



CONTENTS

Preface..... 3

The Work of Matthew B. Crawford

Teachers and Students 4
Matthew B. Crawford

The Organ Maker’s Shop, Erotic Attention, Teaching, and Trust 10
Paul Lewis

Comments on Matthew Crawford’s *The World Beyond Your Head*..... 18
Collin D. Barnes

Convivial Craft-Work and the Fiduciary Program 24
Richard W. Moodey

Articles

Mapping Potat on the Buddha and Zen..... 32
Milton R. Scarborough

“Balance of Mind”: Polanyi’s Response to the Second Apple and
the Modern Predicament 47
Jon Fennell

Journal and Society Information

Editorial Board and Submissions Guide 2

Notes on Contributors 3

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Submission Guidelines

Submissions: All manuscripts should be submitted as a Microsoft Word file attached to an email message. **Articles** should be no more than 6000 words in length (inclusive of keywords, abstract, notes, and references) and sent to Paul Lewis at lewis_pa@mercer.edu. All submissions will be sent out for blind peer review. **Book reviews** should be no more than 1000 words in length and sent to Andrew Grosso at atgrosso@icloud.com.

Spelling: We recognize that the journal serves English-speaking writers around the world and so do not require anyone's "standard" English spelling. We do, however, require all writers to be consistent in whatever convention they follow.

Citations:

- Our preference is for Chicago's parenthetical/reference style in which citations are given in the text as (last name of author year, page number), combined with full bibliographical information at the end of the article. One exception is that Polanyi's major works may be cited parenthetically using the following abbreviations (with abbreviations italicized):

<i>CF</i>	<i>Contempt of Freedom</i>
<i>KB</i>	<i>Knowing and Being</i>
<i>LL</i>	<i>Logic of Liberty</i>
<i>M</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
<i>PK</i>	<i>Personal Knowledge</i>
<i>SEP</i>	<i>Society, Economics, and Philosophy</i>
<i>SFS</i>	<i>Science, Faith, and Society</i>
<i>SM</i>	<i>Study of Man</i>
<i>STSR</i>	<i>Scientific Thought and Social Reality</i>
<i>TD</i>	<i>Tacit Dimension</i>

For example: Polanyi argues that (*TD*, 56). Full bibliographical information should still be supplied in the references section since many of us may work with different editions of his works.

- Endnotes should be used sparingly and be placed before the reference section.
- We do recognize that Polanyi's work connects with scholars who work in diverse disciplines that use different style guides. To the extent that our software allows, we will accept other styles (e.g., APA or MLA) so long as the author is consistent and careful in following it. The main point, of course, is to give the reader enough information to locate and engage your sources. Manuscripts that are not careful and consistent in style will be returned so that the author can make corrections, which may delay publication.

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PREFACE

This issue of *TAD* falls into two sections. The first contains material from the session of the 2016 Annual Meeting devoted to Matthew B. Crawford, who refers to Polanyi frequently in his work, most recently, *The World Beyond Your Head*. These articles were prepared originally for oral presentation and have been only modestly revised for publication. In the first essay, Crawford reflects on teaching in contemporary higher education. My article extends on that theme by discussing how I have found his book useful in my teaching. The subsequent articles by Collin Barnes and Richard M. Moodey focus more on Crawford's latest book, which was reviewed in the October 2016 issue of *TAD*.

The second section of this issue contains two essays that examine intersections between Polanyian themes and different religious traditions. In the first article, Milton Scarborough explores affinities between the work of William Poteat and the Buddha. In the second article, Jon Fennell builds on Polanyi's reference to "the second apple" to reflect on Christian themes of fall and redemption in Polanyi's work.

As always, check out the latest updates on conferences, publications, and Society news in News and Notes, now only www.polanyisociety.org.

Paul Lewis

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TEACHERS AND STUDENTS



Matthew B. Crawford

Keywords: apprenticeship, authority, Michael Polanyi, universities, campus politics, cultural authority, conviviality, joint attention, imitation, epistemology

ABSTRACT

The transmission of knowledge requires trust, which is a moral relation between teacher and student. This relation requires the suspension of democratic/individualistic suspicion against the idea of intellectual rank and authority. Ultimately this is for the sake of an end that is affirmable by the lights of democratic individualism: the intellectual independence of the student. But education cannot itself be a democratic enterprise if it is to sustain deference to the idea of truth, as it must.

Polanyi understands the transmission of knowledge on the model of apprenticeship: as a student one must submit to a teacher's way of doing things without yet being able to give an account of why it is the proper way. Learning requires trust. Trust is a *moral relation* between persons, rather than a strictly *cognitive operation* of individual minds. As such, trust has no recognized place in the official epistemology of cognitive science or its guiding antecedents in early modern philosophy. To follow Polanyi further, this mismatch between prevailing epistemology and the actual practice of education is due to our fraught relationship to the idea of authority. We live within a horizon that continues to be shaped by Enlightenment thought, with its highly individualistic picture of human knowing. To place trust in the testimony of others is to substitute mere hearsay for knowledge.

The role of trust in education bears thinking about in our current moment, as there seems to be a widespread breakdown of trust in the university. Many teachers report that they are afraid of their students, in particular of the Jacobin political passions that

currently circulate under the heading of “social justice.” For their part, students do not seem to trust that the discomfiting effects of the books assigned by their teachers are for their own good. They have been encouraged toward an emotional fragility and traumatized self-image, and a corresponding defensiveness that is inimical to learning.

In the chapter entitled “Conviviality” in *Personal Knowledge*, Polanyi addresses the conditions for the transmission of culture, in particular, the conditions that sustain deference to the idea of truth. It turns out you can’t have that without deference to human beings who are thought to know better. And reciprocally, the required stance toward intellectual authorities arises from caring passionately about the distinction between truth and error. If I understood some remarks near the beginning of the chapter correctly, Polanyi thinks this circle of mutual dependence cannot be grounded in a realist, correspondence theory of truth. But that doesn’t make the circle itself any less real. One could call his account historicist or pragmatic, according to emphases that emerge at various points, but I am open to being corrected about this.

To begin with the primitive, animals learn by mimicking. “A true transmission of knowledge stemming from conviviality takes place when an animal shares in the intelligent effort which another animal is making in its presence” (*PK*, 206). What Polanyi calls conviviality in this context is illuminated by recent research into *joint attention*.¹ “There are telling examples...of chimpanzees watching a fellow animal’s attempt to perform a difficult feat and revealing by their gestures that they participate in another’s efforts” (*PK*, 206). Since Polanyi wrote, we have discovered “mirror neurons” that are dedicated to this kind of imitation, and learned that use of the hands and body to mirror the actions of another are no mere epiphenomenal accompaniment to learning, but integral to the cognitive processes that take place.²

Polanyi writes, “All arts are learned by intelligently imitating the way they are practiced by other persons in whom the learner places his confidence” (*PK*, 206). This includes the acquisition of language by young children. Confidence or trust is the key idea here. And this remains the case in adult society; without such confidence the transmission of culture comes to a halt. Polanyi writes,

Our modern culture is highly articulate. If another Flood came over us, the largest liner afloat would not suffice to carry the millions of volumes, the many thousands of paintings and hundreds of different instruments, musical, scientific and technical, together with the host of specialists qualified to use these means of articulation, by which we might transmit to post-deluvian society even the crudest remains of our civilization. The current transmission of this immense aggregate of intellectual artefacts from one generation to another takes place by a process of communication which flows from adults to young people. This kind of communication can be received

only when one person places an exceptional degree of confidence in another, the apprentice in the master, the student in the teacher, and popular audiences in distinguished speakers or famous writers. The assimilation of great systems of articulate lore by novices of various grades is made possible only by a *previous act of affiliation*, by which the novice accepts apprenticeship to a community which cultivates this lore, appreciates its values and strives to act by its standards. This affiliation begins with the fact that a child submits to education within a community, and it is confirmed throughout life to the extent to which the adult continues to place exceptional confidence in the intellectual leaders of the same community. Just as children learn to speak by assuming that the words used in their presence mean something, so throughout the whole range of cultural apprenticeship the intellectual junior's craving to understand the doings and sayings of his intellectual superiors assumes that what they are doing and saying has a hidden meaning which, when discovered, will be found satisfying to some extent (*PK*, 207-208).

In case there are people here unacquainted with Polanyi's thought, I should pause to note that it would be a gross error to read this as an endorsement of authoritarianism. Indeed, Polanyi's political concern, as a refugee from both Soviet communism and Nazism, is precisely a concern for liberty of thought. He is making an epistemological point about how intellectual competence, and therefore real independence, is achieved. And he sees a threat to such independence not only in the totalitarian systems he narrowly escaped as a Hungarian Jew, but also in the theory of knowledge that underwrites liberal individualism.

Polanyi's treatment of the role of authority in education reveals a fundamental tension between learning and democratic culture. Many have noted higher education's creeping embrace of a commercial ethos, and its attendant transformation along the lines of a service industry. The professor's role is to provide a service for pay, and to do so congenially. Plato's Socrates anticipated this in Book 8 of the *Republic*, which describes a tendency of democracy to degenerate: "As the teacher in such a situation is frightened of the pupils and fawns on them, so the students make light of their teachers, as well as of their attendants." "The old come down to the level of the young; imitating the young, they are overflowing with facility and charm, and that's so that they won't seem to be unpleasant or despotic."

In the journal *The Mentor*, one observer who attends meetings of college administrators reports the following: "The first person to speak was a senior dean from a distinguished university. He announced proudly that he and his colleagues admit smart students and then make a special effort to 'get out of their way.' 'Students learn mostly

from one another,' he argued. 'We shouldn't muck up that process.'" Students learning from one another is a respectably democratic-sounding formula, though one wonders why parents keep paying those aristocratic tuitions.

Here the basic model for intellectual life is commerce: just as markets free of interference are said to produce ideal outcomes by the workings of a mysterious hidden hand, so truth will prevail in the open competition of the "marketplace of ideas" among students who *aren't yet educated*. But can an opinion be taken as true merely because it prevails? As a practical matter it is not clear how the college administrators' conviction about the robustness of truth differs from simple deference to public opinion.

Polanyi says a "previous act of affiliation" is required to begin the process of apprenticeship by which culture is transmitted. Such acts of affiliation, or "granting of one's personal allegiance" to an authoritative figure, are what seem no longer to be routine. When you go to the doctor, you go as an empowered consumer of medical information. One doesn't merely seek a "second opinion," one finds a provider whose approach comports with what one has learned oneself by consulting and digesting a dozen different websites, a little traditional Chinese medicine, and any number of holistic and alternative approaches. Likewise, when you shop for a professor, you consult Rate My Professor Dot Com, that sophomore panopticon by which teachers are held to norms established by students: easiness, availability outside class, hotness, etc.

And then there is the *ressentiment* toward authority that is endemic among professors themselves, in the humanities. In her stunning essay "When Nothing Is Cool," the English professor Lisa Ruddick (2015) writes,

Decades of antihumanist one-upmanship have left the profession with a fascination for shaking the value out of what seems human, alive, and whole...Bruno Latour has described how scholars slip from "critique" into "critical barbarity," giving "cruel treatment" to experiences and ideals that non-academics treat as objects of tender concern.

Such objects include the great works of the mind. Undergraduates learn this hermeneutic of suspicion well and direct it against their teachers. Laura Kipnis (2015) describes how some students seek, and find, real coercive power over their professors by enacting a self-infantilizing melodrama of victimhood, with the acquiescence of administrators whose first concern is for public relations. Be sure to read her follow-up essay in the same journal, about being brought before a secret kangaroo court on federal Title Nine violations. Unbelievably, her offence was *publishing the first article*.

If Polanyi is right that education, the transmission of culture, consists of apprenticeship in devotion to truth, then it seems the institution ostensibly dedicated to this risks becoming instead the locus of an anti-culture of suspicion and resentment against

one's intellectual superiors: students against teachers, and teachers against the great works that might have instructed them (in a moment of lapsed vigilance).

Polanyi wrote, "our adherence to the truth can be seen to imply our adherence to a society which respects the truth, *and which we trust to respect it*" (PK, 203, emphasis added).

All this bears quite directly on the recent political convulsion in the United States, which perhaps brought to fruition these tendencies nursed in the academy. It is widely remarked that we have entered a kind of post-truth politics. How postmodern. My suggestion is that we can view this as the product of a post-trust culture in which there remains hardly any such thing as authority. What we saw in the election was disregard for truth *as a standard* before which one might feel some embarrassment. Reality TV doesn't even pretend to be real, and one of our presidential candidates didn't feel it necessary to offer even "truthiness" as a rhetorical style.

The choice facing voters in November 2016 was between a candidate seemingly bent on the destruction of institutions that embody cultural authority, and a candidate who represented precisely those institutions. But in doing so, she unwittingly brought into clarifying relief the ossified, non-falsifiable, self-serving misapprehensions of reality embedded in some of those institutions, and therefore the shaky legitimacy of their claim to cultural authority. At the risk of being overwrought: it looked like a choice between the terrifying prospect of blowing up society, on the one hand, and the suffocating prospect of a tightening net of cultural imperiousness that seemed to be armed with every organ of bureaucratic and commercial power in an axis running from Silicon Valley to Pennsylvania Avenue.

So, half of the country decided to blow up the country. It was the better half, according to a Leninist standard that identifies *winning* with possession of the only kind of truth worth pursuing (for it is History that decides, and when you feel its wind at your back, it is an intoxicating feeling). Of course, this is precisely the standard embraced by progressives, but now the winds have shifted. That would seem to explain their mood of stunned impotence and rage.

My reading in Polanyi has been glancing and superficial, taking bits here and there. The question I would like to pose to my fellow panelists who know Polanyi better is this: does he offer us the means to distinguish between epistemic communities that are successfully getting at the nature of things, and epistemic communities that are merely successful in perpetuating their authority, even at the cost of covering over the nature of things? This is, precisely, the old Enlightenment concern, and one feels the force of it anew. I suspect Polanyi does have something to say on this, and at this moment your fellow citizens might like to hear it. Maybe it comes down to cultivating an awareness of fallibility as a cultural norm.

ENDNOTES

¹See Crawford 2015, 145-148 and the references cited there.

²At the highest levels of athletic training this is being exploited. In the last winter Olympics, you may have noticed ski racers with their eyes closed, moved their hands and bodies in a Tai Chi-like exercise of visualization, executing a practice run before the start. Rehearsing a performance in this way, in a mental simulation that also recruits the body, has been found to consolidate the learning process in many areas of human endeavor.

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THE ORGAN MAKER'S SHOP, EROTIC ATTENTION, TEACHING, AND TRUST



Paul Lewis

Keywords: Matthew B. Crawford, Michael Polanyi, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Robert Pirsig, intellectual passions, tradition, dwelling in, breaking out, faithful innovation, erotics of attention, trust, accountability

ABSTRACT

In response to Crawford's presentation on teaching and trust, I note how Crawford's latest book has helped me teach history of Christian ethics. I also highlight two Polanyian themes relevant to the topic: dwelling in/breaking out and intellectual passions. I then discuss additional challenges to developing trust between teachers and students.

An Opening Confession

I begin with a confession: I am a fan of Matthew B. Crawford's work. I have been interested in it since an editor of *Autoweek* magazine mentioned *Shop Class as Soulcraft* in a column several years ago. I have used that book, to good effect, as a text in several classes. A few years ago, I sent a copy of his section on higher education to our provost when we were in the midst of discussions about curricular reform and the purpose of a university. While I never heard back from the provost and am not sure what to make of his silence, I continue to find Crawford's work incisive and worthy of both our attention and action.

Crawford mentions Polanyi some in *Shop Class*, but does so more extensively in this second book, *The World Beyond Your Head* (hereafter *WBYH* with page numbers given in parentheses.), as he develops and extends themes from the earlier book. In my response to this latest book and his presentation on teaching and trust, I highlight two Polanyian themes in *WBYH* that bear on the topic: dwelling in/breaking out and

intellectual passions. I conclude by identifying some additional challenges to developing trust that teachers face today.

Dwelling in and Breaking Out in The Organ Maker's Shop

Crawford illustrates Polanyi's concept of dwelling in and breaking out in a way that I have found useful in teaching the history of Christian thought, oddly enough. Polanyi's most explicit discussion of dwelling in and breaking out can be found in the sections of *Personal Knowledge* devoted to intellectual passions and doubt (195-202 and 279-286). Using the experiences of scientific discovery and religious worship as examples, Polanyi argues that as we dwell in "articulate systems" through our practices, whether lab procedures or liturgy, we can be drawn out of ourselves into contemplation of that to which these practices point. Although we do not see it made explicit in these sections of *Personal Knowledge*, breaking out implies that practices will and should evolve in response to our contemplation, a point that is consistent with Polanyi's discussion of scientific controversies (*PK*, Ch. 1).

Crawford's description of organ makers George Taylor and John Boody offers a concrete example of what it means to dwell in and break out. Crawford notes that a particular organ they were refurbishing was originally built using synthetic materials that had not aged well. Boody says that he plans to replace the trackers (mechanisms that link keys with pipes) with either wood or carbon fiber. In response to Crawford's query about the use of carbon fiber, Boody says, "Carbon fiber turns out to be *excellent* material for trackers. It's stable, extremely strong, and stays absolutely straight" (242, emphasis original). In short, Taylor and Boody have dwelt in the history and practice of organ-making and here break out of it by innovating with new materials that better serve the functions of the original.

Of course, we should note that Taylor and Boody do not always break with precedent. In another situation, they have to re-leather a bellows. This time, they decide to use traditional materials and techniques: hide-based glue and a vegetable-based process for tanning the leather instead of a chemical one. They do that because, in their judgment, this course of action is not only better, but makes future restorations easier (227-228). In this case, then, Taylor and Boody do not break out of tradition; in effect, they dive deeper into it to recover a neglected part of it.

Yet another angle on dwelling in and breaking out of the tradition of organ building can be found in Crawford's discussion of organ wars. He describes Albert Schweitzer's judgment that the then new Liederhalle organ in Stuttgart was "not a step forward, but backward" (219). Crawford notes that this organ was built at a time when organ builders were more focused on displaying their technical ingenuity than anything else (220). Here then, is a situation in which breaking out of the tradition, in Schweitzer's and Crawford's views, represented too much of a departure from the tradition, insofar

as it did not preserve some values that Schweitzer, as one who deeply dwelled in the tradition, thought it important to preserve.

So how do organ makers decide whether to remain in or depart from tradition in specific situations—or judge whether a departure is good or bad? In Crawford’s account, the criteria seem to be driven by the creative tension between attitudes of reverence and rebellion (210, 236). Furthermore, they appear to arise at the place where the needs of musicality, historical accuracy, engineering, and economics intersect (228, 231, 234; cf. 217-218). Of these, musicality and longevity are arguably the first among equals, as Crawford describes the “the best organ” (241) as one that plays beautifully (238) and lasts for hundreds of years (244).¹

In sum, as Taylor and Boody work on organs, they are faced with making thoughtful, personal judgments about whether acts that break out of the tradition of organ building extend that tradition or break it. In having to make these kinds of decisions, they demonstrate that they are participants in what Crawford rightly describes as a *living* tradition. In saying this, Crawford, like Alasdair McIntyre, means that they are part of an ongoing argument about the goods of the tradition and how best to achieve them. What makes the tradition living, Crawford says, is that participants don’t seek “to replicate the *conclusions* of tradition...but rather to enter the same *problems* as the ancients and make them one’s own” (244, emphasis original).

This statement offers a nice segway to theology, as John Howard Yoder—a Mennonite religious thinker who is hardly a theological liberal—uses similar language to describe the Christian theological task. He says that our job is not to translate the results of earlier generations, but to “emulate their exercise” (1984, 56). We might therefore characterize dwelling in and breaking out in Christian thought as an exercise in faithful innovation. The criteria for judging what counts as a faithful innovation in theology emerges where the words and deeds of the first-century Jesus of Nazareth, the teachings and practices of the Churches over time, and the challenges of twenty-first century life all intersect.

In the Christian tradition of theological inquiry, many doctrinal and ethical innovations have been deemed faithful, even if only in hindsight after a period of argument. A good example is that of Thomas’s synthesis of Aristotelian philosophy with Augustinian (neo-Platonic) theology, a synthesis that resulted in Thomas being declared a heretic. Of course, he later eventually became known as *Doctor Angelicus* and his work continues to be the touchstone for Roman Catholic thought today. In Polanyian terms, Thomas dwelled so deeply in both the Neoplatonic Christian and Aristotelian traditions that he was able to break out of slavish devotion to either (compare MacIntyre 1989, 167-168). This indwelling enabled him to break out of the received tradition in a way that continues to be fruitful today.

An example of ethical innovation concerns teachings about marriage and divorce, innovation we see happening in the New Testament texts themselves. We find that there are four instances where writers recall Jesus' teachings on divorce. Of the four, Paul (in I Corinthians), Mark, and Luke all agree that Jesus said no divorce, ever. Matthew's Jesus, however, allows for an exception, i.e., in the case of adultery. To this, Paul adds two more. First, he says that those who do divorce should not remarry (unless you remarry the person you just divorced). Second, he advises those who are married to an unbelieving spouse should stay married, unless the non-believer wants out. In that case, a divorce should be granted. And just in case someone notes that he has just contradicted Jesus, Paul adds in typically modest fashion, "And I think that I, too, have the spirit of God!" (I Corinthians 7:10-15 and 40b). Jump ahead to the early 20th-century and divorce was still often seen as a sin that would prevent people from being leaders in the churches—a view fewer Christians hold today. As Lisa Cahill observes, while the tradition has from the beginning upheld an model of permanent, monogamous, heterosexual marriage, it has come to accept certain allowable/justifiable exceptions (1984, 143-145). In short, some clear departures from the teachings of Jesus have been deemed faithful innovations by later generations.

So what does this discussion of "faithful innovation" in the historical evolution of Christian theological ideas have to do with teaching and trust? In a class on Christian theology and ethics, some students are threatened by the idea that the tradition has changed over the centuries. Crawford's description of Taylor and Boody provides a vivid and non-threatening example of a living tradition. Hopefully, this innocent example enables students, in their better moments at least, to see parallels with the history of Christian thought and so diffuse any defensive reactions they may have. This can be step that builds the trust that enables them to break out of pre-existing notions on the way to a new, richer, personal integration of the tradition.

Intellectual Passions and the Erotics of Attention

A second Polanyian theme in Crawford's *WBYH* that bears on teaching and trust concerns the importance of intellectual passions. This connection between Crawford and Polanyi seems less explicit to me and so I briefly explain it and offer an observation. Polanyi identifies three interconnected intellectual passions: scientific passions that help us selectively attend to features of our world, heuristic passions that enable us to intuit larger patterns worthy of further investigation, and persuasive passions that motivate us to enter into conversation with others (*PK* 159). Crawford's rough analog can be found in what I have already noted as attitudes of rebellion and reverence, as well as Chapter 10 of *WBYH*, which he devotes to the topic of "The Erotics of Attention." Central to Crawford's account is a love (168) that focuses our attention on "objects that have intrinsic appeal" and so can "provide a source of positive energy"

(170). Although Crawford does not develop this point along Polanyian lines, there is certainly an affinity between Crawford's focus on that which has intrinsic, energizing appeal and Polanyi's intellectual passions that drive discovery.

It might also be worth exploring these ideas in conversation with both Augustine and Thomas. For Augustine, the moral task is learning to love the right things in the right way, a view that can be summarized in his oft-quoted maxim, "Love and do what you will."² We do well to remember too, with Thomas, that all passions do not attract us; some drive us away.³ We therefore have to learn not only to love the right things, but also to be repulsed by the right things. The take away here is that part of our task as teachers then is to address the whole student, not just the head—to help students be attracted to and repulsed by the right things. Some ways we can operationalize this insight in classes are by using provocative examples from literature or film, role play, cases, service learning, and other experiential pedagogies. Regardless of the tools we might use, Crawford's work reminds me that part of our role as teachers is to help students find something worthy of their love and attention. Doing so requires that students break out of their existing ideas and practices, something that will be threatening to many, especially if they do not trust us as their professors.

More Challenges to Developing Trust

As Crawford has pointed out, there are challenges we face in developing trust with students. While I think he is correct in identifying some of them as the deep-seated ideologies of individualism and anti-authoritarianism, I want to add two more. First, consider that eighteen-year olds especially, and undergraduates more generally, are developmentally at a point where they are beginning to experience challenges to their naïve trust in either authority figures or their own preferences (Perry 1999). Indeed, part of our job is to find ways to disabuse them of their ideas that a high-priced and prestigious education will inevitably lead to better a job and/or material success, their convictions that beliefs about good and God are simply subjective preferences, that they are simply welcome to their own opinion, and that all opinions are equal. Instead, we demand reasoned arguments based on evidence.⁴ From our students' perspective, we—to use Crawford's terms—are the world that pushes back against them, and the standards that we try to hold them to are more complex than whether the lights come on after changing a switch. We therefore find ourselves in the paradoxical position of asking our students to trust us as we invite them to distrust and un-love what they have heretofore thought and loved. This task is complicated not only by the fact that the standards of excellence for good arguments and good citizenship are not as concrete as those for building a good organ, but also that we may not have known most of our students long enough to demonstrate that we are trustworthy guides.

A second challenge is that both student and teacher need to trust the larger institution if our relationship is to be a healthy one. Students come to college (and parents send their children to college) with an ambivalent attitude. On the one hand, they express a trust in the utility of higher education, but on the other, are suspicious that the cost may be disproportionate to the payoff. Put differently, they come in with a hermeneutics of suspicion. This situation leads to ever more demands for “accountability,” demands that are increasingly measured in decidedly illiberal ways adapted from the crudest economic models of efficiency and accounting. University administrations and accrediting bodies, along with the federal government, are more than happy to provide “metrics” that demonstrate whether our schools are worth “the investment” (measured only in dollars) we demand. Even our defenses of the liberal arts too often focus on their utility, albeit sometimes in sophisticated and eloquent ways.⁵ One price of this emphasis on accountability is that administrators too often—at least in practice—lose any sense of the institution’s founding vision or the end goal of education. That in turn undermines faculty trust in administrators and contributes to the misrepresentation of the *telos* of education at the popular level. In short, it creates a downward spiral that no one seems to know how to escape—or at least is willing to try.

Concluding Thoughts: Restoring Trust

But the talk of challenges makes for a rather bleak ending. While I do think there are serious challenges to developing trust between student and teacher, as well as between student, teacher and institution, I do not want to end on too negative a note and thereby succumb to the too easy task of recognizing what is wrong. I think we can find ways to address these matters by first identifying practices that have become second nature to us such that we take them for granted. As professors, we build trust by how we develop and implement classroom policies. We build trust when we try to create safe places for trying out new ideas, i.e., places that are safe for rich discussion and real argument (which is decidedly not what some want “safe spaces” to be today). We build trust by challenging others at the same time that we provide them with resources that can help them rise to the occasion. We build trust by modeling good judgment and by explaining the paths by which we arrive at our own conclusions. We build trust by being vulnerable and willing to learn ourselves. Administrators can build trust by doing similar things—and by standing up to popular misconceptions about higher education. So there are practices already in place that may help us restore trust—at least to some degree. May their tribe increase.

As I said earlier, I am a fan of Crawford’s work. I greatly value how he does what Robert Pirsig encourages us to do, i.e., keep philosophy grounded in “the everyday world” (1974, 221). Whether describing short-order cooks, motorcycle racers, glass-blowers, or organ-builders, Crawford has an uncanny ability to bring to life

philosophically-rich concepts and to do so with clear, rightly-directed passion. I have tried to demonstrate that value by showing how I have found his work helpful in teaching the history of Christian ethics as a process of dwelling in and breaking out. I have also found his work to be a helpful reminder that teaching requires not only a reorientation of the mind, but also the passions. He also raises important issues about the conditions necessary for creating a healthy learning environment. The “metrics” for determining such may not always be clear, but the task is important and the goal is certainly worthy of our passionate pursuit in the company of people truly committed to that end.

ENDNOTES

¹The criteria for distinguishing between faithful and unfaithful forms of breaking out will likely be domain specific. Later, I suggest what they may be in Christian theology. In the natural sciences, Polanyi equates breaking out with discovery, a process that is guided by criteria of sufficient degree of plausibility, scientific value, and originality (*KB*, 53-54. For a slightly different list, see *PK*, 135-6 and 148-9).

²See his “7th Homily on the Epistle of I John” and “The Morals of the Catholic Church,” both available at www.newadvent.org.

³Thomas Aquinas distinguishes between two types of passions: the concupiscible that attract and the irascible that repel (*ST I-II*, Q. 23).

⁴See Stokes 2012 for a nice piece on why opinions are not welcome. I often give it to classes.

⁵See, for example, the Phi Beta Kappa toolkit, “The Arts and Sciences are Key” and Biggar (2010). Of course, the tradition of liberal arts itself is an argument about the purpose of education. One vision is rooted in Athens, modified by the Enlightenment, and embodied in the research university: learning has intrinsic value and the primary method of inquiry is doubt. The other main vision is rooted in Rome and the Reformation. In this view, learning is instrumental and helps people find their vocation as they serve the good of society (Lambert 2015).

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Comments on Matthew B. Crawford's *The World Beyond Your Head*



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Keywords: Matthew Crawford, Michael Polanyi, mediated experience, embodied perception

ABSTRACT

Matthew Crawford invites readers to consider how their contact with the real world has been imperiled by the notion that all experience is mediated by mental representations and how skilled activities providing bodily contact with the environment help recover us from this mistaken perspective. In this brief presentation, I ask whether in his critique of mediated experience by appeal to physical skills Crawford neglects to appreciate Polanyi's emphasis on intellectual probes as instruments for contacting reality and whether his doing so inappropriately—and perhaps inadvertently—diminishes the all-important place of belief in Polanyi's epistemology.

Matthew Crawford's *The World Beyond Your Head* (hereafter *WBYH*) concerns itself with the organizing of our lives in modern society and brings, in my view, much needed perspective to the topic. It urges us by appeal to skilled contact with the real world to relinquish technologies that increasingly distance us from this space and to wake up to the fact that reality is not ours for the making, but is encountered in terms of what J.J. Gibson calls affordances. Quoting Gibson, Crawford says, "The affordances of the environment are 'what it *offers* the animal, what it *provides* or *furnishes*, for good or ill'" (55), and he holds that they are readily encountered in such places as the carpenter's shop and mechanic's garage.¹

In the Preface, Crawford sums up his position this way: “Skilled practices serve as an anchor to the world beyond one’s head—a point of triangulation with objects and other people who have a reality of their own” (x). From this vantage point, he explores implications for how we structure the spaces we live in, relate to each other, and rely on tradition to move forward. At the end of the book, I found myself wishing even more for a shared vision of things in society that resembles how organ-makers Taylor and Boody do their craft: “They intend,” Crawford says, “for their organs still to be in use four hundred years from now, and this orientation toward the future requires... engagement with...the past” (210). I think *WBYH* goes some distance in helping this wish become an actuality and appreciate it for this reason.

What I have to offer in my comments on Crawford’s book I wish to acknowledge frankly are not those of a veteran reader of social and political philosophy or even, unfortunately, of Michael Polanyi. I am educating myself in these matters, and have been indelibly touched by Polanyi, but the education is not complete and likely will not be for some years. A final disclaimer is that, although I am a psychologist, the thoughts I present do not draw upon my knowledge of research in this area or engage with the work Crawford discusses in making a case for, for instance, embodied perception and self-regulation; he seems to handle these subjects very well on his own. Rather, my observations lie elsewhere and revolve really only around one theme. It dawned on me early in my reading and resurfaced time and again, so I trusted that I had landed on something important—to me, personally, if nothing else.

The theme is best captured in the negative by Crawford’s critique of mental representations and mediated experience, the Kantian notion that the will is free from governance by the material universe and can give laws unto itself, and David Foster Wallace’s belief that meaning in the world is constructed rather than pressed upon us from the outside. In the positive direction, the theme comes through, not surprisingly, in the title of the book and in references to, for instance, “the world as it is” (253), to its having “a reality of its own” (28, 173) and being “independent of the self” (28, 73, 94) and open to direct confrontation (77). As remarked above, Crawford believes such confrontations especially transpire in skilled activities like hockey, glass-blowing, and motorcycle riding where things outside of us behave in ways that do not readily yield, if they ever do, to our wishes. Such skills are learned by submitting to authorities who are masters of their realm and live with their instruments and tools as extensions of their being, expertly engaging the world beyond their heads as seasoned short-order cooks do during lunch rushes.

These examples bring of course to mind Michael Polanyi’s picture of a blind man’s reliance on a stick to navigate his surroundings. Although at first feeling foreign to users, with extended use and experience, probes become “parts of our own existence,” (*PK*, 59). Crawford’s emphasis, then, is on concrete activities that bring us into contact

with an independently existing reality which acts back upon us in a way that constrains our ability to represent it in whatever way we wish. He says very late in his book, “As embodied beings who use tools and prosthetics, the world shows up for us through its affordances; it is a world that we act in, not merely observe” (249). Because our skills are attuned to the affordances of the world, how we come to see it is not arbitrary; our vision has been shaped by reality itself. No representations are needed because a *direct, unmediated* confrontation has occurred in the skilled activity. The world has shown up for us, and by submitting to it, we interweave ourselves with it.

As I noted already, I am genuinely sympathetic to Crawford’s hope for how things might be in a society revised in the ways he recommends, yet I nevertheless find myself discomfited with what appears to be the crux of his position—namely, that experiences of the finger-turning-bolt kind comprise a realm of activities that are generally free from representation or mediation. The reason for this is that I cannot conceive of ever not having to *think about* or *make sense* of these behaviors, and this sense does not seem to be given in the actions themselves. Indeed, as best I can discern, the Crawford-inspired claim that experiences of the finger-turning-bolt kind are free of representations is *itself* a representation. It is a call to see the world in one way rather than another, and the very fact that Crawford believes I stand in need to hear the call shows, I think, that his understanding is not one the world inevitably urges upon me in skilled activity or otherwise. And to back up a step, is it not important to wonder how Kant ever succeeded through his philosophy of dissociating us from the world as it is if reconceiving its most essential features is not open to us?

I do see signs in the book of Crawford’s appreciation for the representational nature of his project and of the skilled activities we learn in apprenticeships. He shows it, for instance, in the sentence immediately following the one I quoted above: “[W]hen we acquire new skills,” he says, “we come to see the world differently” (249). But what leaves me confused is how much of this representation Crawford sees us bringing to the table and how much of it he believes grows from direct confrontations with the world as it is. Much more in the book I get the sense that the latter plays the greater role. As an example, the quotation by Arthur Glenberg speaks loudly:

[E]mbodied representations do not need to be mapped onto the world to become meaningful because they arise from the world. [They are] directly grounded by virtue of being lawfully and analogically related to properties of the world and how these properties are transduced by perceptual systems (83).

I take this as a call to see embodied representations as the key to apprehending the world *factually*—in a fashion that is irrevocably true to our nature and the nature of things beyond us. Said differently, I see this as a call to the possibility of certain

knowledge and a confidence akin to that espoused by positivistic science, and I am of the mind that while it is indubitable that Polanyi sees the world's reality and our own as genuine, he is resistant to any move that would make our understanding of either stand independent of what we make of them. This, in fact, is where faith enters so vitally into the picture for us.

I will have more to say about this, but first let me see if I can make the grounds for my objection clearer. Polanyi notes in his discussion of skills that the “[h]ammers and probes” that are of primary interest to Crawford “can be replaced by intellectual tools” (*PK*, 59). I take him to be referring here to representations. He continues: “[T]hink of any interpretative framework and particularly of the formalism of the exact sciences. I am not speaking of the specific assertions which fill the textbooks, but of the suppositions which underlie the method by which these assertions are arrived at” (*PK*, 59). These suppositions, I think it is fair to say, are mediators of experience; they stand behind our use of hammers and probes and make sense of them for us. We indwell them and come in contact with reality through them just as we do with the tools and implements of a skilled activity, but the latter are less encompassing. As Polanyi observes,

We assimilate most...pre-suppositions by learning to speak of things in a certain language, in which there are names for various kinds of objects, names by which objects can be classified, making such distinctions as between past and present, living and dead, healthy and sick, and thousands of others...They are not asserted and cannot be asserted, for assertion can be made only within a framework with which we have identified ourselves... (*PK*, 59-60).

And elsewhere he says,

Our native gift of speech enables us to enter on the mental life of man by assimilating our cultural heritage. We come into existence mentally, by adding to our bodily equipment an articulate framework and using it for understanding experience. Human thought grows only within language and since language can exist only in a society, all thought is rooted in society (*SM*, 60).

I am not the greatest fan of referencing contemporary cultural products in academic forums, but in this case the parallel seems too apposite to ignore. I have in mind a particular film. It is 2015's *Mad Max*, which is a resurrection of the older movies by the same name. The story, as I am sure some of you are aware, concerns a fractured and tribally organized humanity in a post-apocalyptic wasteland fighting one another for possession of water, weaponized automobiles, and gasoline. A kind of religious fervor

permeates these characters' lives. It is an eerie picture of a world of representations we do not have, and however fictional it may be, my purpose in drawing attention to it is to say that I really do not think we should assume that the activities of turning an oil pan bolt, replacing a cracked fuel line, or gripping a steering wheel reflect the same reality to us as they would to those characters if they were real. Instead, I am inclined to think that a car for them is almost sentient, a chariot to an afterlife, a protector and destroyer, a living symbol as much as a machine. I am not denying here that the motions of tightening a drain plug might look the same to a third-party observer of our world and theirs; I am, however, asserting that the meaning of the activity reflected in how it is spoken of and represented in the two communities would be vastly different and that the difference would not be inconsequential—merely a product of reality setting parameters on our thoughts without dictating their precise form—but bound up with the very substance of what is taking place.

However “fit to reality” the actions of a soldier in cleaning his gun are, a chef to the aromas of a stew he is preparing, or an early Apache to the heave of his horse running at full speed, I am at pains to see how the pictures they have of their activities could ever emerge purely from the activities themselves, as Glenberg appears to suggest and Crawford to support. Are they “grounded”? Yes, I suppose they are, but this to me seems only to affirm the realness of the actor and of the world in which he lives; beyond this, there is quite truly a universe of possibilities for understanding what is taking place. When we submit to authorities to learn skills, we are coming not just to contact reality, but to represent it to ourselves. Is the reality revealed in the skills really *out there*? For Polanyi, the answer to this question is a nuanced yes that always emphasizes the ineradicable contribution made across generations by convivial inquirers to our understanding of what is real—an understanding that comes to us by inculcation into a tradition of speaking about and seeing the world. The out there-ness of reality in any absolute sense is taken away by this perspective and it urges us to recognize, as Polanyi does in his discussion of the fiduciary program, that “[s]een in the round, man stands at the beginning and at the end, as begetter and child of his own thought” (*PK*, 265). Because of this, we are left to wonder with Polanyi, “Is [man] speaking to himself in a language he alone can understand” (*PK*, 265)?

What rescues those of us who feel the disquiet this question engenders is the very piece of the equation I see Crawford's book as lacking and as the most precious gift that Polanyi makes possible: the ability to shamelessly say, “I believe.” For those who have eaten of the second apple, the world no longer looks the same, and the prospect of our resting sure that in this or that activity the world has shown up for us in a way that it alone is speaking and we are receiving directly its unadulterated communications is no more. As Polanyi says, even “our knowledge of Good and Evil” has “forever [been] imperiled” (*PK*, 268) by this new crisis, and from it skilled activity is no rescue by itself.

What is needed is a superior way of *representing* the world and it is reached I believe by indwelling the probe Polanyi has provided. It is one he builds up over the full course of *PK*, and although he goes to glorious lengths to make a case for his apprehension of the world, we see the lengths to which he goes as glorious and as satisfying only to the extent that we join him. That is to say, I do not see Polanyi appealing to the world beyond his head for ultimate proof of his claims. Rather, I see him appealing to *himself* as a living embodiment of a cultural heritage that transcends him and as a responsible explorer who seeks with others to peer into those parts of reality now hidden to us. “Logically,” he says, “the whole of my argument is but an elaboration of this circle: it is a systematic course in teaching myself to hold my own beliefs” (*PK*, 299).

Is this knowing arbitrary? Not in the least. It is the world viewed from the only place it can be: from inside of a commitment. It is this vision of things I am giving myself to, and I believe it to be true. It shows reality to me and promises to show more than I can presently conceive. Only via the probe of personal knowledge, held in faith, do I come to know the world beyond my head. I intuit that Crawford agrees, but judging from his infrequent use of such words as faith and belief with respect to how we contact reality, I take that his agreement remains tacit, or else I have mistakenly taken these forces to the bone when they do not cut that deep. Still I find myself compelled to believe that they do.

ENDNOTE

¹Page numbers in parentheses are to Crawford’s book.

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CONVIVIAL CRAFT-WORK AND THE FIDUCIARY PROGRAM



Richard W. Moodey

Keywords: Crawford, Polanyi, Bruner, Gibbs, science, craft, technology, individualism, distraction, attention, ideal type, ideology, ethnography, philosophy, tradition, group mind, metaphor, resource, representation, control

ABSTRACT

Matthew Crawford compares his program of convivial craft-work to Polanyi's fiduciary program. He argues that both are good ways of grappling with reality, and that both can help persons to focus their attention in an age of distraction. Crawford criticizes the Enlightenment philosophers for an overemphasis on the representations of things at the expense of grappling with the real things. He argues that attention is a scarce resource, analogous to water. He sometimes uses language that can be interpreted as expressing a belief in group minds.

In *The World Beyond Your Head: On Becoming an Individual in an Age of Distraction*, Matthew Crawford offers his readers a philosophical anthropology (7), a philosophy of education (127) and a polemical political philosophy (248).¹ His philosophy complements that of Michael Polanyi. Polanyi drew on his experience as a chemist in formulating his philosophy of science, and Crawford draws on his experience as a motorcycle mechanic in formulating his philosophy of craft. Polanyi drew a parallel between science and craft, and Crawford says that the relation is “stronger than a mere analogy.” He says that science and craft “are two expressions of the same mode of apprehending the world: by grappling with real things” (135).

Before I read Crawford's book, I was attracted by the realism suggested by the main title, but the subtitle led me to ask two questions: (1) does Crawford defend the

ideology of individualism? and (2) does he say that distraction is the biggest problem of our age? I did not have to read too far to be able to answer “no” to both questions. Crawford *does not* argue that distraction is the biggest problem of our age, and he does criticize of the ideology of individualism. He focuses on distraction because he believes that it prevents many people from becoming “fully-functioning persons” (Rogers 1962).

Ideal and Anti-Ideal Types

He argues that Enlightenment writers changed the picture of the ideal human, drawing a false picture that has had bad effects. He says,

I find that these changes have a certain coherence to them, an arc—one that begins with the Enlightenment, accelerates in the twentieth century, and is perhaps culminating now. Though digital technologies certainly contribute to it, our current crisis of attention is the coming to fruition of a picture of the human being that was offered some centuries ago. This picture is so pervasive that it is difficult to make an object of scrutiny. At the center of it is a certain understanding of how a person encounters the world beyond his or her head (ix).

Crawford’s phrase “the coming to fruition of a picture” suggests that the picture was a metaphorical seed that grew into a tree that is now bearing bad fruit. The metaphorical bad fruit is our “current crisis of attention.” This crisis results in too many people finding it hard, if not impossible, to “maintain a coherent self” (ix).

This picture is less a visual image than it is verbal description of what Enlightenment writers presented as an ideal type. Crawford, however, denies the validity of that type, treating it as an anti-ideal, a picture of the kind of person one should try *not* to be. In addition to criticizing the false ideal, he also describes a true ideal. He hopes to mitigate our crisis of attention by getting more people to work with their hands and by persuading more people to have a different picture of how to encounter the world beyond their heads. He says:

I offer what I take to be a more adequate picture of how we encounter objects and other people. My hope is that this alternative understanding can help us think clearly about our current crisis of attention, and reclaim certain possibilities of human flourishing (x).

This “more adequate picture” is the ideal type Crawford opposes to the Enlightenment picture that he judges to be the anti-ideal and is perhaps best captured by the British

title of his *Shop Craft as Soulcraft* (2009): *The Case for Working with Your Hands, Or, Why Office Work Is Bad for Us and Fixing Things Feels Good*.

Crawford says that the weight of his positive argument “is carried by case studies of attention in various skilled practices”(x). These case studies are brief ethnographies, and they are the best things in the book. They carry the weight of his positive prescriptions: *do* work with your hands; *do* work in solidarity with others; *do* talk with colleagues about your handiwork.

One of my favorite case studies is his description of the conversations between experienced and novice firefighters about a life and death question: how to know when to get out of a burning building. He uses this kind of conversation as a prototypical example of a *philosophical* conversation. A genuine philosophical conversation, like a genuine scientific or scholarly conversation, is one in which the participants subordinate all other desires to their desire to know the truth (62-63). Their heuristic passion makes them true lovers of wisdom about how to survive in a dangerous profession.

Parallel to Polanyi

Phil Mullins (2008, 159) says that in *Personal Knowledge* Polanyi wove together three distinct threads: “broad-based critical philosophizing, broad-based constructive philosophizing and articulation of a *Lebensphilosophie*.” Crawford interweaves these same three threads in *The World Beyond Your Head*. For both men, an important aspect of their critical philosophizing was the transformation of what many people mistakenly took to be an ideal into an anti-ideal. “I start,” Polanyi said, “by rejecting the ideal of scientific detachment” (PK, vii). This is a multi-dimensional ideal. It includes an idealization of completely explicit knowledge and an idealization of complete precision in the use of language. Polanyi sometimes called this false ideal “objectivism.” He said that it had not harmed the exact sciences because physicists and chemists paid little attention to it. “But we shall see,” he promised, “that it exercises a destructive influence in biology, psychology and sociology, and falsifies our whole outlook far beyond the domain of science” (PK, vii). He argued that it often led to nihilism and moral inversion.

Just as Crawford hopes that establishing an alternative picture of what it means to be human will help others to “reclaim certain possibilities of human flourishing,” Polanyi hoped “to establish an alternative ideal of knowledge, quite generally” (PK, vii). To embrace it is to follow his fiduciary program (PK, 264) and to accept the calling of being human (PK, 321). Although Crawford does not use the phrase “fiduciary program,” the emphasis he puts on being submissive to traditions is very similar to what Polanyi meant by “fiduciary.” Neither man advocated being submissive to *all* traditions, as is clear from their polemics against certain traditions that contain false ideals. But both men deny that we ought to reject traditional things *merely* because

they have been handed down from the past. A person must dwell in a tradition as a prerequisite to breaking out of it by new acts of discovery.

Attention as a Collective Problem

What Crawford means by “attention” is informed by Polanyi’s articulation of what he meant by “attend.” After describing Polanyi’s notion of the *from-to* structure of knowing and doing, Crawford says that Polanyi “found that he had to use the word ‘attend’ in a new formulation” (47). A person using a probe attends *from* the sensations in his hand *to* the shape of the focal object at the tip of the probe. He is subsidiarily aware of the feelings in his hand only in terms of the focal object. To know or do skillfully is to attend *from* the subordinated particulars *to* a focal object. Crawford makes this notion of “attend” part of what he means by our crisis of attention.

Crawford says that the ability to pay attention “it is in the first place a faculty of individual minds” (4-5). He adds that “attention has also become an acute collective problem of modern life—a cultural problem.” What I understand him to mean is that there are aspects of contemporary culture that make it harder for individual persons to pay attention to the world beyond their heads. I do not understand him to be using the big person metaphor, attributing to collectivities the ability to pay attention, as if it were a faculty of some kind of “group mind.”

Crawford’s language, however, sometimes leaves open the possibility of interpreting him as embracing something like a group mind. For example, in the following paragraph, it is possible to read him as using “we,” “us” and “our” to point to a collectivity that performs cognitive acts:

Our susceptibility to being buffeted by various claims on *our* attention is surely tied to the “intensification of nervous stimulation” that the German sociologist Georg Simmel identified with the metropolitan environment over a hundred years ago...The way *we* experience this, often, is as a crisis of self-ownership: *our* attention isn’t simply *ours* to direct where *we* will, and *we* complain about it bitterly (5; italics added).

I do not read this as a tacit affirmation of the existence of a “group mind,” but take his reiteration of the first person plural as a conventional way of saying “all of us,” “most of us,” “many of us,” or “some of us.”

Another example of language that can be interpreted to be a tacit affirmation of “group mind” occurs in the preface (ix), where he says that the problem of attention is so widely felt that “an entire society is compelled to ask anew a very old question: What does it mean to be human?” I don’t believe that he imagines that the “entire society”

is a big person, able to perform the cognitive act of asking this question. I read him as saying that *many individual members* of society feel compelled to ask this old question.

Attention as a Metaphorical Resource

Clean air and clean water are *literal* resources, but attention is a *metaphorical* resource. Crawford says that it is easy to understand the importance and fragility of clear air and clean water.

We also recognize that absent robust regulations, air and water will be used by some in ways that make them unusable for others—not because they are malicious or careless, but because they can make money using them this way. When this occurs, it is best understood as a *transfer of wealth* from “the commons” to private parties (11-12).

He points to the environmental degradation that can occur when the “gangsterish regimes” that have replaced Communism in some places fail to protect the commons by allowing the privatization of common goods such as air and water. He cautions us: “We in the liberal societies of the West find ourselves headed toward a similar condition with regard to the resource of attention, because we do not yet understand it to be a resource” (12). I say that attention is a resource only metaphorically. There is a big difference between the way air and water are resources and the way attention can be seen as a resource.

Crawford compares those who assail us with a cacophony of unwanted sounds and a kaleidoscope of unwanted images to the officials in the gangsterish regimes that privatize water. The big difference is that water is a *substance*, but attention is not. The *sources* of water should not be privatized, but there is a small-scale “privatization” of water that takes place whenever a person draws upon the commonly held source of water by drinking some of it. Her personal act makes that portion of water “private” by taking it into her body. Attention, however, is not a substance that can be located in commonly held reservoirs. It is a faculty of individual persons. By attending to something, a person performs a personal act, but, unlike drinking, that act does not “privatize” a small share of a commonly owned substance. The movement involved in her act of attending is *from* her body and the indwelt subsidiaries *to* the world beyond her head. The movement involved in her act of drinking is *from* the world beyond her head *to* her thirsty body.

Representations, Mental and Cultural

Some of the things Crawford says about representations make me uneasy. On the first page of the preface, in his criticism of the Enlightenment picture of how a person “encounters the world beyond his or her head,” he says: “We are said to do so only

through our mental *representations* of the world” (ix). He does show us that *some writers* have indeed said this. But he fails to convince me that any of them, or their readers, really believed it.

I contend Enlightenment writers, and readers, knew very well that the conception of a child results from sexual intercourse between a *real* man and a *real* woman. I can't imagine that a male Enlightenment writer thought that he could become a father by having sex with a mental representation of a woman. Nor do I believe that any of the mothers of the Enlightenment era believed that what she carried, gave birth to, and nursed was a mental representation of a baby. Any child or adult who *really* believed that he could survive by drinking only mental representations of water would soon die of thirst. Those who foolishly wrote that that humans encounter things only through their mental representations of them could not have survived long enough to write their treatises if they had really acted as if they believed what they wrote.

Crawford criticizes symbolic representation, and contrasts it with embodied representation. What he means by “symbolic representation” is the way computer code represents reality by strings of zeroes and ones, and he says that this kind of representation has a “grounding” problem. “How can arbitrary symbols *take on* meaning?” he asks. “How do they acquire propositional content and reference, such that they say something about the world?” (82-83). He says that embodied representation does not have this kind of problem.

I agree with his criticism of this kind of symbolic representation, but argue that what Jerome Bruner and his followers mean by “symbolic representation” is also a form of embodied representation (Bruner et al. 1966). They distinguish between enactive, iconic and symbolic representations, and treat all three as embodied. Think of having to drive from one place to another. If I have driven the route many times, my representation might be enactive. I will make the turns in the right places in much the same manner as a rat makes the correct turns in a maze it has learned to run successfully. If I haven't driven the route before, I might look at a map, and make a mental or “iconic” image of the map, and follow it successfully without having to take the paper map with me. Another way would be to get verbal directions from someone who knows the route. If I remember the verbal directions and follow them, this would be what Bruner means by “symbolic representation.” My memories of the visible map and of the audible set of directions are embodied, just as is my kinesthetic memory of making the proper sequence of turns. I contend that I can have embodied iconic, symbolic and enactive representations of the world beyond my head at the same time, and that they do not interfere with one another.

Crawford's criticism of “symbolic representation” as defined by cognitive science seems to me to be valid only for what Lakoff and Johnson (1999) call “first generation cognitive science.” That version of cognitive science relies on a faulty analogy between

the processes in the brain and processes in computers. “Second generation” cognitive science rejects that analogy, as does Crawford. The ways that the embodied brain functions are so different from the ways computers function that the differences overwhelm the similarities.

“Symbolic representation” can refer to skin-out, as well as skin-in things. We represent aspects of the world beyond our heads by using words and other kinds of cultural symbols that are themselves aspects of the world beyond our heads. It is to these external, skin-out symbols that Eric Voegelin (1952) refers when he describes the method of political science as the “critical clarification of symbolic representations of social reality.” I take Voegelin’s formulation to be a good characterization of the way all social scientists work, as well as a good characterization of what Crawford has done in *The World Beyond Your Head*. He clarifies and criticizes the symbolic representations created by Enlightenment writers of how we confront both things and other persons. By doing this, he gives us a better representation, using words and sentences, in the hope “that this alternative understanding can help us think clearly about our current crisis of attention, and reclaim certain possibilities of human flourishing” (x). But what he presents in his text is an alternative symbolic representation of how we confront persons and things. The understanding of his words is always an act of an individual reader.

Conclusion

Jack Gibbs (1989, 23) defines “attempted control” as “*overt* behavior by a human in the belief that (1) the behavior increases or decreases the probability of some subsequent condition and (2) the increase or decrease is desirable.” To write *The World Beyond Your Head*, Crawford had to engage in overt behavior. I believe that he went through the labor of writing in the belief that it would increase the probability that his readers would have a better picture of how they grapple with the world beyond their heads. He desires this increase because it will decrease the degree to which many of us suffer from a crisis of attention. To be too often and too deeply distracted is an obstacle to human flourishing. I have long believed that following Polanyi’s fiduciary program would help me to be a fully functioning person and Crawford has persuaded me that engaging in the kind of convivial craft-work he champions will also help.

ENDNOTE

¹Page numbers for *The World Beyond Your Head* are given parenthetically.

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MAPPING POTEAT ON THE BUDDHA AND ZEN¹



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ABSTRACT

Despite the fact that none of William H. Poteat's former students on the Yale Conference email list recall ever having heard Poteat mention the Buddha or Buddhism, this article argues for a hitherto unnoticed and striking correspondence of thought between William H. Poteat, the Buddha, and Ch'an (Zen). Both the Buddha and Poteat bear closer analogies to physicians than to metaphysicians and their thought can be compared to a kind of philosophical therapy. While the Buddha's diagnosis pinpoints egoistic desire as the cause of human dissatisfaction with life, Poteat's diagnosis is gnostic apocalypticism. Both physicians are moved to employ unusual pedagogical methods in order to effect a "cure," which consists of a fundamental unity or nonduality of mind and body, a therapy requiring a practice.

William H. Poteat was born to Baptist missionaries in 1919 in Kaifeng, China, where he lived his first decade. China was home to three religions—two native religions (Taoism and Confucianism) and an import from India (Buddhism). Several years into my teaching career, when I took up the study and then the teaching of Buddhism, I saw what I believed to be convergences between Poteat's thought and that of China's first "foreign" religion. Yet I never recall a single instance during my years as Poteat's student at Duke or afterward of his ever having mentioned Buddhism or the Buddha. Following the 2014 Yale Conference on Poteat, I took advantage of the email list it

created and polled the attendees, only to find that their recollection in that matter was the same as mine. Of course, Poteat's China had, in the wake of the Boxer Rebellion and other factors, turned to Sun Yat Sen and Christianity. Poteat was perhaps too young to be interested in a religion other than his own. Joan Duffy, a librarian at Yale Divinity School, did confirm for me that the seminary in Poteat's time there as a divinity student did offer courses in "world religions/comparative religions," but she reported that she is prohibited from revealing whether or not he took them.

In what follows, I will not attempt to provide the reader with a detailed account of the thought of the Buddha, Ch'an, or Zen but will try simply to point out several of the convergences I believe to exist between them, on the one hand, and Poteat, on the other, convergences which have, heretofore, so far as I am aware, gone unnoticed and/or unremarked. Moreover, I will make no attempt to account for these convergences.

The Buddha and Poteat

Although Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, was a skilled thinker who reflected profoundly on the most intractable of human problems, he did not consider himself to be a philosopher in the sense of critically seeking absolute metaphysical truths. When the monk Malunkyaputta, a student of the Buddha, threatened to leave if the Buddha did not answer questions as to whether the world exists in time (or not, or both, or neither), whether the self was identical with the body (or not, or both, or neither), and whether a person exists after death (or not, or both, or neither), the Buddha simply remained silent. The Buddha noted that he had never promised to answer such questions and insisted that answering them "does not profit," by which he meant that doing so was not helpful in attaining *nirvana* (ending suffering), a matter of overriding importance (Burt 1982, 32-36).

The Buddha drove home the point by telling Malunkyaputta a parable according to which a man was wounded by an arrow "thickly smeared with poison." Friends and family quickly summoned a physician to remove the arrow. The wounded man, however, announced that he would not permit the arrow's extraction until he learned to which of the four social classes (*varnas*) the assailant belonged, his name and clan, his height, the color of his complexion, his village's name, and many other identifying bits of information. The doctor pointed out the obvious, namely, that such a delay would certainly result in the victim's death and that what was needed in that moment was hasty removal of the arrow and the insertion of an antidote to the poison into the man's system (Burt 1982, 34-35). The point of the Buddha's story is that a philosopher often asks and seeks to answer relatively trivial questions, whereas he, like the physician in the story, wishes to encourage people to take a more urgent and life-saving course of action.

Although the Buddha clearly philosophizes in some sense, he is fundamentally a healer, not only or primarily of the physical body but of the person. Indeed, the

Buddha's Four Noble Truths, the content of his first sermon following his enlightenment and preached in Sarnath to his former ascetic companions, has often been understood as analogous to a visit to a medical doctor.

The first noble truth is that the life we normally live is *dukkha*, a Sanskrit word that was for many years translated as "suffering" but which is now more accurately rendered as "unsatisfactory." Death, disease, or divorce, for example, are not in themselves the real problem. The problem is our emotional reaction to them. This first noble truth is like noticing the symptoms of an ailment. Having noticed them, we pay a visit to the doctor.

The second Noble Truth is that *dukkha* is caused by *tanha*, namely, by egoistic desire. Some object, person, condition, or state of affairs dances before us, promising fulfillment, and we desire it for ourselves, even at the expense of others. Yet time and again the object of our desire does not bring the expected fulfillment but rather dissatisfaction. On the other hand, aversion, the desire to avoid something viewed as harmful or unpleasant, is also an expression of *tanha*. This second Noble Truth is analogous to a physician's diagnosis of the patient's fundamental problem or condition. The root of the problem, according to the Buddha, is precisely this egoistic desire.

The third Noble Truth, which corresponds to a doctor's prognosis, is that something helpful can be done; a cure for the illness is available. The dissatisfaction (*dukkha*) can be eliminated by means of eliminating egoistic desire (*tanha*).

Finally, the fourth Noble Truth is that egoistic desire can be eliminated by following the Noble Eightfold Path, which is, in effect, a doctor's prescription. It is an eight-step program of self-help therapy that bears analogies to a kind of behavioral modification program performed by people upon themselves.

Potter, too, engages in what most readers would judge to be philosophical reflection, yet the label "philosopher," as in the case of the Buddha, is not necessarily a perfect fit. To be sure, Potter certainly used the term and was interested in ontology and epistemology but not in an attempt to establish absolute metaphysical truths. The texts he assigned and discussed with students included the works of philosophers (Wittgenstein, Austin, Polanyi, Merleau-Ponty, to name but a few), but such authors, like himself, were often on the margins of or at odds with mainstream philosophy. He also read and had students read and discuss with him the writings of poets, novelists, psychologists, and biologists. At least by the time I came to know him, he did not belong to or attend the meetings of the mainstream contemporary philosophical societies (e.g. the American Philosophical Association), although he may have done so earlier in his career. He complained that he had ceased to attend the meetings of such societies once he determined that their members had no interest in discussing an alternative epistemology. He certainly had no interest in producing or defending a critical

epistemology or metaphysics according to the standard models. These, in fact, were often targets of his criticism.

Much of what he wrote and taught, however, could, as I have already intimated, fit readily enough into the format of the Buddha's Four Noble Truths. For example, Poteat, also, saw our modern and postmodern world as afflicted with a disease, namely, nihilism. Such nihilism is the analog to the Buddha's *dukkha*. Nihilism is not so much a philosophical doctrine or system of doctrine as it is a condition, an existential disease, a despair that moderns and postmoderns have contracted and with which they have infected others. Poteat says, for example, that modernity is "addicted to the drug of dynamic nihilism" (Poteat 1994, 46), the loss of belief in all of the basic values that support the flourishing of human existence, from religion to the very meaning of the words of our language (think Derrida). We have tumbled from belief in our power to discern absolute, divine-like, certain knowledge to the belief (among some people) that all human knowledge, judgment, insight, meaning, and belief are nothing but the causal byproducts of electrical processes going on in the central nervous system analogous to those of computers. Elsewhere, he refers to our present condition as loss of "sanity" (Poteat 1994, xxii), "madness" (Poteat 1990, 115), "mentalistic dementia" (Poteat 1990, 105), and "chronic depression" (Poteat 1994, 193). All these last terms are medical, psychological, or psychiatric in nature, and conjure up Kierkegaard's diagnosis of modernity as a "sickness unto death," by which he meant a certain kind of despair. Such "medical" diagnoses seem to call more for some kind of medical attention rather than a further dose of the mental gymnastics of "board certified" mainstream modern and post-modern philosophers.

The analogy between the Buddha and Poteat extends to the second noble truth. Corresponding to Siddhartha's *tanha* (egoistic desire) as the ultimate cause of human illness is Poteat's "hubris." Both are afflictions of the ego. Whether we are Asian or Western, Buddhists or Secularists, the ego typically seeks to *acquire* something more (wealth, flattery, power, position, knowledge, status, advantage) or to *be* something more—more powerful, more famous, more happy, more wealthy, more knowledgeable, and, among philosophers, even absolutely certain or absolutely uncertain. And rarely, if ever, does their successful acquisition bring the expected fulfillment.

The "medical" crisis the Buddha addressed was related to the concept of the self that arose in India in the wake of the decline of Vedism, religious practices and beliefs arising in 1500 B.C.E. and lasting until 500 B.C.E. Vedism was based on the Vedas, poetical and philosophical texts containing four core Vedas (*Rig*, *Yajur*, *Sama*, and *Atharva*), each of which had three kinds of appendices (*Aranyakas*, *Brahmanas*, and *Upanishads*). Vedism was dominated by a priestly class and consisted largely of elaborate ritual sacrifices for which ordinary people paid in the hope of receiving certain

material blessings. Vedism, however, was afflicted by clericalism, materialism, racism, classism, and sexism. It benefitted the few at the top.

Faced with a growing skepticism and pessimism about Vedic religion, the authors of the Upanishads, commentaries on the earlier and more poetic parts of the Vedic scriptures, began a philosophical elaboration of the term “*atman*,” which had first been mentioned in the early hymns, where it had simply meant “self.” In this elaborated view, human nature consisted of several “sheaths” that surround a central ego or *Atman*. The sheaths—body, perceptions, feelings, intellect—are, however, illusions (*maya*) because impermanent. Hidden deep within the sheaths, however, is a permanent metaphysical substance or being (*Atman*), which is one’s true self. This inner self transcends all finite, earthly “realities,” limitations, and sufferings. It does not die but is reincarnated in a new set of sheaths in another life. Of the six orthodox schools of Indian philosophy—Nyaya (logic), Vaisheshika (Atomism), Samkhya (Distinctionism), Yoga, Purva Mimamsa (Exegesis), and Vedanta—only Samkhya and Yoga were earlier than or contemporary with the Buddha, but all of them eventually came to embrace this view. Acceptance of the reality of the *Atman* was, in fact, the touchstone of Hindu orthodoxy. Doubtless, the Buddha would have viewed the idea of a substantial self as grounding egoistic desire.

Analogously, Poteat’s diagnosis of the Western affliction is “gnostic apocalypticism” (Poteat 1994, xi). He describes it as a modern elaboration upon ancient Christian and pre-Christian Western Gnosticism, namely, “the belief that men and women are pure spirits, now held captive in the prison of this world.” Only a special, esoteric knowledge can free them from bondage to this evil world and permit the resultant “pure, untrammelled spirits” to transcend this world and enter a more suitable one (Poteat 1994, xi). The parallels between this Gnosticism and the Upanishadic view described above are obvious.

For Poteat, an early modern Western analogue of ancient Christian Gnosticism is exhibited by Descartes. Puzzled and dismayed by the fact that nowhere in the world did he find unanimity of opinion, he devised an updated version of an ancient and well-worn tack. The root of the problem, he concluded, is that mind is distracted and deluded by association with the material body, which is finite and particular. Pure mind, however, dissociated from body, is capable, he asserted, of achieving the certainty and universality for which he longed. This longing for God-like knowledge is the object of Descartes’s egoistic desire, the Buddha’s *tanha*. For clinical psychologist and psychotherapist John Welwood, the tendency to view reality dualistically is, in psychological terms, a self-centered defense strategy. Welwood goes on to say that dualistic thinking is “essentially a survival mechanism on a par with fangs, claws, stingers, scales, shells, and quills that other animals use to protect themselves” (Welwood 2003, 139).

In describing the human mind and its capabilities when detached and thus liberated from the material body, Descartes, according to Jacques Maritain, used as a model Aquinas' description of the knowledge of angels as "intuitive, as to its mode, innate, as to its origin, independent of things, as to its nature" (Maritain 1928, 57). Angelic knowledge is "a single intellectual operation that is at once perceiving and judging" and which travels "by intuitive leaps from perfect act to perfect act, from intelligible fullness to intelligible fullness" (Maritain 1928, 59). Angelic thoughts are not abstracted from perceived objects but are infusions into the mind by God (Maritain 1928, 56). Angelic ideas are not dependent upon things, but are copies of ideas in the mind of God, which are the models used by God in creating the world. Here is a hubris almost sufficient to think oneself, if not a god, then at least God-certified.

Poteat's more up-to-date description of such Cartesian hubris is what he calls "the theater of solitude," which he describes as follows:

When I interrupt the flow of my ordinary practical activity in the world in order to reflect, I will find myself and the objects of my curiosity presented in a certain fantasy-setting, upon some particular stage, in some singular theater both *in* which reflection is *given* and *upon* which reflection is *brought to bear*... It is a theater at once silent and solitary... In this theater language is all but completely abstracted from its use" (Poteat 1990, 59).

In such a setting, Poteat adds, one becomes, as it were, a silent, static, solitary, disembodied mind, a self that is transcendent of bodily existence, of other persons, and acts of language-bearing and communally-generated shared meanings. It is a world in which no actual reader, thinker, or language-user appears to exist. It is easy in such a rarified atmosphere to believe, as Descartes did, that one can achieve absolute certainty. It is a fiction, Poteat suggests, made possible, in part, by the invention of an alphabet, then print, which seemed to remove meaning from a community of embodied speakers and relocate it into books and then, when read and contemplated, into minds (minus bodies, even eyes). Thus "liberated" from the limitations of any finite, particular mind, the resulting universal mind can presumably achieve the certitude of transcendent truth. Here is egoistic desire on steroids. This imaginative picture, says Poteat of us moderns, has, quoting Wittgenstein, "held us captive" (Poteat 1985, 9).

The Buddha's therapeutic prescription critically brought to bear on Hinduism's doctrine of the *Atman* produced several alternative doctrines. The first is *Anatman*, the position that no permanent substance exists or can exist. Buddha's claim was based, in part, on the fact that in his own meditation practice he never experienced such a reality, despite having studied with several of India's top Hindu masters of his day and

even surpassing them in his meditative achievements. This is an indication that for the Buddha metaphysical claims must meet the test of phenomenological experience.

The Buddha's view was further buttressed by the doctrine of *anicca* or impermanence, evidence of which is everywhere available to the senses. What experience taught him is that all things are undergoing change and are therefore temporal. *Anicca* was also noticed in his experiences in meditation, in which sensations, images, and ideas were found to be constantly shifting.

A third insight of the Buddha was *pratityasamutpada*, which is translated as "dependent co-origination," the view that all events, both so-called mental ones and physical ones, are dependent upon, indeed constituted by, multiple other events. Again, this rules out the idea of a permanent substance.

Finally, he held the view, based on what might be termed a descriptive phenomenology, that human beings are constituted as *namarupas* (name and form). Each *namarupa* or person is comprised of five *skandas*. These are body, feelings, perceptions, dispositions, and consciousness. All five are actually processes, characterized by *anicca*, that jointly interact to generate persons. Thus, there is no substantial, permanent ego or self or substance—no *Atman*. The implication of this insight (prognosis) is that the ego and its egoistic desires of craving and aversion can, in principle, be eliminated.

Like the Buddha, Poteat's philosophical therapy seeks to undercut all notions similar to Descartes' mind, understood as a bodiless, thinking substance. His strategy is simple. He, too, employs a kind of descriptive phenomenology to reveal the human self, not as a disembodied spiritual substance or a discrete faculty, but as a mindbody, a concept that rejects a dualism of mind and body and is the counterpart to the Buddha's *namarupa*. A mindbody is a nondualistic being constituted by the temporality of intentionality, which is in every moment both retrotending past moments and protending future ones. Such a temporality of intentionality is analogous, at least with respect to human beings, to the Buddha's *anicca*.

A mindbody is at once both fleshly and social, possessing trunk, limbs, muscles, brain, tongue, ears, eyes, and relations with other such beings, all co-arising with each other. All these processes, working together (as in the Buddha's dependent-co-origination) are constitutive of human existence and functioning, including reflecting. Thus, for Poteat, even the bodily roots of presently-used concepts are retrotended from the past for present use. They are often discernible in the etymology of words. Such etymological inquiries, coupled with a phenomenology of our ordinary acts of language usage, expose and undermine the hubris that generates the Gnosticism that sustains the theater of solitude and its consequent nihilism.

Ch'an or Zen and Poteat

To this point, I have focused on the Buddhism of the Buddha. Buddhism, however, is itself a historical process, subject to *anicca*. India and Sri Lanka produced not only Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism but also *Dhyana*, the less-well-known Buddhism that the missionary Bodhidharma brought to China. In China it became known as *Ch'an* and later in Japan as *Zen*. All three terms (*Dhyana*, *Ch'an*, and *Zen*) mean “meditation.”

Although East Asian Buddhists read and understood the Buddhist philosophical texts of India, they largely rejected India's exuberant and exhaustive intellectualism to focus attention on practice and intuition. This was Buddhism's pivot to East Asia. According to now-disputed tradition, it was Bodhidharma who gave the following summary description of Ch'an or Zen.

1. A special transmission outside of scripture
 2. No dependence on words and letters
 3. Direct pointing to the self of man
 4. Seeing into one's nature and the attainment of Buddhahood
- (Dumoulin 1994, 85).

Huston Smith provided a summary of the Zen critique of words, understood as carriers of abstract mental concepts: (1) they “build up a kind of substitute world,” (2) they “dilute the intensity of immediate experience,” and (3) they are inadequate for our “highest modes of experience” (Smith 1958, 126). Clearly, for Zen, as for Poteat, reflecting is not simply or fundamentally a purely intellectual or conceptual enterprise. In fact, for both Poteat and Zen, it can be an impediment to enlightenment.

Lin Chi, founder of one of the two principal sub-schools of *Ch'an* Buddhism, says concerning doctrine (*Dharma*): “I don't have a particle of Dharma to give to anyone. All I have is a cure for sickness, freedom from bondage” (Watson 1993, 53). Again, he tells his students that what he is saying to them “is for the moment only, medicine to cure the disease” (Watson 1993, 45). Thus, Lin Chi, like the Buddha and Poteat, was a physician. As a consequence, Ch'an/Zen does not promote abstract thinking but a practice that is based on the phenomenologically-grounded belief that all people already have the Buddha nature within them. This nature is not a metaphysical substance but simply the capacity to become liberated from the tyranny of egoistic desire. Thus liberated, one reaches nirvana, which is *equanimity*, imperturbability, and quiet happiness in the face of life's surrounding turmoil. It also produces compassion in the face of human misery, and the ability to live in harmony with others.

Lin Chi says of himself that he is “a true man of no rank” (Watson 1993, xxiii) and a “lump of red flesh” (Watson 1993, 13). He calls one of his students a “shitty ass

wiper” (Watson 1993, 13). In so doing he is not simply indulging crudeness by uttering catchy or vulgar epithets. He is pointing in dramatic fashion to the inescapably fleshly or bodily nature of human existence. He advised his students as follows: “Just act ordinary, without trying to do anything particular. Move your bowels, piss, get dressed, eat your rice, and if you get tired, then lie down” (Watson 1993, 31).

Nevertheless, the Ch’an-Zen person is also mindly (a grammatical deviation intended to avoid terms that suggest substance) not, of course, the sophisticated and allegedly disembodied mind of abstract thought as described by rationalistic philosophers. He speaks, instead, of “Buddha mind” (Watson 1993, 66) and “everyday mind” (Watson 1993, 45). Zen masters also speak of “original face,” “mind before you were born,” and even “mind before your parents were born.” Here is the counterpart to Polanyi’s tacit dimension and tacit knowing and to Poteat’s bodily and prereflective mind or mindbody. The “mind before you were born” is reminiscent of Poteat’s remarks about the effect of his mother’s heartbeat in setting the rhythm and cadence of his own heartbeat while in the womb, as a bass drummer does for a marching band. This prereflective mindbody is the Buddha nature or Buddha mind or original face and the ground of enlightened living. For Zen, enlightened life lives largely, if not entirely, from that mind.

As a cure for egoism and its consequences, both *Ch’an* and *Zen* prescribe a practice. For all Buddhism, but for *Ch’an-Zen* in particular, practice includes meditation, as their names make clear. But this is not a transcendental meditation as is Hinduism’s *raja yoga*. It is a noticing of one’s own actions in the world and also of the stream of mind-bodily consciousness, noticing the sorts of egoistic ideas and urges that appear, and then through further practice bringing this ego-stream to a halt in the nirvana of the pre-reflective Buddha Mind. Moreover, meditation is not limited to sitting still (*zazen*) but can also be done while walking (*kinhin*) and even working (*nitten soji*). Either gradually (in Soto Zen) or suddenly (in the “great Death” of Rinzai Zen) the basis of one’s existence is transformed with the death of *tanha*. That basis is no longer the individual ego but becomes the interdependent and ongoing co-origination of self with others, which is, according to Mahayana Buddhism, the profound basis of compassion (Skt. *Karuna*). Such compassion for the other does not derive from the practice of altruism (self-denial in favor of the other), but from the insight that, in part, one *is* the other and the other *is*, in part, one’s self, a form of the Buddha’s dependent co-origination (*pratityasamutpada*) and Nagarjuna’s emptiness (*sunyata*), both of which reject fixed substances and autonomous egos.

The foregoing also means that Buddhism rejects the absolute dualism of ego vs. no ego. If, as someone suggested, egoistic desire powers the construction and maintenance of a castle wall around the ego in order to hoard all good things inside the wall for itself while tossing all bad things outside the wall, then elimination of egoistic desire brings

down the wall and re-integrates the self with the wider community. In this respect, as in all others, Buddhism is not dualistic but nondual.

For Poteat also, practice is crucial. He says, “Our mortal wound is healed in practice” (Poteat 1994, 185). For him also, meditation, a practice, plays a part in curing nihilism. Recall the title of Poteat’s first monograph—viz., *Polanyian Meditations*. His meditation, however, is a rumination about and phenomenological description of the source of our action, speech, and reflection that traces them to their grounding in our sentient, motile, reflective, nondual mindbodies and the life-world they inhabit. For Poteat, mindbodies, as indicated earlier, provide one’s ultimate grounding. He says, “My mindbody is the absolutely radical and prior—at the root of and antecedent to absolutely everything (!)” (Poteat 1990, 68). Such prereflective mindbodies, as has been previously noted, are analogous to the Buddha nature or original mind. In fact, Lin Chi admonishes his students to illuminate things “for yourself with the light from your own body” (Watson 1993, 55). That is an ongoing practice.

To be sure, there are also differences in the aim of the two practices. The Buddha and *Ch’an-Zen* focus on bringing about both human happiness (*nirvana*) and the compassion (*karuna*), which egoism precludes. Poteat, on the other hand, focuses on enabling us to affirm our most cherished beliefs, the ones that give ultimate meaning to living in our mindbodily-generated lived world, and to dispel nihilism, our modern and postmodern affliction. That, of course, would contribute significantly to happiness.

For Poteat, that ultimate meaning is embodied finally not in theological doctrines but in an ongoing religious practice, which, in his case, includes the practice of reciting the Apostles’ Creed and participating in the ritual of the Eucharist. He reports that his recitation and participation cannot properly be described as belief. He says: “What I believe—and I do not think of it as something I *believe*, it goes much deeper than that, in fact, all the way to the bone—is that the bread and wine are the *presently actual* body and blood of Jesus Christ; and that, if they are not, then the Son of God has nothing to do with the concrete person I am in *this* time and place; and if this be so, the whole of Christianity is but an elaborate system of symbols at no point engaged with the actual fabric of the world” (Poteat 1994, 135). But he also affirms that even scientific beliefs share the very same ultimate grounding, namely, the coherence of all the mindbody’s multifaceted pretensions and retentions, which form the world, including the world as conceived by science (Poteat 1994, 138).

Given the apparently unorthodox nature of the content of their teaching, what methods do Ch’an or Zen masters, on the one hand, and Poteat, on the other, employ with their students? Both give lectures, assign texts for the students to read, hold discussions in class, and sometimes meet with individual students, but these provide only general contexts in which personal transformation can occur.

Ch'an and Zen, however, also employ more bizarre methods. Lin Chi, like some other Zen masters, shouts at students, walks away from them, berates them by calling them derogatory names, kicks them, and strikes or even drives them away with stout sticks. Lin Chi warns students that if they seek the Buddha, they will lose the Buddha, who is "like the hole in a privy" (Watson 1993, 76). This statement is not meant to show disrespect for the Buddha but to make forcefully the point that each person is a potential Buddha and that enlightenment comes from focusing in practice on one's own condition and resources, not on a figure in the past. It bears analogies to St. Paul's injunction to "work out your own salvation in fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12).

Zen masters, especially in the Rinzai tradition, also assign students conundrums (*koans* or public cases) with which to wrestle in the hope that these often bizarre and puzzling tales or expressions ("What is the sound of one hand clapping?") will eventually unravel a student's merely rational grasp of truth and open the way for *satori*, a more profound insight into life that will ultimately contribute to the death of egoistic desire. While Poteat never used *koans*, so far as I know, he does seem to acknowledge the value of something like *koans* when he says: "Words that appear plainly absurd when read in the direct language of everyday, may, when read as an indirect language, disclose the most potent because covert images and values of our imaginations" (Poteat 1990, 100). Perhaps the term "mindbody" is itself just such a *koan*. What is the sound of a mindbody thinking? Certainly, Poteat would endorse such a suggestion in view of his own admission to using "awkward syntax, nonlinear progression, reflexivity, dialectical reduplication...deliberately 'atonal' diction congested with...clever usages" in order to "drag the reader...even against her will...to dwell in herself as her own unique place" (Poteat 1994, xiv).

Zen practice requires not only sessions of meditation as one important context in which such insights can occur but also includes private meetings, sometimes quite intense, with the master, in which these insights can be tested and either demonstrated or not by the student and affirmed or denied by the teacher. In Rinzai the sessions are called "*sanzen*" and in Soto "*dokusan*." In the West education, for the most part, uses written feedback on tests and term papers as somewhat less personal encounters with the "master," and although private meetings between teacher and student can be arranged, they are probably infrequent and rarely, if ever, so intense as those in Zen.

For Poteat, teaching does not simply mean giving full-blown and formal lectures. In my experience as his student, his "lectures" were often simply short introductions to a topic for the day, one to be discussed in class. Ultimately, however, his teaching aims to induce students to become persons, responsible selves, in the paradigmatic and ethical act of saying "I", a word with the logical peculiarity of designating uniquely the very person who uses it in the very act of using it. Poteat explains as follows:

When I use the pronoun *I* with the reflexive force it always has when in use I am not merely making an identifying reference to an entity—though no doubt this is accomplished. Nor am I merely identifying myself as over against *you, them, this* (physical object), nor, even the bearer of the proper name *William H. Poteat*. In saying *I*, I assume responsibility... More to the point here however is the fact that I could not truly say *I* in good faith, thereby, inter alia, accepting responsibility for myself without being *before* another, a you, bearing and taking up what I say... Every speech act is the act of entering into an implied contract, into a covenant with a speech community the conditions—the requirements, terms—of which are given in the grammar of the language (Poteat 1994, 34-35).

Later, he says that speaking is the “paradigmatic action by which *I* am... *Dicto ergo sum*” (Poteat 1994, 173), both a nod to and rebuff of Descartes’s “*Cogito ergo sum*.” Both writing term papers and participating in discussions provide many opportunities to say “*I*,” as do writing and defending dissertations.

Yet Poteat’s emphasis on the *I* is, like Buddhism’s campaign against egoism, not to be understood dualistically. He would have learned from H. Richard Niebuhr that the self is an existential and social being, a self constantly engaging, whether tacitly or explicitly, in an ongoing communal dialogue (Niebuhr 1951, 32, 241ff). That is why Poteat insists that his understanding of saying “*I*” requires accepting “responsibility” always “before another.” Thus, neither Zen nor Poteat is advocating a dualism of ego vs. no ego. Both “physicians” prescribe the “medicine” of nondualism.

For Zen, then, demonstrating one’s enlightenment before a Zen master is an analogue to Poteat’s saying “*I*” before others. Consider the famous Zen story about Nansen’s cat. Master Nansen discovered some of his monks fighting over a cat. He seized the cat, then addressed the young monks as follows: “If any of you can say a good word, you can save the cat.” The students were tongue-tied, so Nansen cut the cat in two. When Joshu, later a famous master himself, returned to the monastery that evening, Nansen recounted for him the story of the cat. Upon hearing it, Joshu removed his sandals, placed them on his head, and walked out. Nansen said, “If you had been there, you could have saved the cat.” Mumon, a commentator on the story, said that if Joshu had been there, he would have “snatched” the sword and made Nansen beg for his life. Joshu could have also taken less drastic actions, namely, verbally challenging Nansen’s threat as a violation of Buddhist ethical precepts, one of which urges doing no harm to any living being, or simply snatching the cat from Nansen’s hands. In Poteatian terms, Joshu, confident in the belief that it was wrong for Nansen to kill an innocent cat and feeling a sense of responsibility to act, performed the equivalent of saying “*I*” (Reps 1957, 101).

Zen practice, however, is not only serious but sometimes, even if rarely, dangerous, as the following story makes clear. Whenever asked about Zen, Master Gutei simply raised his finger, a response that turned the question back on the questioner. A boy attendant began imitating Gutei's one-finger Zen, lifting his finger when asked about Gutei's teaching. Gutei learned of the boy's imitation, found him, and cut off his finger. The boy howled in pain and ran away. Gutei called after him. When the boy stopped and looked back, Gutei raised his finger at the boy (Reps 1957, 92). He was making the point that no two persons are identical and hence Enlightenment is unique and uniquely arrived at. Perhaps also, he hoped to prompt the boy's breakthrough to enlightenment. Bloodlessly, Poteat makes a similar point by emphasizing the significance of the first person singular present indicative active use of language.

Yet, Poteat, too, employed some non-traditional pedagogical strategies. I recall that in a course on religious language Poteat read or quoted a passage from Wittgenstein, then turned to me and asked if I thought the quote was meant to be understood in an absolute or a conditional sense. I had no idea, but after an anxious moment of hesitation I guessed "conditional." At first glance, there is nothing unusual about that exchange. Initially, I thought that he was either checking to see if I had read the assignment or if I had understood what I had read. It also occurred to me that he might have been simply encouraging me to get more involved in class discussions. What was puzzling for me, however, is that he ignored my reply altogether and went on with the class as if the incident had not occurred. He did not confirm, deny, or comment in any way on my answer. Only much later did it occur to me that he might have been authorizing me to make my own judgments about such matters.

His intent and pedagogical strategy were somewhat clearer in a case recounted by Bruce Haddox, who reports that one day in class (one in which I, also, was present) Poteat sat on Bruce's desk and asked him to "identify himself." Bruce recalls replying with a "Strawson-like...third person, objective analysis," to which Poteat replied, "Haddox? Is that who you really are?" (Haddox and St. Clair, 12). While such an incident might not have been altogether unheard of in an undergraduate seminar in religion or philosophy, it seemed to me to diverge significantly from what I expected in graduate school. Poteat's approach signaled a divergent aim from that of the modern, Western, Cartesian, rational university. Its goal was self-knowledge, which, again, accords well with the aim of Zen.

Yet, according to R. Melvin Keiser, Poteat's pedagogy was not completely devoid of some of the more bizarre tactics of a Zen master. Keiser reports that having sent Poteat some writing, Poteat

responded to my writings like a Zen master rather than his usual approach as a midwife...He whacked me, calling my writing and tape discussions 'weird,' 'absurd,' 'stupid,' 'shocking.' I remembered

smiling in class as Poteat told someone that what they had just said showed them to be a 'post-critical basket case' (Keiser, 140).

Moreover, one of the editorial referees of this essay affirms that he is aware of other incidents similar to Keiser's. Happily, Poteat never went so far as to shove or strike with a staff any of his students, and he certainly cut off no fingers.

As stated at the outset of this essay, my intent in this paper is simply to call attention to hitherto unnoticed convergences between Poteat's views and practices, on the one hand, and those of the Buddha, Ch'an, and Zen, on the other, rather than accounting for them in some way. Almost certainly, they cannot be explained by Poteat's initial decade in China. If pressed to suggest how to explain them, however, I would propose that the similarities result from their common truth. In so saying, I say "I."

ENDNOTE

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“BALANCE OF MIND”: POLANYI’S RESPONSE TO THE SECOND APPLE AND THE MODERN PREDICAMENT



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Keywords: Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, civic predicament, modernity, the second apple, balance of mind, grounds without foundations, Christianity, the Christian life.

ABSTRACT

Among the most arresting images in Personal Knowledge is “the second apple.” Through this metaphor Polanyi describes a fall of man comparable to the expulsion from paradise recounted in Genesis. But here, too, redemption is possible. It comes, says Polanyi, in the form of a maturation of perspective that he calls “balance of mind.” Under this heading Polanyi offers his conception of human fruition, a fruition requiring a loss of innocence that follows from not only departure from the original paradise but also the utter collapse of the allegedly autonomous citadel of critical reason that followed in its train. Interestingly, “balance of mind” has much in common with the Christian life, as understood by Polanyi. Thus, the encounter with “the second apple” is simultaneously both an advance and a return.

The ideal of an impersonally detached truth would have to be reinterpreted, to allow for the inherently personal character of the act by which truth is declared. The hope of achieving an acceptable balance of mind in this respect will guide the subsequent inquiry throughout...this book (*Personal Knowledge*, 71).¹

In *Personal Knowledge*, within the chapter titled “Conviviality,” Michael Polanyi describes our “civic predicament” (203-204; cf. 214). In what follows I will argue that the civic predicament is a manifestation on the political and social level of a deeper and more fundamental disorder on the level of the person. I will further argue that this personal disorder, along with the associated distress, is at the center of *Personal Knowledge*, and that Polanyi’s central objective in writing the book is to elucidate this condition and to offer a response to it.² As we will see, the nature of the personal disorder, and hence the civic crisis, is richly captured in Polanyi’s metaphor of the “second apple.” His recommended response to this condition, which I will maintain is at the heart of his thought and constitutes his primary contribution to contemporary intellectual life, is a perspective that he explicates under the heading, “balance of mind.” There are, moreover, striking parallels between “balance of mind” and the Christian life as Polanyi conceives it. Without a clear understanding of the modern predicament growing out of the second apple, and Polanyi’s novel and ingenious response to it, we will have neither grasped the core of his thought nor recognized the sense in which he is, or is not, responsibly regarded as Christian.

The Problem as Understood by Polanyi

Polanyi’s “civic predicament” is the name of a process that leads to totalitarian arrangements as well as to that result itself. For immediate purposes what is most important are the conditions that give rise to the process. On this matter Polanyi is both clear and somber. After pointing out that “our adherence to the truth can be seen to imply our adherence to a society which respects the truth, and which we trust to respect it,” he observes that “[o]nce we fully recognize these civic coefficients of our intellectual passions, we shall be confronted once again, and even more dangerously with the realization that we hold with universal intent a set of convictions acquired by our particular upbringing” (*PK*, 203). What is the danger here and why does it exist? The answer is that due to powerful developments in intellectual life (beginning, on Polanyi’s account, with “the Copernican discovery”) we are strongly tempted, indeed, in many cases compelled, to infer from the admission that convictions (standards) are local and contingent that they lack genuine authority.³ They are “merely” particular. Under the influence of this judgment, “to the extent to which we acknowledge that we have actively decided to accept [those convictions and standards], they will tend to appear arbitrary” (203). Therefore, only a dupe would give way to them (211). To accept the authority of convictions that we acknowledge are contingent and local would indicate that we have foolishly regarded standards that are merely “adventitious” (204) to be universal. No responsible individual can consent to such bad faith! Given, then, for Polanyi, the intimate connection between commitment to principles and the existence of viable civic life, the consequence is predictable: “Thus the disturbance of

our convictions caused by the sight of our own ubiquitous participation in the shaping of truth, will expand into a civic predicament, and the struggle to regain our mental balance in this situation will gain a new significance” (204). The civic predicament is, then, rooted in a frame of mind. Polanyi’s remedy will necessarily consist of a radical reorientation of that frame of mind.⁴

The centrality of this analysis to Polanyi’s thought is further indicated by the fact that a similar account is at the heart of a later writing (from 1965). Tellingly, this contribution is titled, “On the Modern Mind.”⁵ Among the primary characteristics of this mind is a skepticism that, ironically, is in the service of “a moral purpose, namely of a relentless intellectual honesty” (12). As in *Personal Knowledge*, Polanyi here points out that the modern mind is therefore marked by internal conflict: in the name of principle it calls all principles into question. For now, we must put this fascinating and ominous matter aside and ask, instead, about the origins of the powerful impulse toward skepticism.⁶ In this endeavor, the second apple illuminates the landscape.

Polanyi’s metaphor of the second apple exists within a tale that highlights a persistent appetite that cannot be satisfied. In this tale, there must, of course, be a first apple. That term refers to the biblical account in which Adam and Eve, under the influence of the Serpent, bite of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. The temptation responsible for this act may well play a prominent role in Polanyi’s tale. Of greater importance to Polanyi, however, is the insight gained from the first apple. Something hitherto absent, knowledge of good and evil (or at least a concern with it), is now an enduring and indelible feature of human life. Paradise is lost and mankind will forever be fundamentally different than it once was. For Polanyi the most significant aspect of this transformation is the loss of innocence. Where once there was a seamless simplicity, there now is a chronic complexity, i.e., man is troubled in an unprecedented way.

In Polanyi’s sweeping account of Western intellectual and cultural history, the authority of the biblical account grows increasingly doubtful (especially in the wake of the Copernican discovery) and we eventually find ourselves in the 17th and 18th centuries in which the most influential and creative minds proudly and confidently declare their independence from the alleged theocratic fantasies of the species’ youth. Such confidence is largely a product of man’s growing appreciation of the results of his own investigations of the world. On this perspective, it is patent that the universe can in fact be understood, and man, exclusively through his own devices, is capable of unlocking its secrets (that is, grasping the fundamental principles), and thereby making sense of it all. These are heady times. Significantly, these sophisticated minds are still marked by a yearning comparable to that of the earlier religious believers. No less than their predecessors, they seek order and meaning. Or, more fundamentally, the later thinkers represent a continuation of the desire to discern some sense in the universe and to grasp the significance of man’s place within it. But now, without precedent, the

old appetite coexists with “the greatly increased critical powers of man” which have “endowed our mind with a capacity for self-transcendence of which we can never again divest ourselves” (268). Polanyi then completes the picture:

We have plucked from the Tree a second apple which has for ever imperiled our knowledge of Good and Evil, and we must learn to know these qualities henceforth in the blinding light of our new analytical powers. Humanity has been deprived a second time of its innocence, and driven out of another garden which was at any rate a Fool’s Paradise. Innocently, we had trusted that we could be relieved of all personal responsibility for our beliefs by objective criteria of validity and our own critical powers have shattered that hope. Struck by our sudden nakedness, we may try to brazen it out by flaunting it in a profession of nihilism. But modern man’s immorality is unstable. Presently his moral passions reassert themselves in objectivist disguise and the scientific Minotaur is born (268).

Let us pause at this point to draw out the significance of several features of this long passage from *Personal Knowledge*. To begin with, we have in Polanyi’s account an instance of the “ratchet effect.” Man over the centuries has experienced important transformations. These cannot be undone.⁷ Whatever response we might devise for contemporary challenges and difficulties will need to be formulated in conjunction with a critical sophistication and potential for transcendence that cannot be reversed.⁸ By “transcendence” Polanyi means a proclivity for critical distancing from any candidate idea or formulation and a propensity to identify and subject to critical scrutiny its underlying presuppositions. In short, the acidic impulse toward skepticism is indefatigable and ineradicable. If the perspective that reigned prior to the second apple has disappeared, that which is responsible for this disappearance has not.

A second central feature of Polanyi’s metaphor is that the partaking of the second apple, and the related forced departure from the new paradise, consists of just the sort of realization that characterizes the operation of such transcendence. Specifically, the expulsion was a direct result of seeing that there are no “objective criteria” in light of which to ground an ethics or make sense of the world. In many of his writings, Polanyi enlarges upon the cultural and political responses to this disturbing realization. Such an unfolding is, in fact, at the core of his “civic predicament.” It is important for our immediate purposes to emphasize that these dramatic reactions to the loss of objective criteria presuppose the legitimacy of the conviction that such foundations are intellectually and morally necessary.⁹ We witness here in intellectual guise the persistent appetite mentioned above.

It is now evident why Polanyi states that biting the second apple has “imperiled our knowledge of Good and Evil.” In the same way that the earlier supernatural order, formalized in scripture and Church doctrine and manifestly a product of an authority that spoke from a domain apart from and beyond that of men, deteriorated in the face of man’s critical powers, so too via the tasting of the second apple did its successor, predicated on “the authority of experience and reason,” collapse (265). The pride of jettisoning the theocentric perspective and deriving our ethics instead from the world known by the senses and explicated by human reasoning gave way to despair and desperation born of the same critical tendencies that destroyed the earlier order.¹⁰ The loss of any external authority from which we can take our cues constitutes a new nakedness. Polanyi’s genius consists in recognizing this condition and in formulating a revolutionary response to it.

Polanyi’s Response to the Predicament

There is a ray of sunlight in the rather dark picture thus far painted by Polanyi. This consists in the realization that the very critical powers that are responsible for the demise of both “medieval dogmatism and modern positivism” (265) are also capable of acknowledging their own limitations and recognizing a need for restoration of an earlier acritical capacity as a vital component of an invigorating third alternative. Polanyi’s grand human narrative consists of three epochs:

1. A period marked by holding unproven beliefs, not realizing (or caring) that they are unproven (a condition we might call blind faith);
2. An era of proud and confident critical reason, intolerant of faith, and holding beliefs, presuming they are proven (when they are in fact not); and
3. A just dawning fiduciary period, arising in response to the bankruptcy of its deluded predecessor, characterized by the *conscious and deliberate* holding of beliefs that we acknowledge are unproven (and unprovable).

Polanyi’s primary contribution is to mark the decisive defeat of the first two of these perspectives while outlining and, in a remarkably consistent fashion, arguing for the third. In this way, Polanyi, quite self-consciously, ushers in a new era.

What are the features of the new manner of thinking? In answering this question let us begin by hearing from Polanyi as he closes “The Logic of Affirmation” (*PK*, Chapter 12) with the paragraph that follows the long passage cited above:

The alternative to this, which I am seeking to establish here, is to restore to us once more the power for the deliberate holding of

unproven beliefs. We should be able to profess now knowingly and openly those beliefs which could be tacitly taken for granted in the days before modern philosophic criticism reached its present incision (268).

Polanyi is able to refer to his proposal as a restoration because it is built on an observation made long ago by St. Augustine: “Unless ye believe, ye shall not understand”¹¹ Polanyi states that by returning to St. Augustine we “restore the balance of our cognitive powers” (266). Understanding and the path to truth, as with St. Augustine, will henceforth follow from a proper appreciation of the role of belief instead of, as in the critical age, with an attempt to bypass or eliminate it. Belief, it would seem, is at the heart of a new balance of mind.

The master project of *Personal Knowledge* is well understood as a process of enablement. The book succeeds to the degree that readers (and, importantly, Polanyi himself) have strengthened their capacity to see the world and understand the truth in a certain manner.¹² There are several shorthand labels, as well as a rich set of cognate terms, for this condition. We will begin with the content of the labels.

The most fruitful of the labels, already suggested in the above reference to St. Augustine, is “balance of mind.” The actual term is used at least twice in *Personal Knowledge*. The first of these, on p. 71, is cited in the epigraph to this essay. Among the noteworthy aspects of this passage are its references to re-interpretation and to truth. As we will see, both matters are at the heart of the perspective that is Polanyi’s remedy for the civic predicament. The second appearance of the term, quite significantly, occurs at the close of the section titled “The Educated Mind.” In describing the product of ideal education Polanyi states, “The paradox of self-set standards is re-cast here into that of our subjective self-confidence in claiming to recognize an objective reality. This brings nearer by a great step the final conception of truth within which I shall seek to establish my balance of mind” (104).¹³ Of note again is the connection of the new perspective with a revised conception of truth. We might even say that the two are effectively equivalent. Equally significant in this passage is the suggestion that balance of mind is the product of intellectual agility, i.e., of an act of liberation that is not compelled, but is instead the result of entertaining a new possibility and permitting it to emerge. It is important here to note that in the metaphorical reference to “balance” Polanyi does not mean to suggest a compromise between forces, nor does the term represent a capitulation to skepticism. Rather, “balance” is the label for a distinctive and novel perspective. It is for Polanyi a form of sanity defined by a distinct insight, as opposed to a desperate intellectual compromise.

Polanyi also refers to “mental balance.” Take, for example, the passage from p. 204 cited above. In speaking of “the struggle to regain our mental balance,” the context clearly indicates that the phrase refers to correction of a frame of mind, associated with

the civic predicament, which ensued from a philosophical error. Through correction we are to retrieve something that was lost. Given what we read elsewhere in *Personal Knowledge*, it is clear that Polanyi here is referring to the perspective of St. Augustine—a perspective shaped by the recognition of the central role played by belief. In this healthier frame of mind, man’s critical powers exist in balance (creative harmony) with faith.

“Frame of mind” is in fact another of the terms employed by Polanyi. Near the center of *Personal Knowledge* he says, “The principal purpose of this book is to achieve a frame of mind in which I may hold firmly to what I believe to be true, even though I know that it might conceivably be false” (214). Earlier on the same page Polanyi indicates that the unbalanced condition that he hopes to remedy is rooted in a passionate infatuation with the prospect of knowledge that is entirely independent of any trace of the personal.¹⁴ Polanyi’s philosophical endeavors can be understood as a compassionate effort to release his fellow man from this intoxicating, yet toxic infatuation.

The epistemological balance envisioned by Polanyi has a political and social manifestation within which the totalitarianism that issues from the civic predicament is inhibited. Where balance of mind obtains, a sense of moderation—born of appreciation for the rare and fragile conditions upon which political liberty and vibrant intellectual life are predicated—prevails. Within this atmosphere of moderation, the fanciful yet maniacal thrust for total independence of mind, and the associated desire for perfection of social and political circumstances (unalloyed justice, thoroughgoing equality of condition, etc.), are tempered. It is among Polanyi’s chief contributions to the fruition of cultural and political life, as well as to the conditions of freedom that make it possible, to demonstrate that they are utterly dependent upon maturely restricted expectation. He observes, “An absolute moral renewal of society can be attempted only by an absolute power which must inevitably destroy the moral life of man” (245). Balance of mind, then, is accompanied by refinement of judgment in realms beyond epistemology itself. In Polanyi’s measured yet inspiring words, “The attempt made in this book to stabilize knowledge against scepticism, by including its hazardous character in the conditions of knowledge, may find its equivalent, then, in an allegiance to a manifestly imperfect society, based on the acknowledgement that our duty lies in the service of ideals which we cannot possibly achieve” (245).¹⁵

The limited objectives of this inquiry forbid significant development of the matter, but we would be remiss not to mention in this connection that Polanyi’s concept of balance of mind allows him to respond with hope and guarded optimism to a critical problem that deeply worries Leo Strauss. Strauss, perhaps the most penetrating political philosopher of our time (and certainly among the most challenging and controversial), observes, “The crisis of the West consists in the West’s having become uncertain of its purpose... We do no longer have that certainty and that clarity. Some among us even despair of the future, and this despair explains many forms of contemporary

Western degradation... [A] society which was accustomed to understand itself in terms of a universal purpose, cannot lose faith in that purpose without becoming completely bewildered."¹⁶ Readers familiar with Strauss are therefore stopped dead in their tracks when, in *Personal Knowledge*, they encounter the following: "Can the beliefs of liberalism, no longer believed to be self-evident, be upheld henceforth in the form of an orthodoxy?" (244).¹⁷ Polanyi affirms it can. As we unfold the constituent features of balance of mind, we will see how Polanyi is able to respond in a manner so much more hopeful than does Strauss. For the time being, it is profitable to reflect on a clue offered by an additional query that follows Polanyi's question: "Can we face the fact that, no matter how liberal a free society may be, it is also profoundly conservative?" (244).

The modesty at the center of Polanyi's balance of mind is manifest in his imaginary exchange with the skeptic (*PK*, 315). Polanyi will not argue with the skeptic. Why? The answer is that to participate in such an argument is to concede to the very presuppositions that Polanyi in his book, especially in the concept "balance of mind," is so mightily struggling to leave behind. To argue with the skeptic is comparable to the snake consenting to reenter its shed skin. Vigilance joins modesty, faith, and responsibility at the core of balance of mind. It also suggests that arriving at balance of mind is akin to conversion, and is not to be achieved via the frontal assault of formal argument.

As noted several times above, possession of balance of mind is fully compatible with the search for truth. Indeed, on Polanyi's analysis, that balance is an indispensable prerequisite to the success of that search. Polanyi commences Chapter 10 of *Personal Knowledge* with perhaps the most dramatic of the confessional statements that permeate the book: "I believe that in spite of the hazards involved, I am called upon to search for the truth and state my findings." This sentence, summarizing my fiduciary programme, conveys an ultimate belief which I find myself holding. Its assertion must therefore prove consistent with its content by practising what it authorizes" (299; the emphasis is Polanyi's). In what follows this testament Polanyi articulates, perhaps as well as it can be said, the fundamental paradox that defines balance of mind. He states, "This is indeed true. For in uttering this sentence I both say that I must commit myself by thought and speech, and do so at the same time. Any inquiry into our ultimate beliefs can be consistent only if it presupposes its own conclusions. It must be intentionally circular" (299).¹⁸ Note in Polanyi's words the juxtaposition of modesty and ambition, of restraint and deep enthusiasm. The capacity to grasp and appreciate "the fundamental paradox" defines the very core of the balance sought and recommended by Polanyi. It is a frame of mind whose existence requires a constant renewal of commitment. And, notably, it is nurtured by sustained faith. Making the paradox possible as well as necessary is the marked absence in this account of reference to anything impersonally objective, and of any desire for it. To have achieved balance of mind is a cleansing.

By now the reader has grown impatient awaiting greater clarification regarding the concrete features of Polanyi's balance of mind. These will emerge as we review several of the cognate terms for it used by Polanyi in *Personal Knowledge*. Several of these terms were mentioned or implied in the confessional statement just cited: belief, calling, consistency, and circularity. Several others, such as self-reliance, responsibility, and commitment, will arise as we move forward.

In executing this plan it is profitable to begin with a long passage from the closing summary of Part Three of *Personal Knowledge*. Here we find Polanyi returning to the question at the root of the civic predicament: "How can we claim to arrive at a responsible judgment with universal intent if the conceptual framework in which we operate is borrowed from a local culture and our motives are mixed up with the forces holding on to [existing] social privilege?" (322). Polanyi's reply was previewed earlier in the book:

It is the act of commitment in its full structure that saves personal knowledge from being merely subjective. Intellectual commitment is a responsible decision, in submission to the compelling claims of what in good conscience I conceive to be true. It is an act of hope, striving to fulfil an obligation within a personal situation for which I am not responsible and which therefore determines my calling. This hope and this obligation are expressed in the universal intent of personal knowledge (65).

We find here many critical concepts. What do they mean? Now, at the end of Part Three, Polanyi is prepared to elaborate.

A useful place to begin is with the concept of "calling." Each of us is born into a particular set of circumstances (how else could it be?) and, despite whatever education we receive and whatever broadening of experience we undergo, we are indelibly marked by our origins and early upbringing. To infer from this fact that it is impossible to perceive truths whose range and authority exceed the boundaries of our particular background would represent a concession of the impossibility and illegitimacy of an aspiration that has characterized man since time immemorial. This for Polanyi would be a scandalous outcome. Yet Polanyi is a fair and well educated man. He is fully aware of the arguments of what has come to be known as post-modernism, and is remarkably sensitive to its predecessors in various guises such as Marxism, historicism, psychoanalysis, Nietzschean will to power, arrant skepticism, and outright nihilism. His response to these more or less responsible responses to the fact of our particularity reflects his unique genius. Rather than deny our particularity, he embraces it and repeatedly notes that he, like the rest of us, just happens to have emerged when and where he did and to believe what he does (while admitting that his own background is unusually rich).

But, in opposition to the modern critical mind, he will not be defeated by this fact: “Believing as I do in the justification of deliberate intellectual commitments, I accept these accidents of personal existence as the concrete opportunities for exercising our personal responsibility. *This acceptance is the sense of my calling*” (322; the emphasis is Polanyi’s). Our particular circumstances are not a limitation; they are instead an opportunity. But they are so only if we believe this is the case, and act in that light. The action envisioned and, importantly, practiced by Polanyi himself (not the least in the very authoring of *Personal Knowledge*), begins by taking personal responsibility for one’s movement toward the truth and, as the first step in taking such responsibility, committing oneself to that endeavor and establishing and maintaining faith in the effort’s positive outcome. As for those particular circumstances (including one’s body) out of which one necessarily emerges, Polanyi counsels that we embrace the fact and regard it as a gift, for these circumstances provide the opportunity to attain and enjoy whatever goods the universe has in store for man. The term “in store” is sure to rattle the critical mind and cause it to unleash the batteries of its skepticism. But Polanyi is too agile to be susceptible to such an assault. This is because his sense of there being an unfolding purpose and our finding ourselves part of it is not grounded in an ontological claim that could, quite properly, be put on the defensive. Instead, Polanyi invites us to join St. Augustine in looking back and seeing in the world an unfolding, a playing out of a purpose greater than us. Showing a strong resemblance to aspects of the philosophy of C. S. Peirce, Polanyi urges that we not argue with the skeptic on this matter but instead act on the possibility of there being purpose and attend to the consequences of doing so.

In this account of the balanced mind, both commitment and submission are prominent. Interestingly, their relative roles appear to vary inversely. As noted above, commitment is vital in the early stages of establishing a life open to the prospect of truth. But as we proceed along the resulting path, we find that we are increasingly sustained though submission. In this vein, Polanyi remarks, “Within its commitments the mind is warranted to exercise much ampler powers than those by which it is supposed to operate under objectivism; but by the very fact of assuming this new freedom it submits to a higher power to which it had hitherto refused recognition” (323).

Another prominent feature of the balanced mind is self-reliance. “We cast off the limitations of objectivism in order to fulfil our calling, which bids us to make up our minds about the whole range of matters with which man is properly concerned” (324). More starkly, Polanyi states, “we must accredit our own judgment as the paramount arbiter of all our intellectual performances...[this is the] ultimate self-reliance, to which this entire book shall bear witness” (265). It is worth remarking that within the crucible of his modesty Polanyi’s aspirations are bold. He is second to none in wishing to know, but the mark of arriving at the truth has changed. Earlier, he asserts, “*truth*

is something that can be thought of only by believing it" (305, the emphasis is Polanyi's). The views of our fellow inquirers, present and future, of course play an indispensable role in whether we can believe, and hence in what we believe. It is because securing the assent of relevant authorities is an essential part of coming to believe the object of our commitment that Polanyi employs the dramatic formulation, "Our vision must conquer or die" (150). The searcher is self-reliant but never alone.

Finally, we arrive at the most distinctive characteristic of the balanced mind. It is a feature made possible, as well as strikingly appealing, through our having been relieved of the presumed indispensability of external objective criteria. Let us in this connection hear at length from Polanyi:

Those who are satisfied by hoping that their intellectual commitments fulfil their calling, will not find their hopes discouraged when realizing on reflection that they are only hopes. I have said that my belief in commitment is a commitment of the very kind that it authorizes; therefore, if its justification be questioned, it finds confirmation in itself. Moreover, any such confirmation will likewise prove stable towards renewed critical reflection, and so on, indefinitely. Thus, by contrast to a statement of fact claiming to be impersonal, an affirmation made in terms of a commitment gives rise to no insatiable sequence of subsequent justifications. Instead of indefinitely shifting an ever open problem within the regress of the objectivist criticism of objectivist claims, our reflections now move from an original state of intellectual hopes to a succession of equally hopeful positions; so that by rising above this movement and reflecting on it as a whole we find the continuance of this regress unnecessary (324).

Polanyi goes on to remark, "Commitment offers to those who accept it legitimate grounds for the affirmation of personal convictions with universal intent" (324). The balanced mind, then, enjoys grounds but has dispensed with foundations. Indeed, its distinctiveness is ultimately rooted in its thoroughgoing liberation from the idea that we require such foundations. In the place of what Polanyi characterizes as the futile and fruitless interminable quest for objectively compelling foundations he offers a perspective that acknowledges the inescapable personal nature of our knowing and our participation in the world. Justification still exists, of course, and it remains legitimate and incumbent to seek it. But we are now released from the insistent yet intrinsically disappointing demand for satisfaction of strictly external objective criteria. Instead, Polanyi invites us to be committed to commitment and to place our hopes in hope itself. Consequences will ensue from doing so and these can and will be assessed. But the assessment will be in terms of what we and, vital to Polanyi's schema, what our

fellow explorers, believe and are committed to. In this fashion “we thus resume our full intellectual powers” (324). That is, our coming to know the truth, as suggested by St. Augustine, occurs within a context of faith manifest in commitment. Our claims about the world may prove true or false. Whatever their fate, however, the resolution is the product of standards whose authority is rooted in our commitment to them. The primary challenge, then, is to “conquer my self-doubt” (267). Finally, as Polanyi repeatedly emphasizes throughout *Personal Knowledge*, this very account of the balanced mind, and his recommendation of it, are themselves subject to the very same standards—necessarily so, if we are to honor this account with our consistency. Polanyi’s peculiar assertion thus makes the most perfect sense: “To the question, ‘Who convinces whom here?’ it answers simply, ‘I am trying to convince myself.’” (265).¹⁹ This is the mind capable of contending effectively with the modern predicament, and of transcending it. In light of the resulting possibilities, we might say that the second apple was a gift.²⁰

Christian Parallels

Throughout *Personal Knowledge*, Polanyi speaks of Christian life with passion and deep respect. What does he mean by Christianity? How does he understand what takes place within it? We receive our first clue, under the heading “Dwelling In and Breaking Out,” in a discussion in Chapter 6 of the act of worship. Polanyi states, “The indwelling of the Christian worshiper is therefore a continued attempt at breaking out, at casting off the condition of man, even while humbly acknowledging its inescapability” (198). Earlier in this discussion Polanyi emphasizes the role played in worship by surrender. Also central to his account is the fact that “the worshiper accepts the obligation to achieve what he knows to be beyond his own unaided powers and strives towards it in the hope of a merciful visitation from above” (198). And, of the highest significance, Polanyi adds, “The ritual of worship is expressly designed to induce and sustain this state of anguish, surrender and hope. *The moment a man were to claim that he had arrived and would now happily contemplate his own perfection, he would be thrown back into spiritual emptiness*” (198; emphasis added). This final point is stated even more dramatically in Chapter 9:

In the chapter on Intellectual Passions [Chapter 6] I have described the Christian faith as a passionate heuristic impulse which has no prospect of consummation...[T]he sense of inadequacy inherent in the Christian faith...is part of the Christian faith that its striving can never reach an endpoint at which, having gained its desired result, its continuation would become unnecessary. A Christian who reached his spiritual endpoint in this life would have ceased to be a Christian (280; cf. 199 and 285).

We are now in a position to recognize the striking parallels between the perspective of Christianity, as understood by Polanyi, and that of the balanced mind, a connection explicitly and dramatically asserted by him in the closing paragraph of Book Three of *Personal Knowledge* (see 324).²¹

Let us begin by noting that Polanyi asserts that a “fiduciary philosophy,” which constitutes the core of the balanced mind, “does not eliminate doubt, but like Christianity says that we should hold on to what we truly believe, even when realizing the absurdly remote chances of the enterprise, trusting the unfathomable intimations that call upon to do so” (318). A number of now-familiar terms stand out here—trust, belief, and calling—in conjunction with an atmosphere of commitment. For Polanyi, Christianity illustrates the sustained faith in possibilities that defines the balanced mind. Christianity is particularly instructive in demonstrating that facts are secondary and that the plausibility of what is believed is not at all decisive.²² In both cases the driving force is faith. Polanyi is very impressed by the absurdity of what Christianity asks us to believe. That absurdity raises the tension required for belief and thereby calls forth a greater degree of trust and commitment. Polanyi draws a parallel to the “apparent absurdities” of contemporary physics in which physicists “enjoy...what they alone can comprehend” (282): “Far from raising doubts in my mind concerning the rationality of Christian beliefs, the paradoxes of Christianity will serve me as examples for an analogous framing and stabilizing of other beliefs by which man strives to satisfy his own self-set standards” (282). The resulting condition of mind (and soul) is the very model for the balanced mind.

Let us pause for a moment to dwell on the question of facts. Although Polanyi is a distinguished scientist, immediate facts are not for him the central point. They cannot be, for we are to attend to the consequences of discovery more than to the discovery itself.²³ Still, facts are *in a sense* relevant. The history of Christianity demonstrates that the successful effort to disprove historical claims associated with Christian doctrine is capable of undermining the capacity to believe the doctrine itself (see 282-283). We are reminded by this of the importance, in Polanyi’s account of the balanced mind, of securing agreement from relevant authorities. In this connection, Polanyi describes “*persuasive* passion, the mainspring of all fundamental controversy” (159), a phenomenon that Polanyi likens to the attempt to convert (150-151). An essential part of coming to adopt a view is bringing relevant others over to our position. As noted earlier, “Our vision must conquer or die” (150). The central foe for the balanced mind is a metastasizing hesitancy that undermines faith and commitment. Witnessing others seeing and enjoying what you see and enjoy is a powerful antidote to this condition. Polanyi’s analysis casts a stimulating and useful light on the evangelism called for by Christianity.

Interestingly, Polanyi sees in the success of historical criticism of earlier Christian belief, and in the victories generally of the critical mind in regard to religion, an extremely valuable gain. He states, "Today we should be grateful for the prolonged attacks made by rationalists on religion for forcing us to renew the grounds of the Christian faith" (286). These new grounds, having nothing to do with claims that are susceptible to falsification by critical inquiry, are precisely those of the balanced mind, whose faith is grounded in faith and is committed to commitment.²⁴ As suggested in the grand historical narrative described earlier, the same critical impulse that destroyed early naïve forms of belief, and then the self-confidence of the critical mind itself, ironically possesses the potential to reveal a new vista which is immune to its acidic propensities. The rationalist undermining of traditional religious belief was a trigger that made possible a new condition of faith, predicated on grounds very different from the alleged foundations of earlier and less penetrating forms of belief. This event explains how we can regard the critical movement, including the consequences of eating the second apple, as a gift. This second departure from paradise is responsible for unlocking the possibilities of an unprecedented self-reinforcing, circular faith which returns to us all of the fruits of the pre-critical fiduciary perspective, now heightened and enriched by its encounter with and supersession of the critical mind. The grandeur of what is thereby unleashed is captured in the closing paragraph of *Personal Knowledge* where Christianity is honored and the final word is "God."²⁵

ENDNOTES

¹Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974 [first published in 1958]).

²It is gratifying to discover, several months after writing these words, the following statement by Richard Gelwick: "Polanyi's aim was not to invent a new concept but to renew the moral and spiritual foundations of our culture." This assertion comes from "Science and Reality, Religion and God: A Reply to Harry Prosch," *Zygon* 17/1 (March 1982):35.

³The compulsion is the result of a loss of capacity to think otherwise. See *PK*, 266.

⁴More specifically, Polanyi understands the task fundamentally to be a "reform of the conception of truth" (204).

⁵Michael Polanyi, "On the Modern Mind," *Encounter* 24 (May 1965):12-20. Phil Mullins has uncovered a pair of addresses by Polanyi that show that he was examining these matters earlier, well before the Gifford Lectures of 1951-1952 that gave rise to *Personal Knowledge*. Titled "Science and the Modern Crisis," these talks occurred sometime prior to 1945 (Mullins makes the case that they were delivered in 1944). As the title suggests, Polanyi is here concerned with "the crisis of our times." He states that it is a crisis "based on spiritual or, generally, mental grounds..." (108). See Michael Polanyi, "Science and the Modern Crisis" in *Memoirs and Proceedings of the Manchester Library & Philosophical Society*, 87/6 (June 1945):106-117.

⁶“Ominous” is an understatement. The paradoxical combination of skepticism and moral fervor leads, on the individualistic side, to nihilism and, in the political and social domain, to totalitarianism. See, for example, “On the Modern Mind,” 18f.

⁷On this matter see Polanyi’s 1960 essay, *Beyond Nihilism* (Cambridge: Cambridge at the University Press, 1960), 35-36: “We shall not go back on the scientific revolution which has secularized extensive domains of knowledge.”

⁸“But revision cannot succeed by merely returning to ideas which have already proved unstable” (ibid., 35).

⁹I am reminded at this point of a colleague who frequently argues, “No God, no good” and has even written an essay by this title.

¹⁰In tracing the details of Polanyi’s grand narrative, it is intriguing to note Arthur Melzer’s reference to “the relentless downward spiral and self-destruction of modern philosophy” that is at the heart of his account of Leo Strauss’s distinction between ancient and modern rationalism. Reminding us very much of Polanyi, Melzer observes that, on Strauss’s telling, ancient rationalism, unlike modern rationalism, “was genuinely self-knowing and able to give an adequate justification of itself.” See Arthur M. Melzer, *Philosophy Between the Lines: The Lost History of Esoteric Writing* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014), 350 and 349. Polanyi joins Strauss in recognizing that the problem of justification, to the degree it is deeply appreciated, illuminates the most fundamental questions.

¹¹*PK*, 266, note 1.

¹²Cf. *PK*, 381: the aim of *PK* “is to re-equip men with the faculties which centuries of critical thought have taught them to distrust. The reader has been invited to use these faculties and contemplate thus a picture of things restored to their fairly obvious nature. *This is all the book was meant to do*” (381, emphasis added). Surely the emphasized sentence is an overstatement, and probably betrays a trace of irony on the part of its author. Yet, it is a telling assertion.

¹³Readers unacquainted with “the paradox of self-set standards” are directed to pp. 63 and 95ff. The paradox, the study of which takes us to the center of Polanyi’s thought, is captured in the question of how can it be that one accepts as a reliable guide a standard that is admittedly derived from oneself? Cf. 315.

¹⁴It is useful in this connection to consider the important role played by repugnance in the face of durance (confinement or imprisonment) in Pierre Manent’s *An Intellectual History of Liberalism* transl. by Rebecca Balinski (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995). See also the closing chapter (“The End of Nature”) of his *The City of Man*, transl. by Marc A. LePain (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).

¹⁵Vincent Colapietro shows admirable insight into the mind outlined by Polanyi. Its dispositions include “humility, patience, and hope,” and belong to “a passionate yet playful person who possesses the capability of living in uncertainty and doubt for an indefinite time. It is also the portrait of the virtuous person, wherein virtue reclaims its original meaning of strength.” See “Intellectual Passions, Heuristic Virtues, and Shared Practices: Charles Peirce and Michael Polanyi on Experimental Inquiry” in *Tradition & Discovery* 38/3 (October 2011):62.

¹⁶Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press: 1978 [first published in 1964]), 3. See, too, Strauss’s *Natural Right and History* (Chicago, The University of

Chicago Press, 1965 [first published in 1950]), his most prominent book, for further notable echoes of Polanyi. On page 1 Strauss asks, “Does this nation in its maturity still cherish the faith in which it was conceived and raised? Does it still hold those ‘truths to be self-evident?’” Later, on p. 6, he notes, “Once we realize that the principles of our actions have no other support than our blind choice, we really do not believe in them anymore. We cannot wholeheartedly act upon them anymore. We cannot live any more as responsible beings.” Strauss and Polanyi shared the same publisher. Might they have been reading one another’s work?

¹⁷In *Science, Faith and Society*, a work earlier than *Personal Knowledge*, Polanyi is strikingly explicit on this matter: “We may try to penetrate one step further by asking what the grounds are on which we hold the conviction that truth is real, that there is a general love of truth among men and a capacity to find it? These convictions (and others closely related to them, like the belief in justice and charity) have recently become involved in a fateful crisis...[which is a component of] the general crisis in which our civilization is involved to-day” (73-74). The account which follows of the genesis of this crisis is fascinating. Of great significance to the present study is that the balanced mind elaborated in *Personal Knowledge* is the remedy to this crisis. *Science, Faith and Society* is a rich complementary source for elements of that mind. See *Science, Faith and Society* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1946).

¹⁸It is striking to read Alasdair MacIntyre on this point: “There is no such thing as justification as such, just as there is no such thing as justification independent of the context of any tradition... the first principles of such a theory are not justified or unjustified independently of the theory as a whole.” This is from *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, 252, cited in Thomas Pfau, *Minding the Modern* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013), 232.

¹⁹Earlier on the same page, Polanyi states, “Seen in the round, man stands at the beginning and at the end, as begetter and child of his own thought. Is he speaking to himself in a language he alone can understand?” (265).

²⁰An interesting question is whether the gifts keep coming. If inquiry never ends, and this is certainly Polanyi’s preferred human destiny, might there sometime be a *third* apple? That is, is it not conceivable that the balanced mind in some sense will be seen through and superseded? (This possibility was first brought to my attention by Collin Barnes.) Due to the very nature of these phenomena, it is difficult, perhaps impossible, to imagine such a development.

²¹So that the reader may reflect on the question as we proceed, let us note that the understanding and role of Christianity for Polanyi that emerges here may be of some service in relieving Marjorie Grene’s embarrassment and distress regarding *PK*’s “closing Christian apologetic.” See the final paragraph of Marjorie Grene, “The Personal and the Subjective,” published in *Polanyiana* 2:4/3: 1 (1992):43-55 and later in *Tradition and Discovery* 22/3 (1995-1996):6-16. It is unlikely that what embarrasses Grene is in fact embraced by Polanyi. Grene, incidentally, is also distressed by “the hopelessly anthropocentric evolutionism of the final chapter” of *PK*. “Anthropocentric evolutionism” is ambiguous. While it is accurate to say that evolution for Polanyi has so far issued in the emergence of humanity (and, with it, a refined version of tacit knowing), this is not to concede (and Polanyi does not say) that evolution’s culmination or final cause is humanity. See in this connection, Jon Fennell, “Is Polanyi’s Emergence Reductive?” in *Appraisal* 11/2 (Autumn 2016):1-13.

²²See 284: “The acceptance of the Christian faith does not express the assertion of observable facts and consequently you cannot prove or disprove Christianity by experiments or factual records.” See, too, *Meaning* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press: 1975), 159: “the meanings achieved in

religion may be of this same sort. The contents may continue to seem completely implausible to us, while yet we see in the Resurrection stories a meaning expressing the whole significance of life and the universe in genuine and universal feeling terms. Then we can say: It does not matter. If not this story exactly, then *something like this* is somehow true—in fact, is somehow the highest truth about all things.” (This, of course, is an integration of clues or particulars, requiring effort, which gives rise to meaning.) Over the years I have heard several well educated and intelligent colleagues assert precisely the opposite, viz., that if there were no precise literal support for Christianity they would no longer believe. It is evident that Polanyi would consider these individuals confused, and in the grips of what philosophers call a “category error.” We can scarcely resolve this difficult issue here. At the least, it is clear that Polanyi’s position is controversial. His portrayal of Christianity is, however, remarkably fruitful in illuminating the fiduciary frame of mind.

²³In his insightful and lucid analysis of Polanyi and Peirce’s views on the nature of inquiry, Colapietro remarks, “For both Peirce and Polanyi, the emphasis falls on learning and discovery, not knowing. Self-corrective processes and practices replace self-warranting cognitions or truths...so that everything is, in principle, open to revision and reappraisal.” This leads Colapietro later to refer to “the heuristic road.” He makes the penetrating additional point that Polanyi’s inquiry into inquiry is a means of protecting the integrity of this important human practice. See Colapietro (note 15 above), 54-56.

²⁴We can anticipate passionate protest from a variety of Christian believers who find facts to be important indeed. In response to the vehement allegation that Polanyi in his account has excised vital realities, one imagines him responding in an echo of William James: “What difference would it practically make to any one if this notion rather than that notion were true? If no practical difference whatever can be traced, then the alternatives mean practically the same thing, and all dispute is idle. Whenever a dispute is serious, we ought to be able to show some practical difference that must follow from one or the other’s being right.” (This passage comes from *Pragmatism* (Indianapolis & Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1981 [first published in 1907]), 26.) It will not be lost on many readers of *Personal Knowledge* that Polanyi, when speaking about Christianity, to a considerable extent occupies the perspective of an outsider. From that presumed vantage point he perceives remarkable wisdom and grand rewards in the Christian life. To the degree that he participates in that life, he personally experiences them. But he is able to discern what he understands to be the central gifts of the Christian perspective without committing to the empirical claims in question. It is evident that he believes that these claims are superfluous, even for those who assert that they are vital. That is, on his view these individuals would in fact lose nothing substantive in abandoning the factual claims, and would thereby render themselves less vulnerable to the disappointment (and potential disenchantment) that follow from their being discredited.

²⁵So, is Polanyi a Christian? It seems prudent on this question to follow a wise Harry Prosch: “What this means about [Polanyi’s] Christianity I must leave to those who know such things.” See his “Polanyi’s View of Religion in *Personal Knowledge*: A Response to Richard Gelwick,” *Zygon*, 17/1 (March 1982):48.