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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>

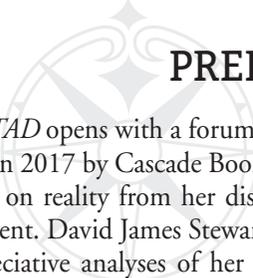
For example: Polanyi argues that (*TD*, 56). Full bibliographical information should still be supplied in the references section since many of us may work with different editions of his works.

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- 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* opens with a forum on Esther Meek's latest book, *Contact with Reality*, published in 2017 by Cascade Books. The book takes us into the development of Meek's thought on reality from her dissertation, which is largely preserved intact therein, to the present. David James Stewart, Mihály Héder, Kyle Takaki, and Andrew Grosso offer appreciative analyses of her views that press for refinements and raise important questions for further discussion. Meek responds by offering more insight into the origins of the project and addressing issues raised by the individual reviewers.

We also have two review essays on the book edited by Dale Cannon and Ronald L. Hall, *Recovering the Personal: the Philosophical Anthropology of William H. Poteat*. The book contains essays from the 2014 Yale conference celebrating Poteat's work. Other essays from that meeting have appeared in earlier issues of *TAD* and so this book now makes most of the contents of that event available in print.

Of special importance in this issue is the annual membership renewal flyer. In order to continue receiving print issues of *TAD*, dues need to be paid by 31 December (see the flyer for details).

As always, check out the latest updates on this year's annual meeting in Denver, publications, and other Society news in News and Notes, now only at www.polanyisociety.org.

Paul Lewis

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GETTING IN TOUCH WITH POLANYI'S REALISM: AN EXAMINATION OF ESTHER MEEK'S CONTACT WITH REALITY



David James Stewart

Keywords: Michael Polanyi, Esther Meek, reality, contact with reality, realism, epistemic realism, Polanyian realism, indeterminate future manifestations, truth, correspondence theory of truth, truth as performative

ABSTRACT

This essay provides a general overview of Meek's central arguments in Contact with Reality, focusing on her interpretation of Polanyi's notion of "contact with reality" as it pertains to the viability of a distinctly Polanyian brand of realism. Special attention is given to Meek's treatment of "indeterminate future manifestations" as the core of Polanyi's epistemic realism and the implications of this for a theory of truth.

A Brief Introduction to Contact with Reality

At its heart, Esther Meek's *Contact with Reality* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017) is a close reading of Polanyi's philosophical thought. I use the word "heart" intentionally here, for while her main focus is on the perennial question of realism, her project also has an undeniable *personal* quality, apropos of a central feature of Polanyi's postcritical epistemology. As she zeroes in on the unique form(s) of realism hidden in plain sight in Polanyi's writings, one cannot help but notice Meek is an evangelist not only of Polanyi, but also of the liberative and healing potential of his proposals. The conviction that a rigorous examination of a concept like "reality" can in fact have such potential is rare, especially in monographs comfortably situated in the contemporary

analytic tradition. For my money, then, regardless of how one evaluates Meek's defense of Polanyi's realism or the unstated implications of her argument, *Contact with Reality* (henceforth *CWR*) is a solid example of what academic philosophy can be in its best moments: suffused with heart without being preachy, personal without being parochial, and duly technical without being disconnected from the realities of the human experience.

The personal character of Meek's project is exemplified by its form as well as its content. The bulk of *CWR* comprises a slightly revised version of her 1985 doctoral dissertation. By her own admission, Meek intentionally preserved the integrity of the original manuscript—an interesting decision, to be discussed later. Because of this, the first part of the book (the original dissertation), "Early Consideration of Contact with Reality" (chapters 1-11), has the feel of a journey of personal discovery. Here, the reader has the sense of reading Polanyi alongside Meek. The second part, "Re-Calling Contact with Reality" (chapters 12-14), has instead the feel of a retrospective reflection on her earlier work in light of her subsequent intellectual development.

Meek's central thesis is that an analysis of Polanyi's notion of "contact with reality" (see *PK*, 104; 147; 313), in conjunction with a host of related concepts, shows that he is an "epistemic realist" (*CWR*, 6; 58). In this mode of realism, although reality is independent of the knower, it's nevertheless "substantially accessible" to them (*CWR*, 12). In Meek's view, Polanyi concurs with what Joseph Margolis refers to as the "original realist thesis," viz., that reality exists external to the knower and independent of any conception of it (*CWR*, 55-56). Although Polanyi emphasizes the personal character of knowledge (i.e., that the agent plays a necessary, active role in the discovery and dissemination of knowledge and truth), Meek is adamant this has little in common with those types of constructivism or Kantian idealism wherein there's an unbridgeable chasm between reality-in-itself and reality-for-us. Polanyi, she claims, believes we can access the "in-itself" of reality, and this despite the intrinsically subjective, personal character of all human knowing (*CWR*, 57).

Evidence of this can be found in Polanyi's comments about the "powerful" impulse characteristic of critical thought (i.e., post-Kantian thought) "to eliminate any quest for an understanding that carries with it the metaphysical implications of a groping for reality behind a screen of appearances" (*SM*, 20). Rather than seeing this as a cop-out, as a way of bypassing the transcendental turn without having to deal with it, Polanyi pushes back against the belief that the results of science are merely descriptions of experiences, that is, of phenomena. When the Enlightenment ideals of rational inquiry and healthy skepticism are pushed to the extreme, defending truth claims about the in-itself of reality becomes impossible insofar as everything is basically reduced to a matter of epistemology. Even though Polanyi considered the assumption the natural sciences are indicative of "complete objectivity" to be delusional (*PK*, 18), he nevertheless maintained they can lead to objective knowledge about empirical reality. It thus

makes sense that for Polanyi, as for any realist, ontology precedes epistemology (*CWR*, 74). In this framework, the knower, by right of being an embodied, physical entity, is already rooted in and part of the world prior to having made any conclusions about it, let alone conceptual distinctions between knower/known, subject/object, etc. (*CWR*, 12-13). For Meek, it's precisely the subject's rootedness in the already-existing external world that makes realism a live option.

On this foundation Meek builds her case for a distinctly Polanyian brand of realism. She provides helpful overviews of tacit knowledge, the subsidiary/focal dialectic, the logics of discovery and indwelling, the notion that we know more than we can tell, and the claim that grasping an aspect of reality leads to an "indefinite range of yet unforeseen consequences" (*PK*, 147), which Meek refers to as "indeterminate future manifestations" (or the "IFM effect"); familiar ideas to those who've read any of Polanyi's major works. The basic shape of her argument is that Polanyi regards the universe as inherently rational, that all knowledge is either subsidiary or rooted in the subsidiary, and that the real is that which manifests itself in unforeseen ways as a knower discovers new, meaningful ways of indwelling a network of unspecifiable subsidiaries. Polanyi's realism is thus a synthesis of the notions that a knower makes contact with reality through the skillful act of an "integrative discovery" (*CWR*, 81) and that "truth lies in the achievement of a contact with reality" (*PK*, 147; *CWR*, 83).

It's no accident the truth question pops up here. It would be difficult to offer a thoroughgoing defense of a realist metaphysic without directly addressing it. Meek recognizes this, and spends a significant amount of time working through the issue. But the conclusions she draws about the theory of truth implied by Polanyi's realism are as unexpected as they are intriguing. It seems inarguable that, like most versions of metaphysical/ontological realism (though by no means all), epistemic realism is closely connected to the correspondence theory of truth. The paradigmatic example here is the view advanced by Russell and Moore at the beginning of the twentieth-century. The idea that truth is about the 1:1 correspondence between a statement about the world and the world as it really is (i.e., a fact about the world) is a virtual cornerstone of Russell's metaphysical realism. At first blush, the theory of truth implied by Meek's definition of epistemic realism seems to have much in common with this correspondence theory. Following G. H. Merrill, Meek explains epistemic realism comes down to the idea that to accept a theory is to believe it's true, to believe its terms denote existing entities (*CWR*, 58). The parallels are obvious: "existing entities" corresponds to the world "as it really is" in Russell's scheme, and believing a theory to be true corresponds to making a statement about the world, presumably a statement one believes to be true. At this point Meek makes two noteworthy claims. First, that, at least according to Merrill's definition, epistemic realism ought to be distinguished from metaphysical realism (*CWR*, 58). Second, that while a "great portion" of Polanyi's statements about reality fall under the rubric of epistemic realism, this shouldn't be taken to mean he isn't

also a metaphysical and semantic realist in certain ways (*CWR*, 58 n. 11). The kicker is that Meek rejects the notion Polanyi's realism is indicative of the correspondence theory of truth (*CWR*, 84).

Ultimately, Meek's position is that in a systematic account of Polanyi's thought, when it comes to the question of truth, the notion of "contact" replaces that of "correspondence" (*CWR*, 166). She goes so far as to suggest that the constellation of concepts related to "contact with reality" can be read as a "creative response to the thin correspondence realism that mainline philosophers ambivalently supported" (*CWR*, 150). Rather than truth being a matter of 1:1 correspondence with reality, as far as Meek is concerned, Polanyi's realism points to a "*one-to-infinity correspondence*" between thought and reality (*CWR*, 247; her emphasis). The operative principle here is that reality always manifests itself in unforeseeable ways, because reality is fundamentally inexhaustible. This is the IFM effect in a nutshell, and it's at the heart of Polanyi's notion of discovery. Accordingly, a statement about reality is true insofar as it reveals an aspect of reality and truth is the achievement of having made contact with reality (*CWR*, 163). Because truth is akin to a responsible commitment made with universal intent, it could be said Polanyi's conception of truth is performative. We can't step outside of the framework we indwell, the framework to which we're necessarily *committed* (*CWR*, 178). While there's a sense in which this sounds like circular reasoning, a more generous interpretation would be to say Meek is here engaged in the difficult task of explicating the dialectic of truth and belief in Polanyi's assertion that "truth is but the external pole of belief, and to destroy all belief would be to deny all truth" (*PK*, 286).

Meek wants to demonstrate Polanyi himself espoused a form a realism, not just that core Polanyian concepts might come in handy to certain types of realists. This means *CWR* is descriptive rather than constructive. It's the difference between the questions of what Polanyi said or believed and what it could mean to be a Polanyian today; between exegesis of Polanyi and indwelling Polanyian ideals. This bears mention because Meek acknowledges Polanyi doesn't address the question of realism in a precise, systematic manner. Reality, sort of; but *realism* as an 'ism,' no. Perhaps his realism is obscured by his fiduciary account of knowledge (*CWR*, 11): an interesting possibility. Either way, to her credit, she concedes "contact with reality" might only be a manner of speaking for him (*CWR*, 75). And yet she never backs down from the bold claim that *Polanyi's* realism is "the best realism to hold," that his is the most justifiable kind (*CWR*, 6). She takes this one step further in saying that Polanyi reinvented epistemology, essentially "recast[ing] rationality in a new key" (*CWR*, 135).

Contrast this with her claims that Polanyi's insights on the topic are little remembered today (*CWR*, 2) and that his position hasn't been given its due because of the way it "challenges the fundamental parameters of the philosophical debate, then and now, regarding realism and anti-realism in philosophy of science and in epistemology" (*CWR*, 6). One might read this with a raised eyebrow: how can Polanyi have

reinvented epistemology, changed the parameters of the conversation, all while being more or less ignored by the majority of his peers and contemporary thinkers? But Meek hasn't made such a facile oversight. No, for her, Polanyi's realism obviates the problem altogether (e.g., *CWR*, 5; 252; 253). "*Reality* solves the problem of realism," she says (*CWR*, 7; her emphasis), by which she means realism can't be given external justification. Trying to prove realism—or any other metaphysics, for that matter—is evidence of having capitulated to the myriad faulty assumptions deeply woven into "modernist" epistemology, the red thread of which Meek identifies as "anti-realism" (*CWR*, 259). Setting aside the suspect "anti-" rhetoric, the basic idea here is a fundamental Polanyian one: there's no stepping outside the frame to prove in some unfalsifiable fashion the validity of one's interpretation of the frame; you can't use your spectacles to scrutinize your spectacles (*M*, 37). In this light, maintaining a realist posture is no different than making a claim about the truth-status of a Copernican vision of the solar system: both entail that a knower indwelling the from-to structure of reality has focally integrated the relevant subsidiary elements such that they can justifiably claim to have made a responsible commitment to the unpredictable manifestations of the real. The linchpin of Meek's argument is that, for Polanyi, the from-to structure of reality is ultimately unformalizable, which is to say the focal integration (i.e., the *meaning*) resulting from the skillful act of indwelling a particular complex of subsidiaries cannot be exhaustively delineated. Nor can subsidiaries be known *qua* subsidiaries. To focus on them would be to achieve a new focal integration, which would of course be predicated upon another network of unspecifiable subsidiaries, ad infinitum. Meek's case for Polanyi's realism takes these intimations of indeterminacy and unknowability and goes all-in with them: "It is precisely the unformalizable—to speak oxymoronically—that testifies to the real. It is in the unformalizable that the real shows itself to be independent of the knower" (*CWR*, 233).

Some Initial Impressions

As noted above, the lion's share of *CWR* is Meek's original doctoral dissertation, "deliberately preserved...with only minor revisions" (*CWR*, 5). She says she did this "out of respect for [her] colleagues in the Polanyi Society," because it was the dissertation that led to her involvement in the Society in the first place (*ibid*). This strikes me as odd. Given that the dissertation was written over thirty years ago, why not present an updated account of the argument? Why not update the writing so it doesn't read so much like a dissertation? The first part of *CWR* is rife with serpentine prose, there are too many quotes, and it's often repetitive, both in terms of the content of different sections as well as specific words: all of this could've been ameliorated without much effort. As it is, the reader is left to guess which parts of the book she still agrees with and which parts are vestiges of her former skeptical worldview.

Another problem arises as a result of leaving the dissertation as-is: by not revising the text in light of the relevant literature produced over the past three decades, the book already feels dated, reading more like a time capsule than a contribution to an ongoing scholarly conversation.

More specifically, I would have expected Meek to account for some of the contributions made to the study of Polanyi's realism. There are, for example, eight articles in an issue of *Tradition & Discovery* (26, no. 3: 1999-2000) dedicated to this question, but Meek mentions none but her own. Similarly, there are other important articles in this same vein she passes over as well.¹ I don't quite know what to make of this.

Regardless, while Meek makes a number of interesting and insightful observations about some of the broadly realist assumptions underlying Polanyi's thought, I'm not convinced this is the final word on whether his postcritical epistemology is indicative of the type of realism she thinks it is. More to the point, I'm not sure it matters. Don't get me wrong, the big metaphysical questions are as important as ever, especially given what researchers in theoretical physics and neuroscience are discovering about the world and the human person. But Meek doesn't actually address them head-on. She's written a book about whether or not Polanyi is a realist, not a book on realism, per se. So it's hard to take seriously her conviction that *CWR* will somehow make "philosophers and realists of us all" (*CWR*, 8). Setting aside the fact this type of project will likely appeal most to those already in the Polanyi camp, it seems to me Meek gets to the *real* issue too late in the game. It isn't until the penultimate chapter—"The Current Conversation: The Difference Polanyi Would Make"—that she finally begins to address the question of what Polanyi's epistemology and notion of "contact with reality" have to teach us about the nature of *reality itself*. I'm an avowed, card-carrying Polanyian, but the question of whether or not Polanyi was a realist pales in import to the questions of whether realism is itself viable and how it stacks up against different forms of idealism. One is a question about a philosopher, the others are questions of philosophy itself. To be fair, there is of course value in the first question. But with that being said, even after reading *Contact with Reality* with a spirit of excitement and anticipation, if someone asked me why Polanyi's realism matters, my answer would be, "I don't know."

ENDNOTE

¹To name just a few: Dale Cannon, "Sanders' Analytic Rebuttal to Polanyi's Critics, With Some Musings On Polanyi's Idea of Truth," in *Tradition and Discovery* 23/3 (1996-7): 17-23; Andy Sanders, "Criticism, Contact With Reality and Truth," in *Tradition and Discovery* 23/3 (1996-7): 24-36; Phil Mullins, "Polanyi's Participatory Realism," in *Polanyiana* 6/2 (1997), <http://chemonet.hu/polanyi/9702/mullins.html> (accessed February 28, 2018); Walter B. Gulick, "The Meaningful and the Real in Polanyian Perspective," in *Polanyiana* 8/1-2 (1999), <http://chemonet.hu/polanyi/9912/gulick.html> (accessed February 28, 2018).

BEING REAL AND CONTACT WITH REALITY



Mihály Héder

Keywords: evolution, ultrabiology, naturalized epistemology, realism, person, Esther Meek, Michael Polanyi

ABSTRACT

In the first part of Contact with Reality, Meek provides a justification for Polanyi's realism, a justification she suggests Polanyi himself did not fully articulate. In the second part of Contact with Reality, Meek explores her own shift in thinking about realism, one that relieves Polanyi of the burden of justification. I argue Polanyi's account of the reality of persons and their evolutionary history—what he calls “ultrabiology”—provides the foundation of his epistemology and thus his realism.

Introduction

What makes it challenging to reflect on Esther Lightcap Meek's *Contact with Reality* (2017; hereafter, *CR*) is that it actually comprises two books, partially in conflict with each other. It offers a verdict on various philosophical stances on realism by reconstructing Polanyi's thought and demonstrating its relative superiority, but also does not miss the opportunity to advance its own position on realism. Those familiar with Polanyi will find much in common between Meek and Polanyi: *CR* very much resembles *PK* in its heterogeneous goals and modalities. In the first half of part one of *CR*, Meek summarizes Polanyi's views on realism. In the second half of part one, she evaluates the significance of Polanyi's realism relative to other approaches to realism and (in particular) the philosophy of science.

An overall goal of the entire book is to highlight what Meek herself first stresses in the introduction, namely, the tremendous insights to be gained from adopting Polanyi's framework. I hope I will be forgiven for commenting on this first introductory chapter:

an introduction provides space for an author to share the background and motivations of the work and should generally be off-limits to criticism. Yet I can't help pointing out two things here, both related to a rather romantic perception I would call "Michael Polanyi as the unappreciated treasure."

My first point has to do with the jubilant language about the "liberating" and "healing" effects Polanyi's philosophy had on Meek. Mired as she had been in a miserable skepticism, her study of Polanyi provided her with a glimmer of hope about the viability of realism. I mention this only because this starting point seems to have consequences for the whole project. Meek basically attempts to develop a missing justification for Polanyi's efforts that he himself appears to have thought unnecessary, namely, a defense of his realism. From reading *CR*, one could have the impression Polanyi's realism was chiefly supported by his natural attitude as a premier scientist (i.e., a tacit commitment to realism is necessary to practice science) and possibly by his faith in his own fiduciary program. So he appeared not to give much thought to justifying his realism and thus this job now falls to the professional philosopher.

I suggest Polanyi might have thought his critique of objectivism successfully put the burden of proof on those wanting to make *anti*-realist arguments and therefore there was no need for him to justify his commitment to realism. This very same issue about the burden of proof surfaces in the second part of *CR*, where Meek appears to lift this burden, but possibly not with the right justification.

The other thing worth mentioning about the introduction has to do with Meek's perception that Polanyi's work is generally not recognized or respected to the degree it deserves (a recurring theme throughout *CR*). However, taken together *PK* and *TD* easily have fifty thousand citations; this does not include other works by Polanyi. While many of those citations might be only about a mention of tacit knowledge and may not entail real understanding of Polanyi's broader project, I do not think he is neglected to the degree we sometimes portray him to be. There is no question that in current philosophical debates about realism and some other philosophical issues Polanyi is not often cited; amongst non-philosophers, however, his works are much more visible than are those of many more prominent analytical philosophers.

I turn now to comments about the first part of *CR*. One thing worth pointing out is that Meek's ambitious efforts are apparently based on all of Polanyi's relevant works. While this exhaustive search for every possible reference to Polanyi's realism provides tremendous insight, it can also be a problem. First, although this exhaustive approach can provide revealing background information, it sometimes does not add much to the overall project; I felt this to be the case in the section titled, "Ontological Aspect of Tacit Knowing." Second, one has the impression while reading Polanyi's works that, although he generally retained the same family of ideas throughout his career as a philosopher, he carved them up in alternative conceptual ways in successive books. The

result is that while the concepts do not really contradict each other, they sometimes cannot be seen as entirely complementary either.

I have a similar concern having to do with the amount of attention given to the concept of indwelling: it is extensively discussed in chapter two but mostly missing from the rest of part one, but then re-emerges in part two. I suggest highlighting the concept of indwelling without attending to the related concept of the “active centre” is symptomatic of a skew in the representation of Polanyi’s work.

Some concepts important to Polanyi’s thought are missing altogether. One of these is evolution, which can serve as an account of the history of reality, especially of a multi-layered ontology. Meek repeatedly describes Polanyi as a premier scientist and a game-changer in our understanding of the philosophy of science, but she also insists (in part two) that the source of his novel epistemological insights and reality are basically unexplained. I argue that his having been a scientist and a medical doctor would have made him sympathetic to the naturalization of epistemology (a goal sought by others, as well) and enabled him to develop a research program that yielded groundbreaking results.

Just as Polanyi’s works both partially supersede one another even as they partially complement one other, the two parts of *CR*, written three decades apart, exhibit a similar tension. I will not be able to comment very much on part two: this second, newer part of *CR* argues the main points of part one are still valid today, so much so that Meek no longer believes it’s necessary to justify a realist standpoint (although she offers no real explanation on how this change has come about).

As for the other arguments of part two—especially covenant epistemology and the idea reality itself might be personal—Meek heads in directions I cannot follow and therefore I cannot judge her arguments. But I do want to share my interpretation of what Polanyi proposes in chapter nine of *PK* about religious faith and Christianity. There he classifies religious vision with other heuristic systems like mathematics. On this basis, he argues that, since true or false statements are not possible in such heuristic systems, neither are true or false statements possible about the existence of God. On the contrary, if the statement “God exists” were thought to be true (and thereby expected to yield indeterminate future manifestations) it would make the object of that statement comparable to natural objects, and thereby destroy it as a proper object of religious worship.

Objectivity and Reality

In chapter one of *PK*, “Objectivity,” Polanyi presents the core idea of contact with reality: “We accept [a given theory] in the hope of making contact with reality; so that, being really true, our theory may yet show forth its truth through future centuries in ways undreamed of by its authors...In this wholly indeterminate scope of its

true implications lies the deepest sense in which objectivity is attributed to a scientific theory” (*PK*, 5).

Meek explores one aspect of this account very thoroughly in part one of *CR*, namely, the indeterminate future manifestations (or what she calls the “IFM Effect”) we expect from a true theory. The “IFM Effect” is a telltale sign of truth, and according to Meek, the discovery of truth is based on tacit “foreknowledge” facilitated by the aesthetic quality of a theory and its capability to spark our intellectual passions.

But I think there is more to this idea that needs to be noticed. Polanyi’s treatment of objectivity in chapter one of *PK* can be seen as his argument for realism. For instance, when he writes he wants to “recall how scientific theory came to be reduced in the modern mind to the rank of a convenient contrivance, a device for recording events and computing their future course” (*PK*, 6), we read therein an implicit charge against instrumentalist descriptions of science.

This reduction of theory begins with the reduction of the reality of the person. That line of thought culminates in chapter six of *PK*, “Intellectual Passions,” which describes the contradictory nature of the Laplacean ideal of knowledge. Polanyi argues the ethereal Laplacean mind would not have any real understanding or knowledge about anything, precisely because of its ethereal nature. I believe there is here an implied argument about the reality of the person, an argument that is additional to the possibility of true theories (i.e., realism). When we forget about the reality of the person and move immediately to analysis of our knowledge of the external world, we end up relying *only* on the claim that the structure of our knowledge reflects the structure of the objects of our knowledge; in other words, we are supposed to infer *from the structure of knowing to the structure of being*. However, this inference alone—without another independent argument (i.e., about the reality of the person)—is not enough of a foundation for ontological statements about the world (cf. Margitay 2010; Paksi 2019).

Evolution and the Emergence of Man

If we are able to accept the reality of the person, it is entirely justified to ask about the origins of that person. Polanyi took seriously the continuity between animals and humans, extensively studied animal learning, and concluded explicit knowledge is just the latest evolutionary development after a long era during which knowledge was held only tacitly. This continuity between humans and animals—or, to put it another way, this continuity within nature—underpins the claim that the structure of our mental representation of other biological beings resembles the structure of those beings themselves. This correspondence is due to the “anthropogenesis” manifest in the shared “ancestral system” of biological species. Polanyi notes, “We have reached the point at which we must confront the unspecifiability of higher levels in terms of particulars belonging to lower levels, with the fact that the higher levels have in fact come into

existence spontaneously from elements of these lower levels. How can the emergent have arisen from particulars that cannot constitute it?" (*PK*, 393).

This also means that trust in knowing is in part justified by evolution. A later passage in *PK* illustrates the evolution of contact with reality very clearly:

In my description of anthropogenesis I have surveyed the gradual rise of field centres to the rank of full personhood, and I have again spoken of this rise when illustrating some aspects of emergence by the logical maturation of the mind from infancy to adulthood. At all levels of life it is these centres which take the risks of living and believing. And it is still such centres which, at the highest stage of development, actuate those men who seek the truth and declare it to all comers—at all costs (*PK*, 404).

The reality of the person, together with the evolutionary heritage of the human species, make a good argument why anti-realism appears contradictory. It also explains why contact with reality can generally be achieved (thanks to our evolved skill set), but is also fallible. Polanyi referred to this form of reasoning in terms of “ultrabiology” and suggested evolutionary progress “can be extended by continuous stages into epistemology, and more generally, into the justification of [our] own fundamental commitments.” Ultimately, this evolutionary series “should present itself as a series of successive existential achievements” (*PK*, 387).

I do think the “ultrabiology” argument, as the foundation of Polanyi’s epistemology, also includes a foundation for Polanyi’s realism. The argument, as Polanyi admits, is still circular. However, he also shows that no other kind of conceptual system is possible, and therefore an admittedly circular system should be seen as more viable than one claiming to be un-circular and grounded solely in objective evidence.

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Reality Crisscrossed



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ABSTRACT

It some important ways, Meek's Contact with Reality (2017a) starts where Dreyfus and Taylor's (2015) Retrieving Realism ends. What is at stake for Polanyians is the status of evolving metaphysical views anchored in Polanyi's epistemic concerns. I sketch three metaphysical pictures, then focus on dialectically engaging with Meek in hopes of widening the dialogical space for differing Polanyian projects.

Where's Polanyi?

Esther Meek's wonderful work, *Contact with Reality* (hereafter *CR*), can be read as a sorely needed Polanyian correction to Hubert Dreyfus and Charles Taylor's *Retrieving Realism* (hereafter *RR*). Although Polanyi resides in the shadows in *RR* (e.g., their critical notion of absorbed coping makes explicit reference to two of Polanyi's examples; see *RR*, 80), Polanyi has a significant and broader role to play. From an inclusive point of view, there are crucial horizons that Dreyfus and Taylor (hereafter *DT*) overlook, discussion of which will help set the scene for engagement with Meek concerning the profoundest levels of being.

There is plausible speculation as to why *DT* seem to act largely by omission (see Apczynski 2017; Meek 2017b; Rutledge 2017; Lowney 2017). A further reason might be discerned in their characterization of the predominant "mediational" picture of reality they aim to reveal (and correct):

The strands [of this picture] were (1) the “only through” structure, (2) the explicitness of content, (3) which one can’t get beyond/behind, and (4) the dualist sorting, of the mental and the physical, the space of reasons and the space of causes. Now both Rorty and Davidson vigorously reject (1); while Rorty, and less unambiguously Davidson, subscribe to (4). But where the tradition can really be seen as operative is in their acceptance of (2) and (3). The contents of our grasp on the world are to be understood as explicit beliefs (2), and there is no going behind or beyond these in the space of reasons (3): only beliefs justify beliefs (*RR*, 64).

As this applies to Polanyi’s marginalization, (1) could be read as fitting Polanyi’s from-to structure regarding how epistemology grounds ontology. On this flat reading, Polanyi would be interpreted as claiming that reality is gleaned “only through” tacit knowing’s workings; however, while true in a sense, this doesn’t hold concerning just how DT characterize (1). (2) is similarly beside the point for Polanyi, so it doesn’t shed light on his marginalization. (4) is ambiguous in an interesting way for Polanyi, and he can be partially accused of this, but not in the manner that DT target. This leaves (3), where they might read Polanyi as either subscribing to a version of (3) (but not the “space of reasons” version), or as being too easily caricaturized for holding this view. Concerning the latter, perhaps this offers a reason for Polanyi’s conspicuous absence, by and large. As for the former interpretation, it doesn’t appear very plausible given DT’s sophistication and sensitivity as readers and philosophers.

Let’s suppose for argument’s sake that (3) is the major stumbling block bearing on Polanyi’s marginalization. In place of (explicit) content that one cannot get behind, we would have the revised version (3): content of whatever sort is grounded in tacit knowing, which we cannot get behind. First, from (3) DT cannot infer that tacit knowing doesn’t make contact with reality, for this clearly doesn’t square with Polanyi’s writings. They also cannot infer that his account is “mediational” in its portrait of realism, as the particular mediational picture they contest is untrue of Polanyi, and the correctives they offer for that picture (embodiment and the like) strongly resonate with Polanyi’s views. The only remaining plausible reason would be that tacit knowing grounds ontology, which is the reverse of DT’s contact theory. Generally speaking, Polanyi’s realism places emphasis on the move from epistemology to ontology (as I discuss below), but DT’s realism emphasizes primordial contact with the world over epistemology.

If this is the reason for Polanyi’s marginalization, it is still founded on a poor reading, as Polanyi’s views encompass DT’s version of primordial contact. Such skillful modes of coping are *already presupposed* in tacit knowing’s workings, which then fund the real question for Polanyi about how knowledge in general operates as contextualized by various domains of inquiry. We might then ask: whose realism is really being

retrieved? A preconceptual, prelinguistic contact with the world (or a “coproduced” realism between agent and world) still leaves DT with a glaring hole in their account—namely, the realisms produced by science and not just their captivation by a rapid picture of correspondence, true reality, and so forth (see endnote 1). These realisms cover phenomena like the strangeness of the quantum realm (and its multiple interpretations), the quest for a grand unified theory, the important ways in which biology is a differing kind of science from physics, and so forth—realisms that better fit with Polanyi’s pluralistic heterarchical hierarchies of inquiry, whose coproduced contact offers a richer view of knowing and its workings in science. For as robust as DT’s socialized realism is, it barely scratches the surface of a Polanyian realism that not only accommodates their realism, but also countenances the added layers of depth and richness that come with the consequential aspects of inquiry.¹

They could respond by saying that nothing in their account discounts these consequential dimensions, but that is just the point—their omission of the arc of tacit knowing and its heterarchical hierarchies of inquiry leaves untouched perhaps the most significant features of a robust realism worth having. Non-exclusionary realism is no substitute for an inclusionary one. Again, whose realism is being retrieved? For more than just retrieving realism, we should also be asking: what *unknown* realisms might inquiry coproductively enact-and-discover? In a similar consequentialist vein, Meek writes: “In my personal gradual growth to realism, I have not ever left behind the Polanyian statement of reality as that which manifests itself indeterminately in the future” (Meek 2017c). She also opens a significant space for the unknown via the indeterminate dimension of Polanyi’s realism.

A further qualification I would add to Meek’s IFMs (indeterminate future manifestations) is that Polanyi’s consequential realism isn’t just indeterminate in tacit knowing’s workings (as related to inquiry’s heterarchical hierarchies)—it is crucially indefinite. These related notions are not identical, since an indeterminate space of inquiry draws attention to a horizon of mystery that fundamentally cannot be fully broached—a leap of faith is required.² While I think the Polanyi-Gelwick insight that all acts of knowing contain a structural element of faith is correct, the nuance of “indefinite” adds the Peircean insight that inquiry is potentially infinite in its consequential dimensions, and that growth, while funded by faith, is more than just indeterminate—it continues on indefinitely and fallibly in generating tacit knowing’s pluralistic heterarchical hierarchies.

Three Approaches

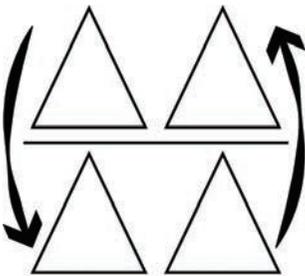
I will use DT’s pluralistic robust realism as a springboard for considering three differing approaches to Polanyi (in particular, approaches which circumambulate how universal intent can be read regarding ethics, values, etc., and the sort of robust

pluralism Polanyi would endorse).³ DT’s pluralistic robust realism makes four claims (RR 154):

there may be (1) multiple ways of interrogating reality (that’s the “plural” part), which nevertheless (2) reveal truths independent of us, that is, truths that require us to revise and adjust our thinking to grasp them (and that’s the robust realist part), and where (3) all attempts fail to bring the different ways of interrogating reality into a single mode of questioning that yields a unified picture or theory (so they stay plural).

Concerning (1), I suspect that Meek’s IFMs strike a middle ground between Charles Lowney’s (2017) emergence-with-risk version of realism and DT’s realism. Concerning (2), I don’t think Meek holds that truths are independent *as such*, since Polanyi’s consequential realism has dynamic orders of growth that are enmeshed with tacit knowing and contain more than we can tell—even in the process of making contact, inquiry is a never-ending (indefinite) process of revealing that which manifests itself indeterminately in the future.

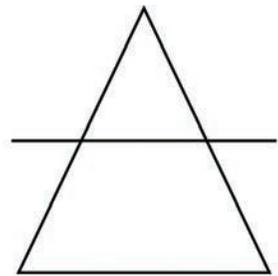
As for (3), this marks a departure point for Polanyians, who in general would either reject (3) or seriously revise it, opting for a convergent pluralism (see endnote 7) that ranges from the “liberal” (depending on how one reads Polanyi’s dynamic orders of inquiry’s heterarchical hierarchies) to the “conservative” (Lowney’s emergence-with-risk). I hypothesize Meek strikes a middle ground stemming from her reading of D.C. Schindler’s idea that “Being” opens itself from above and is not primarily emergent from below. This isn’t inquiry that enables and is enabled by various kinds of robust pluralisms at different levels (what I describe herein as semiotic-heterarchical-hierarchies); and this isn’t a Platonic convergence to a consequential realism concerning values, morals, theories, and so forth (Lowney’s emergence-with-risk). Rather it might be said that it moves away from “bad infinity” and towards good, fruitful infinity (the “liberal” reading by contrast countenances *multiple* good infinities). Here are three images to signify the differing approaches:



Pluralistic hierarchies



Ecstatic IFMs



Convergent emergence

As details are added to these sketches, further contrasts among metaphysical projections compatible with Polanyi's realism will emerge.

In my previous papers for *Tradition & Discovery* (Takaki 2010, 2011, 2013a, 2013b, 2014), there is an arc exploring Polanyi's realism moving from embodiment to enactive pluralism, and along the way arguing for a crisscrossed, complex semiotic realism. A key difference between this semiotic accounting of Polanyi's pluralistic hierarchies and the other two pictures concerns their claim that we can make contact with reality (semi) "independently" of our knowing it. For the rightmost image, the idea is that we make full emergent contact at (or near) the ascending "cone" of inquiry, giving us a structural correspondence between what we know and the (semi-independent) structure of reality—a kind of Platonic revealing of the essential Being of things. The middle image also contains a Platonic trace, the major difference being that inquiry already makes partial (ecstatic) contact with reality from above *and* below (cf. Meek 2017b).

I suggest that both views are problematic for two reasons. First, Polanyi already starts his project from the recognition there is a reality commonsensically "independent" of us and that science generally aims to discover the real (stemming from his experience in the *Naturwissenschaften*, leaving open explorations of the *Geisteswissenschaften*), but is troubled by the seductive Cartesianisms this pretheoretic picture intimates. Second, to make contact with reality semi-independently of our knowing it downplays the heart of the Polanyian project, which grounds ontological and metaphysical claims in epistemic concerns. Let us put aside DT's infelicitous uses of boundary conditions, natural kinds, universal causal laws, and the like in arguing for their retrieved realism (see endnote 1). Polanyi's sophisticated realism, grounded in scientific practice and reflective experience, raises a significant problem about what sort of metaphysical picture we should project regarding dynamic orders of being and "the real." Are we to smuggle in Cartesian elements to preserve intuitions about correspondence, truth, or independence (raising the issue of whose tradition), but now bejeweled with emergence or exuberance (raising the concomitant issue of whose discovery)? Are we to disavow the seductions of the Cartesian picture only to, as with DT, opt for an unacknowledged "Cartesianism 2.0" (or perhaps 1.5)?

Several brief examples illustrate the problem. Consider one of the major interpretations of quantum mechanics, the Copenhagen interpretation. Since observation is intimately related to what collapses the wave function, on this view there is no reality as such that occurs independently of some form of measurement (or construed in a wider sense, by some system of interaction—still rendering the notion of independence problematic at best).⁴ And even bypassing the quagmires of interpretation, quantum entanglement is an experimental fact that intimates not independence, but a far more complex, knotted picture of reality as crisscrossed. Another less exotic example that

significantly entangles ourselves as “system variables” is climate change. We are integral parts of this phenomenon (and our related enactment of the Anthropocene), for which we cannot simply talk about a global system that is independently real as such. The situation becomes similarly ensnared when considering more social forms of science, such as medicine, psychological categories (as with the DSMs), and economics (rife with egregious examples). The more entwined things get, the more problematic it becomes to project well-worn notions like independence, correspondence, or truth.

In place of independence is reality as crisscrossed, within which semiotic inquiry takes place—reality becomes a working hypothesis for exploration with universal intent. In place of correspondence are our projected, embodied tools of discovery (e.g., scientific models, experimental techniques, and so forth) that enact coproduced stabilities. And in place of truth are regulative ideals like the pursuits of wisdom and truth, where fallibilistic faith guides our epistemic ontologies.⁵ At this level questions regarding morality, spirituality, metaphysics, and the like become salient, where further contrasts between the three Polanyian pictures come into view (even if still remaining within the same general field of Polanyian play).⁶ The remainder of the paper focuses on dialectically engaging with Meek’s exuberant metaphysics and how our pictures of Polanyi’s realism have consequences at the highest levels of being.

Comparative Contrasts

I shall proceed by contrast in hopes of widening the dialogical space for differing Polanyian projects. To begin, the pluralistic hierarchies I argue for holds that the realms of values (which I use here to generically stand for morality, spirituality, metaphysics, and so forth) are neither merely emergent (with risk) nor ecstatic IFMs with regard to the deepest levels of existence—especially concerning contemplative, soteriological being. While the other two pictures can approximate this profundity, neither offers a comprehensive view that accounts for comparative insights across traditions, as neither a supersession-via-fusion-of-horizons (Lowney) nor an exuberant-indeterminate-infinity (Meek) suffices. In brief, what pluralistic heterarchical hierarchies enact are worldviews (of which values form a part) with their concomitant traditions and discoveries. And in keeping with Polanyi, such hierarchies are also tools of understanding by which to structurally disclose worldviews with their epistemic-ontic projections. The temptation of Meek’s semi-independent view of reality and its Platonic traces is the reification of metaphysics and inquiry (even if both are fallibly construed). By contrast, the risk of pluralistic heterarchical hierarchies isn’t relativism (a non-starter for Polanyian inquiry properly construed and accredited), but rather inquiry not given a wide enough berth nor sufficient time and resources to begin to emerge into robust being.

With these general remarks, I now delve into the two prominent differences between the picture I offer and Meek’s view. The first concerns the status of the independence of

reality. In *CR*, she cites a number of places in which Polanyi speaks of the independence of reality, which appears to be coextensive with the “external world.” I earlier suggested that Meek’s picture doesn’t hold to independence as such, but rather a semi-independence, as we are entwined coproductively with reality. However, at times Meek seems to suggest a full-blooded metaphysical independence, with subsequent interaction between knowers and the known (perhaps perichoretically construed; see Meek 2011, esp. 215-480). While Polanyi can be accused of a partial Cartesianism, I am proposing a “Polanyi 2.0” that pushes beyond dualistic acceptance of the independence of reality as such. More specifically, in chapters four and five of *CR*, Meek appears to conflate Polanyi’s realist assumption with metaphysical realism (and its imported baggage of independence); she interprets Polanyi’s comprehensive entities with this slippage in the background (her approach to the reality-statement-as-definition highlights its metaphysical element and downplays its simultaneous status as hypothetical). As alluded to previously, in place of the problematic notion of independence, I opt for a “semioverse” where reality is (differentially) crisscrossed, and where reality-as-a-working-hypothesis highlights the fallibilistic nature of inquiry. One reason this difference matters is that Polanyi’s contact with reality might be better understood as a kind of enmeshed entanglement with aspects of reality, where given this crisscrossed nexus of relationality, we can make sense of Polanyi’s claim that certain things can be more real than others (for if reality were independent as such—akin to *natura naturans*—it becomes problematic to hold that realities can be more or less real).

This relates to the second and perhaps biggest difference between our two pictures. She suspects that for Polanyi, “ontology ultimately precedes epistemology” (*CR*, 74), where the assumption that the order of the real is rational “yet inexhaustibly rich” (*CR*, 74) highlights the independence of reality. I argue for the reversal of this order, and also suspect that the real isn’t merely rational—in more nuanced and dynamic fashion, our understanding of the real suggests that what we take as real/rational are islands of stability afforded by a vast enabling ocean of inexhaustible chaotic and complex richness (an a-rational order, at very best). From this vantage point, the question arises: what aspect of Polanyi do we highlight as “tradition” in moving forward to new Polanyian world-views (of discovery)? Metaphysics or epistemology? In short, the benefits of the former are laid out in Meek’s works; the risk is various ossifications steeped in tradition. The benefits of the latter issue from fallibilistic semiotic inquiry; the price is a precarious faith.

A further advantage of emphasizing epistemics over ontology is that throughout *CR*, the statements Meek makes in support of the independence of reality can also be read as reality-as-a-working-hypothesis. To cite a key example, she writes:

The independence of reality for Polanyi, therefore, ultimately stands or falls with his particular analysis of perceptual experience along

with his innovative, philosophical tradition and problem-challenging epistemology of subsidiary-focal integration. This latter is in turn proposed on the basis of, and substantiated by, perceptual and scientific experience. Thus, the Polanyian defense of reality is inductive, as Alan Goldman said a defense of realism must be (*CR*, 235).

Firstly, this “particular analysis” and “his innovative, philosophical tradition and... epistemology” better accords with the claim that the core of Polanyi’s worldview grounds ontology (and metaphysics) in epistemics. Secondly, this inductive defense of reality almost by definition treats reality as a working hypothesis, whose metaphysical status depends on past experience with stabilities that can be projected to future coproductions. These coproduced “realities” are determinate as stabilities, but indeterminate (and indefinite) in terms of their grade of significance—stones become lesser realities than other richer forms of discovery *for a community of inquirers invested in such significance*.

Meek rightfully notes there is no grasping of aspects of reality without responsible inquiry, or without a fiduciary framework (*CR*, 248). Most importantly for Meek, there is no grasping of these patterns that are not “pregnant with unforeseeable implications” (*CR*, 248). While the former fiduciary responsibility favors epistemology over ontology, Meek reads the latter IFM element as favoring metaphysics over epistemology. This is a bit puzzling since it not only can be read simultaneously as inductively supporting reality-as-a-working-hypothesis (compare *CR*, 258), but it also presupposes a community of inquirers for whom such pregnancy can be brought into being. To reemphasize, if reality were independent as such (*natura naturans*), there is in principle no difference between stones and pregnant achievements; but this isn’t Polanyi’s view. While we can hew closely to the letter of Polanyi’s works, we can also push forth to form worldviews that may better cohere with the spirit of tradition-and-discovery.

Worldviews and Traditions

This brings us to a key consideration: is a Polanyian metaphysics best developed in view of certain lines of inquiry in the Judeo-Christian tradition (compare *CR*, 240-243)? As with DT, the question then arises: whose tradition and whose discovery supports whose realism? The earlier image of Meek’s project suggests a non-plural cone of inquiry, with weak convergence amidst pregnant IFMs and increasing mystery—all bound in dialectical tension.⁷ But what if other traditions and discoveries not only broadly accord with the trajectory of Polanyi’s thought, but also suggest avenues for developing metaphysical views with hybrid (i.e., “cross-fertilized” comparative) vigor?

It should first be noted that towards the end of *CR*, Meek expands on this cone of inquiry (bound in dialectical tension) by viewing Polanyi’s epistemology as being both “from above” and “from below” (*CR*, 281-283) while placing emphasis on its

being from above (as I read it, the privileging of metaphysics over epistemology). The ecstasis of reason and reality issue in an abundant surplus of mystery-as-truth (*CR*, 288), where knowing—at the deepest levels of being—becomes an act of communion with this surplus. Such contact/communion does not take place merely in the phenomenal realm, but also in the noumenal, as it were, where transcendental ideals like truth, goodness, and beauty (in Kantian terms, *regulative* ideas that outline the conditions for the possibility of their pursuit) get transfigured into *transcendent* realities (*CR*, 290-291).⁸ It is here where the contrast between our two pictures emerges most starkly, as Meek’s picture invests faith in a reified metaphysics that then redounds to epistemic concerns, whereas the semiotic picture I offer grounds faith’s projections in pluralistically evolving, dynamic heterarchical hierarchies.

This contrast comes into view from the standpoint of “gestalted wholes.” In addition, the picture I offer accommodates a number of Meek’s “subsidiary details” when adopting the stance of reality-as-a-working-hypothesis. Firstly, an enactive realism acknowledges an abundant *surplus* of information, viewed semiotically (in Peircean terms, the use of sign, representation, interpretant, etc. are all various gradations and levels of mediation—signs are mediums that mediate mediations, at whatever level of infinite semiosis). Secondly, semiosis accommodates knowing *as from above and below* (as expanding hermeneutic circles of inquiry) but isn’t funded by Meek’s ecstatic duality. And lastly, the *mystery* of inquiry is also present, as inquiry is irretrievably criss-crossed with reality, making knowing’s encounters not a transcendent matter, but more subtly one that is consequential, fallible, as well as imminent. While this picture doesn’t appear to convey the same ecstatic faith that a metaphysics from above can confer, it does possess its own sort of *ecstasis* in the form of creative surplus—a surplus semiotically entwined with complex knot upon knot of projected epistemic understandings that are embedded in emergent layers upon layers of pluralistic (heterarchical) hierarchies, intimating a picture of inquiry that is fallible yet fueled by faith in, and hope for, enacting discoveries.

All this suggests that Meek’s reified metaphysics presents but one path within an expanded Polanyian field of play, creating thereby a space for comparative exploration of other metaphysical developments perhaps not transcendently conceived, yet nonetheless real, beautiful, ecstatic, and abundant. Other traditions and worldviews, rich in depth and scope, deserve no less consideration in articulating a robust pluralism worthy of the name. Yet such a pluralism, insofar as it can be accommodated within an expanding Polanyian vantage point, is also thereby united-via-difference, as these explorations not only participate in the project of infinite semiosis, but also exhibit similar commitments to ideals like truth, beauty, and goodness. For often what is revealed from a comparative viewpoint is that core soteriological ideals ground metaphysical worldviews, whose traditions are developed accordingly (see Takaki 2016).

Most generally speaking, rather than a Western captivation by metaphysics, what is being suggested here is a shift to worldviews, whose ingredients are manifold—soteriological, axiological, epistemological, metaphysical, and so forth. If reality (as working hypothesis) is a crisscrossed, creative surplus, then it needs a wide berth that the expansive schema of worldviews affords. It is from this standpoint that a comparative approach makes the most sense and can be especially conducive to exploring hermeneutical notions like the fusion of horizons, which must countenance traditions and discoveries. While Polanyi emphasized discovery, his vision does not privilege tradition over discovery, nor discovery over tradition, but rather discovery-enacted-via-tradition. I submit that a Polanyi 2.0 should embrace and foster traditions and discoveries, while remaining grounded in the indefinite and indeterminate future enactments of inquiry. Lastly, if these speculative forays are on the right track, they intimate the partial correctness of these Polanyian pictures—and thereby their partial incorrectness in the guise of incompleteness. This is as it should be, as future versions of Polanyi are a matter of horizons unexplored, indefinite and indeterminate in their hopeful future embodiments.

ENDNOTES

¹There are four general shortcomings to DT's key claim that they "want to argue *both* for our embodied direct access to the things of the everyday world as they appear *to us* and a realist view of science as describing the things in the universe as they are *in themselves*, independent of their relation to our bodily capacities and our coping practices" (RR, 132). 1) Their appeal to "independence" lacks proper consideration of inquiry's consequential dimension. 2) Such independence reintroduces a backdoor dualism in the form of correspondence (RR, 135). 3) The contrast class for their robust realism is Rorty's deflationary realism, both of which essentially miss the thickness of extra-linguistic scientific exploration (e.g., the key roles of intuition and connoisseurship; the power of technological probes; the structural significance of material practices; and so forth). One slippage occurs when they write: "our background understanding not only takes for granted that we are in contact with boundary conditions independent of us and our mode of making things intelligible; it also takes for granted that there is more to the objects of everyday experience than we will ever be able to make explicit" (RR, 138). The affinity with, if not appropriation of, Polanyi is clear. However, what contextualizes their claim is the appeal to "our most basic, primordial way of being in the world" (RR, 138), which misses the nuanced deployments of boundary conditions in mathematics and the sciences—skillful deployments, often artificially imposed to induce systems-thinking in hopes to grasp "what is out there" (cf. Takaki 2013b, 2014). 4) Their dubious appeals to natural kinds and universal causal laws reveal their spectator's distance from scientific practice (natural kinds have been disputed in evolutionary biology and have questionable value in understanding complex changes at the level of chemistry; and the notion of universal causal laws plays little role in how physicists understand laws—they tend to think in terms of mathematical symmetries and structures). In brief, DT subtly but fundamentally miss the mark in their rather scientific realism. A fusion of horizons including Polanyi is needed to expand and correct this conversation which is largely taking place within mainstream Anglo-Eurocentric confines.

²But perhaps not mystical; see Dale Cannon, “Longing to Know If Our Knowing Really Is Knowing—Reflections on Esther Meek’s *Longing to Know: The Philosophy of Knowledge for Ordinary People*,” in *Tradition & Discovery* 31, no. 3 (2005), 6-20. See also Meek’s response, “*Longing to Know and the Complexities of Knowing*,” op. cit., 29-43.

³It should be noted DT appropriate Gadamer’s fusion of horizons as a key element of their pluralistic robust realism. They write: “Gadamer makes central the paradigm of a ‘conversation,’ in his understanding of human science, rather than that of an inquiring subject studying an object” (*RR*, 125), perhaps indicating a difference from Polanyi’s emphasis on epistemic inquiry. However, a significant shortcoming of their appropriation is the failure to recognize comparative philosophy’s key use of the fusion of horizons—their examples tend to be anthropological rather than comparative. (For more on a major prejudice of mainstream Western philosophy, see <https://aeon.co/essays/why-the-western-philosophical-canon-is-xenophobic-and-racist>.) From this comparative perspective, I find Polanyi’s framework superior, as well as compatible with conversation as part of the dynamic of inquiry—broadly and charitably construed. A further shortcoming is that their heavy reliance on Heidegger, insofar as it bears on their desire to combat ethnocentrism, is stained by the discovery of his black notebooks.

⁴It could be objected that the interpretation preferred by theorists is the many-worlds interpretation. However, even this reified Platonism can be accommodated by 1) tacit knowing’s underpinnings of how such a mathematical metaphysics is generated and projected, for which prethetic “contact” with “reality” becomes seriously problematic on DT’s account; and 2) Polanyi’s heterarchical hierarchies, as tacit knowing’s discovery of these mathematical patterns parallels in Spinozian fashion the structure of these worlds (between which there isn’t properly any correspondence, given their lack of interaction).

⁵The interrelated roles of faith and fallibilism are key to Polanyi’s pluralistic dynamic orders of being, which I suggest also better fits with the view I present. Compare Phil Mullins, “Michael Polanyi’s use of Gestalt Psychology,” in *Knowing and Being: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Michael Polanyi*, edited by Tihamér Margitay (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 10-29; idem, “Michael Polanyi’s Early Liberal Vision: Society as a Network of Dynamic Orders Reliant on Public Liberty,” in *Perspectives on Political Science* 42, no. 3 (2013), 162-171.

⁶At this level, even DT, outlining the unity of their robust pluralistic realism, claim such metaphysics (of unity and multiplicity/plurality) is ultimately to be decided on empirical grounds, construed broadly (*RR*, 155). If this isn’t a nod to the consequential dimension of inquiry, I don’t know what is, only reinforcing the need for more explicit inclusion of Polanyi’s far more sophisticated realism. Furthermore, the “view from nowhere” they contest is also better corrected from a Polanyian standpoint; cf. Olimpia Lombardi, “Prigogine and the Many Voices of Nature,” in *Foundations of Chemistry* 14, no. 3 (2011): 205-219. DT’s citing of the convergence of physics and chemistry (*RR*, 157) misses crucial subtleties to which Lombardi alludes; see also Olimpia Lombardi and Martín Labarca, “The Ontological Autonomy of the Chemical World,” in *Foundations of Chemistry* 7, no. 2 (2005), 125-148.

⁷This would be “weak” in relation to Meek’s discussion of non-convergence as a denial of Putnam’s and Goldman’s accounts of what might be called in this context “strong” convergence (*CR*, 146-7). I think her denial of strong convergence is encapsulated in her statement that “there can be no *fixed* account, or *complete* picture, which we gradually approximate” (*CR*, 192). However, rather than nonconvergence I would suggest that science contains far too many hit-upon stabilities

that Polanyi recognizes as in some sense “convergent:” perhaps stones, being thus far projected as relatively uninteresting, would qualify as strongly convergent, whereas profound scientific discoveries would be weakly convergent in that discoverers have hit upon a stability—as aspect of reality—that as interestingly rich, intimates IFMs, and calls for further exploration.

⁸While Schindler discusses these ideals that Balthasar appropriates from medieval philosophy, the connection to, and relevance of, Kant is largely sidestepped; see D.C. Schindler, *The Catholicity of Reason* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2013), 63-64.

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PARTICIPATION IN REALITY: BOTH DISCOVERY AND INVENTION



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Keywords: realism, discovery, embodiment, participation, epistemology, ontology, Esther Meek, Charles Taylor

ABSTRACT

This article uses Charles Taylor's exposition of different forms of meaning as a way of analyzing some of the central themes of Esther Meek's account of realism. The perspective Taylor provides encourages revisiting the way various elements of Meek's argument align with one another, and helps highlight the importance of embodiment and the centrality of the person for all accounts of knowing and being.

Esther Lightcap Meek's *Contact with Reality* (2017; hereafter, *CWR*) invites careful reflection about a considerable range of issues, but I will herein focus on only a few. In particular, I want to look at the related concepts of "discovery" and "contact," both of which are central to the form of realism Meek advances. I'm sympathetic to Meek's arguments, but would like to suggest a somewhat different way of accounting for both "discovery" (as a descriptor of what happens when we make "contact with reality") and "contact" (as a descriptor of our relationship to reality as occasioned by discovery). My proposal is a fairly simple one: "participation" is a better way of talking about our relationship with reality than "contact," and the difference between these two ways bears on how we think about "discovery."

I'm going to start, not with Meek, but with Charles Taylor, and specifically with a recent proposal of his that has implications for Meek's project. In *The Language Animal*, Taylor (2016; hereafter *LA*) devotes a considerable amount of energy to elucidating the differences between two forms of articulation: one of these forms he describes

in terms of “biological” meanings or “life meanings,” and the other he describes in terms of “metabiological” or “human meanings” (*LA*, 179-180). The former tend to be more instrumental in character, while the latter are more existential: life meanings “can be replaced” by third-person accounts (or, in some cases, by completely impersonal accounts), but human meanings cannot (*LA*, 182). Life meanings more readily translate across cultures, but human meanings are more often “peculiar to certain cultures, or even subgroups with a culture” (*LA*, 183-184). Human meanings thus depend on hermeneutic forms of reasoning and articulation, whereas life meanings do not (*LA*, 255-257).

In the interests of clarification, it’s worth noting these two forms of articulation do not strictly correspond to another important two-fold distinction Taylor makes in *LA*, namely, that between “enframing” views of language and “constitutive-expressive” ones (*LA*, 3-4). This latter distinction is intended to signify two different and competing accounts of language itself, one of which (the enframing view) Taylor identifies with Hobbes, Locke, and Condillac, and the other of which (the constitutive view) he identifies with Haman, Herder, and Humboldt (*LA*, 4-5, 48-50). While it’s right to say those in the enframing tradition tend to put more of their eggs in the basket of biological or life meanings while those in the constitutive tradition tend to put theirs in the basket of metabiological or human meanings, these two binaries should not be conflated (i.e., as we would if we believed life meanings can be understood strictly in terms of the enframing view of language and human meanings in terms of the constitutive view). The reason we should not collapse these binaries into one another will become clear forthwith.

At this point, it’s necessary only to highlight Taylor’s account of the contributions distinctly human meanings make to our understanding and experience. The “semantic dimension” of language, he argues, cannot be reduced to the purely “descriptive dimension” associated with life meanings (*LA*, 25-26). Human meanings help us recognize all forms of language not only symbolically communicate experience but make experience possible in the first place (*LA*, 29). “Discovery and invention are two sides of the same coin” (*LA*, 178), and as we develop new forms of articulation we thereby open up new horizons of meaning and possibility. Language thus enables us not only to expand our awareness and understanding of reality, but *to expand reality itself* by introducing new forms of meaning that in turn evoke new possibilities for identification, expression, and action. Our capacity for language enables us to go far beyond the more utilitarian, instrumental possibilities afforded by life meanings, and gives us “much greater flexibility, a capacity to change, even to transform ourselves, which has no parallel among other animals” (*LA*, 339).

Thus, Taylor’s distinction between life meanings and human meanings—and especially his account of the latter—raises a potential question for Meek: if human

meanings are created at least as much as we might say they are “discovered,” do they signify “contact with reality”? Human meanings, representative as they are of everything from accounts of personal identity, to socio-political standards, to moral rectitude, to aesthetic value, to religious devotion, to any number of additional forms of meaning, seem to be more vulnerable both to the charge of subjectivism and to the predations of skepticism (cf. *LA*, 183-184). Both life meanings and human meanings, Taylor suggests, are open to clarification, correction, and development: life meanings can be (and often are) adjusted on the basis of “external” or “indirect” justifications, whereas human meanings are adjusted on the basis of “internal” or “direct” justifications (*LA*, 197-198). But for someone convinced of the superiority of those forms of articulation that signify life meanings (i.e., their relative apparent objectivity and impartiality), any appeal to internal justification will likely seem to be a kind of special pleading.

This issue can be recast in terms of the problem of self-set standards. Meek, of course, is quite familiar with this problem, and gives it significant attention in *CWR*. In fact, she identifies (though not in any precise or technical manner) two different versions of the problem: we use self-set standards to help us apprehend and understand both what Taylor calls life meanings and what he calls human meanings, but these different usages are not exactly the same because the character or the qualities of the standards are not exactly the same.

Relative to the discovery of life meanings, the problem of self-set standards boils down to a question about how the contingencies of our perceptual, conceptual, and expressive abilities enable us to recognize the rational order of reality (both those dimensions open to our immediate experience and those dimensions that are not, such as the quantum realm). However, it's precisely the comparable thinness of life meanings—i.e., their more instrumental, descriptive, impersonal character—that enables us readily to subject them to objective adjustment and correction: the limitations of our capacities can be overcome by the kind of external or indirect verification Taylor associates with life meanings.

Similarly, Meek describes Polanyi's exposition of the role of intuition in the apprehension of the real: dynamic intuition, strategic intuition, creative intuition, and “confirmatory” intuition all contribute to our recognition and understanding of meaningful *Gestalten* (*CWR*, 44-46). These forms of intuition are employed in “every form of human achievement,” from the most quotidian to the most sophisticated forms of intellectual and artistic striving (*ibid.*), and are likewise open to calibration and correction. Thus, reliance on self-set standards need not compromise our confidence in affirming truth “is not made or invented, but rather discovered” (*CWR*, 56). It may appear we have ourselves selected the standards by which we adjudicate the reliability of our knowledge, Meek suggests, but “it seems more true to say they have imposed themselves on us” (*CWR*, 27). Quoting Polanyi, Meek affirms even the “most daring

feats of originality...must be performed on the assumption they originate nothing, but merely reveal what is there" (*CWR*, 87; quoting *PK*, 130).

Relative to the discovery of human meanings, however, the problem of self-set standards is a bit more complicated. This is not because there exist no external or direct loci by which we might calibrate and/or correct our apprehension of human meanings; community, tradition, and culture all potentially play this role (cf. *LA*, 190). If the only challenge we faced at this point had to do with the question of how the contingencies of our perceptual, conceptual, and expressive abilities enable us to recognize the meaningful *Gestalten* of human meanings, this would simply be a variant of the problem of self-set standards as it applies to the recognition of life meanings.

The problem here, however, is that human meanings (at least as Taylor presents them) *are themselves* self-set standards. The articulation of a human meaning is less a matter of employing self-set standards to apprehend or articulate an independent, objective meaning; rather, the meaning or truth in question is something better thought of as an invention rather than a discovery. The apprehension of a human meaning brings about the possibility of a "new way of feeling, of experiencing our world," a feeling that "doesn't precede the articulation, but comes about through and with it" (*LA*, 188). Such articulation "alters the shape of what matters to us. It changes us" (*LA*, 189). Further, human meanings cannot be teased apart the way life meanings often can; instead, they "impinge on us not singly...but in interconnected skeins" (*LA*, 184). At one point, Meek herself alludes to something that sounds very much in line with Taylor's analysis of human meanings: following Polanyi, she affirms human beings are "capable of producing" new insights and articulations that transform reality by adding new and hitherto unforeseen meanings to it (*CWR*, 68; cf. *PK*, 382-390). For all his realism, Meek admits, whether Polanyi believed "the nature of reality determines the nature of knowledge or vice versa is not entirely clear" (*CWR*, 74).

Of course, one way of addressing this issue would be to deny any qualitative distinction between life meanings and human meanings. One might do so even while granting a distinction between (on the one hand) more quantitative forms of reasoning and articulation and (on the other) more qualitative forms of reasoning and articulation. For example, if one's convictions incline towards materialism, one can argue human meanings are really just life meanings in disguise; given the current state of science it may not (yet) be possible for us to recognize the physical, chemical, and/or biological basis of what we poetically refer to as human meanings, but as our understanding of the natural order continues its inexorable march we'll increasingly be able to recognize the material basis of all meaning (even if we elect, for the sake of convenience, to retain our more poetic forms of expression).

But one can also deny a qualitative distinction between life meanings and human meanings if one's convictions incline in a rather different direction. A theist, for

example, might argue human meanings are real and are indicative of God's will for the world, and as such are, like life meanings, discovered and not invented. We may not be able (as we are with life meanings) to use empirical observation to do so, but we nonetheless come to recognize the independent existence of aesthetic, moral, and/or religious truths in a manner not too dissimilar from the way we come to recognize life meanings (i.e., via the successful implementation of appropriately calibrated perception, subject to a process of on-going clarification and correction).

Taken together, these (admittedly oversimplified) possibilities suggest answering the intertwined questions of whether there are such things as human meanings and whether they are discovered or invented depends on more than just differentiating between instrumental, third-person forms of expression and existential, first-person forms of expression. In other words, how we tackle this question(s) will itself inevitably depend on certain self-set standards we use to determine our answer.

So we have here a set of interdependent questions—a polycentric problem, as it were (cf. *LL*, 171-181)—having to do with our understanding of articulation, knowledge, and reality, and (especially) the way these inform and influence one another. We began by considering the distinction Taylor makes between different forms of articulation. From there, we shifted to related issues having to do with how different accounts of articulation shape our understanding of human knowing (and, in particular, whether or not what Taylor calls “human meanings” amount to what Meek calls “contact with reality”). This in turn uncovered questions about the relationship between knowing and being, and (especially) the reciprocation between them. I will in the remainder of this essay outline one way of approaching this cluster of issues that draws on both Meek and Taylor but also in some ways departs from them.

Meek and Taylor (and Polanyi and others) concur that one very revealing way of coming at this problem involves recognizing the essential contribution embodiment makes to all knowing and being. Meek, for example, affirms the “bodily rootedness of all thought” (*CWR*, 105), and highlights the role of embodiment in Polanyi's exposition of tacit knowing (*CWR*, 35-36), its importance in our awareness and understanding of other persons (*CWR*, 105-106), and the similarities (and differences) between Polanyi's account of indwelling and Merleau-Ponty's exposition of the “lived body” (*CWR*, 205-235). Taylor likewise draws on the work of Merleau-Ponty to highlight the way our “motor intentionality” enables the “gestalt perception of wholes and parts” in our environment (*LA*, 151). Embodiment, articulation, and meaning, he says, are inextricably bound up with one another; action, language, and purpose “dovetail, and complement each other” (*LA*, 43-44; cf. 161, 223-225).

One of the often unspoken but nonetheless consistent implications of this approach is that there's a distinction to be made between “the body” and “embodiment.” In other words, one thing both Meek and Taylor (and Polanyi and others) at

least indirectly suggest is that embodiment involves more than the body itself: the body is the central or principal *locus* of embodiment, but *embodiment* extends beyond the body. In addition to the disposition or action of the body itself, embodiment includes, for example (and in no particular order), the more instrumental forms of indwelling we adopt when we use tools, the more ritualized forms of indwelling we observe in our day-to-day interactions, and the more conceptual forms of indwelling we employ in our intellectual, moral, and aesthetic strivings. Just as our understanding always resists complete objectification (i.e., we know more than we can tell), so too does our embodiment elude comprehensive explication or even identification. If it makes any sense to speak of an “extended mind” (e.g., Clark and Chalmers 1998; Rowlands 2009; Rowlands 2013; et al), it is only because we have an “extended body.”

Embodiment, however, is essential for understanding not only knowing, but also being, and the possibility of accounting for embodiment in this expansive manner implies the need for an accommodating cosmology. This includes both an anthropology that resists every form of reductionism, as well as a corresponding account of the order(s) of the real to which the various dimensions or modes of human awareness, articulation, and action are attuned—or, perhaps better, *within* which they are enmeshed. In other words, attending to the importance of embodiment for apprehension and understanding leads naturally to consideration of the kind of stratified cosmology outlined by Polanyi in the latter sections of *Personal Knowledge* (see esp. *PK*, 347-405).

Meek acknowledges Polanyi’s “metaphysical doctrine of emergent levels of being,” but doesn’t seem terribly interested in it; she appreciates some aspects of it (e.g., the way it enables us to make sense of the relationship between body and mind; see *CWR*, 103-106), but also judges it to be one of the more “problematic” dimensions of Polanyi’s thought (*CWR*, 14; cf. 93-96). She recognizes some Polanyi scholars (e.g., Edward Pols) place more emphasis on Polanyi’s stratified cosmology than she is wont to do (*CWR*, 65-67), but ultimately she chooses not to employ it in any thoroughgoing manner.

Meek’s relative disregard of Polanyi’s stratified ontology is curious, not only because it seems Polanyi’s epistemology and his cosmology (inchoate though it may be) very much depend on one another, but also because just such a cosmology stands to make a significant contribution to her efforts. More specifically, it seems this vision of embodied knowers enmeshed within a hierarchically organized universe was what enabled Polanyi to mitigate the emphasis he was in *Personal Knowledge* forced to place on the role of commitment in knowing and being, and to explicate more fully the dynamics of the tacit dimension.

One potential implication of Polanyi’s vision of a hierarchically organized universe is that the notion of “contact” may actually not be the best way of describing our

experience of knowing. When we say we have made “contact,” we imply there exists a certain distance between ourselves and the objects of our awareness, an estrangement of sorts we overcome through the act of knowing. The image of embodied knowers embedded in a hierarchically organized universe, however, suggests knowing may have less to do with overcoming any presumed distance and rather more to do with the successful recognition of particular phenomena against a background of overwhelming intensity and depth. In other words, the challenge we face is not making “contact” with reality, it’s successfully disentangling the complexity of a reality that is far richer and more meaningful than we can ever know!

Even though hierarchical ontology is not an integral part of Meek’s project, she is clearly committed to an understanding of reality that affirms the real is ultimately beyond our complete understanding: her exposition of what she calls the “IFM Effect” (i.e., the “indeterminate future manifestations” successful apprehension of reality evokes) is central to her argument (see *CWR*, 77-78, 193-195). Taking her cue from D.C. Schindler’s reading of Balthasar, she suggests “the act of understanding is not unilateral but a co-act of different activities of the soul and the object in conjunction with one another” (*CWR*, 287). A particular *Gestalt* whereby we apprehend some part or aspect of the order of the real affords us a “piercing line of sight into the bottomless depths of the thing’s reality” (*ibid.*). Successful apprehension of the real elicits a host of unforeseen ramifications “because reality itself is pregnant with an inexhaustible fund of future prospects” (*CWR*, 293), and it is as we pursue greater understanding of these ramifications that we are led into deeper levels of participation and communion with the real.

So I find myself in agreement with many of Meek’s proposals, although it seems I’m more inclined than she is to value the potential contributions a hierarchical ontology like the one sketched above can make to a fulsome account of knowing and being. But what about the potential challenge presented by Taylor’s distinction between life meanings and human meanings? Does supplementing Meek’s argument with a bit of cosmology help address the question of whether or not the identification of human meanings is better thought of in terms of “invention” rather than “discovery”?

Another way of asking this question—one more consistent with the emphasis I have placed herein on embodied knowing and the stratified cosmology it implies—would be to inquire after the particular forms or modes of embodiment signified by each of the two kinds of meaning Taylor identifies. Do we, in other words, indwell and interiorize life meanings the same way we indwell and interiorize human meanings? Does each form of meaning signify a qualitatively distinct pattern of embodiment? Lurking behind these questions is still another: what is the nature of the correspondence between (on the one hand) physical forms of indwelling and interiorization and (on the other) conceptual ones? Is the relationship between them merely analogical, or

can we indeed conceive of embodiment as something that includes both the physical and the conceptual?

It's helpful to recall here that even those instances of embodiment we might be inclined to describe more so in physical terms nonetheless evince a conceptual aspect or dimension. The reason for this has to do with the purposeful character of every form of embodiment we adopt: we indwell and interiorize physical tools only in order to accomplish some purpose, and even if our proximate purpose is an ostensibly corporeal one there typically lies beyond it a more distal one(s) that can only be articulated in conceptual terms. Our goals and intentions, even the most quotidian, rarely present themselves in isolated or even discrete terms: we encounter them, as Taylor notes, "in interconnected skeins" (*LA*, 184). So it seems, rather than seeing conceptual forms of embodiment emerging out of physical ones, we should recognize these different forms or modes of embodiment (and thus the forms of meaning they signify) arise together.

David Kettle's (1994) use of figure-ground polarities as a way of making sense of human identity helps clarify this point. Kettle identifies three versions of figure-ground polarities: (1) spinning on an axis, (2) movement toward a horizon, and (3) floating in zero-G space. In the first instance, the (proximate) still point of the axis is the reference (i.e., the ground) we use to make sense of the (distal) movement of the environment around us (i.e., the figure). In the second instance, the (distal) still point of the horizon is the reference (i.e., the ground) we use to make sense of the (proximate) movement we experience (i.e., the figure). In the third instance, we experience a "*dual indeterminacy, out of which arise figure and ground in polar relation to one another...Figure and ground arise together, interanimating one another*" (Kettle 1994, 11; emphasis in the original). It is only this third image, Kettle suggests, that does justice to the way human beings recognize both the world as meaningful and themselves as "lively, responsive and responsible persons indwelling, participating in, creative and moral life" (Kettle 1994, 16).

Kettle's account nicely captures the image of the embodied knower for whom life meanings and human meanings arise "in relation to one another." This by no means allows us to say life meanings and human meanings are qualitatively identical or that we can collapse one into the other; rather, it reinforces an understanding of both that enables us to apply Polanyi's account of dual control to the actualization of meaning through articulation and enactment. The "marginal control" of higher-level human meanings organizes and elevates the constituent elements of the lower-level life meanings that in turn delimit the "boundary conditions" of the human meanings (cf. *M*, 49-50; *TD*, 41-45, 88; *PK*, 382). This is never only a question about the correlation of different kinds of concepts; understanding, articulation, and action, Taylor reminds us, are inextricably bound up with one another (*LA*, 43-44; cf. 161, 223-225). It is the relationship between these dimensions of our experience that constitutes our embodiment.

So strictly speaking, it's not the case that we "discover" life meanings and "invent" human meanings; rather, they inform and support one another. This is what Taylor means when he says discovery and invention "are two sides of the same coin" (*LA*, 178). What counts as a life meaning depends almost entirely on the (embodied) frame of reference that informs our sense of human meanings. Likewise, our sense of human meanings will always to some degree be circumscribed by the parameters signified by our life meanings (one might want to entertain transhumanist arguments regarding the possibility of our overcoming the current parameters of our life meanings, but I will not engage such arguments here, entertaining though they may be).

We don't, in other words, simply read off (life) meanings from a wholly independent, objective order with which we must first make contact, but neither do we simply impose (human) meanings on an otherwise incomprehensible horizon lacking any sign of purpose or significance. Rather, the apprehension and enactment of both life meanings and human meanings depends on our embodied participation in the superabundant meaning of the real. Our actions and articulations are less a matter of overcoming any presumed distance or estrangement between ourselves and reality, and more one of gathering together, out of the tremendous richness of the rational order of reality, the elements of our experience and coordinating them in a manner designed to testify, however imperfectly, to this fullness.

There are several additional issues that merit further consideration, but that I can at this point only mention in passing. Each of these issues deserves attention in and of themselves, but how we address any one of them will of necessity require attending to our assumptions about the others (i.e., the relationship or correspondence between them is itself an important question). First, the perspective outlined above is one ultimately organized, not around the body, but around the person. As important as the body is for understanding cognition, it is incapable of allowing us to say everything we need to say about human identity, understanding, and experience. Human embodiment, rather, signifies the existence of a particular form of being, one that includes both an individual dimension as well as a relational one, each supporting and sustaining the other. Polanyi's reorientation of epistemology around the image of the responsible agent is the harbinger of a similar reorientation in the area of ontology.

Second, recognition of the differences between the various modes of articulation and action available to us generates questions about the relationship between these different modes and the possibility of there being an overarching rationality evident in all of them. This is in some respects similar to the search for a "grand unified theory" in the study of physics. In classical thought, of course, the transcendentals of truth, goodness, and beauty were thought of as ultimately being coordinated in being itself. In modern thought, truth, goodness, and beauty have not only been estranged from one another, they are sometimes thought of as having to *compete* with one another. But we

are now beginning to recognize that progress in our understanding of any one of these dimensions of reality entails progress in our understanding of all of them.

Third, the diversity of human experience and the near-infinite range of articulations and actions that follow from different ways of understanding invite reflection on the challenges of pluralism. In some respects, this is but another way of describing the possibility of our recognizing an overarching rationality evident to varying degrees in all forms of understanding, articulation, and action. Both Meek (*CWR*, 260-277) and Taylor (*LA*, 320-331; cf. Dreyfus and Taylor 2015, 148-168) are sensitive to this issue. Relativism is incapable of providing any satisfactory resolution of this challenge (not least because it emphasizes the individual dimension of human identity at the expense of the relational), as are all forms of collectivism (not least because they emphasize the relational dimension of human identity at the expense of the individual). What's wanted is an account of human relations wherein unity and diversity do not compete with one another but mutually reinforce and complement one another.

Finally, the question of transcendence lies just over the horizon of all these issues. Again, both Meek (*CWR*, 278-297) and Taylor (*LA*, 76-82, 212-214, 274-280) recognize that analysis of articulation, understanding, and action naturally opens into questions about whether the natural order in some way signifies a supernatural one. Here, of course, the going can be especially rough, given the expectations and assumptions of the present age (e.g., Taylor 2007, 594-617). But (to paraphrase Augustine of Hippo) just as there is no subject that requires more diligence and no subject wherein an error can be more disastrous, so too is there no subject wherein proper understanding is more beneficial (cf. Augustine, *De trinitate* I.5). The fact all these issues almost necessarily evoke reflection on the possibility and nature of transcendent reality is itself significant, as is the fact a metaphysic organized around the concept of personal being will do a better job illuminating the nature of these issues and the correspondence between them.

I'm not sure I have proposed anything herein that is radically at odds with Meek's efforts in *CWR*. Perhaps I have done nothing more than rebalance the distribution of weight she places on the various inter-related themes at the heart of her account of realism. But my hope is this rebalancing will help further accentuate the forms of understanding, articulation, and action that provide the "epistemological therapy" we so desperately need (cf. Meek 2011, 1-30).

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THE FUNDAMENTAL QUESTION OF REALITY: A RESPONSE TO MY INTERLOCUTORS



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Keywords: Michael Polanyi, contact with reality, realism, reality, subsidiary/focal integration

ABSTRACT

In this essay I respond to the assessments of my Contact with Reality provided by Stewart, Héder, Takaki, and Grosso. I clarify the book's agenda as posing what I call the fundamental question of realism, i.e., whether reality is there. I distinguish this question from various realisms that describe specifics about what reality is like and how we through our knowing interact with it. This fundamental question exercises logical priority, has existential importance, and is timely in response to modernist epistemology. In addition to this question, my book also is motivated by what I call the "lodestar" of Polanyi's epistemology: subsidiary/focal integration, issuing in contact with reality, with concomitant indeterminate future manifestations. Various decisions I made in Contact with Reality and my engagement of Polanyi's work have generally been motivated by these two concerns. I conclude by responding selectively to specific matters raised by each interlocutor.

I appreciate the opportunity to devote this issue of *TAD* to my recent *Contact with Reality* (Meek 2017a; hereafter, *CWR*). I have found much value in pondering the contributions of my colleagues. I know from experience that I begin to know a book of my own only once it is published and I start to talk it over with others. Convivial conversation advances understanding, in the spirit of Polanyi himself; it is the hallmark of the Polanyi Society. Together we hope this conversation continues.

The Fundamental Question of Realism

The submissions from each of my interlocutors prompt me to ask afresh: in *CWR*, what was my central question about Polanyi and realism? What realism, and whose? Thus I begin with some comments that bear on all the responses taken together.

My central question, which *CWR* addresses, is *whether reality is there*. In any discussion of realism—or of anything—this question is fundamental. Let's call this the fundamental question of reality (hereafter, FQR). However, the ever-burgeoning plethora of “realisms” seems to overshadow it. Marjorie Grene wrestles with this matter and settles on the beautiful phrase, “the primacy of the real” (Grene 1995, chap. 6). It aptly expresses what I have been after all along.

I distinguish this “existential” (in more than one sense) question from specified positions of many theses of “realism”—positions that designate, rather, what reality is like or how our knowing engages it. The former might be categorized as metaphysical realism (or just metaphysics); the latter might be called epistemic realism. As per the title of my 1985 dissertation, I considered the FQR a matter of epistemic realism (*CWR*, 11). However, it seems that many discussions espousing realisms of any sort actually bypass the FQR.

CWR makes it clear that the FQR has been the urgent question for me. It may be a “lowly” question, but I resist David Stewart's concluding assessment that it does not matter. It is lowly in the way that all fundamental philosophical questions are lowly. As one moves beyond skepticism, the FQR becomes a question of profoundest wonder: why is there something rather than nothing? How is it that I would be so blessed as to be apprehended by reality and to understand it? That's a posture worthy of a lifetime. The wonder grows with deepening understanding, as David Schindler argues in direct challenge to modernist epistemology and its bias against metaphysics (see Schindler 2013, esp. ch. 7). The FQR is the embarrassing question our modernist era characteristically bypasses. Raising it, as Polanyi does, and addressing it, as *CWR* does, matters strategically in our time.

To be sure, Polanyi himself never doubted reality is there. In this respect *CWR*'s agenda is not solely to represent his stance, but rather, as if by a magnifying lens, to focus its beams on the FQR. Polanyi at least raised the FQR, displaying throughout his work that it matters. For him it matters in science, in opposition to the socialization of science, in opposition to positivism, and in epistemology quite generally. This is what drew me to his work.

The FQR ought to be addressed before one offers specific accounts of realism or claims about the nature of reality. As with all fundamental questions, it would be effectively impossible to accord consideration of the question before taking up *life*. However, in life (in fact, *contra* Polanyi's claim, which Stewart notes) we must and can in some way use our spectacles to examine our spectacles, as Polanyi's own epistemology

demonstrates. What is more, Polanyi's sophisticated epistemology demonstrates I don't have to do this in order to be addressed by reality. In fact, my indwelt spectacles, even if impoverished or skewed, can still have positioned me in a manner soon to be overtaken by integrative insight, thanks to reality's generous overtures. So the FQR has logical, if not chronological, priority with respect to additional realist stances.

In Polanyi's thought, it is evident the answer to the FQR is *yes*, and that *one thing* shows this: *contact with reality*. It is not Polanyi's doctrine of levels, or his consideration of the growth of thought in society. It is not his conviction that people are more profoundly real than cobblestones; even a cobblestone will do it. These topics of course are germane to realisms of this or that sort and deeply intriguing. But this shows why in foregrounding the FQR I downplay these other important dimensions of Polanyi's thought. I remain taken with the wonder and witness of contact with reality and its unfolding implications.

How do we know that reality is there? We know reality is there because of the phenomenon, the event, of contact with reality. In our pursuit of the yet to be known, this is our common experience: an insight "breaks in" which irreducibly supersedes and transforms even my beginning stance, the parameters of my question, and even me along with it. Reality "is what obtrudes, fascinates, concerns me from the start and, so far, to the end, and it is also what has made and continues to make me who I am," says Grene (1995, 115). Reality, in its primacy, it turns out, contacts back—or, better, *first*. Reality itself, breaking in and apprehending me in the phenomenon of contact, directly addresses the fundamental question of realism (*CWR*, part two).

As a youthful Cartesian skeptic in the milieu of modernity, in my doubt of the real, I dismissed even my own bodily senses. So of course I did not trust or even see my common experience of insight. That is why Polanyi's authoritative witness to this phenomenon mattered deeply to me: he was a premier scientist speaking about his *expert* experience in scientific discovery. Discovery, of course, foregrounds the FQR in a way that the still dominating epistemic preoccupation with explicit explanation and justification precisely does not: the discoverer just is asking, "Is anything *there*?" Polanyi challenged a deadening approach to science itself that was actually marginalizing discovery as non-epistemic. Discovery is essentially fraught with the unformalizable. What discovery apprehends is "messy as you like, but real," as Grene says (1995, 114). To be an expert discoverer, Polanyi represents, is to love endlessly the feel of this question. It is to surrender to it, to trust it, to follow where it leads. But Polanyi's account shows that everyone lives this question in ordinary life; by nature humans long to know and understand. We experience the phenomenon of contact in every act of insight, from the simplest perception to the most sophisticated thesis.

To give oneself to the "yes" of Polyanian contact with reality is to be made over as a realist, released from what now appears a ludicrous skepticism. Recovering reality, as

per Polanyi, resolves the question of realism (*CWR*, chs. 12 and 14). I followed the lead of Hans Urs von Balthasar in saying life should make philosophers and realists of us all (*CWR*, 8). *CWR* contends it does so, with the therapeutic aid of Polanyi's epistemology.

Does the word "contact" imply distance, as Andrew Grosso contends? Granted, the word can sound distant and diminutive. However, when one considers Polanyi's distinctive use of it, one cannot miss its richness. Polanyi does not mean his phrase to describe a realist account so much as the event, an epiphanic encounter the knower undergoes, in which she is participatively present. I have suggested elsewhere that "engaging" and "unlocking" may be more apt to describe the phenomenon (Meek 2003; cf. Schindler 2015, ch. 4).

The Polanyian Lodestar

Polanyi's notion of contact with reality is embedded integrally in his insightful and innovative account of knowing as subsidiary/focal integration. Each anchors the other reciprocally—as knowing and being always do. He offers his epistemology to defend and accredit the unformalizability of the process, which he deems precious and critical to science and humanness. Polanyi's approach to both the FQR and knowing is to foreground what is happening in the act of insight. What happens when we know—when we discover? Knowing roots deeply in the unspecifiable; it launches toward the unspecifiable; it is deeply abetted and satisfied in the unspecifiable.

Over the decades-long interim that *CWR* bookends, I have focused on Polanyi's epistemology, teaching any number of people to identify, accredit, and implement subsidiary/focal integration in all their knowing ventures. For me, the lodestar of Polanyi just is subsidiary/focal integration (SFI), leading to contact with reality (*CWR*) with its telltale indeterminate range of future manifestations (IFM) and unspecifiable sense of the possibility: thus, SFI → *CWR* → IFM. This lodestar has been my launch-point for considering what reality is like—as over against Polanyi's doctrine of levels.¹

This sheds light on the authorial choices that shape *CWR*, and now my anticipated work. I acceded to the stipulations of my philosophy department, the prevailing winds of contemporary philosophy, as well as the ongoing concern of my Polanyi Society colleagues, to connect and commend Polanyi's work to the analytic tradition's epistemic and realist stances. *CWR* devotes multiple conversations to it, engaging major players in Polanyi's own time and currently, including, quite strategically, the influential and widely considered work of Charles Taylor. But by presumption the dominating analytic approach rejects the very challenge and reform Polanyi's lodestar brings to light: knowledge, to be knowledge, must be rooted integrally in and from the inarticulate. So my efforts have been received less than enthusiastically, just because of the unaccepted superiority of Polanyian epistemology. This was Polanyi's experience; and I cast chapter 13 of *CWR* as the difference Polanyi *would* make.

Continually drawn as I am to this lodestar of SFI → CWR → IFM, I intend to ask in *CWR*, “What is it about those IFMs?” What does the phenomenon of discovery say about the nature of the real? This avenue of inquiry is what led directly to my developing my own proposals about knowing and being: the claim that reality is person-like, and knowing is best construed as an interpersonal encounter (see Meek 2011). My direction moving forward, inspired by Grene’s ringing primacy of the real, thus inclines toward Schindler’s work on knowing and being. *CWR*’s final chapter is a fledgling’s first flight.

It’s evident throughout my work that I profess Christianity in its classic, historic expression. That means that I believe that God is real and most real. This is to say something definitive as an opening stance; definitively not a last word. I sense a deep resonance between his work and my religious profession, as do many other Polanyians. But this in itself is not to impose my version of Christianity onto his own (or that of others). It is not to bend his proposals to prove God is real. Polanyi’s own work doesn’t exactly narrow down the options. But neither does it reject such options preemptively. And it refuses to ensconce a relativistic claim that all comers are equally valid.

In order to hold truthfully to Polanyi’s innovative, modernism-dispelling epistemology, its implication must be embraced: we may not rule against certain dimensions of quest for reality as inaccessible or illegitimate. Nor should we stipulate a relativism that effectively disrespects those who disagree with us. Both of these actually commit the inconsistent (anti)metaphysical reification of modernism. The modernist claim that knowing is in principle not appropriate for theological inquiry is itself a theological claim. Polanyi’s epistemology directly challenges this modernist holdover, as does, I believe, his doctrine of levels. In fact, subsidiary/focal integration opens reality to the indeterminate—the farthest thing from subjectivity—unless of course one sees it as the subjectivity of an “other.” To seek understanding requires that we be continually open to the real beyond us.

Not ruling out God’s reality, then, is not to commit metaphysical reification (cf. Schindler 2013, ch. 4). In fact, it resonates with what Polanyi portrayed about subsidiary/focal integration, that it opens to the real in a way that is more honestly religious than modernist epistemology. He felt that his epistemology might be better for religion than any effort that religion might be able to carry out (*CWR*, 241). In this matter also I move out from this lodestar of Polanyi’s thought.

The Realisms

Before offering specific responses to my co-contributors, let me locate *CWR* with respect to various theses termed realisms. The FQR may be said to be *Polanyi’s realism* fundamentally, if not exclusively. This stance regarding the FQR may be deemed a *phenomenological realism*: it concerns the phenomenon of contact with reality. I have

called my own stance an *exuberant realism* to call attention to the FQR, to contact with reality's joyous IFM-fraught in-breaking, and to the abundant generosity of reality's contacting back (or first). I believe Takaki employs the term "*consequential realism*" to denote the phenomenon of IFMs; I would concur. The FQR itself might be considered an *epistemic realism*: in our knowing, we find reality to be there. It may be considered a *metaphysical realism*: reality is there independently of our knowing it. This of course should not be identified with the absurd claim that we can know it is there independently of our knowing it, nor with the denial that our knowing and reality mutually interact with and shape each other (Takaki's "semi-independence"). We can tell it is independently there, not because we step out of our skin or because we do not engage it, but because it answers back. Undeniably, it has a life of its own, not lessened by but rather showcased in our responsible involvement. Thus, the FQR is consistent with an *enactive realism* (Takaki) or a *participative realism* (Grosso); these are appropriate designations for Polanyi's realism and mine. It is entirely appropriate to designate Polanyi's an *emergent realism*; I do not at least currently designate my own that way. My realism could be called *personalist*; for developing realism out from the Polyanian lodestar has suggested to me that reality is person-like (see Meek 2011).

David James Stewart

David Stewart's fine synopsis of *CWR* dominates his contribution, which I appreciate as an approach. His overall assessment of the work is dismissive, however. This appears due in part to a few apparent misreadings of the text.² It is also evident my philosophical proclivities diverge from his own—one reason I have tried in this rejoinder to specify mine more starkly. It is to be expected that as a result Stewart judges *CWR*'s merits differently.

Stewart questions whether *CWR* in this form honors the ethos of the Polanyi Society, since it omits taking up discussions and proposals around realism evident in the more contemporary literature. This does indeed identify an editorial decision that remains uncomfortable, as well as an ongoing desire now that *CWR* has been published. There have, however, been a number of face-to-face conversations about related issues within the Society since 2000; I'm not sure Stewart has been involved in many of these discussions.

Stewart avers the main task of *CWR* should have been to show how Polanyi's realism stacks up against different forms of idealism. I appreciate his enthusiasm for chapter 13. However, his assessment of the book makes no mention of *CWR*'s exploration of Merleau-Ponty, Taylor and Dreyfus, Grene, or Schindler. It mystifies me that at least the engagement with Dreyfus and Taylor, enthusiastically continued by other respondents, does not count toward this agenda—not to mention the ponderous

chapters in the first part of *CWR* which Stewart wishes had been revised. Nevertheless, I look forward to Stewart's own contributions in this area.

Mihály Héder

I'm especially enlightened to read Mihály Héder's perceptions of my work. I note he finds my perception of Polanyi's value "romantic," jubilant about its liberating and healing effects: I plead guilty, as many students and conversation partners of mine will attest. Additionally, he notes the apparent mismatch between my own existential question about reality and Polanyi's utter confidence about reality, which I have addressed above.

Héder observes that *CWR* postures itself as offering a philosophical justification which Polanyi himself had not provided, one that now falls to the professional philosopher to supply. To be sure, I regret this remark, a sophomoric claim I overlooked in editing. But the savvy reader acquainted with the analytic philosophy of that time will rightly surmise this misconstrual tellingly reflects that milieu, my situation as a dissertation candidate in it, and the posture in which I was being groomed that I have long since revoked. However, in *CWR*, what I meant was that Polanyi offers no justification, not for realism, but rather for the reality statement—that contact with reality is characterized by indeterminate future manifestations. Héder proceeds to identify major discussions, such as Polanyi's critique of objectivism, his refutations of positivism and of reductivism, and his positive account of ontological levels, which constitute Polanyi's own justification of realism, or shifting of the burden of proof to anti-realism. I am indeed happy to accept this characterization, as *CWR*'s discussion implies.

I have spoken already to the concern about reified metaphysics. I do believe discovery uncovers *things* that are there, and avoids concocting *reifications* of things that are not. That's what discovery is about. To be a thing, as Aristotle argued long ago, is the wonder-full heart of metaphysics. Add to this that for Polanyi things include ones with active centers, as Héder notes, and you have a convivially personal metaphysics.

Finally, I am glad for Héder's claim that Polanyi is not the niche thinker we make him out to be. But nothing has changed my perception throughout the last forty years of always checking first a book's index for Polanyi's name and more often not finding it, and of talking mostly to people in ordinary walks of life. Speaking to an array of audiences as I do, I can reliably expect most present will have never heard of Polanyi or will not know his epistemology; thus, the great value of sharing it.

Kyle Takaki

Both Takaki and Grosso begin by attending not to *CWR* but to Charles Taylor, I note with humility. But I like that Takaki sees *CWR* as moving beyond Dreyfus and Taylor's *Retrieving Realism* by demonstrating the comparative superiority of Polanyi's

realism. I have much to learn as I continue to listen to Takaki's work. I appreciate that it probes how knowing works in science, including its intrinsic logical leap of levels (his "pluralistic heterarchical hierarchies") and how it intrinsically involves a knower rooted in reality engaging reality in a mutually reciprocal enactive realism.

Takaki's engagement of Polanyi's levels actually confirms my early uneasiness with the doctrine; it corroborates that Polanyi's "ontological equation," as a one-to-one correspondence, may not be valid. It is preferable to see that every act of coming to know involves a jump of levels. From this it may be inferred, not necessarily that there is a single hierarchy of them, but rather that reality itself self-discloses epiphanically. This is also a specific example of moving directly from Polanyian contact with reality to implications regarding what reality itself is like.

I will give further thought to Takaki's proposed spectrum of stances on realism—Taylor's, Takaki's, and Charles Lowney's emergence with risk. Takaki suggests mine is a middle position, offering this analysis to widen the conversation about realism.

I do not, however, care for the thought of reality as a working hypothesis, as Takaki names it. That doesn't seem something that Polanyi himself would say; it doesn't square with the passionate commitment to the as yet unrealized discovery that he is concerned to represent. I also note Takaki's use of the term "worldview." But I will need to understand what he is saying more deeply before I can respond properly. I do say more below about my beginning thinking regarding levels, which also bears on my response to Takaki's well-packed presentation.

Andrew Grosso

Andrew Grosso's approach perhaps most affirms and resonates with the actual arc of *CWR*'s unfolding. I have suggested above Grosso's critique of "contact as distance" can be met in a way that reveals Polanyi's and mine to be a participative realism. Grosso deals in the new work of Charles Taylor regarding language, *The Language Animal*. Judging from Grosso's description, Taylor's thesis displays philosophical commitments of a piece with those in *Retrieving Realism*, which *CWR* engages and challenges. The distinction between life meanings and human meanings reflect tacit commitments that continue to prevail in modernity.³ According to Polanyi, it is not *ever* the case that life meanings do not depend on hermeneutic forms of reasoning and articulation. Taylor's claims overlook Polanyi's distinctive and critical description of their status as *subsidiary*. From the standpoint of an impending discovery, just about everything is subsidiary, consenting to and standing readied for their own incipient transformation in the anticipated *Gestalt*. All that is subsidiary is bodily indwelt by me and my collaborators, along with all we have hitherto come to understand or misunderstand—our vision of reality, all language and meaning, and all hermeneutical, philosophical, and psychological commitments involved.⁴ Subsidiaries meld anticipatively which, when

they were focused on previously or in destructive analysis, are even contradictory. It is my endeavor in *CWR*, along with the opening reflections of this essay, to suggest Polanyi's unique account of knowing and contact with reality actually helpfully redraws such discussions.

Polanyi's Doctrine of Levels

I turn finally to the matter of Polanyian levels. Now as I discharge my existential quest and begin a wider philosophical life, I believe something like the doctrine of levels is both undeniable and fruitful. I do believe that the dynamic of discovery and insight itself just is an existential experience of the in-breaking of a higher level (see Meek 2017b). The apprehension of a *Gestalt* transforms the clues. To employ Schindler's language, the "higher" level is the other that generously self-discloses, gifting the one seeking the very conditions of possibility required for apprehension (Schindler 2013, ch. 2). As a concrete example, the birds in my yard must reveal to me how best to care for them as I attend to them; as another, a prospective friend or long-loved daughter must clue me in on how to care for her. All that Polanyi says about boundary conditions and principles of marginal control, the irreducibility of the higher to the lower, offers insight into the act of discovery. The act of discovery suggests the doctrine of levels—another launching out into reality from the notion of contact.

To my admittedly thus-far shallow understanding of Polanyian levels, I add that four things seem to have been especially important about them to Polanyi. One is the irreducibility of relative levels and their characteristic workings. A second is that the higher up you go, the more interpersonal the knowing becomes. I would say this suggests that there are no higher levels than are interpersonal; everything less personal would be a step back. It seems to me that Polanyi's epistemology displays knowing as just the work of the nexus of conditions that typify the personal/interpersonal level.

Third, for Polanyi the "beyond"—the next higher level—is somehow the most important and definitive thing about the lower levels—even when it has not yet been discovered. If, in knowing, the knower is on or in a lower level, by definition she'll need the gracious initiative of the higher even to sense its presence; and she can well anticipate that comprehending that level in principle exceeds her capacity. We must see knowing as "from-to and beyond"—integrally open to the other. Transcendence, by which I mean the necessary irreducibility and inscrutability of the next higher level from the one below, is utterly essential to Polanyi's account of knowing and of levels. The higher level can be seen to make the lower what it most characteristically is, even when it cannot yet (or ever can) be identified. The next level beyond is necessary. This also supports the claim that the act of discovery is actually the definitive window into epistemology.

Fourth, even as the level beyond is necessary to the lower, it is so in a manner that brings it to a freer, fuller flourishing as itself. This involvement is not dominating so much as evocative. Higher levels function less like a control and more as a personal other. This shows again how appropriate it is to view the higher levels as interpersonal.⁵

Conclusion

In conclusion, I once again express my thanks for this symposium on *CWR*, and for the substantial contributions of my interlocutors. I am grateful for the further thought and articulation they have already engendered, and I anticipate more to come as we all consider these issues further.

ENDNOTES

¹Additionally, *CWR* bears ample witness to the fact Grene deemed Polanyi's doctrine of levels a suspect part of Polanyi's work and strongly encouraged me away from it.

²With reference to the title of the second part of *CWR*, Stewart construes "re-calling" as a mere reference to the past, missing the richer meaning the hyphen introduces. Also, Stewart equivocates the word "epistemology" in the context of his claim *CWR* contradicts itself regarding Polanyi's contribution: he cites my claim Polanyi reinvented epistemology alongside my claim Polanyi's contributions have been more or less ignored in prevailing discussions (cf. *CWR*, 6, 135). The word refers in the one to an account of knowing, in the other to the general philosophical discussion.

³Schindler's thorough metaphysical work in his *Catholicity of Reason* uncovers the metaphysical commitments that predominate in modern thought and culture, including Taylor's distinction. Schindler also documents the massive change in the notion of causality that comes about at the hands of Galileo, a metaphysical move that delegitimizes metaphysics itself. See Schindler 2013, chs. 5 and 6.

⁴In fact, the undergirding subsidiary layer the *Gestalt* constitutes generously overlooks or supersedes certain mistakes we have made, the way "love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Pet 4.8 NRSV).

⁵Schindler (2013, 258) follows Balthasar and argues we must see the analogy of being (akin in some respect to Polanyian levels) as *katalogical*—not based "out of itself" but "gifted from another." This is in direct challenge to modernist epistemology.

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REVIEW ARTICLES

Dale W. Cannon and Ronald L. Hall, eds. *Recovering the Personal: the Philosophical Anthropology of William H. Poteat*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016. Pp. 219 + vii. ISBN 978-1-4985-4094-0. \$85.00.

PERSONHOOD IN A POTEATIAN, POST-CRITICAL VEIN

David Nikkel

Keywords: Cézanne, mindbod(il)y, person(al), post-critical, Poteat

ABSTRACT

This well-organized collection invites us to engage Poteat's post-critical understanding of personhood. The essays on philosophical anthropology call us to responsible personhood as they focus on various topics, including Poteat's teaching, the meaning of post-critical and how and when we should think critically, and the importance of place. The three essays engaging theology share a theme of our grounding through our embodiment in a relational, incarnational world. The final two essays, the last by Poteat, focus on Cézanne's paintings as a thick material and mental enactive mindbodily process, in which the paintings "think themselves" in Cézanne and in the viewer.

This collection of essays—primarily drawn from the 2014 conference “The Primacy of Persons: the Intellectual Legacy of William H. Poteat,” and divided into three sections (Philosophical Anthropology, Theological Considerations, and Aesthetic Considerations)—is well organized as a whole, as are the individual contributions. There is much to commend in each of these essays, so this review can only touch on some of their strengths. Polanyi scholars will find much of interest in Poteat’s development and expansion of Polanyi’s work, and those engaged in scholarship on Poteat’s work itself will also find this book richly rewarding.

In the introductory chapter, the editors Dale Cannon and Ronald Hall succinctly set out what they take to be the most salient points the various essays attempt to make. Following that, Bruce Haddox and Edward St. Clair paint a portrait of Poteat as a teacher and a mentor who took a very personal approach to those roles. Haddox relates an incident that archetypically displays the post-critical and personal approach Poteat employed. Indeed, Haddox seemed to set himself up perfectly for a Poteatian encounter. Being called upon to identify himself, Haddox responded in an impersonal analytical philosophical manner. To this, Poteat reacted with a long silence and finally queried, “Haddox? Is that who you really are?” (12). I believe all of us who engaged in the classroom with Poteat and his philosophical anthropology were invited and (willingly) compelled to grapple with who each of us was as a responsible human being.

Dale Cannon neatly summarizes various uses of the term “post-critical” and hits the mark when he says being post-critical means acknowledging and accrediting “the fiduciary foundations of our knowledge...and our reliance upon the traditions and languages” of our “apprenticeships” and as recognizing “the priority in reasoned enquiry of methodological faith and trust to methodological doubt and suspicion” (27). Cannon also rightly locates the historical context of post-critical thinking as absolutely critical (pun intended): it represents a reaction to the critical models of thinking formulated most influentially by Descartes and Kant, indeed, a hoped-for paradigm shift (24-25). Cannon notes that both Polanyi and Poteat distinguish the pre-critical from the post-critical (24), and suggests it is appropriate for a post-critical thinker to be critical “in a different way” (31-32). In this context he includes a valuable quotation from Poteat’s *Recovering the Ground*: “Criticism is the tacit, mindbodily recognition of incoherence in the course of my quest of coherence. This criticism is incessantly being carried out instantaneously [i.e., pre-reflectively]” (32). While not disagreeing with Poteat and Cannon here, I would suggest that the particularities of when to be critical in contexts where some find it possible to be (more or less) pre-critical become quite complicated. In deciding, for example, the truth of certain scientific and historical claims and how these may square with the truth of scripture and tradition for a religious believer makes it impossible to be a totally “innocent” pre-critical believer. Reflective thinking of some sort becomes requisite in one’s quest for coherence—even for the fundamentalist who wants to remain pre-critical. We can also refer to traditions of racism, sexism, and other alleged “isms,” to which many of us would find it appropriate to apply critical and reflective reason. Would it be a worthwhile project to suggest guidelines for when the post-critical thinker needs to be critical, or is this something that needs to be decided piecemeal?

Ronald Hall invites us to “critically recollect” our history and pre-history. By “pre-history” I take Hall to be referring to the human history that we have not immediately or directly experienced, yet which crucially forms us and informs us in our personal

circumstances. I agree with Hall that the responsible person needs to own that history and its contingency. My own understanding of “pre-history” is slightly different than Hall’s: I think of it in terms of the pre-linguistic, pre-reflective dimensions of the human mindbody (that have evolved for us as a species) that not only underlie our language, but remain part of the cohesion and meaningfulness of human life even after we have acquired language. While agreeing with Hall on the centrality of language for human culture and history and rejecting with him nostalgia for a state of animal or childhood innocence (56), I regard the non-linguistic dimensions of our human mindbodies as sharing with speech “the possibility of [providing] stability... *within* contingency” (53). So the following declaration by Hall seems to overstate the case: “Without speech, contingency would be unbearable, even terrifying” (53). I do not believe that animal life and human infant life are normally “unbearable.” Hall also somewhat overdraws our radical historical contingency: he cites Heidegger’s notion of being thrown into this world (52), which seems to contrast with Poteat’s focus on our feeling at home in the world when we live from our mindbodily integrity. Yet I agree with Hall that our culture (and probably each of us as individuals) tends to crave certainty, when instead we should recollect “the spirit of childlike trust and acceptance” in the midst of life’s radical contingency, as did Bill Poteat.

In writing about “The Primacy of Persons,” David Rutledge effectively conveys modernity’s displacement of persons and the loss of a sense of place. He catalogues from literature—Auden, Donne, Kafka, Riesman, Salinger, Sartre, Dostoevsky, and Camus—depictions of the alienation, anxiety, despair, and “restless passion” that stem from this loss (74). He traces the epistemological and ontological roots of this displacement especially to the exteriorization of space revealed artistically in art of the Italian Renaissance and philosophically in Descartes’ doubting individual *cogito* that relies upon mathematical rationality. Rutledge shows a knack for enlisting some of Poteat’s most characteristic and striking quotations, including: 1) “Persons have places” (73; *The Primacy of Persons and the Language of Culture*, 33); 2) “It is the perennial temptation of critical thought to demand total explicitness in all things, to bring all background into foreground, to dissolve the tension between the focal and the subsidiary by making everything focal” (72; *Primacy of Persons*, 261); 3) “In my mother’s womb, within which her beating heart rhythmically pumps the blood of life through my foetal body, forming itself toward my primal initiation into the very foundation of my first and most primitive cosmos” (78; *Polanyian Meditations*, 22-23).

Ronald Hall argues convincingly that, while Polanyi’s focus was clearly and chiefly epistemological, Poteat went beyond Polanyi with a primary focus on ontology and anthropology. He pithily characterizes modern epistemology and ontology: “modernity has given us a picture of ourselves as ghosts in machines, and ultimately as machines” (86-87). A nice touch is his recognition of Romanticism as held captive to modern

dualism, or at least to one of its poles. Romanticism counters the Enlightenment split of reason over emotion, but Hall notes its “assault(s) on the adequacy of ordinary speech, preferring music, or language-as-lyrical-poetry to express spirit’s transcendence” (97). While it lies all in parentheses, I do take issue with one paragraph, where Hall finds “mind-body” more accurate (though less forceful) than Poteat’s “mindbody.” There he describes our minds as “distinct but inseparable from our bodies.” For me, our phenomenal bodies are not clearly distinct from mind; a psychosomatic unity pertains where my bodily acts are conscious, intentional, and meaningful. I also demur from Hall’s description in the same paragraph of Poteat’s quote “muscles make assumptions” as “unhappy” (94). Though metaphorical here, Poteat I believe accurately expressed the meaningful tacit role of our bodies in activities like playing the piano or tennis.

Although Poteat was seldom explicitly theological beyond his early career, the next three chapters fruitfully explore some of the theological possibilities in Poteat’s work. James Stines examines how Poteat overcomes Cartesianism through engaging Kierkegaard. This entails a reversal of the Cartesian *cogito*, from “I think, therefore I am” to “I am, therefore I think” (111). The person who is in Christ will refuse dualism and related monisms and instead “condescend to God’s vulnerability, to God’s embodiment, to Incarnation, to real presence, to the enacted ‘I’” (107). I would caution that much of human sinfulness has little to do with the reflective mind in relation to God and much to do with pre-reflective selfishness.

Elizabeth Newman nicely captures the modern and postmodern loss of place with a comparison of Poteat’s negative experience of a shopping mall as involving nothing particular and personal with Steve Jobs’ celebration of the sameness of malls around the world. She invokes the Christian doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* to counter the restlessness and inability to feel at home in the world under the modern picture of humanity. This picture inverts creation *ex nihilo* with the belief “that we create ourselves out of nothing: no prior history, story, or tradition is necessary, much less our own created being in the world” (121). Even as the early church used the doctrine to counter Gnostic understandings of the world and humanity, Newman invokes the tradition to affirm the goodness of embodied or incarnational being in the world.

Melvin Keiser begins his chapter with an analysis of Pascal’s and H. Richard Niebuhr’s influence on Poteat (130-36), and ends with a call to attend “to feeling in the depths of my tacit dimension” (144). Keiser notes a passage in “Persons and Places” (41) which struck me and strikes Keiser as uncharacteristic of Poteat’s project as a whole: “The incarnation faith deprives a man of his place in nature, in the city, in historical memory, in order to give him a place before the Lord” (138). Keiser argues that Poteat did not adequately draw upon Pascal at this point, as “incarnation here would seem to be no longer the divine dwelling in us as we dwell bodily in the world but a means to stand before God beyond the world” (138). Newman in her essay

includes a counter Poteatian quote: “Nature is indeed our mother” (123). And Keiser counts that Poteat fifteen times in *Recovering the Ground* refers to Paul’s characterization of God as “[that] in which I/we live and move and have my/our being” (137, 145), which is music to the ears of this professed panentheist. In our grounding in our mindbodily orientation to the world we are at the same time grounded in God. One may discern a polarity, or better a complementarity, in Poteat’s theology between God as person, relatively transcendent, who speaks to or in us, and God as more transpersonal and immanent, experienced “in Silence,” a term and practice Keiser invokes from his Quaker heritage (142-43).

As Cannon and Hall suggest in their introductory chapter, Kieran Cashell’s “Post-Critical Aesthetics” is in some ways the most original essay in the collection to comment on Poteat’s project. Cashell demonstrates impressive breadth and depth in his knowledge of contemporary theory of aesthetics and art. Tellingly, Cashell relates Poteat’s conversation with Moustakas, whose *Alexander the Great* sculpture is pictured on the cover of the book and which became the occasion for Poteat’s “Orphic dismemberment.” Regarding his sculpture *Bird in Flight*, Moustakas speaks about his imagination as a mental state, as if he implemented an idea in his head through a more or less incidental medium. Poteat however sees imagination, to use Cashell’s words, as “irreducibly physical and mental,” “intertwining the margins of body and material finally into a Mobius strip of vital, reflexively interconnecting forms” (159). Cashell analyzes at length why Cézanne captured the interest of Merleau-Ponty and in turn Poteat. At bottom “for Poteat and Merleau-Ponty before him, Cézanne’s art represents an instance of phenomenology articulated through the pictorial medium of painting” (162), where thought, perception, feeling, bodily action, and materiality are not separated but mutually shape an enactive process. Cashell engages many thinkers on Cézanne’s uniqueness in terms of the tactile nature of his paintings, their dynamic nature, the absence of linear perspective and related conventions, and the tension between the subject of a painting and its materiality as medium. Cashell argues that Poteat’s unique contribution to this conversation lies in his insight that “the paintings *think* themselves in us in an analogous manner to the trees, river, mountain, boulders, and apples that dwell in the painter’s ‘mindbodily’ sentience and imagination when he positioned himself at the optimum place to experience them” (172). Cashell suggests this insight should not be interpreted as saying we duplicate the artist’s experience, but rather become aware of our own mindbodily engagement with reality when we allow Cézanne’s paintings to “think themselves in us” (172).

It is fitting that this book concludes with a piece by Poteat himself, apparently the last one he wrote and the one Cashell engages. Also appropriately, even as Poteat regarded Renaissance painting as signaling an ultimately insane picture of ourselves and the world, this final piece by Poteat concerns how Cézanne’s painting signals the

reversal of that picture. Near the beginning Poteat heralds this reversal: “The weight and plenitude of the landscapes and still lifes imparted by the shadow of Cézanne’s mindbodily presence in the world is there as well for anyone who will behold and be beholden to them, if he/she will but wait until the painting ‘thinks itself in [him/her]’” (189). This piece includes perspicuous analysis and criticism of linear perspective and its relatives in terms of Western artistic and intellectual history. It concludes with analysis of some of Cézanne’s works and words relative to materializing sensations or perceptions, to touching the real through his mindbodily presence in and to the world. A portion of Poteat’s closing paragraph admirably summarizes the significance of Cézanne’s work for Poteat’s own project:

We become active participants in a world comprised of Paul Cézanne, his palette, his brushes, his brush strokes and his world; we are incorporate—not only, not even primarily, through our sense of sight, but with all the sensory and meaning-discerning powers of our mindbodies—in his *own* embodiment of the numinous power of the Real. With a single apple he strikes through the mask of modern subjectivism to the very Ground of the world (201).

POLANYI FOR HUMANISTS: AN APPRECIATION OF THE WORK OF WILLIAM H. POTEAT

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ABSTRACT

William Poteat's work took Michael Polanyi's post-critical thinking into humanistic fields. This paper explores some of the reflections of current philosophers on Poteat's contributions.

Why should people who take philosophical inspiration from Michael Polanyi be interested in a collection of papers about the work of William H. Poteat? One answer is that Poteat was so instrumental in introducing Polanyi's work to Americans, but another and more important one is that Poteat's own work inflected the post-critical insights of Polanyi in ways particularly useful in the humanities. It gave them a heuristic boost in those domains of discourse. Such wider considerations of Polanyi's work have loosened the constraints of modernism in many fields and deepened an appreciation for how widely applicable his epistemological insights are. Poteat is preeminent among those who have redirected Polanyi's wake-up call to the sciences to the more directly humanistic studies he worked in.

Most of the essays in this volume come from a celebration held at Yale University in June of 2014, a celebration by Poteat's former students on the occasion of his papers being archived at Yale's Divinity School. The essays include seven examinations of his philosophical anthropology, three considerations of post-critical theology, and one that explores post-critical aesthetics. The final essay is Poteat's previously unpublished paper, "Paul Cézanne and the Numinous Power of the Real." These essays, especially those by Bruce Haddox and Edward St. Clair, include richly evocative reminiscences of what it was like to be Poteat's student. They also, especially those by Dale Cannon and Ron Hall, include fine expositions of Polanyi's thought. I, however, am going to pay special attention to those elements of the essays that demonstrate ways Polanyi's insights were developed by Poteat.

The essays by Cannon and Hall include careful exposition of the term "post-critical" as Polanyi understood that term. These essays also present a widened scope for how we think of the "from" or tacit pole of awareness in Poteat's work, a scope that emphasized the historical roots of the personal modality of being, particularly its nexus

of personal relationships and places that ground our concrete sense of who we are. Cannon, in his “Being Post-Critical,” focuses on Poteat’s brand of post-critical thinking as one that highlights the oral/aural experience, the recovery from the Cartesian abstractions of spatiality for our sense of place, and the recovery of Hebraic metaphors of being, presence and historicity, among other themes. Hall’s “Critical Recollection” redresses the relative lack of attention he thinks Polanyi scholars have given to tradition in the body of our tacit awareness. He finds Poteat “urging us to embrace the radical historical contingency of our mindbody existence” (52).

Bruce Lawrence’s paper, “The Genealogy of Poteat’s Philosophical Anthropology,” traces the origins of Poteat’s doubts about critical reasoning to his doctoral work on Pascal. Pascal awakened him to an alternative to Descartes’ mathematical grasp of the world. What interested Poteat particularly was not so much the epistemological contrast but the cultural one. He observed that taking Descartes seriously has led our intellectual life into a kind of “cultural insanity” that all but obliterates the more rooted (what he would later call “mindbodily”) sensibilities that Pascal celebrated.

Lawrence shows how Poteat’s critique of modernity was honed early in a 1954 review of Karl Popper’s *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. Though he thought Popper came tantalizingly close to appreciating the limits of critical thought, he found Popper oblivious to the more basic reality beyond our explicit grasp. About thirty years later, in his *Polanyian Meditations*, Poteat identifies a similar obliviousness in the similarly “tantalizingly close” approach to rendering the world in language taken by Walter Ong. Ong was interested in the relation between orality and literacy, but what he overlooked according to Poteat was “a latent logos common to my gesturing and speaking that is archaically rooted in my mindbody” (“body language,” as it were).

The focus in “The Primacy of Persons,” by David W. Rutledge, is on the language Poteat uses. It is, admittedly, rhetorically rich, so rich indeed that this reviewer finds that keeping the OED at hand while reading him is half the fun! For some, such a painterly style of writing might suggest affectation, but that is not true in Poteat’s case. It is rather his way of putting us in mind of the pernicious shift language usage suffered in modernity, a shift to forms of truth-telling that are estranged from the mindbodily awareness earlier usage was rooted in. Using words that highlight their own etymology is one way to recapture what was lost when language got “fixed in printed form by reflection” (77). Polanyi placed persons at the center of knowing. Poteat places them in a tradition where speech patterns of pre-literacy are on display in the original meanings of what they say. Such speech-rooted language, he says, “has the sinews of our bodies” (79). Rutledge’s essay, along with several others in this volume, gives us salutary examples of how we can reinstall ourselves in place (rather than space) as the ground of our personal being.

Ronald L. Hall's "Dethroning Epistemology" invites us to consider how Poteat's development as a philosophical anthropologist took a turn that in some respects escapes Cartesian thought more radically than Polanyi did. For the latter, knowing *that* is grounded in knowing *how*, and this insight led him to link ontology to a non-Cartesian account of knowing. While Poteat celebrated this epistemological corrective to critical thought, he eventually came to be skeptical about any ontology rooted in an account of knowing. As Hall puts it, he was awakened "from his epistemic obsession" (86) by an encounter with a Greek sculptor named Evangelos Moustakas. This encounter led him to dethrone epistemology "along with its metaphysical mistress" (91), a move Hall calls "Poteat's most subtle and profound philosophical coup" (91). After that awakening he resisted the inclination to reduce all consciousness to modalities of knowing. Instead, he proffered the Christian concept of the incarnation as positing a radically new way of understanding human existence as personal. What was incarnate was the Word; it is thus language that holds spirit and flesh together in a dialectical tension so as to enable us to mindbodily negotiate our world. The result was to redefine the project of philosophical anthropology as one of "linguistic phenomenology" (87) and to find in the biblical idea that human beings were created *imago Dei* an understanding of the power of speech as analogous to God's creative word.

Poteat chose to teach not in Duke University's philosophy department but in its Divinity School, no doubt for a variety of reasons. Certainly his sense of vocation involved opening up new ways of thinking for future church leaders, but James W. Stine's "Personhood and the Problematic of Christianity" finds in his Christian commitment another prompt for his awareness of the "Cartesian absence of reconciliation between subject and object" (105). He tells us, "'The Christ' symbolizes a unification or reconciliation of the so-called objective and external realm of history and its language of ordinary historical discourse with the subjective or personal and internal realm of language for discourse about profound events or changes and states within ourselves in the realm of freedom" (105). Stines finds the same rejection of the mind/body dualism drawing him to the later Wittgenstein, who "was on the right track in showing how words and world come together" (106). But he thinks it was probably Søren Kierkegaard who most enriched his conceptual alternative to critical thought by insisting that "the truth is not first of all the answer to an objective 'what'; rather, it is first of all in you and me in the 'how' of relation" (107).

Theological debates tend to be conducted in timeworn doctrinal language, and because he did not usually reason in those terms, Poteat was sometimes dismissed by his colleagues as a non-theologian. But Elizabeth Newman, in her "Incarnational Theology," sets that matter straight by pointing out the engagement between two central Christian doctrines—creation *ex nihilo* and the Incarnation—and the core insights of post-critical thinking as Poteat focused them in his reflections on the "mindbody."

By inseparately conjoining the two terms modern philosophy has systematically separated, Poteat makes being and goodness intrinsic to one another, indicating “that logic, orientation, and purpose are integral to all being” (122). This reveals as a conceit the existentialist notion that we shape ourselves in a value-creating way (the value is already there) and allows for the divine action to be in and through incarnate action.

R. Melvin Keiser’s “Toward a Post-Critical Theology” takes up Newman’s question in a slightly different way. He puzzles over the turn Poteat made from his early theological musing (often in response to his work with H. Richard Niebuhr at Yale Divinity School) to his later reluctance to enter into explicitly theological reflections. In a delightful anecdote, he reflects on the humbling experience of being “whacked” (140) by Poteat’s Zen-master technique of catching him up short when his critical habits led him to objectivize religious truth. Perhaps the master saw the primary challenge of disabusing budding young theologians of their habits by getting them to concentrate first and foremost on how radically different post-critical thinking is before they ventured into matters of religious truth. But even when the technique is successful, it leaves unanswered the question of how we are to make first-person, mindbodily faithful claims un beholden to the criteria of critical thinking. Kaiser’s reflections on this topic are deeply personal and highly tentative, but very helpful in getting us to put the question of theology properly.

The hold of dualistic thinking is tenacious, to be sure, and in many fields it remains unchallenged. But Kieran Cashell, in her “Post-Critical Aesthetics,” reminds us how that hold is loosening, not only in philosophy—where Polanyi’s work complements the phenomenological movement in beginning to weaken it—but also in the visual arts. The paintings of Paul Cézanne in particular have been recognized as visualizing the world as it appears without the subject/object dichotomy. Merleau-Ponty, in his essay “Cézanne’s Doubt,” finds in Cézanne “the same kind of direct, primordial contact with quotidian reality that he was using the phenomenological method to describe in his own research” (161). Poteat too, perhaps initially at Merleau-Ponty’s prompting, found in the painter not only a deconstruction of linear perspective—that visual emblem of modernity—but a visual resolution of the problem of dualism. His work seemed to reveal “what it is *like* to see...[and] what it is *like* to feel” (172). Cashell explores Poteat’s fascination with Cézanne “as an agency of *anamnesis* for his project of recollecting the ground of mindbodily being” (179).

Thus she provides us with an introduction to the final essay of the collection, Poteat’s own essay on Cézanne, “Paul Cézanne and the Numinous Power of the Real,” which was his attempt to capture the mysterious hold Cézanne’s paintings had over him. For him, the rupture they represent in the history of painting is parallel to the one post-critical thinking represents in the history of traditional philosophy. Poteat’s challenge is to show how Cézanne’s paintings can convey the *haecceity* of things (their

thisness) as opposed to their *quiddity* (their *whatness*). By the very nature of the task, it is as much evocation as explanation, and this he does in a wide variety of ways—by comparing a camera-eye view of the Grand Canyon with the mindbodily eye-view, by comparing the retinal impressions of the impressionists with how the “sensations of the world of nature offered to its own immanent *logos* clues for a dynamic integration to an oppugnant thisness” (194), and by comparing perspectival presence to the eye with presence “in obedience to *logos* that never loses its dependence upon and fidelity to its radix” (196).

How appropriate that this jewel box of a book should culminate with such a rich example of how Poteat’s language itself, plumbed to its premodern depths, can help us find our way back to where we have been all along, but awakened from the amnesia modernity has fostered in us and refreshed for the tasks of weaning our intellectual world in its many facets from the deadly fixations that threaten to blind it to the obvious.

