

# Tihamér Margitay on Polanyi's Ontology: An Introduction

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*This issue of Tradition & Discovery includes (1) six responses to Tihamér Margitay's recent criticisms of Polanyi's hierarchical ontology as well as (2) Margitay's responses to his critics. This is a brief introduction to this special issue.*

Tihamér Margitay, Chairperson of the Department of Philosophy and the History of Science at the Budapest University of Technology and Economics, is a very capable young Hungarian scholar with a serious interest in Michael Polanyi's thought. The department he chairs has since 1989 provided leadership for the Michael Polanyi Liberal Philosophy Association, which introduced Polanyi's thought to post-communist Hungary. The MPLPA has sponsored several conferences on Polanyi's scientific accomplishments and his philosophical thought, and it publishes *Polanyiana*, for which Margitay now serves as editor.

In 2008, Margitay chaired an MPLPA-sponsored conference in Budapest entitled "Reconsidering Polanyi." At that conference, he gave a provocative paper entitled "From Epistemology to Ontology: Polanyi's Arguments for the Layered Ontology." That paper, included among thirteen essays from the conference in *Knowing and Being: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Michael Polanyi* (Tihamér Margitay, ed. [Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010], pp. 128-140), raised large questions about how successful Polanyi was in making his case for his hierarchical ontology.<sup>1</sup> Shortly after publication of this book, I asked Margitay if he might be interested in using his essay as a centerpiece in TAD for discussing the adequacy of Polanyi's stratified ontology. He not only welcomed my proposal but generously volunteered to help in organizing such a discussion. I am pleased that this project has come to fruition in this issue of TAD.

The six respondents who comment on Margitay's essay in this issue were chosen because they come at Polanyi from a variety of different angles and have somewhat different backgrounds and interests. Some are older scholars who were involved in earlier discussions of Polanyi's ontology, stretching back thirty years, discussions that spilled over into articles in this and other journals and books. Others are younger scholars, several of whom have published recent essays in TAD that broached ontological issues. Two comments are from Hungarian scholars very interested in Polanyi. In a subsequent issue of TAD, there will be some further discussion of issues treated here. I want to thank Tihamér Margitay for his thoughtful reflections on the variety of responses his article elicited. The discussion brings greater clarity to the complex range of issues that are involved in making ontological claims from a Polanyian perspective.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Most subsequent references to this article in this issue of TAD are simply noted in the text in parenthesis by page number(s). Beginning on page 42, Margitay summarizes the main arguments he makes in his article, and those unfamiliar with his claims may find it useful to read these first three pages of his article before turning to the individual responses.