

CONTACT WITH REALITY: COMPARING MICHAEL POLANYI AND DREYFUS AND TAYLOR, *RETRIEVING REALISM*



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ABSTRACT

*This essay contrasts Michael Polanyi’s insight regarding contact with reality to the idea of direct contact theory that Hubert Dreyfus and Charles Taylor develop in their recent effort to “retrieve” realism. Whereas the latter locates a “direct” contact “beneath” articulation in a preconceptual layer “accessible only by phenomenology,” Polanyi locates contact in discovery—not beneath, but rather beyond, our efforts to know. It is also apparent that the authors of *Retrieving Realism* presume an epistemology less sophisticated than Polanyi’s subsidiary-focal integration, as well as omitting the critical epistemic component of commitment. The essay concludes that Polanyi offers the superior challenge to “the picture that held us captive”—Cartesian epistemology with its resultant anti-realism, one which additionally unleashes a lively, surprising real to its proper primacy.*

Anyone who has undergone formal philosophical study in recent decades will have no trouble appreciating the work of Hubert Dreyfus and Charles Taylor in their recent *Retrieving Realism*. This is because it speaks within and to the prevailing conversation in and around realism, against the backdrop of modernity. It speaks accessibly and

effectively—also unusual in analytic philosophy. As its title suggests, the coauthors labor to retrieve realism by challenging the by now commonly panned “picture that held us captive”—Ludwig Wittgenstein’s apt characterization of the Cartesian world picture (*RR*, 1).¹ Dreyfus and Taylor identify four key features that define this defective picture: first, the presumption that the “outer” world is mediated to the “inner” self “only through” representations; second, a rejection of anything but explicit belief; third, a commitment to justification only by appealing to explicit beliefs, preferably immediate givens; and finally, a mind-body dualist “sorting” (*RR*, 10-12). One of the book’s assets is the authors’ effective presentation of the defective picture, both in its damage and in its appeal (*RR*, 24-26).

The authors claim that the great philosophers of the 20th century, Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, along with Wittgenstein, have carried out a most effective challenge to this defective picture (*RR*, 18). They themselves espouse Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology which they draw into the analytic milieu in their endeavor to retrieve realism. Dreyfus and Taylor name the defective picture, “the mediational view.” Correspondingly, they term their own proposal a “direct contact theory” (*RR*, 17-26 *et passim*). Contact with reality, they pose, is direct, rather than mediated: rather than the defective picture of our accessing the world only via representations, knowers are always already embedded bodily in the world, thus contacting it directly. This direct contact supports the retrieval of realism. Their primary interlocutor they take to be Richard Rorty, as a representative of the most challenging anti-realism that must be satisfied in their argument (*RR*, 7 *et passim*).

In June 2016 the Polanyi Society met for a special conference in celebration of the anniversary of the publication of Michael Polanyi’s *Tacit Dimension*.² A major portion of the program was devoted to examination of *Retrieving Realism*. What follows here reflects my assigned contribution to the panel convened on the book, namely, to explore its notion of contact with reality in comparison with that of Polanyi’s.³ Records show that Hubert Dreyfus and Charles Taylor participated in most of the Polanyi study groups, gatherings of scholars orchestrated over the decades for Polanyi by Marjorie Grene (Breyspraak and Mullins 2016; see also Grene 1971). Given that their work in *Retrieving Realism* so profoundly overlaps Polanyi’s, it is beyond mystifying that in this book no use or even mention of Polanyi’s insights is ever made. Polanyi garners only a solitary footnote, an aside to the Polanyian scientist being like the ordinary football player in incorporating active and receptive into his work. The footnote was evidently added as an afterthought; the succeeding “*ibid*” was never corrected (*RR*, 76). It is difficult to imagine that such august philosophers would have felt it necessary to avoid what others have perceived as an embarrassing association. Surely they could have at least spoken in a manner similar to Grene: throughout her excellent work she regularly comments that “this is something like what Polanyi was doing when he...” (Grene 1995, 17).

“Contact with reality” is a prominent notion in Michael Polanyi’s work also. Polanyi repeats that designation frequently throughout his work. For example, from the preface of *Personal Knowledge*: “Such knowing is indeed *objective* in the sense of establishing contact with a hidden reality; a contact that is defined as the condition for anticipating an indeterminate range of yet unknown (and perhaps yet inconceivable) true implications” (*PK*, viii). For me as a philosopher, this idea of contact has for decades delighted and intrigued me as the very sort of phenomenon I need to be assured of: a reality independent of my knowing it. This contact with reality testifies to the independent real and thus constitutes the position of realism and its justification (Meek, 2015).

My purpose in this essay, then, is to compare and contrast the claims of *Retrieving Realism* with those of Polanyi with respect to the notion of contact with reality. If, in comparing Polanyi’s proposals, in general, to the general argument of Dreyfus and Taylor in *Retrieving Realism*, the reference point for the comparison is their challenge to Cartesian modernist epistemology, the two proposals display much in common. Both make that a high priority and offer an effective challenge that dispels the picture that held us captive. I would say, however, that while this is the sole agenda of Dreyfus and Taylor in this book, Polanyi perhaps never saw himself (focally) as doing this. Rather, he saw himself as innovating within the modern intellectual tradition.⁴

However, if we change the reference point so as to compare the two proposals directly to each other, telltale contrasts emerge. As per my natural attention to the matter of contact with reality, the contrasts specifically involve a divergent understanding of the matter of contact with reality, along with what I feel to be a defective understanding, on the part of the authors of *Retrieving Realism*, of their own “preconceptual layer.” My comparison in this essay is not merely for the sake of comparison. While Taylor and Dreyfus contribute a well-reasoned work valuable in the arena of analytic philosophy, these are key dimensions of knowing and of realism that Polanyi’s work elucidates uniquely, to which knowers of any stripe would do well to pay attention. What follows here, then, is a list of these contrasts. I trust that also by the end of the essay, the difference these contrasts make will be evident.

To begin with, let us note the obvious: Charles Taylor and Hubert Dreyfus are premier philosophers.⁵ Polanyi was a premier scientist, aided significantly by a premier (though refreshingly maverick) philosopher in Marjorie Grene. Grene states, as she argues that Polanyi’s work offers “grounds for a revolution in philosophy,” that what was distinctive of Polanyi was that he raised these philosophical matters from within science (Grene 1977, 166-67). It is only to be expected that the two approaches would lay the accents divergently on what might be seen to be a common agenda. But Polanyi the scientist also targeted philosophical anti-realist opponents: the positivists (1967). However, these thwarted the work of good science; so his was not a “purely” philosophical agenda.

Related to this divergence of focus is a critical contrast. The arguments differ with respect to whether or not discovery is taken to be paradigmatic for knowing, and of foremost importance in epistemology. For Polanyi the paradigm of all knowing is “knowledge of an approaching discovery” (*TD*, 20). While it may not be accurate to say that the Dreyfus/Taylor argument remains in the “context of explanation” by contrast, it clearly displays an absence of attention to discovery. Following Merleau-Ponty and the phenomenologists, they attend to perception. They look to the known (cubes and such), not to the not-yet known. By contrast, Polanyi also attends continuously to perception; but his emphasis on the not-yet known leads him to attend to exploratory perception. He finds in even the most primitive perception the intrinsically integrative subsidiary-focal structure (*TD*, 7). For Polanyi, it will be subsidiary-focal integration that dispels representationalism. It does not take an argument or proof; it simply takes display—*this* is what we do when we are knowing. There is a real sense in which in this respect Polanyi is more intentional about intentionality than are the phenomenologists. Intentionality should be seen not as aboutness of mental content, but as aboutness, from-to, about the world beyond me, the yet-to-be-known. We will return to the emphasis on discovery when we consider their divergent notions of contact with reality.

Another key contrast between the arguments concerns the specific flaw of the picture that holds us captive that the two arguments identify as critically problematic. Consideration of this difference displays the comparative inferiority of the coauthors’ proposals with respect to Polanyi’s subsidiary focal integration. For Dreyfus and Taylor, the problem with the picture is mediation, or representationalism. I do not believe that Polanyi actually ever addresses representationalism as a problem—apart from challenging positivist efforts to limit knowledge to claims about appearances. But by contrast, for Polanyi, the problem with modernist epistemology is “focalness.”

I say it this way, rather than identifying it as explicit knowledge, for a reason or two. First, I follow Grene in believing that the heart of what Polanyi was saying is that no knowledge can be wholly focal, but rather is always rooted in and outrun by the subsidiary—and in saying that it is that two-level, subsidiary-focal integrative structure which is unique and key (Grene 1977, 175). To speak of the focal is to imply the intrinsically, integratively, related subsidiary. It is true that Polanyi challenges extensively the closely related concepts of explicit knowledge and articulation, along with the false ideal of certainty (*PK*, Pt. III). This emphasis does correspond with the defective picture as Dreyfus and Taylor delineate it (the second feature concerning explicit knowledge only); actually, Polanyi engages this matter far more than they do.⁶

But to continue: why is it important to identify focalness as Polanyi’s concern? It is important in this way: if subsidiary-focal integration is true—and it is difficult to miss observing it once someone points it out—focusing on something that you are trying to comprehend can be just what blinds you to it. (*TD*, 19) For example: focusing on the letters I key and you read in this sentence can blind me and you to the meaning of the

sentence. Blindness obviously would not be helpful for someone wanting to apprehend the real. The more effective strategy for an aspiring discoverer—not to mention aspiring reader or tennis player—is to try to relate to the clues in a creatively indwelling way, in hope of inviting inbreaking insight. Now it is true that “destructive analysis,” according to Polanyi, though risky, can serve to deepen our insight upon reintegration (*TD*, 19). But certainly destructive analysis was never meant to offer the paradigm of knowledge, as it does in modernity.

I believe that a common misunderstanding of Polanyi’s claims, following Grene’s insight here, is to designate explicit knowledge and tacit (or implicit) knowledge—as if they are two unrelated kinds of knowledge (Grene 1977, 175). Not only does this obviate the all-important from-to of the subsidiary-focal, it also presumes that you could have explicit knowledge without the subsidiary—and that you can have explicit knowledge at all. Also, it is common to identify “explicit” with “focal” and “tacit” with “subsidiary.” But the focal and explicit knowledge are not exactly the same thing; this is because it is possible to have focal knowledge that is not itself explicit either. For example, you can be driving a car (subsidiary-focal integration—and thus focused on the performance) without that being explicit knowledge. Also, you can be driving a car and be focused on a philosophical discussion you are carrying on with others in the car. The focal can be—must be, to the extent that our knowing layers up—tacit. Finally, there is a real sense, I believe, in which no meaningful knowledge is explicit knowledge. For it takes subsidiarily indwelling even the most articulate statement for it to be meaningful. Destructive analysis destroys meaning (*TD*, 19). There is a sense in which “explicit knowledge” is performatively incoherent. This is an astounding thought, and it provides a glimpse of the sophistication that Polanyi, the scientist insider, philosophy outsider, built naturally into his description of how we know.

By contrast, Dreyfus and Taylor, in following Merleau-Ponty, seek contact in a “layer beneath” the reflexive or thetic—beneath reflective articulation, or articulate reflection (*RR*, ch. 4). They desire that implicit knowledge be acknowledged; they have in mind especially bodily awareness. But their proposals lack the sophistication of Polanyi’s subsidiary focal integration. If the focal is not identical to the explicit, the subsidiary is not identical to the implicit. The layers they distinguish appear to fall apart, rather than hang integrally together as in subsidiary focal integration. On this view, effectively both layers in a way are focal, and it is implied that reflective articulation is a stand-alone production. This is just what Polanyi wrote to challenge. Also, Dreyfus and Taylor, as a result, do not see that what is needed need not be something exclusively prethetic. After we are language users, we are as subsidiarily rooted in our language in the world as we were before we had learned to speak.⁷ We don’t need the prethetic, “only to be accessed by phenomenology,” to dispel the picture that held us captive. My overarching assessment here is that Dreyfus and Taylor’s own argument

would have been immensely helped had they understood and embraced Polanyi's sophisticated epistemology. Polanyi's account of both "layers" and their relation is what heals us of the picture that holds modernity captive, and does so while contributing to the support, not rejection, of articulation.

Turning to the comparison with respect to contact with reality, let me offer a transitional, prefatory remark. There is something strange about Taylor and Dreyfus condemning "mediated" in favor of "direct" contact. Of course we are rooted bodily in the world; that point is an important one on which both proposals insist (*TD*, 15; *KB*, 147).⁸ As Grene says, "Why can't we check our beliefs against reality? We can't—because we are already in it" (Grene 1995, 17). Nor do we need to exalt representations, or even to say that we have them some of the time, in our epistemic account (*RR*, 27). But the richness that we bring to our understanding must be acknowledged—richness that invites rather than hinders contact with the real—embodiment, language, apprenticeship, tradition, conviviality, expertise, culture. Polanyi shows how it is actually mediation via these critical epistemic features, along with others—mediation *as subsidiarily connected and logically unspecifiable*—that roots us in and with the world. What renders mediation effective is indwelling it subsidiarily. This is what Polanyi is commending in the "changing camp" passage—that we turn the recent "retreat" of acknowledging "limitations" to knowledge into an advance by changing camp (*KB*, 156). We may add to this defense of mediation Grene's argument regarding humans as essentially mediational creatures (Grene, 1995, esp. ch. 8). All this raises a question regarding the aptness of the Dreyfus/Taylor argument characterizing the critical concern as one of mediation.

But now let us turn to contrast the two notions of contact. What Dreyfus and Taylor have in mind by "contact" is the co-production of knowing by the knower embedded in and in touch with her surroundings—"engaged coping" (*RR*, 93, and ch. 4). They consider this to be something prethetic or prereflexive—"beneath" and other than (as I noted) explicit articulation. Polanyi agrees in presuming "the bodily rootedness of all thought"; indeed, Merleau-Ponty's work may be profitably read as an astoundingly rich corroboration and development of the bodied subsidiary. Polanyi can be seen to concur with this rooted contact—as subsidiary. Polanyi avers that it is subsidiary indwelling that makes us feel our bodies to be our own, and that roots us belongingly in the world (*TD*, 16). Proficiency at bike-riding opens a world of biking possibilities to us. So Polanyi espouses and confirms this primordial contact—although, with the conditions which we have noted, that it be seen as subsidiary, and that it not need to be seen as exclusively prethetic.

But the location of the contact that intrigues Polanyi—which makes the difference in one's epistemology, which most significantly connects us to the real, and which even transforms the knower's bodily rootedness—is contact with the yet-to-be-known.

It is contact with reality, not exclusively beneath us or even as subsidiary, but contact primarily beyond us, which as humans we pursue, for which as humans we hope.

Consider just one of Polanyi's expressions of this: "The pursuit of discovery is conducted from the start in these terms; all the time we are guided by sensing the presence of a hidden reality toward which our clues are pointing; and the discovery which terminates and satisfies this pursuit is still sustained by the same vision. It claims to have made contact with reality; a reality which, being real may yet reveal itself to future eyes in an indefinite range of unexpected manifestations" (*TD*, 23-24). Here we can hear his emphasis on discovery, and his preoccupation with a present but hidden reality. We read that for Polanyi, "contact with reality" lies in discovery. And we see that such contact is attested to by our attending sense of an indefinite range of unexpected manifestations.

When I was young, I thought nothing of venturing out onto a log fallen across a deep ravine. It was a delightful expertise. Once I got older, I could no longer do that. Now I find that even far simpler ambulatory feats, such as descending a set of stairs, involve my continual suspecting and attending to my balance, to the end of "justification." I devise this analogy, because Dreyfus and Taylor, in the highpoint of their argument, cite the work of Samuel Todes to offer verticality as an undeniable instance of embedded coproduction that requires an independent real (*RR*, 136-39, esp. n. 8). I do not mean at all to discount the importance of balance for anchoring us in the world. I do mean to suggest that making it primary epistemically, as Dreyfus and Taylor do, in contrast to Polanyi's exuberant reaching out for contact beyond and future possibilities, is not where the accent, for humans, should lie primarily. If we may speak of a "back-door" and a "front-door" contact, the back-door contact is not the locus of contact which, considered in itself (focally), anchors us best in the world.

Thus, it is not the better contact for the purpose of retrieving realism. Locating contact *beneath* involves checking and justifying beliefs; locating contact *beyond* involves joyous surrender.⁹ If the former is a retrieved, robust realism, the latter is an exuberant realism—a plunging into reality in which reality itself overwhelms us. Contact with reality, in its signature "IFM Effect,"¹⁰ proves to be reality contacting us, often more a matter of exploding our questions than answering them, and changing us (and our balance) in the process. Polyanian contact makes even better sense of Merleau-Ponty's powerful claim than does the engaged coping contact of Dreyfus and Taylor: "To ask whether the world is real is not to understand what we are saying" (*RR*, 93). Indeed, if anti-realism is a category mistake, it is also, as per Polanyi, a pseudosubstitution—an illicit denial of one's very own experience of the primacy of the real (Grene 1995, Ch. 6).

This connects with another contrast between the two approaches. It appears that that of *Retrieving Realism* attributes to the prethetic layer the entire provision

of meaning. The prethetic layer, following in the Kantian tradition, alone provides sense-making conditions (*RR*, 31). This understanding is a critical piece of the authors' representation of the contemporary challenge to the Myth of the Given. And following Merleau-Ponty, they also argue further that the prethetic is not the intellectualist's mental structure, but a coproduction connected to the world. Although this would need more careful scrutiny to be sure, it seems that Polanyi directly challenges the sufficiency of the prethetic to meaning. Yes, the subsidiary-focal structure is utterly essential to meaning, though in something other than a strictly necessary nor sufficient sense (Meek 2008, 4-6). But it would be, primarily, the focally integrated pattern that gives meaning to the clues. True, the pattern is "necessarily fraught with the clues on which it relies" (*TD*, xviii); but the semantic "freight" on the "trainline" of integration is at the very least two-way.

What is more, Polanyi sees the knower as pursuing meaning in the cosmos, rationality in nature. In this he is truer to Isaac Newton's own outlook than was Kant. Polanyi's commitment to rationality in nature is what can induce people in modernity to view Polanyi as an "out-dated Platonist" (*PK*, 6). Taylor and Dreyfus do identify Platonism as a contact theory, but quickly and without justification dismiss it as impossible in modernity (*RR*, 17-18). So again in this contrast between the two arguments we see that Polanyi's notion is of a contact with reality, intrinsically meaningful, beyond.

Modern thinkers, in the absence of a working understanding of subsidiary-focal integration, indeed cannot see their way to affirming an independent reality. Merleau-Ponty actually sees himself as an anti-realist; he condemns empiricist sensationalism for holding to that nonsensical belief (Merleau-Ponty 2012, lxxxiv *et passim*). "There is no view from nowhere," as it has become common to say (*RR*, 133). But for Polanyi, this claim is actually wrongheaded. One need not be capable of something logically impossible—of "knowing reality independent of our knowing it"—to know that reality exists independent of our knowing it. Nor should it be taken as a confession of failure to say that there is no view from nowhere; because we are here, not nowhere, we do view—we may be graced with eyes to see—the world. Our view-from-which is not what keeps us from reality but that which launches us out into it. But what testifies to independent reality (not in spite of, but because of, our rootedness) is that it is actually reality that initiates and *surprises*.¹¹ It showers us with a sense of indeterminate future prospects. Then, it transforms our very rootedness and our very being.

Attention to these features of contacting the real make good sense to the one who would be excellent in science and in understanding in general. This is why what intrigued Polanyi about Kant was the "mother wit" that Kant himself dismissed (*KB*, 106).¹² If the telltale proof of realism for Dreyfus and Taylor lies in the phenomenon of verticality, the telltale clue to epistemology and realism for Polanyi lies in the inherent unformalizability of our efforts, leading to deeply profound discoveries.

Mother wit is itself reality—human reality—issuing indeterminately in surprising unformalizable tacit powers and inexhaustible depths. This critical dimension of knowing is what Polanyi was trying to reveal and have us accredit as the personal. Since this is the genius in science that must be protected for science to move forward, restricting knowledge to “unbridled lucidity” and doubt-proof certainty would hobble science (*TD*, 18). We may note the contrast in what the two arguments find problematic in Descartes: the authors of *Retrieving Realism* focus on representationalism; Polanyi focuses on the incoherence of doubting everything to the end of certainty. In fact, it might be argued that in Descartes’ work the matter that Polanyi fingers, certainty, is critically prior to the one that Dreyfus and Taylor engage, representation.

Another contrast between the two arguments has to do with the role of commitment in knowing. For Polanyi it is essential—and essential to realism. It appears to be absent from the argument of Taylor and Dreyfus. Polanyi has been known by outsiders exclusively for his explicitly embracing belief and commitment in knowing. We can see that this stance is his response to the faulty and damaging Cartesian picture. It is true that in later years he places more emphasis on subsidiary-focal integration, as he notes (*TD*, xviii). But I would argue that it is impossible for an epistemology ever (even unconsciously) to overlook or replace the normative dimension. Knowing requires the highly personed acts of consent, commitment, submission, accreditation, indwelling, reliance on clues, and responsible risk. The normative, commitment dimension is nothing to be embarrassed of as some sort of inadequacy. It is not to be dismissed as no longer tenable in modernity. As Marjorie Grene moves to the conclusion of her argument about humanness, she too quotes St. Augustine: “This is my freedom, that I am subject to this truth” (Grene 1995, 179).

How does this all tie in to this study of the contrasting features of our two arguments for realism? First, let us note that for Polanyi, commitment is intrinsically bodied. He defines commitment as “our manner of disposing ourselves toward” reality (*PK*, 61). This is bodied intentionality. Intentionality, we may say, is commitment, and it is bodied. Thus, no proponent of phenomenology should discount Polanyi’s explicit avowal of belief as somehow out of step with embodiment. Polanyi goes beyond the phenomenologist to say that we indwell our most theoretical frameworks—we interiorize and body them, too.

The realist argument needs this dimension of commitment. What is significant about the subsidiary layer—prethetic or thetic—is that we responsibly give ourselves to indwell it. We rely on it, entrust ourselves to it. And it is as we do, and only as we do, that we see the world. It is as we indwell subsidiaries that we apprehend the surprising real beyond us. We do not verify verticality so much as give ourselves to it. But then we also reach beyond ourselves to commit ourselves to the yet to be known. The “argument” for contact in both the subsidiary and the anticipative is not focal but rather subsidiary, as the proverbial proof is in the pudding.

It is ironic that outsiders to Polanyi's work mistake it to be anti-realist—thinking that his rooting knowledge in belief could only be so. We can lay the blame for this blindness at Descartes' door, along with everything else we blame him for. But normative or commitment dimensions are absent from the Dreyfus/Taylor argument for realism. This is typical of a modern argument—one which does not comprehend subsidiary-focal integration, nor the role of responsibility in knowing. In fact, commitment opens the real to us; trust alone opens the real to us. This doesn't make reality less real or realism more qualified. Realism just is indwelling trust in the real.

Indeed, Polanyi himself never struggled with the problem of realism that most of us in modern epistemology have had and continue to have. This situation is similar to “the problem of certainty” that Augustine had, contrasted to Descartes in his appropriation of Augustine's argument. Descartes' concern was to find certainty; Augustine's was actually the opposite: to account for why we have certainty so undeniably—and also to make the most of it, and to delight in it.¹³ By comparison, I believe, Polanyi's is the more natural and exuberant realism.

It has been my personal experience over the years as a Polanyian, that Polanyi's epistemology actually frees reality to be more dynamically real. I would say from experience that his is a realism that heals one's metaphysics, along with one's humanness. My experience has been to cease questioning realism and to begin to enjoy it.

There is a very real sense in which Dreyfus and Taylor, in their argument for realism, display that they, in contrast, remain captive to the picture that held us captive. I apologize for any banality in recurring to finger pointing. I do not deprecate, so much as describe. For any who would directly take on the problem of the picture that held us captive in an arena still in its thrall, must of necessity, for the sake of its agenda, be conformed somewhat to that picture. This is the way it is within analytic philosophy. Polanyi stood on no such ceremony—neither in philosophy nor in his science. He stood free to witness to the real.¹⁴

In conclusion: While the immense richness of what phenomenology uncovers must be admitted and appreciated for its important implications, certainly it must be said that phenomenology is not “the only way” to dispel the modernist, Cartesian, “picture that held us captive” (*RR*, 137). It is more than appropriate to acknowledge Polanyi's distinctive contribution to the challenge mounted widely in the 20th century. But comparing Polanyi's vast contribution to this cause to the recent effort of Charles Taylor and Hubert Dreyfus in their 2015 *Retrieving Realism*, something that those authors failed inexplicably to do, telltale differences emerge and suggest the superiority of Polanyian epistemology and realism. Taylor and Dreyfus address mediation and propound “direct” contact. Polanyi addressed focalness and identified subsidiary-focal integration. Taylor and Dreyfus emphasized “back-door” contact—prethetic, “beneath” the thetic. Polanyi identified “front-door” contact—contact beyond where we are, toward which we grope, by which we are transformed in discovery. The former

is an effort at proof, perhaps at justification; the latter is a venture toward surrender to the real. And finally, we have considered here, Polanyi's steady acknowledgement on the *sine qua non* of commitment, absent from the argument of *Retrieving Realism*, offers a critical piece of the argument for realism. In all of these respects, I find Polanyi's approach superior—truer to our knowing practice, better for the outcomes of our ventures, healing for our humanness, both in its embodiment and in its defining intentionality—its desire for the real, and restorative for our intellectual heritage—because better at dispelling the picture that has held us captive. And perhaps most wonderfully: in addition to healing and advantaging the knower, it restores reality itself to the dynamically inexhaustive primacy it deserves.

ENDNOTES

¹As they will show, simply being able to identify that it is a picture that holds us captive goes a significant way to challenging that picture. Dreyfus and Taylor, *Retrieving Realism*, ch. 2. Hereafter in-text citations as *RR*.

²Polanyi Studies: Past, Present, and Future, 2016 Polanyi Society Conference, June 8–11, 2016.

³Additionally, I presented a stand-alone paper (“Contact with Reality: Retrospect and Prospect”), which engaged *Retrieving Realism* and was intended for what it has become: a chapter in my recently released *Contact with Reality: Michael Polanyi's Realism and Why It Matters* (2017). For my purposes in this book, the appearance of the work by Dreyfus and Taylor was timely and strategic.

⁴Consider, for example, on the one hand, that Polanyi's “Critique of Doubt,” in *PK*, Ch. 9, directly contradicts Descartes' famous thought experiment regarding the *Cogito*. Consider, on the other hand, that according to Grene, Polanyi saw his own work, mistakenly, as supporting a Cartesian view of the mind (Grene 1977, 169).

⁵Hubert Dreyfus passed away just this spring. But I will retain the present-tense to honor his work which continues to live on.

⁶Neither “implicit” nor “explicit” is included in the admittedly selective Index of *Retrieving Realism*.

⁷Consider Grene's superb treatment of this matter (1995, Ch. 8).

⁸They share this, although understanding embodiment as subsidiary represents a significant and qualitative advance. Reading Merleau-Ponty through Polanyian eyes improves its sense, even as it martial it.

⁹Consider the wise comment of Hans Urs von Balthasar, which I insert into the Introduction to *Contact With Reality* (7); as well as his wider work, *Theological Trilogy*.

¹⁰I coined this term in my 1985 PhD dissertation, now freshly reframed and published as *Contact With Reality* (Meek 2017, 77).

¹¹Consider the work of D. C. Schindler (2013) to underscore this critical point, in his “Surprised by Truth,” Ch. 2.

¹²Polanyi rightly understood that attending to it would undermine the work of Kant and his followers—but nevertheless makes for better knowing. That is why he himself is fascinated with “the unaccountable element in science”—this is the title of the essay which this claim prefaces (*KB*, 106).

¹³Augustine. *On Free Choice II*, 33-34, excerpted in Vernon J. Burke, ed., *The Essential Augustine*, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1974), 123-24.

¹⁴It should be noted that Polanyi’s vision may not have been more widely accepted within science than it was in philosophy. Consider standard treatments of the philosophy of science such as that by Peter Godfrey-Smith (2003).

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