection without becoming lost in self-abstraction and self-alienation.

Largely from Kierkegaard, I believe, Poteat early on learned that the human condition is (and fundamental concepts about it are accordingly) through and through “dialectical” – which is to say ambiguous: Nothing is simply what it seems to be on the surface, particularly not what it appears to be to detached, “objective” reflection (whose model of intelligibility remains the wholly explicit, immediately apprehensible, unambiguous, “clear and distinct idea”). What is needed is a sensitivity to the ironic possibilities in existence. All truth as truth, considered existentially, is inherently and essentially dialectical: what it discloses of itself is directly dependent on one’s own mode of relationship to it, on how fully one has for oneself come into rapport with it. When Kierkegaard referred to “existential” matters, he is referring primarily to this relationship that we have to the truth of things. It would not be wrong to say that existential matters are precisely matters of spirit or spirituality in the authentic sense of these words. To keep in touch with and monitor this existential relationship we have to the truth of things requires a different kind of reflection than usual: what Kierkegaard called a passionate, “subjective” reflection, a reflection that attends more to the “how” of truth (how it is to be realized in existence) than to the “what” of truth. An approach to, and communication of, truth that attends to the “what” as if the “how” can be blithely ignored presumes that truth is not dialectical but is evidently the same for all. Such an approach and communication Kierkegaard speaks of as *direct*. On the contrary, an *indirect* or dialectical approach (and communication of truth) that addresses this tacit relationship of ourselves to truth is always in order – indeed, is essential. Unless a person becomes aware of and sensitive to this, she or he is liable to misunderstand and mistake what Poteat was all about and what he found in Polanyi. Sometimes Polanyi was aware of and sensitive to this, at other times he was not. And that is, in large measure, where the difference between them lies.

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In any case, encountering Polanyi's thought heightened, deepened, and re-focused Poteat's agenda. He read some of Polanyi's early essays in 1952, and a manuscript of the Gifford Lectures in 1955 while in England studying ordinary language philosophy. His appreciation of the radicalness of Polanyi's criticism of (to use Poteat's words in *Polanyian Mediations: In Search of a Post-Critical Logic* [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1985], 2) "the prepossessions of the European Enlightenment" ["concerning the nature of human knowing and doing, and, by implication, of the architectonics of learned inquiry erected upon this Enlightenment foundation"] grew with the years, particularly with a "breakthrough" Poteat experienced (into a personally deeper re-duplication) in 1968 with his travel to Greece and meeting with Greek sculptor Evangelos Moustakas. (For his own autobiographical account of this "breakthrough," see the Prologue to *Polanyian Mediations*.) In other words, Polanyi's thought complemented and refined Bill Poteat's agenda, which in turn provided a critical perspective on Polanyi's own work – as to how faithful Polanyi was to what Poteat had become convinced were Polanyi's deepest insights and profoundest criticisms of the legacy of the Enlightenment.

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Polanyi is only one of several intellectual mentors for Poteat, including (in addition to Blaise Pascal) Søren Kierkegaard, Ludwig Wittgenstein (in his later work), Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Hannah Arendt. These were the most important. Others too were important, however: W. H. Auden, Elizabeth Sewell, William Faulkner, Gabriel Marcel, Denis DeRougemont, John MacMurray, Paul Ricoeur, Walter Ong, Hans Jonas, Erwin Straus, George Steiner, John Austin, H. Richard Niebuhr, Joseph Church, Chaim Perelman, Thorlief Boman, Johannes Pederson, Walker Percy, Evangelos Moustakas, Paul Cezanne, and *many* others. All were critics of modernity (at least in the respects wherein Poteat was drawn to them): all were diagnosticians of the cultural crisis/malaise of modernity and the "prepossessions of the European Enlightenment," all sought to find pointers to a saner, more wholesome, truer understanding of ourselves and the world about us. Poteat excelled in putting these thinkers in their writings into creative dialogue with each other (especially in the classroom), using each to counterbalance, correct, and fill out what was missing in the others; each throwing new light on matters of common concern. Without the others (without the "triangulation" afforded by holding each in creative tension with the others) the central crisis of modernity and its issues would be less clear, less well understood. Thus for Poteat and Poteat's students, Polanyi was rarely, if ever, read and appreciated as a thinker by himself, as a thought-world unto itself, or as a solution to the crisis of modernity on his own. *No one thinker, in Poteat's estimation, could or should be!* Polanyi was always only one entrée among others into sorting out the muddle of modernity (though to be sure some were more important in certain respects than were others). And that is how Poteat, I think, would counsel us to be reading Polanyi today.

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Family resemblances among these writers included their different accounts of a large range of problematic consequences and manifold overwhelming temptations issuing from "the prepossessions of the European Enlightenment concerning the nature of human knowing and doing" plus deep resonances in their critique of these consequences and temptations with a Biblical/Hebraic sensibility: varying expressions of gnosticism (or "angelism/bestialism" to use the evocative phrase of Walker Percy); varying forms of nihilism; romantic irony as an existential standpoint; unbounded eroticism ("sensual erotic genius" to use Kierkegaard's phrase); a loss of any substantial sense of reality (a sense of unreality, and a corresponding indistinction between reality and so-called virtual reality); a loss of commonsense; a loss of reflexive self-reference (at least in any concrete sense); a loss of concreteness and of concrete orientedness within our bodies; a loss of the sense of

our embodied incarnate condition; a loss of the sense of being present with and to other persons; a loss of the *otherness* of things (loss of co-presence and mutuality); a loss of worth and goodness of things and the corresponding sense that we are in some fundamental sense answerable to them and for them; an uprootedness from the wellsprings of our passions; a superordination of the visual sensorium and of the visual field from which the seer/knower is as if it were absent; the exteriorization of our sensibility; an inability to give credence to any standpoint other than what the later Husserl called ‘the natural standpoint’ – namely, third-person, detached, impersonal spectation; the dominance of a mechanized conception of the world ripe for unhindered exploitation; a lack of appreciation for paradox, metaphor, indirection (indirect communication), ambiguity, irony, and humor (and that there are some truths that simply cannot be said clearly and distinctly), or contrariwise an unrestrained reveling in them (as in post-modern romantic irony); a prejudice on behalf of formalized, context independent, univocal, tenseless language (paradigmatically mathematics); a prejudicial disposition to treat things under the aspect of abstract homogeneous space and time; a radical discontent with being domiciled in a particular time and place and culture and an irrepressible hankering for being elsewhere (what Max Picard called “infinite flight”); a loss of any happy coming together in a synthesis of infinitude and finitude, of the infinite in the finite, of ideality in the everyday; etc.

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Poteat found counters to these manifold temptations of modernity in large measure (though not exclusively) in terms of a biblical or Hebraic sensibility (Jewish and Christian). He often spoke of biblical themes, concepts, images, metaphors, etc. as “Yahwist” motifs of thought. Here, it seems, for Poteat, was the locus of our sanest prepossessions of knowing and being. Key to these, of course, is the I-Thou, personal encounter, first- and second-person interaction and exchange, between the individual person and God, and between person and person. In prayer conceived as personal encounter (indeed, conceived above all as personalizing encounter) we find the most profound expression of language, *kairos* time vs. homogeneous time, place vs. space, the Augustinian motif of faith seeking understanding in love vs. the Hellenic motif of the priority of intellect to will and passion, calling vs. social role and status. Important in making sense of this is the fact that for Poteat, as for Kierkegaard, and perhaps for Pascal too, being a person of Christian faith was not a matter of assenting to a body of theological beliefs or even of indwelling a particular symbol system and set of stories (one among others) – though subsidiarily, these oriented him to what did matter). It was first of all a matter of returning to and owning up to the particular concrete self one is called to be before God, above all vis-à-vis the decisively personalizing historical incarnation of God in Christ. Christianity for Poteat was not a content for thought, not a *what* to contemplate intellectually, but a radical address that concerns *our* very “existence,” i.e., *how* we are in the world and *how* we relate to everything *qua* responsible person.

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Rooted in these concerns and these prepossessions, Poteat found much to be satisfied with in Polanyi’s thought *and* much to be dissatisfied with. Remarkably, Poteat did not find in Polanyi’s explicit reflections on religion much with which he agreed. Where he found himself most profoundly in agreement with Polanyi was in Polanyi’s understanding of the person of the knower, the knower as called and responsibly obeying that calling, pursuing hidden discoveries, and the knower as experiencing self-transformation in her/his deepening grasp and indwelling of reality both transcendent and immanent, a reality that evocatively manifests itself, yes, but inexhaustibly (see *Polanyian Meditations*, pp. 133, 136 *et passim*.) According to Poteat, Polanyi often said incredibly profound things and said them more profoundly than he realized, but often Polanyi failed to realize that profundity and later unfortunately came to qualify, compromise, or discount some of the most profound things that he had said. Overall, as with all the great philosophical writers by whom Poteat was mentored, each

had failings and shortcomings; each failed fully to appreciate and remain faithful to their profoundest insights into the predicament of modernity and how to extract ourselves from it. (Toward the end of his life, Poteat discovered a book which profoundly confirmed and deepened his intuitions into what he took to be the culture-wide insanity of modern life, *Madness and Modernism: Insanity in the Light of Modern Art, Literature, and Thought* by Louis A. Sass [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992]. Among the sources with which Poteat had earlier become well acquainted that contributed to his diagnosis of the insanity of modern culture, special mention needs to be made of the novels and essays of Walker Percy.)

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Poteat spoke repeatedly of the crisis of modern culture as an *[intellectual] culture-wide insanity*, and meant that charge quite literally, though he was keenly aware of the ironies created in so doing. And he understood his own task (and the larger task of his intellectual mentors) as that of curing this insanity and returning us to our selves, to who we are as concrete, embodied persons, persons before God – yet not supposing that it could be done straightforwardly or easily – least of all as a social program to be advocated for the masses.

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A couple of times (not often though – in fact, rather rarely), I recall Poteat having referred to himself as doing propadeutical (preparatory) philosophical work for more-or-less orthodox Christian theology, in a kind of servant role for Christian theology (or perhaps more broadly for Christian intellectuals generally). The problem was that few of the theologians around him came close, in his judgment, to filling the bill for what he had in mind, or fully grasping and appreciating what he was doing. To his thinking, most contemporary theologians (especially those of a more liberal persuasion, but so also those of a fundamentalist cast) fell victim to the self-abstracting intellectual matrix (habits) of modernity that he was committed to challenging and overcoming.

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Some key “borrowings” or “minings” of Poteat from Polanyi: *mindbody*, *mindbodily* (though he coined these two terms himself, they emerged directly from meditating on Polanyi’s writings), the impossibility of exhaustive (complete) reflection and articulation of any subject, our powers of reflection being grounded in pre-reflective acts of being in the world (which derived as much from Merleau-Ponty as from Polanyi), *bodily presuppositions* of our thought and powers of reflection, the incarnate roots of our concepts (our assumptions and presuppositions) in our bodies, tacit intimations of meaning, alternative pictures of what it is to reflect and inquire than those of the Cartesian and Enlightenment inheritance, knowing and being as being mutually implicated in each other, unspecifiable *presuppositions*, subsidiary clues, the pregnancy with meaning of the pre-articulate; the from-to stretch of attention (temporally no less than spatially) – indeed, the entire tacit dimension of things that constitute the subsidiary particulars from which we attend in attending to the foci of our interests; and certainly a defining characteristic of reality as that which manifests itself inexhaustibly.

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Bill Poteat’s publication that most explicitly takes Polanyi’s thought into discussion is his *Polanyian Meditations: In Search of a Post-Critical Logic*. I would like briefly to characterize what Poteat meant by “a post-critical logic.” I was in fairly close contact with him when he was initially undertaking this project. I may be wrong, but I believe I may have been the one who suggested to him this particular phrase as what it was he was getting at in his initial writing efforts that led to this book. Regardless, in no way do I want to take credit for the conception that lay behind it.

What Poteat meant by it says a lot about what he took Polanyi to mean by “post-critical,” and as well what he took to be the radical import of Polanyi’s thought for newly understanding and re-conceiving “logic,” “reason,” “rationality,” and related concepts from what they have long been taken to mean by Enlightenment thought and mainstream modern philosophy. For us here at this conference, what Poteat was getting at by the phrase can provide for us a paradigm of the relationship between Poteat’s thought and that of Polanyi.

Poteat read Polanyi as directing us to the *re-place-ment* all of the deracinate (= uprooted) products of enlightened critical thought back within the tacit concrete pre-lingual context of their emergence and their appropriate use (compare Wittgenstein here: both “Look not for meaning but for use” and “a picture held us captive”), replacing them back within the stretch of attention between the inarticulate, inchoate intimations of meaning, connection, and order we sense within our mindbody and the actual articulations of appropriate/normative/ correct meaning, connection, and order which we express and seek to have confirmed between us. Formal logic, as such, is not only an abstract, decontextualized, highly refined and sophisticated articulate skeleton [actually a system of signs of such a skeleton] of *some* of these normative relationships (precisely the ones that remain univocally the same from one context to another, ignoring all that are not context-invariant). We cannot as such learn rationally to inquire and reason directly through employing formal logic and following its explicit rules [despite the suasions of formal logic enthusiasts to have formal logic be a core subject of the general university curriculum], no more than we can learn to ride a bicycle through being handed the engineering formula for keeping a bicycle upright via shifts of weight and appropriately orienting the front wheel for any given velocity. We cannot, because understanding and applying formal logic depends upon informal, tacit skills of interpretation and application of the formally explicit terms, concepts, principles and rules, but, even more fundamentally, upon our prior but still present, more primitive tacit, pre-lingual, groping mindbodily efforts to discern meaning, make sense, and find connections between things.

Thus a “post-critical logic” would be logic (both formal and informal) re-placed, re-appropriated, and, as a result, reconceived as a mindbodily extension of ourselves toward what we accredit to be normatively interconnected thoughts – that is to say, logic as employed responsibly by a reasoning person. Indeed, formal logic is nothing, is meaningless, without that tacit appropriation and grounding – even when it forgets its root and ground in our mindbody’s hold upon the world.

Now is this a matter of giving exposition and extension to Polanyi’s ideas? Yes and no. While at times it is Polanyi exposition, in important respects it is doing a Polanyian kind of post-critical analysis of logical, rational thinking – following up that toward which Polanyi pointed, following up intimations of further aspects of the realities which Polanyi’s own writings disclosed. Was it/is it always consistent with what Polanyi wrote? Well, both yes and no. Which is precisely what, I believe, Polanyi would affirm and expect.

### **Some Questions for Further Consideration**

- What is Poteat’s intellectual home base/foundation/tradition? I think we all have some notion of it, but it is not something that surfaces prominently as such in what Poteat wrote or taught. What place and role does it grant to Christian revelation? Where, if anywhere, might we place Poteat theologically and hermeneutically? Does it matter? We need to recall and take into account here Poteat’s deliberate adoption of irony (which he sought to keep mastered) at times in his teaching and in interpersonal relations.
- In some sense, Poteat sought to establish a new intellectual tradition, as it were, among his students and the principal writers/thinkers that were the meat of the reading program in which he directed his graduate students. How does this appear in light of the work of Alasdair MacIntyre and Jaroslav Pelican (in addition

- to Polanyi) about the crucial role of tradition for thought?
- Regarding Poteat's critique(s) of Polanyi: What are its key points? What should we make of Poteat's critique in *PM* of Polanyi as being inconsistently Yahwist?
  - Poteat's project in relation to Polanyi's project? Neither is pre-modernist. Neither is modernist. Neither is post-modernist in most senses of the phrase. Both are post-critical in some sense (both claim this phrase). In the same sense? Is Poteat's "return to the ground" identical to Polanyi's shift (from a modernist/Enlightenment/critical perspective) to what he understands as post-critical? If not identical, then how do they differ?
  - What difficulties stand in the way of understanding and fully embracing Poteat's perspective? For many, Poteat was and remains a mystery as to what his views really were, where he stood on important matters, and where his own perspective fit into (if at all) his hearer's frame of reference. (No doubt this depends on who is under consideration.) Is it more difficult than understanding and embracing Polanyi's perspective? Is it vulnerable to the charge of being in some sense elitist? Too 'far out'? Too radical? Too intellectually sophisticated?
  - Polanyi scholars have spent not a little time wondering and exploring why Polanyi has not been better received among professional philosophers and intellectuals generally. Might we ask and explore similar questions about Poteat? Are the two cases instances of the same problem and the same causes, or do they differ in significant respects?
  - To what extent is Poteat's perspective uniquely Poteatian? How 'common' (widely shared, even among his students) is it? How common could it be/become? How sharable is it? How common *should* it become? How important and irreplaceable is it?
  - The difficulties and obstacles one meets in Poteat's hyper-reflexive writing/rhetorical style: How essential/necessary are they to what it seeks to communicate? Can Poteat's views be simplified (communicated more clearly) without loss? Or does that communication always require the dialectical sophistication Poteat embodied in himself and demanded of his students?
  - Similarly, to what extent is it possible for someone wishing to do for others, and for students in particular, what Poteat sought to do by way of enabling a recovery of themselves from reflective self-abstraction and replacing themselves in possession of themselves within the concrete context of their embodied personhood? Have any of Poteat's own students been able to accomplish this feat? How effectively and with how many of their students? What conditions facilitate its accomplishment and what obstacles frustrate it? Is it possible for others who have not been Poteat's direct students/disciples in this endeavor to take on and pursue it? Further, what can we learn from their collective experience about transitioning readers of Polanyi from a critical to a post-critical perspective?

# *Salto Mortale:* Poteat and the Righting of Philosophy

D. M. Yeager

ABSTRACT Key Words: agency, commitment, heuristics, F. H. Jacobi, Michael Polanyi, William H. Poteat, *salto mortale*.

*Ranging himself against philosophical and theological traditions that he considered “bankrupt,” William H. Poteat sought to set philosophy back on its feet by exemplifying the way one might reason philosophically from a different set of assumptions. His project can, in this respect, be usefully compared to that of F. H. Jacobi two centuries earlier. Poteat and Michael Polanyi offered attuned critiques of philosophical presuppositions and practices. Constructively, both were committed to bringing home the agent and knower who had been evacuated by depersonalized and abstracted accounts of being and knowing.*

Suppose that philosophers really are “out of their senses” and really do “walk on their heads.” Suppose, furthermore, that you are almost alone in being able to perceive the pathos of their impaired cranial hopping. Heads downward, their feet treading air, their heels where their ears should be, they see everything upside down, including you. With dogmatic certitude, they trade and sparkle among themselves, dismissing you as a crank, if they notice you at all. What would you do? What intellectual (and moral) *obligation* would you have? In considering the contribution of William H. Poteat (even—or perhaps especially—when the matter of particular interest is the relation of his work to that of Michael Polanyi), this is where we must begin, because this is where he, rightly or wrongly, began.

It was Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, two centuries before Poteat, who surveyed his philosophical colleagues and complained, “It is as if I saw people walking on their heads while they shout at the top of their voices: ‘Hop! Hop!’ and ‘Hop away from the heretic who, scornful of the head, remains standing on his feet!’”<sup>1</sup> Poteat and Jacobi are alike in at least this: they are both powerful critics, able to discern not just local and reparable oversights and inconsistencies in this or that philosophical argument, but also the invidious and infectious implications of the foundational assumptions upon which philosophical analyses are built. They are also alike in thinking that philosophy can only be put right by beginning from different assumptions. Jacobi’s invitation to Lessing—that he perform the acrobatic feat of a *salto mortale* in order to somersault from an inverted to an upright position—images Poteat’s own diagnosis and prescription with respect to modern philosophy.<sup>2</sup>

This comparison with Jacobi is not justified by anything in Poteat’s biography. I do not recall Poteat ever making reference to Jacobi in his writings or in conversation (although I do distinctly remember his describing philosophers as “walking on their heads”). I bring the two into conjunction simply because their improbable likenesses help us to see why the work of Michael Polanyi engaged Poteat to the extent that it did. I would be surprised if Poteat ever doubted for a moment that it was he who was “right side up,” but he also knew he was looking out at a veritable sea of eye-level boot laces. There were a few others, though, who also had the ground under their feet, and he gravitated to them as allies. That is why figures like Polanyi, Ludwig Wittgenstein, George Steiner, and Søren Kierkegaard were so particularly important as anchors in Poteat’s philosophical and pedagogical program. That Polanyi enjoyed pride of place among these confederates is plain not only from the

title of and prologue to *Polanyian Meditations* but also from earlier essays. For example, in “George Steiner: Extra-Territorial Critic,” after both expressing his appreciation of Steiner’s insight and faulting Steiner for “loss of nerve,” he contrasts Steiner’s work with those who do not succumb to the “evasions” of critical thought and who “have explicitly moved to *post-critical* options.” He names Wittgenstein and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, but “most of all Michael Polanyi in *Personal Knowledge: Toward a Post-Critical Philosophy*.”<sup>3</sup>

It is certainly true that Poteat did not think of himself as a student or interpreter of Polanyi or any of the others; his calling was not to become a commentator explaining, defending, and embroidering the work of someone else. But as peers, they provided confirmation of his fundamental critique; they were witnesses, like himself, to the recovery of “common sense.” They, too, treated modern philosophy, if not modern thought more generally, as strangely and obstinately inverted. They, too, were performing, each in a distinctive way, the treacherous feat of the *salto mortale*.

## 1. Convergences

Of course, his collegial relationship with Polanyi brought Poteat more than moral support in his analysis of the failures of philosophy. In conceiving a corrective alternative, the two were deeply attuned, so attuned that I do not think we can identify distinctively Polanyian elements in Poteat’s thought. At best, we can only point to places where Poteat chose to develop his own position in Polanyian language and structures. Of the many that might be mentioned here, I will confine myself to three.

### 1.1 Faith that grounds knowledge and action

Poteat, for all his hostility to modern philosophical assumptions, possessed philosophical acuity of a caliber that I have rarely encountered since. In both his criticism and his constructive work, he therefore expected of himself a logic that was superior to what he rejected. No fuzzy, second-rate arguments would do. Polanyi’s distinctive analysis of the actual operations of the working scientist opened for Poteat a clear, precise, and philosophically persuasive account of the fiduciary character of all acts of knowing. Polanyi’s framing of the “logic of affirmation” and his theory of the *from-to* structure of all learning and knowing provided a way to frame the attack on narrow conceptions of rationality without having to fall back into the swamp of intuitions, sensibility, feelings and sensations, and innate certainties (a swamp that Jacobi and others since have seldom found the language to escape). Now, to be sure, when Poteat first read *Personal Knowledge* in manuscript, he already had in place his knowledge of Pascal, Kierkegaard, and H. Richard Niebuhr. He had been tussling with the pervasiveness of faith and the limits of reason all along, but, to take just one example from these authors, the contrast between reason and the reasons of the heart, while it brings the cognitive and the conative into some sort of connection, leaves them sundered despite the word play. Polanyi, in contrast, traced the operations of faith, reliance, and commitment within the most putatively objective and rational of human enterprises. Without any deliberate fanfare, he simply filled in one of the various great ditches (some) philosophers had been struggling for several centuries to get across.

Perhaps even more importantly, Polanyi provided a structure that *justified* holding “unproven beliefs,” a structure that installed the indemonstrable as the unavoidable starting point of demonstration. He did this without appealing to any supernatural or mystical ground and without supposing any problematic intuitions or special organs of knowledge. At the same time that Polanyi banished methodological doubt, he removed the philosophical shame associated with reliance on the doubt-able. He thus made space for Poteat to write those

last two paragraphs of “Myths, Stories, History, Eschatology, and Action”:

Such fiduciary grounding cannot be explicitly prescribed; nor is there any sure protection against its eventual erosion.

After three centuries of a quest for, if not an assurance of, certainty we must contritely confess that we in the Western world have lived by nothing more substantial than hope, recognizing nevertheless that hope has always been rewarded by unexpected knowledge and that speech, made bold by hope, has always disclosed to us more than we could explicitly anticipate and than we can ever fully say. “What the dead had no speech for, when living, / They can tell you, being dead: the communication / Of the dead is tongued with fire beyond the language of the living.”<sup>4</sup>

## 1.2 *Heuristic passion*

Jacobi’s attack on eighteenth-century construals of rationality that reduced reason to explanation, together with the inadequacy of Jacobi’s own repeated efforts to formulate a persuasive alternative account, remind us, should we need any reminding, of just how tightly and invisibly we are all bound to the construal of knowledge as repeatable or at least traceable explanatory mastery. Polanyi’s reconstruction of knowing, accomplished by treating it as an action motivated by heuristic passion, provided Poteat with a means of conceptualizing (a means more philosophically convincing than the psychological theories offered by figures like Piaget) his own way of leaping over “rock and abyss” to land “firmly and in good health with both feet on the other side.”<sup>5</sup> Discovery, the revelatory unfolding of the only now known, replaces the tracing and projecting of causal chains as the very soul of the active, groping, achieving enterprise of reasoning.

The notion of “intellectual passions” generally allowed Poteat, in one oxymoronic stroke, to override troublesome received dichotomies. I remember his holding out to me this idea of intellectual passion as the thread by which I might find my way from my background in literary studies into the world of philosophical and theological theory for which I was so manifestly ill prepared. Among the intellectual passions, heuristic passion, in Polanyi’s sense of “truth-bearing passion,”<sup>6</sup> was especially important to him because of its power not only to account for feats of discovery but also to capture (without any self-sabotaging attempt to explain) creativity and originality—novelty in the life of the mind and in our social “world.”

It seems to me (though I admit that I have no firmer evidence to offer in support of this suggestion than my own limited sense of who he was) that it also gave him a name for his own driving, striving, searching, restless journey. It enabled him to claim his inability to find a place of peace as a virtue rather than a reason for despair. He adverted many times to what he called the witnessing presence of the philosophers whose lives and daily practices were, in his judgment, totally dissonant with the theories that they proffered. In contrast, he not only taught about but also witnessed to the vital reality of heuristic passion.

Moreover, it seems to me in retrospect that heuristic passion was what he wanted more than anything else from his graduate students. (I regret to say that at the time, clueless as I was, I did not really understand that.) That desire was, I would suggest, what made him a liberating and inspiring teacher. To seek to cultivate genuine heuristic passion in one’s students is a remarkable undertaking, requiring almost unfathomable trust: trust that the student has enough of a foundation to *reach* for true insight; trust that the student will *lay hold* of an insight that is not hopelessly redundant and banal; and trust that even if the insight is redundant or banal,

the simple *endeavor* of working it out in risk and responsibility will justify the venture.

### 1.3 *The evacuation of the agent*

Poteat complained frequently and colorfully about the philosophical fantasy of the “deracinate” knower, plucked up out of body and history, and divested of concrete particularity in order to reason impersonally and therefore reliably. Yet his more serious and abiding concern focused on the tendency of philosophical accounts to empty knowing, evaluation, and decision of any vestiges of agency at all. Fallacious as it might be to pretend to uproot the knower from her or his historical context, it is even worse to leave “thought” or “judgment” suspended in air to drift unanchored among impersonal and disowned “systems” that are scrutinized abstractly for their logic, their coherence, their truth—all without any reference to the agents who make the claims, uphold their truth, and act in the social space that they create. Here Polanyi’s often almost inarticulate references to that irreducible, always operational “centre of action,” “autonomous centre of decision,” and “primordial centre of individuality”<sup>7</sup> converge with Poteat’s explorations of the mysterious and elusive character of the “I.” Poteat’s publication record makes it clear that his interest in and development of the theme of agency was well underway by the time he encountered Polanyi’s work, but Polanyi’s theory of emergence, which grounds the mind and all its operations (from the most rudimentary perception up through the most elaborate abstract conceptualizations) in the intricacies of bodily probing of world, sufficed to open for Poteat the possibility of recasting the reflexive, reflective “I” as the composite, thoroughly temporal mindbody that dominates Poteat’s late books. This attempt to give some sort of philosophical account of the systematically elusive and unsayable ground and meaning of agency and therefore freedom constitutes Poteat’s most distinctive and most significant contribution.

Indeed, there is reason to think that on this point Poteat may have attributed to Polanyi’s work more than Polanyi himself put into it. The criticism of *Meaning* put forward by Ron Hall and Bruce Haddox provides a case for reflection. They object that in his last, co-authored book Polanyi seems to move backward from important ground that he had staked out in *Personal Knowledge*. *Meaning* treats science and art as quite different, whereas *Personal Knowledge*, as they read it, makes “an innovative claim that science and art were grounded in the same structure of inquiry, the key feature of which was the centrality of the imaginative, creative person.”<sup>8</sup> Hall argues, against the grain of the arguments in *Meaning*, that just as the scientist and the artist *both* “disappear” behind their work, the works of both science and art, *mutatis mutandis*, can only properly be accounted for by reference to the agency and ownership of the scientist or the artist.<sup>9</sup> Haddox is even more explicit about the evacuation of agency he finds in *Meaning*:

The presence of persons as indicators in our first person language shows explicitly what Polanyi has always maintained is the fiduciary grounding of all claims. What this means is that all “framed” indications cannot be analyzed adequately *in themselves*, as Polanyi seems to be doing in *Meaning*, but must be cast within the logic of personal action. “Framed” science is a personal achievement of an abstract nature which is used by someone to indicate something about an aspect of reality.

....

The point here is that indication [the “integration” offered by the scientist or the artist in order to “indicate something about the world”] is an act by someone, not a logical characteristic of a particular class of propositions. . . . Like science, art is created by the imagination through abstraction and is what it is by virtue of how it is used in personal action. Polanyi argues this in *Personal Knowledge*. He seems to forget it in *Meaning*.<sup>10</sup>

I entirely agree with the critique of *Meaning* advanced by Hall and Haddox. But I wonder whether our sense of the regressive character of *Meaning* arises because Polanyi really did “forget” what he had achieved in his earlier work or whether Poteat taught the three of us to “hear” in Polanyi’s earlier work a more developed philosophical account of “the grounds of human action,” the “logical priority” of “first-person indication,” and “the self-involving nature of all actions”<sup>11</sup> than Polanyi ever put there.<sup>12</sup>

Conversely, though, I think it is also appropriate to wonder whether Poteat may, in his later work, have excessively diminished the social dimension of agency that Polanyi carefully preserved. It sometimes seems as if Poteat gave way to that seductive “turn to the self” that he had attacked as it manifested itself in critical philosophy—not, to be sure, in giving in to subjective idealism, but in “forgetting” the social nature of “world.” Consider two claims, one early and one late, from his writing. In “Faith and Existence,” an essay which is deeply consonant with the work of H. Richard Niebuhr and which appeared in *The Hibbert Journal* in 1953–1954, Poteat richly explores the proposition that “*a man’s identity is given by that which he ultimately loves and trusts, for it is this that imparts unity to all his purposes, volitions, and acts by defining his existence, as a whole; that as he is faithless to this he insomuch loses his identity. . .*”<sup>13</sup> Roughly thirty-five years later, in *A Philosophical Daybook*, we find what seems to me to be a quite radically different understanding of the unity that constitutes personhood: “My mindbody is the absolutely radical and prior—at the root of and antecedent to absolutely everything (!)—*here and now: the primordial place; whence all times and spaces are pretended; that every time and space retrotends. There being this place is not the condition of my mindbodily integrity; it is this integrity.*”<sup>14</sup>

## 2. Persuasion, Ambivalence, and Influence

As nearly every commentator on Jacobi takes pains to point out (and as Jacobi himself felt compelled to insist), the *salto mortale* is not a blind, feet-first leap into the abyss (or ditch). It is a risky attempt to right oneself by one’s own daring powers. It is a treacherous maneuver, and performed on a tightrope, it can be fatal. It is one thing to criticize the way philosophy (or theology) is being done. It is quite another to propel oneself from the same formative grounding forward or backward through the air to land at some distance on one’s feet. Although Jacobi’s contribution seems to be attracting new interest, the general judgment still seems to be that, despite his importance as a critic and polemicist, the philosophical alternative he developed (insofar as it can be articulated clearly enough to be fairly evaluated) is neither particularly helpful nor successful. And Poteat? In the end, must the same be said of him?

I confess that I find the books that he wrote at the end of his career disappointing. Jacobi’s constructive project shipwrecked because he was never able to make clear how he thought *reason* ought to be understood, if it was not to be understood as the philosophers of his day (and most philosophers since, for that matter) have understood it. In contrast to the extraordinary lucidity of his critiques of Spinoza, Kant, Fichte, and Lessing, Jacobi’s own philosophical contribution thus remains oddly out of focus. My disappointment in Poteat’s final summings up is not that the fundamental insight remains unclear. In my judgment, the final books do a quite extraordinary job of consolidating the project that he began in the 1950s with “Birth, Suicide, and the Doctrine of Creation” (1959), “‘I Will Die’: An Analysis” (1959), and “God and the ‘Private-I’” (1960). My disappointment arises because I do not think the final books succeed in establishing why the “primacy of the person” really matters or what is gained by anchoring all knowing in mindbodily immediacy, tonality, retrotension, and protension. He fails to show the use. He fails to *show* that or how this will get us “out of the fly bottle.” This would be, from Polanyi’s point of view, a failure of *persuasive passion*.

Polanyi has quite a lot to say, in his chapter on the intellectual passions, about persuasive passion, a passion awakened by our hunger for response. While universal intent always requires that a knower seek to bring others to share her or his convictions, the most vivid examples of (and challenges for) persuasive passion arise when the discoverer is driven to adopt a new framework of interpretation. Persuasive passion, like heuristic passion, involves the crossing of a gap, but the gap is different: “To the extent to which a discoverer has committed himself to a new vision of reality, he has separated himself from others who still think on the old lines.”<sup>15</sup> Formal argument and demonstration will not succeed when one is calling others to adopt “a new way of reasoning.” In such cases, supplemental strategies are required, and Polanyi names two: (1) The opponent’s way of arguing must be totally discredited, and the opponent must “be made to appear as thoroughly deluded,” which, Polanyi grants, “will easily come to imply that he [is] a fool, a crank or a fraud.”<sup>16</sup> Thus, he adds, “In a clash of intellectual passions each side must inevitably attack the opponent’s person.”<sup>17</sup> (2) But Polanyi also notes that “proponents of a new system can convince their audience only by first winning their intellectual sympathy for a doctrine they have not yet grasped.”<sup>18</sup> Polanyi himself does not comment on the startling dissonance between the two. The second is far easier to achieve with one’s students than with one’s philosophical peers, so perhaps it is not surprising that Poteat’s intellectual life, particularly after Polanyi’s death, seemed to find its center among his doctoral students. To employ the first strategy almost always forecloses the second. Moreover, the first, as a strategy of *persuasion*, supposes that a vigorous conversation is in progress in which advocates of competing systems actively contend in the effort to show the bearing of their claims upon the real. Ironically, as Poteat’s thought matured, he seems not to have sought that and may even have actively refused it. Certainly Poteat’s choice of meditative reflection removed him from the ‘agora’ in which “heuristic passion will . . . turn (and have to turn) into *persuasive* passion.”<sup>19</sup>

But perhaps this is unfair. Given the dilemma of the thinker whose *salto mortale* has made him unable to speak any longer in the language of his peers, perhaps it was and is up to those of us who were students of Poteat to do the work of showing the use. Perhaps, in dozens of disparate ways, we actually have. But it is at least possible that, infected with Poteat’s ambivalence toward philosophy, we (with the possible exception of Ron Hall) have not done this work in a telling way, that is, in a way that would lodge Poteat’s contribution in the structure of late modern American philosophy. That his ambivalence toward philosophy was profound is beyond doubt. What we are left with in those last books, much more strikingly than in his earlier work, is a philosopher rejecting philosophy so completely that he seems to have no task left apart from the reiteration of the rejection. A philosopher rejecting philosophy—without being quite willing to abandon it and go back to playing bridge or cut his boat free and come ashore in the world of art criticism or philosophical theology.

Yet, even as I write all this I am increasingly aware that, as the comparison with Jacobi suggests, Poteat actually takes his place in a long and distinctive philosophical tradition. Differences abound, but there are some remarkable similarities between Jacobi’s critique of philosophical rationalism in the late eighteenth century, the appeals to sensibility characteristic of German romanticism, William James’s critique of monological reductionism in the early twentieth century,<sup>20</sup> and the “therapeutic” analyses of Poteat, Polanyi, and Wittgenstein in the middle to late twentieth century—not to speak of Martin Heidegger, Jacques Derrida, and their heirs.

So perhaps the more pertinent question is actually this: Why have Jacobi and all his fellow travelers down through these two hundred years of philosophical argument failed to set philosophy back on its feet? Is it because they as much as their adversaries are trapped inside the fly bottle? But what would the way out look like if none of these can be said to have found it? Is it because those who succeed in the *salto mortale* become, by their very success, incomprehensible, or simply cease to philosophize in any recognizable sense? Or is it

because the dominant tradition, still broadly funded by the continuing success of the sciences, remains so powerful (despite its contradictions, hypertrophies, and dissociations) that even penetrating criticism will continue to amount only to a high, resistant descant reminding us that the harmonies and arguments among the dominant choral voices are not, after all, the entire story?

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, *David Hume on Faith or Idealism and Realism: A Dialogue*, collected in *The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel "Allwill,"* trans. with introduction, notes, and bibliography by George di Giovanni (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994), 276.

<sup>2</sup>Jacobi, *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza*, in *Main Philosophical Writings*, 189. The advice is metaphorically imperfect because the actual acrobatic *salto mortale*, performed on the high wire, is an air-borne, no-hands somersault beginning from a standing jump; thus, the performer begins and ends standing upright. Lessing famously declined to attempt the maneuver on the grounds that it required "a leap that I can no longer ask of my old legs and heavy head" (*Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza*, 195).

<sup>3</sup>William H. Poteat, "George Steiner: The Extra-Territorial Critic," in *The Primacy of Persons and the Language of Culture: Essays by William H. Poteat*, ed. with an introduction by James M. Nickell and James W. Stines (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 1993), 266. The essay was originally published in *Soundings* 45.4 (1972):421-37.

<sup>4</sup>William H. Poteat, "Myths, Stories, History, Eschatology and Action: Some Polanyian Meditations," in *Intellect and Hope: Essays in the Thought of Michael Polanyi*, ed. with an introduction by Thomas A. Langford and William H. Poteat (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, for the Lilly Endowment Research Program in Christianity and Politics, 1968), 231. The closing quotation is from "Little Gidding," the last of T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*.

<sup>5</sup>The imagery is once again Jacobi's, from a letter written to Neeb May 30, 1817. I have not seen the text of this letter, but it is quoted in: Rolf Ahlers, review of *Werke*, by Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, ed. Klaus Hammacher and Walter Jaeschke, *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 43.4 (2005): 492.

<sup>6</sup>Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge* (New York: Harper and Row, 1958, 1962), 143.

<sup>7</sup>Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 364, 403, 377.

<sup>8</sup>Ronald L. Hall, "Michael Polanyi on Art and Religion: Some Critical Reflections on *Meaning*," *Zygon* 17.1:14.

<sup>9</sup>Hall, "Michael Polanyi on Art and Religion," 15-16.

<sup>10</sup>Bruce Haddox, "Questioning Polanyi's *Meaning*: A Response to Ronald Hall," *Zygon* 17.1:20-21.

<sup>11</sup>Haddox, "Questioning," 23, 23, 24.

<sup>12</sup>Poteat himself acknowledges in several places that he draws implications from Polanyi's work that were not "wittingly" written in by Polanyi. See, in particular, William H. Poteat, *Polanyian Meditations: In Search of a*

*Post-Critical Logic* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1985), 192.

<sup>13</sup>William H. Poteat, *The Primacy of Persons and the Language of Culture*, ed. and with an introduction by James M. Nickell and James W. Stines (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 1993), 120–21, italics in original.

<sup>14</sup>William H. Poteat, *A Philosophical Daybook: Post-Critical Investigations* (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 1990), entry for March 17, 1988.

<sup>15</sup>Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 150.

<sup>16</sup>Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 151.

<sup>17</sup>Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 152.

<sup>18</sup>Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 151.

<sup>19</sup>Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 159.

<sup>20</sup>For James's own invocation of the *salto mortale*, see: Ronald B. Levinson, "A Note on One of James's Favorite Metaphors," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 8.2 (1947): 237–39.

## Electronic Discussion List

The Polanyi Society supports an electronic discussion group that explores implications of the thought of Michael Polanyi. Anyone interested can join. To join yourself, go to the following address: [http://groups.yahoo.com/group/polanyi\\_list/join](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/polanyi_list/join). If you have difficulty, send an e-mail to Doug Masini (masini@etsu.edu) and someone will see that you are added to the list.

# William H. Poteat: Liberating Theologian For Polanyi ?

J. W. Stines

**ABSTRACT Key Words:** William Poteat and Michael Polanyi; Polanyi's ambivalent relation to Christian theological perspectives; Poteat's post-critical theological commitment; Poteat and human spiritual qualification; an answer to Polanyi.

*As is well known among readers of Tradition and Discovery, William H. Poteat was a central influence in bringing Michael Polanyi to the attention of American scholars and, particularly, to the interest of scholarship in religion and theology. Poteat's own work was heavily impacted by Polanyi. In turn, Polanyi's affiliation with Poteat at Duke and elsewhere clearly impressed and edified Polanyi and led to Polanyi's request for Poteat's collaboration with him on Meaning and to the prospect of Polanyi's coming to Duke for six weeks to facilitate this. Unfortunately, that promising time was not realized. This present essay represents an effort to discern a direction in which such a collaboration might have deeply and felicitously influenced Polanyi's interpretation and celebration of his own poignant, yet quite restless, religious sensibilities.*

I have been away from intense reflection on the work of Polanyi and Poteat for so long that my return was both exciting and frustrating because every second page of reviewing offered fresh interest and beckoning suggestions for what should be my focus for this present discussion. But finally my review of the Scott-Moleski biography of Polanyi and the passages on his religio-theological perspective evoked in me the question of whether Polanyi read any of Poteat's essays, either before or after Poteat's closer personal contact with Polanyi. I note that Poteat cited from Polanyi as early as 1954 (in "The Open Society and Its Ambivalent Friends") but without noting the specific source (likely *The Logic of Liberty*[1951], xvii). On the other hand, so far as I have been able to discover from Polanyi's published works, there is nowhere mention of Poteat on issues theological or otherwise. Indeed, Richard Gelwick, in a communication to me on September 15, 2008, confirmed this conclusion in his comment that he did "not recall [Polanyi having made] any specific conceptual or other reference to Poteat" in either his reading of Polanyi's writings or in his many conversations with him. Gelwick goes on to emphasize that this is not to deny the major role that Poteat played in encouraging Polanyi through conversations with him, by bringing him to Duke in the spring of 1964 and, four years later, by co-editing with Thomas Langford *Intellect and Hope: Essays in the Thought of Michael Polanyi*, thereby introducing Polanyi to a considerably larger and more appreciative audience in America than he had found at home. That Polanyi never cited or otherwise referred to Poteat in any of his writings, Gelwick says, "is not totally surprising" since "Poteat's reluctance to publish his thought limited the chances of Polanyi referring to it." Poteat's first book-length publication, *Polanyian Meditations*, Gelwick reminds us, didn't appear until "1985, nine years after Polanyi's death." It is worth noting, however, that both Phil Mullins and Marty Moleski have indicated (correspondence from October 2008) that there is evidence Polanyi had read some of the essays in *Intellect and Hope* and had been favorably impressed.

A time most outstanding for a potentially decisive input from Poteat came in 1972 when Polanyi asked Poteat to help him with the volume that he, Polanyi, was engaged upon with Harry Prosch. As the biography notes, "Polanyi even suggested that he (Polanyi) might spend six weeks at Duke, although he was happy with Poteat's alternative proposal of coming to Oxford" (see biography, p. 262). In the end, however, Poteat could not fulfill that prospect, and this apparently auspicious moment never came to fruition. The "Acknowledgments" in *Meaning* specify that thanks should go to Richard Gelwick "for the numerous discussions he found time to hold with Professor Polanyi relevant to the subject matter" of that book. Whatever the quite limited influence

that Poteat appears to have had on Polanyi's thinking, my interest in this essay is to consider how Poteat could have been — or would have been — a kind of Dantian Beatrice for Polanyi's apparently quite intense, but in some ways quite hesitant and tenuous, wanderings toward the light of a more confident, dare we say a more "paradisial" religious dwelling place.

I was particularly touched by an account, in Scott and Moleski's *Michael Polanyi, Scientist and Philosopher (MP)* of some of Polanyi's comments — in the unpublished supplement to his 1969 lectures given at U. of Texas and U. of Chicago — on Dietrich Bonhoeffer's funeral oration for Adolf von Harnack. Polanyi quotes: "Corruptible puts on incorruptible . . . Death where is thy victory?" Then he goes on to say "I now realize how revealing such words are for our destiny even though there is no information given by them. And I can think now of the depth of my own life being expressed by the words, spoken by the congregation on their knees, 'Our Father which art in heaven' and so on, though literally I believe none of the Lord's prayer." (*MP*, 273).

In the larger context of Polanyi's pilgrimage and discourse concerning religion, this final clause, "literally I believe none of the Lord's prayer," notwithstanding the richness of this statement as a whole, hints at a rather surprising mental cramp bespeaking either a momentary, or lingering, failure of nerve — a slip toward a Cartesian object for which Polanyi's whole epistemological tour de force is the massive relieving massage. However, it appears that very many of us have felt that, as exhibited here and elsewhere — especially in *Meaning* — Polanyi was somewhat paralyzed in his religious pilgrimage, with all of its passion and hopefulness, by this shadow of positivistic, essentialistic linguistic theory. In *Meaning* (157) having spoken eloquently of Pauline Christianity, Polanyi says, "None of those beliefs makes any literal sense. They can be destroyed as easily as the actuality of Polonius' death upon the stage should anyone attempt to defend its reality in the world of facts." Here, it appears that Polanyi had lost his own counsel to that of I.A. Richards.

However, in what seems to me a rather potent and instructive "on the other hand," Bill Poteat's pilgrimage of faith — especially within the ambience of his Polanyian meditations (not just in the book by that name) — presents a striking contrast! I find support for this emphasis in any number of places in my personal relationship to Bill and in many places in his writings. One of the most forthright among these is to be found in an unpublished letter of April, 1991 to Professor Walter Mead which Wally shared with me two months after receiving it. He has given me license to quote from that letter. Without Wally's pertinacious questioning of Poteat, we would not have, to my knowledge, any other such bold and unequivocal comments on certain specific aspects of his ongoing relation to the Christian faith. Therefore, I quote somewhat at length here. All of the italics are Poteat's. The quotations imply the questioning to which Poteat was responding:

Though I have not looked at most of the pieces you are reading in the Stines-Nickell collection for many years, I believe I can say that I still stand now where I stood forty years ago in the practice of my life, before God—sometimes actually, sometimes virtually—in the posture of prayer and confession . . . .

To make an unquestionably artificial distinction between my mode of dwelling acritically in the world as one who, in the setting of corporate worship, affirms the Apostle's Creed *without reservation*, on the one hand, and my critically reflective self that wishes to confront the challenge of the Enlightenment skeptic that is in me and all my modern fellows that calls for theological and philosophical arguments on the other, I should say that I have hardly changed at all with respect to the first, but have laboriously undertaken shifts (in) the ground upon

which to carry out the second.

In short my *faith* (as the logos of the way I live my life) remains essentially unchanged; but my “theology” (understood as the attempt to *explicate* the logos of that faith) has undergone a *very* radical change . . . . This last I discovered, I believe, simply by paying painful attention in a radical new way to my own modes of being as *through and through* responsible to God—standing within my own mindbody, on *this* earth, with *my* unique history, in a *particular* cultural setting, at *this* time and place, and with *these* duties. All meaning and meaning-discernment is centered in, radiates from and retotends this mindbody that achieves such integrity as it may have by being before God, who, while he is above all in magnitude, is also closer to me than I am to myself . . . .

Now for the question of the afterlife! When I, in the context of corporate worship declare, *Inter alia*, “. . . I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting,” I do not take myself to be granting *notional assent* . . . to a proposition such as  $12 \times 12 = 144$  (though even *this* is no longer quite the same under the new dispensation), but rather to be *enacting* and *identifying* in as direct a way as can be (that is, there is nothing second-order, derivative, metaphorical, symbolical about it) one of the features in the structure of the one and only world in which I actually live and move and have my being, *insofar as I recognize it as existing before God*. And the enactment of the resurrection of the body affirms that I, this particular man, in *this* history, bearing the scars upon my body and upon my psyche . . . have my being and value *through and through* in God’s eternal and never failing providence both in this moment and forever . . . .

But, of course, you ask: is that world real of which the resurrection of the body is a feature that you have enacted and identified? Answer: as real as *any* world that is made by our uttered words to appear; for it has exactly the same ground in the asseverations of our convivial mindbodies. And there *is* no other world.

“Everlasting life,” then, is life in the bosom of God who is Alpha and Omega and in whom my mortal life in history with all its earthly trappings is granted its eternal significance.

Here and in any number of places in Poteat’s writings the radical nature of his epistemology and the correlative ontology is seen by him to be both derivative of, and applicable to, the primordial indicative of the “I am” of Biblical faith and, I believe, of what Soren Kierkegaard, by way of Johannes Climacus, called “pathetic dialectic.” For Poteat, I am both in the world and yet transcend it; I am that being whose being or non-being is systematically elusive to language and concept, yet proleptically present in every moment of the *Cogito*. Many of the cognate issues here are encountered in such early writings as “God and the Private-I”; “I Will Die”; “Birth, Suicide, and the Doctrine of Creation” and in his later works discussing, for example, the Eucharist in “Memory and Imagination” or, in *Recovering the Ground*, the relative status in the real world of trees and the Last Judgment. Poteat finds himself, as it were, in the position of attempting to persuade someone that he ought to think of the world as having been created. *That*, he says “. . . is not unlike persuading a man who speaks a language having no personal pronouns that there are persons.” (See “Birth, Suicide . . .”, *The Primacy of Persons and the Language of Culture*, p. 168). This, of course, was essentially the problem Kierkegaard set for himself: How does one support the claim that subjectivity is truth?

Did Polanyi's apparent light and joy in the conviviality of The Moot and in prayer finally address his doubts about whether he believed in God, as he put it, "... in any sense which made a difference"? Would exposure to Poteat's constant drumbeat—apparently so resonant with Polanyi's deepest epistemological insights—have led Polanyi, a la Dante's Beatrice, beyond the inferno of his doubts into Il Paradisio? Or is that just one of those utterly absurd and irrelevant questions to which St. Augustine and, perhaps Poteat himself, would have said that God is creating Hell for those who ask such questions? Still—might conviviality in Poteat's kind of relentless critique of our and Polanyi's Cartesian lapses have made any inroads for Polanyi's ascent in matters religious and theological?

In January, 1988, Poteat wrote a letter to me in which he said, "I really am a hopeless Yahwist. For me the world is creature; and in our knowings we respond as persons to it as to its creator" (see *P of P*, p. 19). In this connection we should note that in Poteat's writings, there is almost a refrain, a recurring, usually indirect, reference in early and later writings to the peculiar power and relevance of Anselm's ontological argument from the thought of a being whose non-being is inconceivable. It is clear that for Poteat, as for Kierkegaard, the conviviality of my "I am" with the "I am" of the God relation bespeaks a (pneumatic) spiritual qualification of my being. As Kierkegaard (*Anti-Climacus*) puts it, that in me which is enabled to relate positively to my being as finite freedom is *transparently* grounded in God who is that in which all things are possible. Is that treatise (*Sickness Unto Death*) then to be taken to be some sort of argument for the existence of God which is on all-fours with traditional "rational" proofs? Clearly not. The "dialectic" here may be said to be, in a broad sense, phenomenological—the self as beheld from the horizon of *Anti-Climacus*, the eminently Christian psychologist. As Kierkegaard (*Climacus*) would have it, it is a "pathetic dialectic" which constantly directs, almost coerces, the "reader" to pay attention to her own existence.

It is clear that, for Poteat, there is no dichotomy of the cosmological argumentation and the ontological argumentation. Both presuppose "something thought can't think" – that historical mindbodily being, tensed, oriented, evoked - -apart from which neither memory, nor hope, nor project, nor concept is conceivable. Thus it is not the abstracted Cartesian *cogito* or "rational dialectic" which is transparent to the God-relation, but – and I believe Poteat to be at one with Kierkegaard here – pathetic dialectic. Fully to take up the inescapable presence which I am is to take up the convivial presence, both the given and received, of the "I am" of that Being whose being and whose non-being are alike inconceivable, yet closer to me than I am to myself even though I am (in St. Augustine's terms) "very far from Thee." This spiritual qualification is inalienable even when as Poteat notes (in a powerful, usually overlooked article entitled "The Absence of God"), God shows us His back and not His face; and we could add, present in Job's mindbody-numbing pain when he cries out (paraphrase), "When will it be, you watcher of men, that you leave me alone long enough for me to swallow my spit?" (see Job 7:19-20); and certainly in Pilate's disclaimers when, about to release Jesus to execution, he asks "What is truth" and washes his hands; and, ultimately, even, perhaps especially, in Jesus' "cry of dereliction".

I have come to see Poteat's work as an utterly relentless foray into communicating the pneumatic qualification of human existence. He is joining St. Paul in Paul's letter to the Romans (8:16) in testifying that "The Spirit himself and our spirit bear convivial (united) witness that we are the children of God." (*Jerusalem Bible*, but with my emendation changing "united" to "convivial").

Recall that in *Meaning* Polanyi quoted, in affirmation, from George Santayana as follows: Should we ever "hear the summons of a liturgical religion calling to us: *sursum corda*, Lift up your hearts, we might sincerely

answer, *habemus ad Dominum*. Our hearts by nature are addressed to the Lord.” (*Meaning*, p. 180). This follows upon his claim that we are addressed by nature to the attainment of meaning. I believe that, in his religio-theological pilgrimage, had he spent that hoped-for time with Poteat, he would have experienced a still more comprehensive summons to meaning than even his own marvelous sense for the personal sources of meaning and the correlated freedom had yet realized. Then, perhaps, the thought of his relation to the, implicitly cognitively empty, “literal” Pauline scheme of redemption and the Lord’s Prayer would have seemed a strange remnant from his pre- post-critical infancy.

## Notes on Contributors

**Kieran Cashell** ([Kieran\\_cashell@hotmail.com](mailto:Kieran_cashell@hotmail.com)) lectures in the Critical and Contextual Studies Program, Limerick Institute of Technology, Ireland. He is also School Co-ordinator of Research in Art and Design. He is author of *Aftershock: The Ethical Analysis of Contemporary Transgressive Art* (IB Tauris, 2008) and several articles in journals of philosophy and aesthetics. Cashell’s relationship to William Poteat was different from that which pertained to all the other essayists in this volume: He never met Poteat. As he tells it . . .

My knowledge of Poteat is based exclusively on his written work. I never met him in person nor studied under him. During the writing of my doctoral dissertation in early 1998, however, when my research had foundered at a particularly debilitating aporia, I sought guidance from my internal examiner, Professor John Hayes of Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, Ireland. He quietly but sternly advised me: “These things take time: they should not be rushed. Breakthrough will come.” He went on to tell me about his own experience as a graduate student in the U.S. – at Duke University, North Carolina, in 1969-71 – under the tutelage of one William Poteat (“Have you heard of him?”). He read from a letter he had just received from his former tutor composed of a language that, although I could scarcely recognize the significance of it at the time, activated something latent in me. John then presented me with an essay by Poteat titled “Paul Cezanne and the Numinous Power of the Real.” I read it on the bus on the way home amid a growing visceral excitement. This was it! . . . what I had been intuitively searching for: an elegant and forceful critique of subject/object dualism, a passionate and relevant deployment of personal knowledge, the beginnings of a new aesthetic theory, a language attuned to the experience of being without the quasi-mystical Heideggerian solemnity – in short, a solution to the aporia that had deadlocked my progress. John was right: breakthrough did come.

**Ronald L. Hall** ([ronhall@stetson.edu](mailto:ronhall@stetson.edu)), after completing his B.A. at Stetson University, studied under William Poteat from 1967-70 while working on his M.Div at Duke Divinity School; he continued to take courses from Poteat from 1970-73 while doing his Ph.D. work in Philosophy at UNC-Chapel Hill. He reports that “Poteat and Maynard Adams of Chapel Hill jointly supervised and strangely enough accepted from me a very bad dissertation on Polanyi.” Hall is presently Professor of Philosophy and Chair of the Department of Stetson University, DeLand, FL. He is the author of *Word and Spirit: A Kierkegaardian Critique of the Modern Age* (Indiana U. Press, 1993), *The Human Embrace: The Love of Philosophy and the Philosophy of Love: Kierkegaard, Cavell, Nussbaum* (Penn State Press, 1999). He serves as President of the Florida Philosophical Association and Vice President of the Society for the Philosophy of Religion.

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# Bill Poteat: Colleague?

**Robert T. Osborn**

**ABSTRACT Key Words:** Colleague, collegiality, teacher, Cartesianism, Copernican revolution, philosophy, Christianity, Tom McCollough, Tom Langford.

*Bill Poteat was a member of Duke University's Department of Religion and served a term as Chairman, during which I served with him as Director of Undergraduate Studies. I knew him as a brilliant scholar who devoted his exceptional gifts primarily to his teaching and his students. He was charming, gracious, yet we his Duke professorial colleagues never really knew him. One of our ranks suggested that the idea of Bill as a colleague was an oxymoron. Bill did not attend professional meetings and only rarely had conversation of any sort with colleagues. He lived in Chapel Hill and not Durham. However, he seemed not to be at home in any of his academies-UNC Philosophy Department, Duke Divinity School, or finally the Duke Department of Religion. It was not clear what his commitments were. I knew that he had a Christian heritage and perhaps a Christian "hangover," and had a Divinity degree from Yale. Nevertheless, his personal faith was not publically expressed. Perhaps it found expression in his zealous efforts to overcome the Cartesianism of the modern mind which he contended was inimical to the Christian understanding of the human person and his/her relationship to God. Yet, he was restless, rarely present to us and perhaps also to himself.*

My assignment on this panel is to talk about William Poteat as a colleague. My colleagues and I at Duke University recognized that Bill was an impressive and remarkable man, as all of these panel presentations have indicated. He was an attractive person—brilliant, widely read, very charming, even winsome, and a scintillating intellectual. However, he was a mystery. I don't think any of us in the Department of Religion knew him or began to know him. He lived not in Durham, but ten miles away, in Chapel Hill. He had started his teaching in 1947 in the Philosophy Department at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. In 1957, he relocated to the new Episcopal Theological Seminary of the Southwest, in Austin, Texas, and three years later, in 1960, he returned to North Carolina to teach at the Duke Divinity School.<sup>1</sup> Finally, in 1970, he moved to the Department of Religion at Duke. [Someone commented that he had received his Ph.D. in Religion from Duke and that this, perhaps, was relevant to his returning to Duke rather than to UNC.] Anyway, when he switched from UNC to the Episcopal Seminary, then to Duke, he also moved from Philosophy to Divinity, from a primarily undergraduate humanities faculty to (at Duke) a graduate professional school, a recognized theological school of the Methodist Church, and eventually to Duke's (primarily undergraduate) Department of Religion, where he served a term as its chair.

During all the time he was with us — some 27 years, until his retirement from Duke in 1987 — we never heard his story. I have learned more about Bill Poteat at this meeting than I ever learned while he was my colleague in the Department of Religion. It seems, as I look back, that he did not share his self-understanding, his personal or his professional story, with any of his colleagues. He was simply absent in spirit and mind, and — with his residence in Chapel Hill — generally absent in body. He spent little time in the Department precincts except for meetings with his students and for mandated departmental meetings that he chaired with considerable success. Otherwise he was minimally present. We rarely had coffee, not to mention a beer, together; we shared no extra-curricular time that I recall. He did not attend meetings of the American Academy of Religion, regional or national, even when his colleagues were performing. In short, he was not really a colleague in the sense that we normally think of a colleague. In fact, one of my colleagues who was also Bill's and whom I asked about Bill as a colleague, retorted, "Bill as a colleague? That is an oxymoron." Another one volunteered, "I don't think you want to hear

from me because I would be too critical.” As a colleague Bill was a *homo absconditus*; present but unrevealing.

While he was not a professor with colleagues, he was a teacher with students, as these papers have strikingly demonstrated. One of my colleagues, Tom McCollough, did have more of a relationship with Bill than did the rest of us. He was writing a book at one point during Bill’s tenure as chairman and was having a bit of difficulty. Tom mentioned his problems to Bill, who graciously agreed to meet with him on a regular basis to read and discuss his manuscript. He proved to be quite helpful, a very good teacher. I should also mention here another exceptional moment of collegiality, namely Poteat’s collaboration with Professor Tom Langford in the 1968 publication of *Intellect and Hope: Essays in the Thought of Michael Polanyi*.<sup>2</sup> It is significant, however, that Langford was first of all a theologian. (After serving as chair of the Department of Religion, he was appointed Dean of the Divinity School in 1971.) But he was also a productive student of philosophy who could and did engage Poteat and support Poteat’s interest in Polanyi. On the other hand, Poteat, to my knowledge, had no interest in Langford the theologian or in his theology, and there was no further collaboration. As I have said, Bill was first and finally a teacher. And his community was essentially a community of his students. Not too surprisingly, he married a student, one of his more promising graduate students.

The focus of his teaching was not the history or tradition of philosophy but rather his own philosophy, which appears to have been developing in and through his teaching. I remember a retreat we once had as a department. We read together a short play that Bill had copied for us. (I think it was “The Teacher,” or something similar.) In any case, the play was about a professor who talked much and expected his students to give it all back. His calling was to fill those empty vessels with his wisdom. But there was one student that the professor just could not reach; the student had a toothache. After all, he was embodied, and that body was getting in the way of his (the professor’s) teaching. This was the one time that Bill shared with us, as a department, something that revealed a bit of his thinking. Nevertheless, we had a sense of what Bill was teaching because we knew some of his students, but not because of his having had a direct conversation with any of us. We did know that he was very troubled by the subject-object dichotomy and the disembodied ego-centrism of Cartesianism. I must admit here that I am unqualified to say much at all about his post-Cartesianism. I am, after all, an inveterate theologian — hardly a philosopher. My theologian is Karl Barth, and in this connection I am reminded of a passage in Barth where he speaks of the “all too triumphal overcoming of the subject and object dichotomy.” [Audience laughter.] But Poteat did overcome the subject-object dichotomy . . . as all of you [fellow panelists] have told me one way or another. This was our impression of Bill.

At the end of his life, I had a feeling, a sense, of Bill’s loneliness. Sadly, his dying days were scarcely noted in the Department of Religion. I visited him during those days, not often I fear, and I left for our Shaw Island residence in Washington before he died. I think Tom McCollough also visited him, but to my knowledge not many others [among his former faculty colleagues].<sup>3</sup> I was thinking, as you were discussing the possibility of establishing a Poteat archive at Duke, that I would not be able to suggest to whom you might go today, at Duke, to pursue the project. There are probably very few who would recognize his name. I think his legacy is the legacy that you all [panelists], as his students, have preserved and might pass on. But I don’t suspect that, otherwise, there is much of his legacy at Duke University today. It is sad and disappointing because he was such a remarkable man. But he was not really our colleague or a part of the Duke community.

I must tell you about my last visit with him. He was virtually bedridden. We had an interesting conversation, one that may say something about him, or at least my perception of him. I mentioned to him that, sometimes when I am writing, I get stumped by what I am trying to say. I can’t work through the puzzle that I have taken upon myself; so I have to pick up a pencil and scratch my way through. I can’t do it on the computer. I have

to get more of my body into it. When I told Bill about this, he immediately resonated and lit up. He knew what I was talking about.

But one question I had, after I had finished my last visit with him, was (without wishing to be too critical of him): How good a listener was Bill? I know Bill was a wonderful teacher when there were, in his students, open vessels. This was his community. One of the questions Dale Cannon raised here is: Why was Bill not more widely, or better, received by the larger community of scholars? In response, my question is: What was there for him to learn from that community?

Do you [fellow panelists] remember that time when you got Bill to come to the AAR / Polanyi Society annual meeting (November 19 - 20, 1993, in Washington, D.C.), which was to focus on Bill and his philosophic vision? That was one of the most memorable moments in my academic life. You will remember it if for no other reason than that Bill was present, at an AAR meeting. He was, of course, the occasion for the [section] gathering. And do you not still hear his remarkable claim? (This was not a student's evaluation): He had accomplished a "Copernican revolution" in philosophy. Now, that being the case, what of significance was he to learn from other, pre-revolutionary philosophers? He had, after all, created a radically new world of philosophy. And this revolution evidently laid upon Bill a huge revolutionary responsibility - namely, as Dale reported in his presentation, the task of curing "the crisis of modern culture, . . . its intellectual, culture-wide insanity," the "task of curing ourselves and returning us to ourselves as persons, to who we are as persons before God." Now, that is an overwhelming responsibility, and even if he *had* achieved a Copernican revolution in philosophy, could he seriously have imagined that he could fulfill such a responsibility?

Hearing these words, I have to say, to myself, "He is asking for Jesus," who did take on the responsibility to cure our souls and to restore ourselves before God. And with this, I am brought to the final, and perhaps first, question that Bill confronted me with, a question he never answered: Was he a Christian? Much suggests that he was, but not much is finally convincing. He did seem to have a Christian "hangover," a theological legacy of sorts. He was raised, I understand, in a devout, prominent, Baptist family and graduated from a divinity school, although he never was ordained. He left a fine Department of Philosophy for [a seminary, then] a Divinity School, and then a Religion Department.

[Panelist: Where did his Christian legacy play into his life?] That is a good question. Not in his language, not in his speech, not in his practice that any of us could recognize. And yet, I think it did play, as a secularized, [Dale Cannon interrupts: not entirely secularized, I think] . . . but uprooted vision of his responsibility. Along with this is an absence of concreteness — particularity in his thinking and "religious" discourse. It was only marginally theological or doctrinal. It was not "biblical" in any explicit, concrete way. The name "Jesus" is not heard, nor is Scripture cited. One does not hear echoes of the language of Canaan — an essential for authentic theological talk, according to Karl Barth. The Yahwist perspective that Poteat occasionally claimed for himself is abstract. And I have to think of Bill's inability to be settled in Chapel Hill, in Austin, in Duke's Divinity School, or in its Department of Religion. He was not happy in the Department; he was not happy in the Divinity School; he was not happy in Chapel Hill. Perhaps it was because he was judged by a memory, by an inherited "religious" vision of himself, by a hope that seemed well beyond him, whose fulfillment he could find in no place - not Chapel Hill, not Austin, not Duke, not Durham, no where.

This is my take on Bill. When I had my last time with him, I have to say I loved the man, but I felt he was in his Savior's hands, not his own, not in mine, and not in ours. What he was longing for, he was not to get here.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>The Episcopal Theological Seminary of the Southwest ceased to exist after a few years.

<sup>2</sup>Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press.

<sup>3</sup>[Editor:] It should be noted that some of Bill Poteat's former students visited him in his final days. Ron Hall, in an e-mail dated 6-6-2008, recalls his and the late Taylor Scott's visit with Bill on his death bed: "He asked Taylor to preach the homily at his funeral at Duke Chapel and he asked me to say a prayer from Soren Kierkegaard. I read the prayer aloud to him on that last visit and he looked up at me and said: 'That guy could really pray!'" A large number of Poteat's former students, some traveling considerable distances, attended his funeral service.

## Notes on Contributors

**Walter B. Mead** ([wbmead@comcast.net](mailto:wamead@comcast.net)), President of the Polanyi Society since 2006 and Professor Emeritus, Illinois State University, had his only personal contact with Michael Polanyi in the summer of 1970, when he was invited to enjoy a full afternoon of conversation with Polanyi at Oxford University. His relationship with Bill Poteat, except for three or four personal visits with him, was primarily during the last twelve years of Poteat's life, when they carried on an extensive correspondence. He is the author of two books, *Extremism and Cognition: Styles of Irresponsibility in American Society* (1971) and *The United States Constitution: Persons, Principles, and Issues* (1987) and numerous articles that have appeared in *The Journal of Politics*, *The Review of Politics*, *The Political Science Reviewer*, *Judicature*, *Tradition and Discovery*, *Interpretation*, *Modern Age*, *Transaction/Society*, and *The Intercollegiate Review*.

**Robert T. Osborn** ([rosborn@nc.rr.com](mailto:rosborn@nc.rr.com)), B.A., University of California, L.A.; B.D., Garrett Biblical Institute; Ph.D., Drew University, is Emeritus Professor of Religion at Duke University. He enjoyed a distinguished 43-year career (1954-1997) of teaching in the Department of Religion at Duke, a span that completely encompassed Bill Poteat's years (1960-1987) on Duke's Divinity and Religion faculties. Indeed, given his association with Poteat until the latter's death in 2000, his 40-year acquaintance with Poteat represents the longest of all the contributors to this discussion. Professor Osborn's teaching responsibilities included Bible, Ethics, "Christian Thought," and the History of Christian Thought. But in all, he reminds us — despite his being first and foremost a theologian — as a member of a "Department of Religion" (as opposed to a theological seminary), he was under the academic stricture of circumventing such "forbidden five-letter words as *theos* and *logos*." Currently he lives with his wife, Dottie, half of the year in Durham, North Carolina, and the other half on Shaw Island, Washington.

**James W. Stines** ([jwsmtn@bellsouth.net](mailto:jwsmtn@bellsouth.net)) did his Ph.D. studies at Duke University 1964-70, during which time William H. Poteat was his major professor. Jim is Professor Emeritus (Philosophy/Religion) at Appalachian State University in Boone, N.C. He has published previous essays in *TAD*, and he was guest editor for a special *TAD* edition on William Poteat: Vol. XXI, No.1, 1994-95. He also co-edited with James Nickell a collection of Poteat's essays entitled *The Primacy of Persons and the Language of Culture* (U. of Missouri Press, 1993).

**D.M. Yeager** ([yeagerd@georgetown.edu](mailto:yeagerd@georgetown.edu)) did her Ph.D. work at Duke University in the early 1970s in the "Religion and Culture" program (established by William Poteat), under the primary guidance of Poteat, who was also her dissertation director. Diane is the Thomas J. Healey Family Distinguished Professor in Ethical Studies in the Department of Theology at Georgetown University. Her articles have appeared in such publications as *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, *The Journal of Religion*, *Tradition & Discovery*, and *The Journal of Lutheran Ethics*.

# Making Tacit Knowing Explicit: William H. Poteat's Adaptation of Polanyi's Post-Critical Method

Kieran Cashell

**ABSTRACT** Key Words: William H. Poteat, Michael Polanyi, Post-Cartesian epistemology, post-critical logic, apprenticeship, tacit/explicit knowing, indwelling, subsidiary/focal, mind/body, mindbodily, being in the world, reflexive phenomenology, picture, *Gestalt*, figure, ground.

*William H. Poteat's critique of Cartesianism is an amplification of the philosophical work of Michael Polanyi. Poteat applies Polanyian methods to articulate an alternative to the metaphysical dualism that, he argues, still dominates Western reflective thought at a tacit level. His argument is that the novel logic of Polanyi's Personal Knowledge puts the presuppositions of the modern philosophical tradition in question. In the elaboration of this focal argument, Poteat's subsidiary acceptance of Polanyi's anterior work is total. Nevertheless it remains important to disambiguate the thought of the two philosophers. In this essay, I argue that Poteat's reliance on Polanyi as means of elaborating his own original philosophical position is perhaps what is most distinctive of this relationship. For Poteat relies on Polanyian grounds ontologically to the extent that, once assimilated, these supporting grounds are finally cancelled. I argue that even if it is ultimately impossible to locate the precise point where Polanyi ends and Poteat begins, it remains necessary to attempt a clean separation. For only in this way can Poteat's unique contribution to philosophy be focally appreciated.*

“We bear this access to Being about with us as the condition of there being a world.”  
William H. Poteat, *Polanyian Meditations*, p. 14.

“... every thoughtful submission to authority is qualified by some, however slight, opposition to it.”  
Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, p. 164.

“To understand sums in elementary school the children would have to be important philosophers.  
Failing that, they need practice.”

Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Zettel*, 703.

William Poteat's critique of post-Cartesian dualism is presented as an amplification of the philosophical work of Michael Polanyi. In *Polanyian Meditations*, the concept of tacit knowing is applied as a method to initiate and develop an alternative to the metaphysical dualism that, according to Poteat, still dominates Western models of theoretical reflection.<sup>1</sup> His argument is that the innovative logic suggested by Polanyi's idiosyncratic interpretation of key concepts in *Personal Knowledge*<sup>2</sup> (such as: “presupposition,” “premise” and, especially, “assumption”) rewards careful and serious philosophic attention.<sup>3</sup> In fact, this inadvertently avant-garde use of logical concepts, according to Poteat, has the radical potential to put the basic presuppositions of the entire modern philosophical tradition in question. Even the very hypothesis of tacit knowing itself, namely, that there is an inexplicit dimension of pre-reflective belief that determines explicit acts of reflective knowledge, and hence cannot be clarified *prior* to inquiry, suggests, for Poteat, nothing less than a dramatic epistemological transvaluation with revolutionary consequences for how our situation in the world is understood. A key hypothesis of *Polanyian Mediations* is that any theory of knowledge (epistemology) necessarily implies a theory of being (ontology). More accurately: my modes of knowing reduplicate my modes of being in the world.<sup>4</sup> To

one apprenticed to the tradition and informed by its conceptual values, ‘to find a new way to think about my situation in the world,’ Poteat says elsewhere, ‘is the ultimate tour de force’.<sup>5</sup>

Polanyi’s radical position is, according to Poteat, relatively easy to state: that knowledge is *knowing*, ‘merely a special class of human activity subsumed under the larger class, viz., the complex repertoire of ways of humanly being in the world’.<sup>6</sup> In Poteat’s terms the truth of this unassuming claim is established when one appreciates that it is *revelatory of being*; it is ‘pregnant with the possibility of disclosing hitherto undiscovered aspects of *reality*’ (and this is Poteat’s Polanyian definition of truth) a reality that we nevertheless inhabit as it inhabits us but yet may ultimately remain opaque to theoretical reflection if the norms that govern it are set by the post-Cartesian epistemological paradigm.<sup>7</sup> For it is only relative to the distinctive epistemic conventions of this paradigm (and I mean principally the mutual autonomy of subject and object) that “reality” is identified as that which is problematically independent of, and therefore indifferent to, human existence. According to the basic demands of this orthodoxy, which prioritises conceptual clarity and overvalues the inquiry motivated by scepticism, the cognitive ego is (imagined to be) radically detached from the context and provenance of all *actual achievements* of knowledge. Yet, as Poteat reminds us, the ascendant autonomy of the transcendental subject comes at the devastating price of a profound, despairing alienation from nature.

This “bifurcation of nature” . . . meant that man as knower comes increasingly to be conceived as alien to, because estranged by abstraction from, and therefore quite incommensurable with, the material world that is the very object of his knowing.<sup>8</sup>

With the doctrines of Descartes is inaugurated what Poteat elsewhere terms our ‘long season of self-alienating madness’.<sup>9</sup> Polanyi’s thesis proposes to preserve the dynamic activity of knowing in the theory of knowledge and thereby cauterise the bifurcation of nature by retrieving the epistemic agency and ontological context lost in the paradigmatic picture.

In the elaboration of this *focal* argument, Poteat’s *subsidiary* acceptance – his *belief* in the truth of Polanyi’s anterior work – is total. To those trained in the practice of critical exegesis, where the requirement to attribute ideas to a single agency seems imperative, it is not easy to accept the hybridisation of thought represented by Poteat’s open admissions of deference. We could say, employing the central inspirational motif of *Polanyian Meditations* that, as readers of Poteat, his acceptance of Polanyi as intellectually anterior is logically implied in our acceptance of Poteat’s work as derivative. Accordingly, Walter Mead’s claim to distinguish where Polanyi leaves off and Poteat takes off<sup>10</sup> may appear perhaps too quick to disregard Poteat’s admission of thorough Polanyian assimilation: Polanyi has become, as acknowledged in the *Prologue to Polanyian Meditations*, part of the integral structure of Poteat’s tacit knowledge and therefore, according to this concept, this should be *assumed* to constitute the given logical ground of every subsequent hypothesis articulated. This is not to accuse Mead of being insensitive to the embedding of Polanyian thought in Poteat’s thinking. He is well aware of the complex indebtedness of Poteat’s thought to Polanyi. His paper ‘William Poteat’s Anthropology: “Mindbody in the World”’ remains an important and subtle effort to distinguish Poteat’s original contribution while acknowledging that his original thought *must still be* conceived as profoundly influenced by Polanyi. However, despite what I might appear to argue here, I think, as should become clear as I proceed through the argument of this paper, that Mead is absolutely correct to confront the difficulty of disambiguating the thought of the two philosophers. For what is most strikingly original about Poteat’s method – *paradoxically* – is the almost obsequious way in which he relies on Polanyi as means of ultimately articulating his own philosophical position. And yet it could be maintained with some justification that Poteat relies on subsidiary

Polanyian grounds only to the extent that, once assimilated, and in a movement corresponding to a dialectical *Aufhebung*, these supporting grounds can finally be successfully sublated: cancelled, they remain preserved in an embalmed state in the infrastructure of Poteat's focal itinerary. Thus, even if it may be ultimately impossible to locate the precise point where Polanyi 'leaves off' and Poteat 'takes off', it remains decisively necessary to attempt a clean separation. For only in this way can Poteat's original contribution to philosophical investigation be focally appreciated. Otherwise his radical writings are in danger of being misconstrued as mere commentary. And they are definitely not that.

Self-consciously and respectfully indebted to Polanyi, his presence in Poteat is ubiquitous; it informs everything at an infrastructural level. With 'humility and obedience'<sup>11</sup>, the authorial presence in his own text is thereby reduced to a *medium* for the transmission of Polanyi's thought. Poteat's authorship is mediated Polanyi. It might be said that Polanyi is so profoundly ingrained and knitted into Poteat that his explication involves an unprecedented form of *introspection*. In order to think *out* of himself, he has had to look *into* himself. Yet this, *paradoxically*, places Polanyi, even if this very analysis derives from his proximal-distal distinction, at a strategic distance. Indeed the etymological origin of "mediation" is the later Latin *mediare*, which as Poteat, in a moment of unconscious self-revelation, observes, signifies "to cut in half".<sup>12</sup> So I guess my question is: is it possible to separate the halves of this mediation? Can we amputate Poteat from Polanyi? Where do we search for the seams?

Yet the peculiarity of this *aporetic* mediation – the conscious introjection of one thinker by another so that he is at once infinitely proximal and significantly distal – may be considerably clarified when that relationship is considered as an *apprenticeship*. And indeed, this is how Poteat himself describes it. The idea of apprenticeship is not without philosophical significance for Poteat's Polanyian project; for that which is involved in the initiation into a practice, namely: submission to the authority of the mentor until the practice is competently acquired, the time taken for the trade to be thoroughly assimilated by the apprentice, the synthesis of knowing and doing implied in training, and the final ownership of the practice taken by the journeyman as evinced in a secure and confident style of novel application – are all of a piece with the epistemological perspective developed in *Personal Knowledge*.

Polanyi's account of tacit knowing often refers to the model of apprenticeship; he writes: 'the intimations followed by the learner are based primarily in his confidence in others; and this is an acceptance of authority'.<sup>13</sup> In the *Tacit Dimension*, he characterises scientific knowledge, its acquisition and accreditation, as apprenticeship to a practice; for it is only when considered in terms of initial acquiescence to authority, that Polanyi can argue that the generational relay of knowledge is 'predominantly tacit'.<sup>14</sup> In the individual case, this occurs by virtue of the process Polanyi calls 'indwelling', namely, the complete acquiescence to the practice until it becomes "second nature". 'In order to share this indwelling, the pupil must presume that a teaching that appears meaningless to start with has in fact a meaning which can be discovered by hitting on the same indwelling as the teacher is practicing'.<sup>15</sup> That is to say, by focally appreciating the subsidiary *form* of the practice more than its content (how the professor behaves in the work context, how she embodies her fundamental beliefs, epitomises "best practice") the belief system that governs the logic of the practice is finally introjected as an internal dimension of the apprentice's subsequent epistemological attitude. Unless this process takes place, the practice is not completely assimilated and the approach to problem-solving cannot be innovative. This involves unconditional *belief* in the value-system of the institution epitomised by the mentor. 'Such an effort is based on accepting the teacher's authority'.<sup>16</sup> The protégé is successfully inducted into the fiduciary structure of the institution only when the values and methods of this institution have been successfully introjected (that is,

unconsciously assimilated) and a *way of doing* becomes a *form of life*, the proximal ground of departure for every subsequent distal application of knowledge. Every creative act based on its fiduciary structure is informed by it and simultaneously reinforces the axiology of the institution. The process is concluded when the journeyman, having assumed ownership of the belief system that has taken up residency in her, possesses the potential to undertake self-directed inquiry (and ultimately make an individual contribution to the field) – all without immediate awareness of the operative tacit dimension orchestrating her conscious research-questions.

Because it suggests that knowing is *active* – and, primarily, a *belief-based* activity – the apprenticeship model is crucial to understanding the epistemological picture elaborated by the journeyman Polanyian philosopher Poteat. What is that picture? Poteat argues that Polanyi’s innovative use of logical concepts, although largely involuntary, implies the *shocking* truth that ‘our only grounds for accepting [the grounds of the premises of formal logic] is the fact that we do accept them and cannot imagine *not* doing so’.<sup>17</sup>

Because they are internalised through apprenticeship to a practice, such grounds have become so much an intrinsic part of our being, that we can be made conscious of them, if at all, only after the fact of having made some discovery based on them. When inquiry is complete, having derived some conclusion from a logical assumption, and having represented this in a defensible, logically sound pattern of argument, we may then inquire: what constituted the axiomatic assumption of this *practice* itself and where are *its* grounds? What beliefs, that is to say, ground the motivation for and indeed the *structure* of inquiry itself? Certain assumptions constitute the tacit conditions of possibility of inquiry itself, indeed, of all cognitive activity and as apprentices to a ‘convivium’ of practitioners, we come to rely implicitly on these grounds – they are implied in all subsequent practice.<sup>18</sup> These grounds are made up of pre-reflective believings that inform our cognitive attitude and comportment at an infrastructural level and finally constitute the ‘logical / ontological *grounds* of our coming to achieve our presently *explicit* beliefs’.<sup>19</sup> Knowledge, despite appearances, is never *sui generis*.

It is necessary to indicate that *ground* as used by Poteat should be understood in the *Gestaltist* sense as that *background* according to which all explicit acts of knowing are the intentional figures.<sup>20</sup> This explains why the background infrastructure of beliefs cannot be lucidly or explicitly dwelt upon *as such*: to use Polanyi’s terms, it cannot be focally apprehended simply because it is *dwelt within: at once* that subsidiary matrix that makes possible all focal apprehension and the *sine qua non* from which every cognitive performance is initiated. ‘In every act of speech’, Poteat observes, ‘I attend from this richly implicative grid of surplus meanings in my native language as ground to what I am actually bodying forth as figure’.<sup>21</sup>

Therefore because tacit, that is to say, deeply introjected, the epistemological grounds of inquiry are radically fiduciary – they cannot be explicitly *known* prior to inquiry: they are unconscious (if in the ordinary rather than Freudian sense). Tacit knowing, for both Polanyi and Poteat, remains, by definition, therefore, *immune to doubt*. And, for Poteat at least, it goes all the way down to the ontological ground of all belief and epistemic activity.

The alternative epistemological and ontological ground unto which I have been trying to draw you is one upon which our feats of reflection and intellection – the exercise of our so-called higher powers – are seen to be rooted in and derivative of even our most primitive forms of sentience, motility and orientation: our “minds” are seen to be inextricably implicated with our “bodies”.<sup>22</sup>

According to the orthodox epistemological narrative, as we have considered, knowledge tends to be divorced from the actual activity of *knowing*. If emphasis falls on the *latter* however, Poteat argues, this will return us *ultimately* to its intentional genesis in the knowing *living* body of the knower. Situating the act of knowing in the body of the knower, according to Poteat, compels us to consider the agent of knowledge as a complex hybrid of cognitive and somatic aspects. It is a reductive falsification of the facts to continue to consider cognitive activity as contained in the mind, or claimed exclusively by consciousness, or sited in the Cartesian cogito. Rather, as a motor skill is integrated with the comprehensive logic of the somatic economy, knowledge is *incarnate* – that is, it should be considered to inform our physical being; knowledge is held *viscerally*, ‘by the very act of “taking up” existence in the world’. We, in other words, *embody* our knowing.<sup>23</sup>

According to the unprecedented epistemological view intimated by Polanyi and amplified by Poteat, it is actually possible to say that “muscles make assumptions”.<sup>24</sup> (See, for instance, Poteat’s close analyses of striking a tennis ball in *PM*.) ‘When therefore I rely on my bodily being in the world as the *conditio sine qua non* of my action, *it* is the assumption in which the act is grounded’.<sup>25</sup>

I would like to suggest that Poteat *embodies* his epistemological apprenticeship to Polanyi and that *Polanyian Meditations* is a document, a written report of this embodiment expressed from within its ingrained structure. Indeed, in a later work, Poteat describes the process of coming to know, again implicitly following Polanyi’s model of apprenticeship, through the extraordinary claim that all knowing is indwelling an “other”<sup>26</sup>: ‘to indwell an other’ he explains ‘is in the important sense to *know* it; to have had this knowledge is to be able to *remember* it, to bear it along and recreate it in myself’.<sup>27</sup> His apprenticeship to Polanyi is exactly of the order of this *indwelling* an other in the important sense described here. Once he has thoroughly assimilated Polanyi, and thereby realised *in himself* that the existential infrastructure of all knowledge and belief must be assumed to subsist behind all our acts, the aim of Poteat’s project will be to recollect this forgotten knowledge in order to retrieve the ultimate ground – and get his readers to attend to it despite its resistance to focal apprehension. Indeed, this resistance is due in large measure, Poteat claims, to the ‘amnesia’ of post-Cartesian metaphysical dualism which, in depicting the self as a ‘theatre of solitude’, abstracts the object of knowledge from the knower, disremembers the ‘concrete density’ of the lifeworld and, most paradigmatically (and damagingly), divorces the body from the mind.<sup>28</sup> But because, as we have seen, Polanyi’s radical theory of tacit knowing puts the dualism of mind and body into question, Poteat insists on referring to the final irreducible ontological background implied by this epistemological view by suturing the Cartesian divorcees into a hybrid: whence the ‘mindbody’ that has given critics of Poteat much grief: Thus: ‘My mindbodily being in the world, itself finally opaque to reflection, is my bedrock assumption’.<sup>29</sup>

Irreducibly both body and mind, only mind because already body and only body because mind, ‘We discover at bottom they are not two but one’.<sup>30</sup> In a very late text, possibly his last, an unpublished essay on Cézanne, Poteat delivers perhaps the clearest expression of the consequences of his Polanyian indwelling and its associated project of recollection. According to this alternative epistemology, the ‘dualism of mind and body’ he writes ‘has been seen not to be ontologically radical, but derivative; so too with the distinction between subject and object – a distinction that [may be] indispensable for our second-order discourse ... but not ontological bedrock’.<sup>31</sup> He concludes:

From the standpoint of our mindbodies, the subject and object of our second-order, essentially static conceit of our relation to the world are seen to be but two different moments of a single reality. ... At no point in this lively dialectic is there any place for a subject with an opposing

object.<sup>32</sup>

The *mindbody* is that which is responsible for *assuming* the pre-reflective tacit beliefs that determine all subsequent acts of cognitive behaviour. Although these may never be made explicit, the mindbody itself *expressly* embodies all our infrastructural beliefs and epistemic attitudes, and, although the tacit dimension cannot be articulated in propositional language, and although the mindbody therefore refuses to be theoretically reflected, is ‘systematically elusive’,<sup>33</sup> nevertheless (and here Poteat draws on Wittgenstein’s saying / showing distinction), it ‘shows itself’.<sup>34</sup>

Poteat is aware that such notions as holding inexplicit beliefs, possessing tacit knowledge we are unaware of yet pre-reflectively rely on, or, indeed, hypotheses about a locus of reflection that itself resists being reflected will appear nothing short of scandalous to apprentices to a paradigm that identifies objectivity with abstraction and philosophical probity with disinterested detachment. Yet all ‘scandal disappears if we remember that all of our most fundamental believings and evaluings are (logically) dependent upon their mute embodiment in our intentional mindbodies in their convivial setting, [yet remain] beyond explicitation’.<sup>35</sup> One of the most significant (and most disturbing for the post-Cartesian mind-set) consequences of this is, of course, that all our most fundamental beliefs and values, held within the fertile, *radically given* ground of our existential itinerary, remain immune to doubt and are therefore, to the extent that they are implicitly relied on yet only tacitly known, *certain* in a way more profound than the Cartesian sense. This is the real scandal.

Characterised according to the model of apprenticeship suggested here, what Poteat acquires from Polanyi may in fact ultimately be impossible to measure. But one thing he does get from him is the confidence to express and develop his own philosophical intuitions into a full-blown post-critical philosophical project. This project has two aspects.

On the one hand, Poteat, totally accepting Polanyi’s radical theory of knowing, seeks to expose the subsidiary commitments that refer our knowledge to a fundamental ontological ground. Thus Poteat claims to use Polyanian logic as a critical method to elaborate and amplify what he believes still remains latent in *PK*, namely, that the background of all my knowing, doing, speaking, and the reflective inquiries that derive from these primary activities, is my pre-linguistic being in the world: the irreducible “mindbody” repeatedly invoked in *PM*. This is what is *a priori* accepted (intuitively given) in all my deliberative inquiry however alienated it may appear to be from that ‘ambient’ and ‘lively’ locus.<sup>36</sup> The *mindbody* is the physical being that, in its quotidian context, temporally extensive and bio-historical, in its presence, which at once ‘retrotends’ my past being (as memory) and ‘pretends’ my future (as anticipation), is sentient and intentional, Poteat establishes as the matrix ‘of all meaning and meaning-discernment’.<sup>37</sup> It is the ultimate ground, ‘the nonexistence of which’ he says ‘is inconceivable’.<sup>38</sup>

But this proposition is, Poteat exclaims, the most prosaic datum possible! And yet, precisely for this reason, it simultaneously represents the most radical challenge for those apprenticed to the philosophical tradition. It is also unfortunately the most difficult for sympathisers to defend.

“Yes, of *course*. These facts are obvious; *everyone* knows them – the most ordinary things in the world”; and because they are ordinary – in other words, known to us simply because they are imbedded in our routine practice, rather than as the outcome of systematic reflection – we conclude that they could not possibly have any serious philosophic import, inasmuch

as, since Descartes, only that knowledge is taken to be serious that is the issue of a skepticism raising us, so it is imagined, above our history and practice.<sup>39</sup>

And this brings us conveniently to the second aspect of Poteat's project. It is, of course, needless to say, intimately related to the first aspect ... as a duck to a rabbit. This is the adaptation of the Polanyian 'picture' of apprenticeship to a practice, where the inquirer is pictured as 'engaged in the activity of inquiry, governed ... by a way of doing, anterior to the formalisation of explicit rules'<sup>40</sup> into a post-critical method to expose the tacit assent to a discredited Cartesian *modus operandi* he believes to be endemic to modern Western culture. And this is also where Poteat, having taken ownership of the belief system that has taken up residency in him, begins to apply his interiorised Polanyian motifs in a creative and individual way to a unique problem. This is, in other words, where his project really comes into its own.

It is not insignificant that the last three meditations of *PM* do not mention Polanyi or refer to his writings. This is because this marks the point where the umbilical cord is severed and the two halves can be separated: Poteat will now concentrate on developing his own post-critical project of exposing the residual Cartesian metaphysical dualism from its sublimated state in the cultural imagination of Western modernity. And now, because he believes this commitment to the critical heritage of Descartes has been thoroughly assimilated, it has actually become *uncritical* – a fundamental part of our common sense repertoire. The Western *zeitgeist* is profoundly, yet unconsciously conditioned, infected, by what he calls an 'ur-Cartesianism'<sup>41</sup> which is reinforced by alphanumeric literacy and the official supremacy of mathematical ideals of formal rationality as well as the ascendancy of the visual models of conceptual theorisation. Indeed, using the post-critical method, this crypto-Cartesianism can be exposed as most damaging, most insidiously influential, paradoxically, in instances where it is explicitly criticised yet still unconsciously affirmed.

For Cartesianism, as characterised in *PM*, is not a systematic theory rigorously explicated by its exponents. Rather it is a dominant but deeply sublimated metaphysical grammar composed of a vocabulary of paradigmatic images and values, motifs and metaphors that operate at a subterranean level in the imagination; and this grammar informs all our implicit beliefs about the nature of reality and our relationship to it, determining even the motivation to think or inquire in the first place. We are all, Poteat argues, apprentices to the institution of Cartesian dualism. Indeed, its ubiquitous presence is so pervasive, Poteat argues, that the very efforts to overcome its paralysing binary grammar often anchor us even more inescapably to it. Thus according to Poteat's analysis, this entrenched, fiduciary commitment to the Cartesian metaphysical picture is the very background condition that necessarily remains uncritically assumed and is therefore ironically the very thing that remains immune to the methodological doubt canvassed by Descartes.

An ecumenical doubt, infused with an intellectual energy sufficient to affect a whole worldwide culture, only became possible when a Descartes, during a few hours, took himself to be a world-transcending – even a self-transcending – god before whom "everything" could be arrayed, as if in a gnostic instant, to present its credentials to a detached and non-committal gaze.<sup>42</sup>

The target of Poteat's post-critical method is nothing other than this legacy of 'uncriticised Enlightenment criticism'.<sup>43</sup> In his hands, the Polanyian post-critical logic becomes a method, a project of de-sublimation which is closely related to the psychoanalytic technique. For, he explains, we 'are working against long-standing and powerful resistance' and 'the psychoanalytic analogy is apposite here'.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, he frequently uses the terms of pathology to describe our dysfunctional sublimated commitment to Cartesianism: it is, he says, 'a chronic

depression', a 'repetition compulsion',<sup>45</sup> or even a full-blown 'madness'.<sup>46</sup> With this realisation, a 'demand for sanity takes hold'<sup>47</sup> yet 'if we are to cut deeper into the sources and characteristic disorders of this culture, we will have to bring some of the motifs of this criticism to bear on itself'.<sup>48</sup> Criticism of this pathological critical heritage will therefore have to assume the form of 'nothing other than a precritical logic recovered after an excess of [uncriticised] criticism'.<sup>49</sup>

But why is the Cartesian epistemological paralysis so resistant to every genuine therapeutic effort to eradicate it? It only has the indestructible, pernicious power it has because 'our subscription to it is ... tacit'<sup>50</sup>: make it explicit through the post-critical method, Poteat suggests, and 'the ground we have surrendered, even though we never ceased to stand upon it, will be recovered; and with it our sanity'.<sup>51</sup>

Retrieving the ground and our mental health clearly requires two almost antithetical approaches: on the one hand, it requires a more disciplined and thoroughgoing critical comportment than the critical ethos of Enlightenment modernity has bequeathed to us. For this post-critical method must prepare itself to challenge the very norms of lucid objectivity by refusing to accept methodological doubt as the provenance of inquiry. On the other hand, it requires, at the same time, every effort to suspend our 'critical inheritance'.<sup>52</sup> This involves the ingenuous acceptance of the intuitive ontological ground of all inquiry, belief, activity and knowing, that from which all the dualisms of the Cartesian picture derive, namely, my *mindbodily being in the world*. This is because:

In our acritical, off-duty moments what is obvious is taken at face-value and as worthy of no special notice. Only when a whole critical tradition has trained us to be on guard and has grossly impeached our sense of what is important in what is obvious do we have to struggle to recover our senses.<sup>53</sup>

Drawing our post-critical attention to this 'systemically elusive' ultimate background, the [mindbodily] 'whence of all meaning and meaning-discernment'<sup>54</sup> is the only way to eradicate the Cartesian metaphysical dualism to which we are unconsciously apprenticed; for this irreducible ground is precisely the ontological matrix which is *suppressed* when the allegedly *radical* mind has been divorced by reflection from my bodily being, when the concept of the object stands opposed to the transcendental subject, and when the fantasy of the disembodied *ego cogito* has claimed a hegemonic perch from which all being is surveyed. And I feel at once god-like, yet desperately alienated. The remedy for our post-Cartesian psycho-pathology, according to Poteat, is to recover the quotidian mindbodily being in the world, the forgotten ground of all knowing and activity.

This necessary ground is precisely the Being to which all men have an absolutely indubitable access in the convivial sense of their own existence to which they are ... bonded, the non-existence of which is inconceivable.<sup>55</sup>

But how, Poteat, can you know all this?

I am hard pressed to say. However this will in no way weaken my intuitive certainty.<sup>56</sup>

Poteat's adaptation of Polanyi's post-critical philosophy now perhaps becomes clear against the background sketched here. He describes it as the supreme and repeated effort to avoid alienation from the existential actuality of his own mindbodily being in the world. He calls this effort 'reflexive phenomenology'<sup>57</sup> and it is characterised as follows: 'to allow myself to resonate with the actuality of my own existential mindbody in its act of reflecting upon reflection *from the inside*'.<sup>58</sup> It is this method that is applied to in those descriptive

vignettes of engagement in activities so crucial to Poteat's philosophical style: striking a ball with his tennis-racket, jogging for five miles with his dog, gazing at a painting in his study, listening to a landlady refuse to let her rooms and watching her gestures, lying on a rock by the Grand Canyon for six hours, the panic of a sudden attack of amnesia in a shopping mall.

Above all, however, the most important motifs in this *genre* are the detailed descriptions of the physical process of writing – of Poteat, our author, actually writing with pen on paper – that repeatedly interrupt the course of our reading. Drawing attention to the nib of his Cross pen at the beginning of *Recovering the Ground*, for instance, he attributes the subtleties of his thought to the extra-fine point of that nib. 'A delicate instrument for thinking' he says 'encourages delicate thought'.<sup>59</sup> The point of these impolite incursions that so rudely alarm the solitary reader, of course, is to induce us to awaken to our own mindbodily being in the world and thus shake us out of our Cartesian slumber by making us reflexively conscious of our somatic, proprioceptive, spatio-temporal engagement in the very activity of existing. 'The texts of my books' he continues are so 'designed to defeat their appropriation in order that, paradoxically, the reader will be forced to dwell in, reappropriate and come to value the logos of his or her own quotidian mindbodily life'.<sup>60</sup>

If all this seems quite distant from Polanyi it is because the journeyman Poteat has struck out here on his own post-critical programme. In fact, at one point, he explicitly contrasts his reflexive methodology with Polanyi's post-critical philosophy, claiming his own as more radical than Polanyi's and reminding us perhaps of Polanyi's observation that 'every thoughtful submission to authority is qualified by some, however slight, opposition to it'.<sup>61</sup> Yet, even here, Poteat immediately qualifies the claim by adding that this radical reflexive phenomenology is *tacitly* implied in the 'metaphorical intentionalities of *Personal Knowledge* throughout'.<sup>62</sup> And yet somehow, again *even here*, this tacit implication raises an explicit head when Polanyi says:

We can voice our ultimate convictions only from within our convictions – from within the whole system of [mindbodily] acceptances that are logically prior to any particular assertion of our own, prior to the holding of any particular piece of knowledge.<sup>63</sup>

Perhaps the point is that Poteat is never closer to Polanyi than when he appears furthest from him. But how could I establish that? I can't. *But I feel its truth.*

So how is one to do justice to this unique philosophical project? Certainly, as should be clear, the configuration of a formal paper, acceding respectfully to the lucid formula of argument and exposition, that ticks all the rhetorical boxes familiar to the academic tradition would misrepresent Poteat and, indeed, implicitly condemn his efforts: 'the paradigm of a good written-out argument surreptitiously takes on the values of a page of print' and thus effects 'a reduction of the lively reality of our actual [feats of knowing] to an abstraction'.<sup>64</sup> 'The literate imagination, because it is alienated by print from the concrete density of my mindbodily life' he insists, *in print*, 'moves me – leads us – toward an abstract picture of myself in the world'.<sup>65</sup> To do justice to Poteat, to bear witness to his lifework, which I *want to do* because it is important to me, cannot be to *teach* "Poteat" – if this means to tell students what his work is about, and if this means addressing that 'upon what "objects" it bears'.<sup>66</sup> No, I shall teach what I've always taught, but now with more confidence, rejuvenated from apprenticeship to a completely transformed post-critical epistemological enterprise that encourages the development of a unique and personal style of being in the world.

One may therefore claim expertise regarding Poteat's writings and yet fail to grasp the ultimate

significance of his work. This is because the objective of his teaching was not to transmit a determinate informational content accessible to cognitive assimilation. Rather, as Dale Cannon, a former student of Poteat observes, the significance of the latter's work actually resists being taught, it refuses, that is, to be translated into informational terms. Poteat's significance 'has to do with something that cannot straightforwardly be said and comprehended in modern intellectual terms at all.' Rather, Cannon concludes:

It has to do with undergoing a shift in sensibility, a radical shift: from attending to *what* ... to attending to the *how of intellection itself*, and specifically to *the how of being both an intellectual and oneself, a whole person in the world.*<sup>67</sup>

To do justice to Poteat's post-critical philosophic project in this live presentation I would have had to attempt to capture my *aporetic* struggles with Poteat's (and Polanyi's) ideas. Somehow, I would have to have endeavoured to create *new* ways to adequately represent these perplexities – to develop some form that would mime the process of composition, that would represent, ultimately, the practice of thinking itself – complete with its passions, existential absorptions, as well as its abortive starts, snares, distractions, hiatuses, the frustrations of never quite finding the right words. The 'fail again, fail better' scenarios: am I getting it right?; have I explained it adequately?; what the hell am I saying / doing here? How does one represent the long periods of near catatonic inactivity characteristic of 'doing philosophy'? What, indeed, of the thinking that emerges at the distal point of the pen-tip scratching its traces on the surface of the paper that Poteat has drawn our philosophic attention to? What also of the fingers' choreography across the keyboard that appears to outrun my very thoughts, I am talking about that tacit kinaesthetic skill for locating keys that I cannot adequately explain and would be hard pressed to say how and when I learned? But this pressure does not weaken my intuitive certainty.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>William H. Poteat. 1985. *Polanyian Meditations: In Search of a Post-Critical Logic*. Durham: Duke University Press.

<sup>2</sup>Michael Polanyi. 1958. *Personal Knowledge: Toward a Post-Critical Philosophy*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

<sup>3</sup>*Polanyian Meditations (PM)* pp. 14-25; 26-31.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>5</sup>Poteat, *Recovering the Ground: Critical Exercises in Recollection (RG)*. Albany: State University Of New York Press, p. 47.

<sup>6</sup>*PM*, p. 15.

<sup>7</sup>*PM*, p. 227.

<sup>8</sup>*PM*, p. 253.

<sup>9</sup>*RG*, p. 6.

<sup>10</sup>Walter B. Mead. 'William Poteat's Anthropology: "Mindbody in the World."' *Tradition and Discovery*, 21: 1 (1994-95): 33-3, p. 34.

<sup>11</sup>*PM*, p. 10.

<sup>12</sup>*RG*, p. 17.

<sup>13</sup>*PK*, p. 208

<sup>14</sup>Polanyi. 1966. *The Tacit Dimension*. Garden City: Doubleday, p. 61.

<sup>15</sup> *TD*, p. 61.

<sup>16</sup> *TD*, p. 61.

<sup>17</sup> *PM*, p. 226.

<sup>18</sup> *PM*, p. 236.

<sup>19</sup> *PM*, p. 226.

<sup>20</sup> *PM*, p. 218.

<sup>21</sup> *PM*, p. 218.

<sup>22</sup> *RG*, p. 212.

<sup>23</sup> *PM*, p. 16.

<sup>24</sup> *PM*, p. 17.

<sup>25</sup> *PM*, pp. 17-18.

<sup>26</sup> *RG*, p. 208.

<sup>27</sup> *RG*, p. 209.

<sup>28</sup> *RG*, p. xix.

<sup>29</sup> *PM*, p. 18.

<sup>30</sup> *PM*, p. 219.

<sup>31</sup> Poteat. 1998. "Cézanne and the Numinous Power of the Real" (CNPR, unpublished manuscript),

p. 34.

<sup>32</sup> "CNPR", p. 40.

<sup>33</sup> *RG*, p. 1.

<sup>34</sup> *PM*, p. 22.

<sup>35</sup> *PM*, p. 228.

<sup>36</sup> *PM*, p. 269.

<sup>37</sup> *PM*, pp. 272, 283.

<sup>38</sup> *PM*, p. 234.

<sup>39</sup> *PM*, p. 250.

<sup>40</sup> *PM*, p. 29.

<sup>41</sup> *PM*, p. 253.

<sup>42</sup> *PM*, p. 224.

<sup>43</sup> Poteat. 1990. *Philosophical Daybook: Post-Critical Investigations (PD)*. Columbia: University of

Missouri Press, p. 3.

<sup>44</sup> *RG*, p. xvi.

<sup>45</sup> *PD*, p. 5.

<sup>46</sup> *PM*.

<sup>47</sup> *PM*, p. 262.

<sup>48</sup> *PM*, p. 252.

<sup>49</sup> *PM*, p. 220.

<sup>50</sup> *PM*, p. 254.

<sup>51</sup> *RG*, p. xxii.

<sup>52</sup> *PM*, p. 215.

<sup>53</sup> *PM*, p. 45.

<sup>54</sup> *PM*, p. 277.

<sup>55</sup> *RG*, 213.

<sup>56</sup> C.f. *PM*, p. 184.

<sup>57</sup> *PM*, p. 190.

<sup>58</sup> *PM*, p. 192.

<sup>59</sup> *RG*, p. xvii.

<sup>60</sup> *RG*, p. 4.

<sup>61</sup> *PK*, p. 164.

<sup>62</sup> *PM*, p. 192.

<sup>63</sup> *PK*, p. 267 / *PM*, p. 192.

<sup>64</sup> *RG*, pp. 2, 1.

<sup>65</sup> *RG*, p. xix.

<sup>66</sup> *RG*, p. xiv.

<sup>67</sup> Dale Cannon 'Haven't You Noticed That Modernity Is Bankrupt? Ruminations on the Teaching Career of William H. Poteat', *Tradition and Discovery*, 21: 1 (1994-95): 20-32, p. 23.

