



THE JOURNAL *HUMANITAS* AS AN INCUBATOR OF POLANYI'S IDEAS



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ABSTRACT

Michael Polanyi, along with colleagues at University of Manchester, worked to produce the journal Humanitas, A University Quarterly for two years just after the end of World War II. This essay outlines how Polanyi's two articles in Humanitas and other work on the journal reflect Polanyi's developing philosophical perspective.

Introduction

Michael Polanyi, along with several other Manchester colleagues, worked, in the mid-forties, on the journal *Humanitas, A University Quarterly*. However, there were only a total of eight *Humanitas* issues published between the summer of 1946 and the autumn of 1948. Apparently, this journal project folded for lack of financial support.¹ The Scott and Moleski Polanyi biography says only a little about Polanyi's work on *Humanitas* and Nye's *Michael Polanyi and His Generation* does not mention this journal. However, Polanyi's work on *Humanitas* came in an important period in which Polanyi's ideas are developing and Polanyi's articles in the journal and other work on the journal reflect this, as my discussion in this essay will demonstrate.²

Polanyi's Interest in Academic Journals

Until about 1950, Michael Polanyi published many articles and letters in science journals. Polanyi's philosophical writings make clear that he held the process of reviewing articles and debating research results in such journals as part of the public conversation among scientists through which science progressed. But soon after he came to the UK, Polanyi's interests broadened and he also began to publish in a variety of non-scientific journals particularly on topics in economics, political philosophy, and politics. In some cases, such as that of the British weekly *Time and Tide* (discussed in detail in Mullins 2019), Polanyi developed special relationships with editors that apparently gave him opportunities to place articles and reviews. Polanyi seems to have regarded the lively discussions in non-scientific journals as functioning somewhat like the discourse

in scientific journals. Such discussions were a part of the public conversation about matters of importance to those who took on responsibilities for shaping the larger emerging culture.

Michael Polanyi also apparently was eager to play an active role in establishing and managing some new non-scientific journals. Polanyi was in correspondence with Hayek around 1940 about establishing a new journal focused on political liberalism (see the discussion in Jacobs and Mullins 2016, 112-114). Interest in such a journal apparently originated at or just after the Good Society Conference in 1938 where Polanyi presented a version of his economics education film. Hayek and others wanted to create a new international journal and, when Polanyi indicated interest, he was added to the group. He and Hayek discussed the appropriate name for the new journal and Polanyi tried to put Hayek in contact with a possible funding source. This journal project, however, never got off the ground.

In 1945, Polanyi put together his own proposal for a new journal focused on liberal political philosophy and circulated the proposal to several of his colleagues whom he anticipated might join him in putting together this journal (see Mullins 2021 forthcoming for an extended discussion of this journal project). This proposed journal was first called “Our Times” (Box 4, Folder 12, MPP) but apparently later was re-titled “Civitas” and Polanyi gave to Richard Gelwick a redacted copy of the “Civitas” proposal in the early sixties (see “Civitas 46:”). Polanyi seems at first to have mistakenly believed this journal could be funded by the Manchester Literary and Philosophy Society. Later he encouraged Karl Mannheim to seek support from Routledge but Routledge was not interested. This journal proposal is a particularly interesting mid-forties document since it outlines both weaknesses of and contemporary challenges to liberalism and Polanyi’s aspirations to reform liberalism. But this journal project, like the earlier project with Hayek, also never got off the ground.

In the forties, *Humanitas* was the only new journal project that Michael Polanyi worked on that did in fact at least for a short two years turn out diverse and interesting issues that included writing by Polanyi and others.

The Launching of *Humanitas*

The inaugural issue of *Humanitas* describes the journal as a “modest instrument” helping the university as a whole “face the task of reintegrating the material and spiritual aspects of society.”³ But this statement also affirms that, in the post-World War II environment, it was imperative to recognize “a crisis of values” before any constructive moves could be made to “arrest the drift to complete chaos.” It was noted that at that time what was needed was for human beings “to achieve some agreement concerning the ends they seek.” The universities were challenged steadfastly to stand for “super-material values” and to be places in which “tradition must be revitalized and developed, before being handed on.” In a word, *Humanitas* in its inception was a journal oriented toward supporting the university in its post-war mission as a vital institution cultivating sensitive, reasoned discourse about human life and human society. Under this broad rubric, the eight issues of *Humanitas* (the final publication was a double issue, numbers 7 and 8) published a strikingly diverse array of material, including reviews of publications in different areas, poems, and articles on art, literature, culture, politics, economics, science, philosophy, religion, and the role of the university.

Polanyi may not have had any direct connection with the production of the first Summer 1946 issue of *Humanitas* but he certainly was aware of the new journal and was a supporter. In a 25 June 1946 letter to Kathleen Bliss, Polanyi notified Bliss about *Humanitas* and says the new journal was started by a group of Manchester students which he praises as a “group which wants to re-conquer spiritual ground in secular

life” (Box 5, Folder 2, 0259, MPP). Bliss worked with J. H. Oldham and was, like Polanyi, a member of Oldham’s discussion group the Moot (Mullins 1997). Polanyi seems to have written this letter to Bliss to apologize for missing the last meeting of the Moot, but the focus of the letter is to encourage Bliss to support *Humanitas*.⁴

Polanyi knew and worked with some of those involved in putting together the inaugural Summer 1946 issue and he soon became directly involved in the new journal’s work. His essay “Why Profits?” was published in the second (Autumn 1946) issue. Six of the eleven contributors to the first issue are identified on the table of contents page as student contributors. *Humanitas* was, as Polanyi’s letter to Bliss suggested, a student-initiated project. Apparently, the launching of *Humanitas* was a project that sought broad support from the University of Manchester. Polanyi saved a flyer to the university from John Stopford, the Vice-Chancellor. This undated document (which apparently was written and circulated prior to the then anticipated Spring 1946 first issue) announced the forthcoming journal and included the anticipated editorial statement. Stopford identified this statement as “having gone to the heart of the sickness of our civilization” and to “have seen most clearly the role which the University can and must play in restoring a healthy society” (Stopford flyer, Box 5, Folder 4, 0518, MPP).

One of the students who wrote a review in the inaugural issue (and who apparently was among the core group of students who initiated the journal project), as well as material for later issues was Robert Marcus, who came from a Hungarian family and took a Manchester degree in chemistry in the mid-forties. Subsequently, Marcus continued his education, studying classics, philosophy, and theology, and eventually became an eminent Augustine scholar. Marcus remained a Polanyi contact at least until the mid-sixties. Brian Gowenlock reported that Marcus joined him and Michael Polanyi at an Oxford conference in the mid-sixties that featured a speech by a then-prominent Christian theologian, John A. T. Robinson; Marcus and Polanyi subsequently became engrossed in a discussion of matters germane to medieval theology and philosophy, which Gowenlock found beyond his reach. Gowenlock suggested that Marcus, after working with Polanyi and taking a chemistry degree, briefly worked in industry in part of 1946, but was soon doing graduate work with the philosopher Dorothy Emmet, Polanyi’s friend and sympathetic colleague (see the online obituaries and memorial articles on Marcus [listed in References, consulted 23 May 2021]).

Dorothy Emmet, Michael Polanyi, Karl Popper and *Humanitas*

Dorothy Emmet wrote a review of Karl Popper’s *The Open Society and Its Enemies* for the inaugural issue of *Humanitas*. Her careful discussion, titled “Totalitarian Philosophers?” (1946b, 30-34), is sharply critical of Popper’s book. She points out that Popper’s idea about open and closed societies takes and twists, for rather different purposes, an earlier distinction Bergson made between open and closed moral systems. She notes that the main purpose of the book seems to be to contend that “the teaching of certain great men of the past” (30)—and this includes Plato, Aristotle, and Hegel—have impeded the development of an open society in which “humaneness and reasonableness” (30) prevailed. Emmet argues that Popper’s case is a rather sloppy one that ignores what we know about history and the context in which these and other figures lived and wrote. Effectively, she contends Popper is unfair and unbalanced in his treatment of figures like Plato. She questions Popper’s notions about “historicism” which he seems to use as a term to castigate thinkers who make any claims about patterns in history (which Popper equates with a longing for a closed society), and which Popper tries to link to modern totalitarianism. It is a devastating review.

The Open Society and Its Enemies is a book about which Polanyi likely was also quite critical, although he was not as outspoken as Emmet. It seems most likely that Polanyi found Popper's form of liberalism, grounded in a recycled version of Bergson's ideas about open and closed societies, very inadequate. Their conceptions of totalitarianism differed, as did their conceptions of liberalism. Polanyi's liberalism has "public liberty" front and center, whereas this notion of liberty does not figure in Popper's liberalism (see the discussion in Jacobs and Mullins 2011-12, 68-69). A few years later in his Preface (likely written in 1949) to his 1951 book *The Logic of Liberty, Reflections and Rejoinders* (hereafter *LL*), Polanyi notes (but without a direct reference to Popper), "a free society is not an Open Society, but one fully dedicated to a distinctive set of beliefs" (*LL*, vii). This succinct statement, pointing to the centrality of beliefs, in fact echoes the ideas found in Polanyi's 1947 draft editorial statement for *Humanitas* (discussed below) as well as in other Polanyi publications such as Polanyi's Riddell Lectures published late in 1946 as *Science, Faith and Society* (1946/1964, hereafter *SFS*).

Dorothy Emmet was in fact Popper's host when he came to Manchester to make a presentation at a June 1946 meeting of the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society focusing on the recently published *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. As Polanyi's correspondence with Popper shows, Polanyi set up this June presentation for the Society (Jacobs and Mullins 2011-12, 68-69). Emmet tells a humorous story (1996, 79-80) about her "personal encounter" with Popper in her role as Popper's host in this Manchester visit: when she met Popper after his lecture and introduced herself, "he launched into an attack on me for the review" [in *Humanitas*]. Later in the evening after dinner, he re-launched his attack but Emmet "told him that I thought he spoilt his case by overstatement. . . I took the liberty of telling him that I did not think he would find that this [overstatement] worked in England. Confronted by overstatement we tended to think of what could be said on the other side." Popper seemed surprised by this comment; he had very recently arrived in England (where he had never lived) from New Zealand to take his Reader in Philosophy position at the London School of Economics. He later became much more congenial and in subsequent meetings he behaved much better. Emmet concluded "A good row can be a bond."

Emmet, like Polanyi, was interested in and supported *Humanitas* and soon joined the editorial board (see discussion below), and she in fact collaborated with Michael Polanyi on several projects in the forties and early fifties. This collaboration is a larger topic than I can fully explore here, although I note one interesting incident that was perhaps a seedbed for their later cooperation on *Humanitas*. In November 1944, Emmet and Polanyi participated in a Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society symposium on "Science, the Universities and the Modern Crisis," in which Polanyi's paper "Science and the Modern Crisis" apparently was the opening address but Emmet also gave a paper, "Science and the 'Unity of Thought.'" Both papers were subsequently published in *Memoirs and Proceedings of the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society* (Emmet 1943-45, 122-125 and Polanyi 1943-45b, 107-116). In her brief essay, Emmet contends that she participated in this symposium only because "she has been brought along here by the iron hand which Professor Polanyi conceals in his velvet glove" (1943-45, 122). Her essay proposes that different areas of inquiry (including different areas of science) should attend to the presuppositions of their form of inquiry since this is a prerequisite for discovering any common presuppositions. Polanyi liked Emmet's paper. And in his remarks in the questioning session after his presentation (published as "Postscript", Polanyi 1943-45a, 161-163), Polanyi noted his approval of "Miss Emmet's thesis—that truth is worth pursuing, the importance of justice and fairmindedness, respect for freedom of spirit, the conviction that we can to some extent recognize nonsense when we see it, and the recognition that man can interpret experience in more than one

way” (161-162). He goes on to say that his own paper takes Emmet’s claims as presuppositions representing the “minimum requirements of liberalism” (162), although he believes many contemporary Europeans no longer share such suppositions.

Other Emmet Writing for *Humanitas*

Emmet had three reviews and one article in *Humanitas* in its short life. In addition to her review of the Popper book, she reviewed a recent English translation of Kierkegaard’s *Works of Love* (Emmett 1947b, 37-38). Her circumspect conclusion proposes Kierkegaard was “a measured genius who seems to have felt the need to pour out his thoughts in many variations on the same theme. But those who are not deterred by his repetitiveness and occasional perversity will find some penetrating remarks in this book” (38). Emmet’s third review positively treated a collection of essays by her philosophy colleague A. D. Ritchie, a colleague who also had a science background (and an earlier appointment in science) and who she identifies as a “physiologist and a philosopher” (Emmet 1948, 62).

Emmet was a superbly and very broadly educated professional philosopher, and like Polanyi, she had interdisciplinary interests and she was often quite critical of much contemporary philosophy. She notes that her *Humanitas* article “Reflections on Logical Positivism” (Emmet 1947a 13-19) was intended to help non-philosophers understand Logical Positivism. It is perhaps worth noting that this Emmet article appears in the Autumn 1947 *Humanitas* (v. 2, no. 1) which is the first issue after Michael Polanyi becomes the chair of the editorial board. Emmet describes Logical Positivism as a kind of empiricism focused on method. She calls attention to the emphasis on propositions and their verifiability and logical positivism’s readiness to dismiss propositions as nonsense that are not verifiable. She describes this philosophical movement as an updated form of older positivism that draws on more recent work on logical foundations of mathematics. She points out that there has been much conflict among professional philosophers about what verification in experience is and that there has been great interest in problems of language and logical syntax. She emphasizes the ways positivism has attacked so-called “metaphysical” statements as statements whose truth cannot be empirically tested. On the whole, Emmet’s article is pedagogically oriented and describes and analyzes Logical Positivism from a broad angle of vision, but it is quite clear that Emmet is sharply critical of Logical Positivism and particularly its notions about empirical verification and its attack upon “metaphysics” which she holds to be misguided.⁵ I quote a lengthy passage near the end of her *Humanitas* essay because it suggests Emmet’s respect for “a ‘metaphysical’ element” in thinking, including scientific thinking. This respect was very likely a view she shared with Michael Polanyi whose first chapter in his 1946 *Science, Faith and Society*, titled “Science and Reality,” outlines Polanyi’s convictions about the fundamental beliefs of scientists:⁶

So the distinction [made by some Logical Positivists that emphasized a division] of all non-nonsensical propositions into tautologies and empirical hypotheses will not stand. We have to give an account of convictions and valuations. We also have to reckon with the fact that in the interpretation of experience we use certain very general ideas. These may not be absolute and may shift from time to time—it looks for instance as though ideas of Substance and Cause, which have served as such general ideas in the past, were undergoing a shift at present. In such conceptions there is a “metaphysical” element, not always easy to detect, but deeply imbedded in our thinking (Emmet 1947a, 19).

Polanyi's Writing and Recruiting for *Humanitas*

The Discussion of Profits

Polanyi had articles in the second and third issues of *Humanitas* (Autumn 1946 and February 1947). As noted above, Polanyi's article in the second issue was "Why Profits?" and this was an essay published almost simultaneously (July) in the Ethical Union's journal *The Plain View* (1946e, 197-208).⁷ There is a footnote in the Autumn 1946 *Humanitas* article indicating permission was given to reprint "Why Profits?" as a part of "a symposium on the profit motive in trade and industry" (Polanyi 1946d, 4). Polanyi's argument is a complex one that I cannot here review in any detail, but it is worth noting that he affirms that "a system of capitalistic enterprise can be made to conform to any standard of social justice on which society is sufficiently agreed. There is no necessary reason why profits should lead to economic injustice" (1946d, 8). He acknowledges that he does not develop this point in this essay, but it is a point that suggests the broadly philosophical perspective Polanyi takes. Polanyi essentially argues that "modern production and distribution can be organized only on commercial lines" but he is quick to add both that he has "said nothing to suggest that such a solution is perfect" and that his "outline of a money-making society" is incomplete and calls for elaboration of a "number of qualifications" and "supplementary points" (1946d, 10). Polanyi's discussion of capitalism thus needs to be seen in relation to his broad interest in problems of social organization and development in history.

"Why Profits?" is followed in the second issue of *Humanitas* by "Profit: A False Guide" by H. D. Dickinson (1946, 14-18), who was an articulate economist who Polanyi knew and who had written about market or commercial socialism. Dickinson contends that he agrees with Polanyi's account of money and the operation of price and cost, but he does not think Polanyi "proves the necessity of profit" (1946, 14). He introduces differences between static and dynamic market economies and some of the problems of monopoly. Dickinson is more sympathetic than Polanyi toward public ownership not obliged to make profits. But Dickinson's discussion, like that of Polanyi, is focused at a macroscopic level on the elaboration of possibilities and problems of social organization. The Polanyi and Dickinson articles fit together as a sophisticated discussion of one area of social concern debated in this post-War period in journals like *Humanitas*. It seems very likely that Polanyi arranged not only for the reprinting of his article but for including the counter perspective of Dickinson. In some archival material from a few years earlier (likely notes or lecture material) Polanyi mentions Dickinson's ideas and apparently in one setting was a speaker (perhaps in a debate) who was followed by Dickinson (see Polanyi 1940 [6 Dec], 13; Polanyi 1941a, 1-5; and Polanyi 1941b, 1-2). The "Why Profits?" discussion in *Humanitas*, like many other Polanyi materials in the forties, strongly suggests how engaged Michael Polanyi was with the issues of the day. And this includes matters concerned with economics, although it is clear that Polanyi's interest in economic matters is often at the macroscopic level concerned with possibilities for social organization.

Other Polanyi Interests and Connections

Some other materials that appeared in other issues of *Humanitas* also very likely owed something to Polanyi's current interests and connections. The minutes of an editorial board meeting (see the 16 June 1947 *Humanitas* Board Meeting Minutes noted in References), chaired by Polanyi, identify one of the

functions of Board members as soliciting contributions using personal contacts. The following list identifies *Humanitas* material that Polanyi likely helped solicit:

- “The Moral Implications of the Atomic Bomb” in the final Autumn 1948 double issue was written by the philosophical theologian D. M. Mackinnon (Mackinnon 1948, 26-29) who knew Polanyi in the Moot (from 1944) and also appeared with Polanyi on a BBC program in 1948.
- The discussion between Bertrand Russell and F. C. Copleston, S. J. about the existence of God (Russell and Copleston 1948, 2-17) in the same issue is a dialog that was apparently originally a broadcast on the same BBC program in which Polanyi and Mackinnon appeared.
- C. V. Wedgwood also contributed an article, “History and Politics,” to this same issue. Polanyi knew Wedgwood from her work with *Time and Tide*, and met her in 1947 at Mont Pelerin and corresponded with her (Mullins 2019. 3-19).
- Bertrand de Jouvenel has an article on total war in this final issue of *Humanitas* (de Jouvenel 1948, 18-25) as well as an essay “Revolt from Order,” an article on modern nihilism, in the earlier Autumn 1947 issue (de Jouvenel 1947, 24-26). He, like Wedgwood and Polanyi, was a member of Mont Pelerin.
- The German physicist and philosopher C. F. von Weizsacker’s essay “The Spirit of Natural Science” in volume 2, number 1 (von Weizsacker 1947, 2-12) essentially provides a sketch (treating Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler, Descartes, Pascal, Newton, and Laplace) of the development of modern scientific ideas (i.e., important territory for Polanyi).
- Polanyi invited Storm Jamison (pen name for Mrs. G. Chapman), a novelist he knew, to publish a conference address in *Humanitas* (see the September 1947 correspondence between Polanyi, Walter Stein [editor] and Chapman in References); she published “The Situation of the Writer To-day” in the Winter 1948 issue (Jameson 1948, 7-12).

“Science: Observation and Belief”

Polanyi’s article in the February 1947 *Humanitas*, “Science: Observation and Belief” (1947 [February], 10-15), is a very concise essay that recycles and expands some basic ideas in *Science, Faith and Society* published the previous year. This essay, apparently a university lecture which the editors of *Humanitas* asked to publish (see Walter Stein’s 12 October 1946 request letter to Polanyi),⁸ elaborates more fully than most other writing in this period some of Polanyi’s ideas about the significance of belief.

“Science: Observation and Belief” begins with Polanyi’s straightforward claim that science is rooted in “a personal act of faith” (10). He then moves on to suggest “this conclusion is not altered but only obscured by introducing the element of scientific prediction” (10). Further, those who contend scientific propositions are merely provisional or probable or simple statements are speaking nonsense. Science aims at discovering truth and any claims to the contrary (e.g., that science is a summary of data generated by observation) are misleading—otherwise objections to astrology are without merit. In a word, the opening section of “Science: Observation and Belief” bluntly disputes many popular notions about the nature of science.

The second section of this *Humanitas* article affirms that accepting science as a whole or particular scientific claims requires relying at least to some extent on personal conviction. And the source of some personal convictions is a person's upbringing which for modern people is an environment with naturalistic suppositions rather than the magical outlook of primitive cultures. More specific beliefs informing a scientific view are built upon more general naturalistic presuppositions. Polanyi's discussion, however, is careful to point out that prevailing scientific views change or grow as the scientific community continues to inquire. Copernicus and Kepler were Pythagoreans, but Galileo and his immediate successors were "dominated by the idea of a mechanical universe consisting of matter in motion" (13). Field theories modified the mechanical outlook before "an entirely new assumption" was imported into science by Einstein "in his discovery of relativity" (13) and this has more recently been succeeded by "a further fundamental modification of our outlook on nature by the acceptance of a purely statistical interpretation of atomic interactions" (13).

What Polanyi covers in precis in his essay's second section is some of the important things covered in parts of his opening chapter of *SFS* and in the *SFS* Appendix. In "Science: Observation and Belief," this leads to the conclusion that the beliefs of scientists held "on their own responsibility" underlie "methods of discovery" and inform scientists' "readiness to accept a certain type of evidence or to reject it as the case may be" (13). Thus "the whole activity of scientists is based on a set of surmises of different grades" and some of these are "quite unconscious beliefs" while others are "more or less definite assumptions" and still others are entertained as "personal hunches." These beliefs are not codified and are not taught in textbooks, and it is "impossible to formulate them in explicit terms" (14). Polanyi summarizes his views by saying "at all stages of consolidation science must ultimately rely on a set of beliefs derived mainly from the scientific tradition" (14). He also affirms "personal creative judgment is at the source of all discovery" but in the case of many great scientific discoveries "the evidence at first does not induce general approval among scientists" (14). Science, he concludes, "is based on experience selected and interpreted in the light of certain traditional, intuitive and conscientious beliefs" (14).

In the concluding section of "Science: Observation and Belief," Polanyi argues that misrepresentations of science open the door to "Marxist interpretations which would reduce science to ideology" (14). That is, Polanyi reviews his familiar case against State intervention to direct science to pursue "visible interests of society" (14). He contends that science can survive only if scientists recognize and affirm the true roots of science, its "groundwork of scientific beliefs" (14). He calls upon scientists to "profess their adherence to these beliefs by an explicit declaration of faith" (15). Polanyi suggests that human beings cannot suspend all judgment, but Descartes and the rationalist program of modernity have made the erroneous *de facto* choice of assuming "involuntary beliefs" (15) are to be preferred to deliberately professed beliefs. Fanaticism in modernity has, however, exceeded that in the era of professed creeds. Conscious acceptance of belief is to be preferred to holding "old instinctive and unconscious beliefs" (15). As an antidote, Polanyi thus proposes a twist on Descartes' famous motto:

Cogito ergo credo—I think, therefore I believe. Let us accept this fact and believe with open eyes. We have then a chance to hold our beliefs in mature consideration of alternative beliefs, and not merely to succumb to some uncontrolled residue of belief (15).

Positive belief, Polanyi contends, is required by many "essentials of our civilization" and thus emphasis upon positive belief in science "has close relations with other realms of truth" (15). All the developments in modern civilization which rely on positive belief—and Polanyi mentions "liberated art, literature, scholarship

and religious conscience” as well as modern tolerance and “a revolution in law”— “hang together” and are “rooted in the great traditions of our civilization” (15). These traditions “embody transcendent beliefs” that for centuries could be taken for granted but in fact can no longer be taken for granted today. Given pervasive doubt, Western culture has reached the end of the era of self-evidence. And thus, Polanyi ends his short essay calling for a “reformation by a positive profession of the beliefs which form its [i.e., our civilization’s] foundation” (15).

“Science: Observation and Belief” seems to take a step beyond the articulation of *SFS* in which Polanyi emphasizes belief as the metaphysical foundation of modern science. Although this essay is published less than a year after Polanyi delivered his Riddell Lectures, it reflects Polanyi’s interest in emphasizing not only the grounding function of belief but also the importance of acknowledging beliefs in a time in which corrosive doubt has undermined all statements of belief and anything that formerly was taken to be self-evident. There are other essays and unpublished writings in this period (e.g., see Polanyi 1950, 1947/2020, and 1945 [March]) that articulate similar ideas but “Science: Observation and Belief” is particularly straightforward in calling for an open profession of faith.⁹

The Reorganization of the *Humanitas* Editorial Board

An opening editorial titled “The Intelligent Layman” (signed only “The Editors”), in the June 1947 (1[4]: 1-2) issue of *Humanitas* indicates that Dorothy Emmet, Michael Polanyi, R. I. Marcus and two others had been invited to be components of the reconstituted “editorial mechanism of *Humanitas*” (1947 1[4]: 2). Although the opening editorial is somewhat vague, it appears that the editorial changes, which effected a “more even proportion of senior and younger members, and represent a wider variety of viewpoints,” were a response to some sharp criticisms of the journal’s “undiscriminating eclecticism” (1947 1[4]: 2). The following Autumn 1947 issue indicates Polanyi has become the “Chairman” of the editorial group that also includes Emmet and R. I. Marcus (1947, 2[1]: table of contents page) and Polanyi continued in this role as chair through the final Autumn 1948 double issue of the journal. As some of the discussion above of *Humanitas* contributors indicates, Polanyi seems particularly to have influenced the material published for some of the later issues of the journal.

Apparently, when Polanyi became chair of the editorial group, he also became the person who drafted the short introductory comment (usually noted as from the editors) that often was included at the beginning of issues of *Humanitas*. One interesting archival document, dated 17 June 1947 (Box 31, Folder 3, 0176-0177, MPP), is Polanyi’s draft editorial for the Autumn 1947 *Humanitas* (the published version is *Humanitas* 2[1]: 1). The document announces that the journal is on a quest to be a “home for things of the mind” (draft, 1 and final, 1—both documents are simply cited in parenthesis by page). The draft is perhaps more interesting than the final redacted published editorial, which was likely produced after some discussion with others, but the connection with the draft is clear. The final essay somewhat shifts the focus of the essay to the importance of “essential beliefs” (final, 1), their endangerment in contemporary culture, and to differences of belief, their adjudication, and the responsibilities of the university in these matters. But both drafts very pointedly, like “Science: Observation and Belief,” attack skepticism which has undermined the human capacity for holding beliefs. Polanyi notes the “pruning knife of scepticism” that has earlier excised error and released creative force has now “struck at our indispensable beliefs” and many want to “arrest its blade, but know not how” (draft, 1).¹⁰ In his draft, Polanyi suggests that *Humanitas* wants to focus on the “modern will to believe” (draft, 2, without any reference to James) and this requires training to “hold things

of the mind without soiling or breaking them” (draft, 2). As in other Polanyi writings in the mid and late forties, Polanyi is interested in restoring trust in belief. As in “Science: Observation and Belief,” Polanyi calls for openly stating “real beliefs” and learning to “apply them” (draft, 2). The draft concludes that finding a “home for things of the mind” will be coincident with the project of finding a “home for a free society” (draft, 2). When people “recover the capacity to hold firm the truths we believe in, we shall also know how to rebuild the house of political liberty in Europe” (draft, 2).

Conclusion

Perhaps because of his earlier experience reading and publishing in scientific journals, Michael Polanyi seems particularly in the forties and later to have believed non-scientific journals were important for ongoing social-political and cultural discussions. Polanyi published many things in many different journals, and he seems often to have had many helpful connections with journals like *Time and Tide*. Polanyi’s correspondence with Hayek around 1940 and his later effort to launch a new journal “Our Times”/ “Civitas,” show that Polanyi was particularly interested in stimulating academic discussions of liberal political philosophy. But the Polanyi-supported journal project that managed to get off the ground for a short life was the *Humanitas* project, which produced eight interesting and quite diverse issues. Polanyi seems not to have been involved in founding this journal, soon after World War Two, that focused on the role of the university in emerging culture. But he clearly was a supporter and worked closely with some people like his philosopher colleague, friend and collaborator Dorothy Emmet who also supported the journal. Both he and Emmet not only wrote for the journal but soon were members of the editorial group and Polanyi seems to have generously used his contacts to generate material for *Humanitas*. Polanyi’s publications in *Humanitas* were concerned with two topics of great interest to him in the forties. His “Why Profits?” is part of a broader *Humanitas* discussion of social order and how markets should be structured. Polanyi three times published versions of this essay, the last as a chapter in *LL*. “Science: Observation and Belief” summarizes and recasts some of the ideas in *SFS*. This essay like so many other Polanyi writings in this period focuses in on the importance of belief. This essay as well as some of the editorial material Polanyi drafted for *Humanitas* reflect both Polanyi’s early interest in thinking about the limits of the period of critical philosophy with its obsession with doubt and his early interest in what he later calls a fiduciary philosophy.

ENDNOTES

¹See the 10 May 1948 letter (Box 5, Folder 5, 0620, Michael Polanyi Papers, University of Chicago Library) from the editors of *Humanities, A Quarterly Review* to subscribers concerning the financial plight of the journal project. Parenthetical citations of archival materials are hereafter foreshortened to box, folder, digital number and MPP. Thanks to Paul Lewis and Walt Gulick for comments on an early draft of this essay, as well as comments from reviewers.

²Brian Gowenlock was one of Polanyi’s last chemistry students from the mid-forties and was a source of information about Polanyi’s life and work in the forties and later periods (see Tibor Frank, 2002-03, 6-7, and Marty Moleski, S.J. and Phil Mullins, 2019 [online only]). For a number of years, Gowenlock corresponded with Marty Moleski, S.J. and me and provided some details about *Humanitas*. This informative body of material is listed in References only as Gowenlock correspondence, variously dated. Thanks go to Marty Moleski, S.J. for his cooperation with my effort to sort out Gowenlock’s correspondence and some details about the *Humanitas* project.

³This statement is in the Summer 1946 *Humanitas* (1[1]) in the inside cover editorial titled “Objects.” Subsequent quotations in this paragraph are also from this editorial. When the discussion hereafter makes sources clear, subsequent quotations from

Humanitas issues are listed in parentheses by volume, number, and page or simply by page. The References list material in the standard way according to authors' names or (in the case of unsigned pieces) by the journal issue.

⁴See also the 1 and 3 October 1946 letters from Polanyi's secretary to Walter Stein, the *Humanitas* editor (in References, Polanyi 1946b), which make clear that Polanyi, in a visit to Princeton, has been successfully working to generate interest in *Humanitas*.

⁵The first published edition of Polanyi's March 1946 Riddell Lectures (i.e., *SFS*) was dedicated to Emmet, although this dedication is not included in the 1964 reprint. See the copy with a dedication to D. M. E. posted at <http://www.polanyisociety.org/essays.htm>. Emmet published *The Nature of Metaphysical Thinking* in February 1945 (Emmet 1949 [printing] is hereafter cited), a book that I suspect influenced Polanyi's Riddell Lectures, if not also earlier Emmet publications on metaphysical thinking. If Polanyi read, for example, "The Uses of Analogy in Metaphysics" (Emmet 1940-41, 27-46), he likely found Emmet's views quite provocative. Here she argues "when we come to metaphysical analogies, we are asking not only 'How can we make the nature of the physical world more intelligible?' (which might, as Kant says, only mean how can we find a rule for making a unity out of appearances), but 'What is real?'" (Emmet 1940-41, 30). *The Nature of Metaphysical Thinking* reflects that Emmet was attuned to both the history of Western philosophy and contemporary currents in British and American philosophy. She develops ideas about how metaphysical schemes (and she acknowledges her interest in robust schemes like those of Hegel or Whitehead) are generated analogically from the articulation of relationships taken to be constitutive of experience (Emmet 1949, v). Emmet notes in her opening discussion of "the problem of metaphysics" that "metaphysics is concerned not only with some pretentious or ambiguous system or theory of the universe, but, as the logical positivists have rightly seen, wherever questions of truth about 'reality' are raised at all . . ." (Emmet 1949, 3). In one section of her book, Emmet notes discussions with Polanyi about Gestalt (Emmet 1949, 203). *The Nature of Metaphysical Thinking* is a book that was in Polanyi's library when he died. Title pages are in Boxes 57 and 58 of MPP.

⁶Emmet in fact helps Polanyi, in 1946, re-publish a version of "Science and Reality" (Polanyi 1946c, 137-150, which simply omits section II [*SFS* 1964, 25-28]) in an issue of *Synthese* in which an Emmet essay (Emmet 1946a, 134-137) also was published. Emmet's letters to Polanyi outline how Polanyi can cut his first Riddell Lecture for this Dutch journal in which she is going to publish one of her essays; she also reports on the Dutch conference she attended by the journal's sponsoring organization. These letters, although dated only "Friday" and "Sept. 10th" are almost certainly 1946 letters (Emmet to Polanyi, Box 14, Folder 2, 0080 and Emmet to Polanyi, Box 14, Folder 2, 0077-0078, MPP). Her own essay in this July-August 1946 issue of *Synthese*, "Philosophy and 'the Unity of Knowledge,'" is akin to Emmet's earlier published essay "Science and the 'Unity of Thought'" that grew out of her November 1944 participation, with Polanyi, in the symposium "Science, the University and the Modern Crisis." (see the discussion above). In fact, Emmet's *Synthese* essay includes a footnote indicating parts of her essay were used in this earlier symposium (1946a, 137). In "Philosophy and 'the Unity of Knowledge,'" Emmet also interestingly suggests that "the relation between . . . schemes of interpretation and empirical enquiries may be the form in what used to be called metaphysical philosophy presents itself to our generation" (Emmet 1946a, 136).

⁷Polanyi later again republished "Why Profits?" as the ninth chapter of *LL* titled "Profits and Polycentricity" (*LL*, 138-153). There is an unclear footnote after the *LL* chapter title indicating that the essay was in *Humanitas*, 1946; the *LL* version of the essay has been slightly modified.

⁸Thanks to Eduardo Beira for providing this letter (and several others) relevant to Polanyi's work on *Humanitas*. Scott and Moleski (2005, 202) suggest this university lecture was originally intended for publication in *Humanitas*, but the Stein letter suggests the editor and others heard the lecture, liked it very much and asked if it could be published in *Humanitas*.

⁹After the forties, Polanyi, of course, develops ideas about subsidiary and focal awareness and, eventually, he works out his theory of tacit knowing. The later framework for thinking about knowing suggests that even in overt professions of faith (i.e., professions of belief) there will remain unarticulated and unarticulatable tacit elements. Polanyi likely thought this was the case in the forties, although he does not have his epistemological ideas clearly worked out yet.

¹⁰The note struck here is in harmony with a 1948 essay in which Polanyi asserts that we must examine the "foundations of modern thought" and "realise at last that skepticism cannot in itself ever discover anything new." Skepticism can release "powers of discovery, but the powers must always spring from belief" (Polanyi 1948, 100).

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