

## NEWS AND NOTES

### *Tradition and Discovery* 48:1

### February 2022

The “News and Notes” section of *Tradition and Discovery* includes bibliographic information, calls for papers, meeting programs, and any other items possibly of interest to members of the Polanyi Society and other persons working with the thought of Michael Polanyi. Send materials to Phil Mullins at [mullins@missouriwestern.edu](mailto:mullins@missouriwestern.edu).

---

### **Resurrecting the Nashotah Conference and Pre-Conference Polanyi Seminar**

As anyone who reads notices posted on the Polanyi Society website and recently circulated on the Polanyi Society Discussion List already knows, the late spring 2022 in-person Nashotah conference was recently cancelled. COVID developments have complicated the process of putting together in-person events. Unlike earlier Polanyi Society-sponsored conferences in Chicago and Nashotah, things are simply too unpredictable at present to assure that we can assemble a high-quality conference for a critical mass of people.

At the time that this edition of “News and Notes” is being written, we are attempting to put together several online events that might have been part of an in-person Nashotah Conference. We have in hand a few paper and panel discussion proposals. **But if you did not submit a proposal for Nashotah but will now still consider submitting, please do so.** Send proposals to Andrew Grosso ([atgrosso@icloud.com](mailto:atgrosso@icloud.com)). We hope to organize several Zoom sessions in the 1-3 June 2022 period in which the conference was originally scheduled for a “Virtual Nashotah.” However, if this period is not one that works well for you, we are interested in scheduling Zoom events both earlier in the spring (March, April or May) and after the early June conference dates.

The cancelled in-person conference included an opening conference workshop, focusing on some of Polanyi’s social and political writing (and its relevance for contemporary culture), and a pre-conference general seminar for those just beginning the study of Michael Polanyi’s thought. **We hope that both of these elements can be resurrected as Zoom events.** We anticipate that there will be a pair of Zoom sessions that focus on discussion of some selected short Polanyi texts treating social and political themes (texts will be posted for downloading). We also plan to put together Zoom sessions designed for those beginning work on Polanyi. These sessions will provide some overview and bibliographic information and likely will focus on a component of a major Polanyi writing (e.g., a chapter or section of *Personal Knowledge*). **Both the Zoom sessions on Polanyi’s social and political themes, and the sessions that are part of a more general introduction, are open to anyone.** All you must do is register to receive the link for sessions. It will be very helpful if anyone interested in these Zoom events (or interested in suggesting when such events should be scheduled) will send an e-mail to Andrew Grosso.

Sessions will be advertised (including registration information) on the Polanyi Society website ([polanysisociety.org](http://polanysisociety.org)) and the Discussion List.

Let me finally note, as President of the Polanyi Society Board of Directors, that the Society needs to be able to count on the continuing support of those interested in Michael Polanyi's thought. The pandemic has brought unanticipated challenges. Academic institutions that have long indirectly supported the Society have changed fundamentally. As this note makes clear, the Society, at this stage of history, is primarily constructing online programming. We hope that you will continue to support the Society by renewing memberships and making donations which you can easily do using the secure PayPal link on [polanysisociety.org](http://polanysisociety.org).

Phil Mullins, President

Board of Directors

[mullins@missouriwestern.edu](mailto:mullins@missouriwestern.edu)

---

## Academic Papers, Blogs, Dissertations, and Publications

The History of Economics Society awarded, in December 2021, the Craufurd Goodwin Best Article Prize in the History of Economics in 2021 to Gábor István Bíró. The award recognized Bíró for "[Michael Polanyi's Neutral Keynesianism and the First Economics Film, 1933—1945](#)" which was published in *Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 42(3). The following paragraph comments on this noteworthy essay:

While a number of works on the history of visual representation of economics have been produced in recent years, Bíró's article is among the first elaborate studies of films on economics. He provides a fascinating account of both how Michael Polanyi made the first economics film and its critical and popular reception. Utilizing archival and published materials, Bíró describes Polanyi's film as the outcome of a process of representing Keynesian economics involving different media: from diagrams, films, books, then back to motion pictures. The inclusion of contemporary economists' opinions of the film is invaluable in portraying the visual culture in economics at the time. All in all, Bíró's work is not only a superior historical account of our own discipline, but also makes a significant contribution to our understanding of visual representation in science and technology in general.

Gábor István Bíró's "[From Red Spirit to Underperforming Pyramids and Coercive Institutions: Michael Polanyi against Economic Planning](#)" was published online in December 2021 in *History of European Ideas*.

Abstract: This paper examines the evolution of Michael Polanyi's critique of economic planning. It portrays how the focal point of his critique shifted from addressing the "spirit," "social consciousness," and "public emotion" of the people supporting planned economies to addressing the administrative "unmanageability" and the logical impossibility of economic planning. Polanyi developed thought experiments of imaginary economies, contrasted the "pyramid of authority" with the polygons of liberty, and explained organic (spontaneous order) and inorganic (corporate order) ways of adjusting economic relations. He attempted to *relax* the Leviathan of Soviet economics, and drew the conclusion that mathematics is not sufficient in itself to properly address the economy. Eventually, Polanyi developed an institutionalist approach in order to be able to address both the variability of market economies and the failures of socialist "super-planners" who claimed to eliminate the drift of individual economic adjustments.

Gábor István Bíró is the editor of a 2022 collection of essays published by Routledge (actually available in November 2021): [Humanity and Nature in Economic Thought: Searching for the Organic Origins of the Economy](#). ISBN 9780367686956. 206 pages. \$128. Bíró's essay "The Politics of Naturalizing the Economy: Organic Aspects in the Economic Thought of Karl and Michael Polanyi" (171- 194) in this collection analyses the economic thought of Michael and Karl Polanyi: "while the brothers had radically different ideas about what the economy and its science should look like, they were both working on renaturalizing the economy and rehumanizing society" (2).

*VIRTUE* is the flagship online publication of the Institute for Classical Education. It shares stories, ideas, research and experiences in classical education with readers across the nation, helping them to pursue the classical ideals of truth, goodness, and beauty. In November 2021, Jon Fennell's short essay "Trust in Science: Michael Polanyi and the Fiduciary Basis of Scientific Inquiry" appeared in *VIRTUE* (<https://classicaleducation.institute/trust-in-science-polanyi-fall-2021/>). Fennell was also recently interviewed in the Hillsdale College Classical Education Podcasts Series (<https://soundcloud.com/hillsdaleclassicaled/sets/leading-figures-in-education> --look for number 23 in this series). In this 20-minute discussion, he treats Polanyi's importance for education as well as several other aspects of Polanyi's ideas and his life. This interview is a brief and straightforward audio resource that should be useful to anyone who is curious about Michael Polanyi's ideas and especially those who may wish soon to study some of Polanyi's writing.

Thomas Cloud ([tcloud4@lsu.edu](mailto:tcloud4@lsu.edu)) is writing a dissertation on Polanyi and phenomenology at LSU and gave a paper, "Michael Polanyi's Recovery of the Person Through Science," in an Eric Voegelin Society Mini-Conference on Zoom on January 3, 2022.

Abstract: In this paper, adapted from a dissertation chapter, I summarize Michael Polanyi's argument that the attempt to replace virtue with method via the fact/value distinction leads naturally to both totalitarianism and the conflation of science and technology. Conversely, by

recovering the distinction between science and technology, Polanyi sets the stage for a reverse moral chain reaction that recovers the person through recovering science.

Collin Barnes. 2022. “Michael Polanyi’s *Personal Knowledge* as a Work of Alchemy in the Jungian Sense.” *International Journal of Jungian Studies*, 1–25.

Abstract: A climactic moment appears in Michael Polanyi’s *Personal Knowledge* when he describes the modern predicament of humanity as a second ejection from paradise triggered by the uneasy discovery that our knowledge cannot be justified objectively. Polanyi’s philosophy is a response to the cataclysmic consequences of this second fall from grace. It seeks to establish a “balance of mind” that yields neither to the Scylla of objectivism nor the Charybdis of nihilism. Such themes are reminiscent of Jungian psychology and the process of individuation, yet there is no evidence that Polanyi appreciated this. That he nevertheless employs metaphors and ideas suggestive of the psychical transformations recorded by alchemists is telling. It raises the possibility that while his work is evidently concerned with epistemology, it is, at another level, a highly sophisticated depiction of psychological growth—both for Polanyi, and for anyone who accepts his invitation to join the opus.

The article recently became available on Brill’s website (<https://doi.org/10.1163/19409060-bja10023>) for a fee, or you can write Collin Barnes ([cbarnes@hillsdale.edu](mailto:cbarnes@hillsdale.edu)) and ask for an offprint.

Cambridge Scholars Publishing reprinted the recent [TAD interview with Sheldon Richmond](#) about his book *A Way Through the Global Techno-Scientific Culture* on the [Cambridge Scholars website](#).

Stephen Turner. 2021. “Response: Normativity, Practices, and the Substrate.” In *Stephen Turner and the Philosophy of the Social*. Edited by Christopher Adair-Totef. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 243-266. <https://www.worldcat.org/title/stephen-turner-and-the-philosophy-of-the-social/oclc/1250020833?referer=br&ht=edition> .

Stephen Turner. 2021. “From Neo-Kantianism to Durkheimian Sociology: Hermann Cohen and the Problem of Sacrifice.” *Durkheimian Studies* 25:135-153.

Abstract: The phenomenon of sacrifice was a major problem in nineteenth-century social thought about religion for a variety of reasons. These surfaced in a spectacular way in a German trial in which the most prominent Jewish philosopher of the century, the neo-Kantian Hermann Cohen, was asked to be an expert witness. The text he produced on the nature of Judaism was widely circulated and influential. It presents what can be taken as the neo-Kantian approach to understanding ritual. But it also reveals the ways in which neo-Kantianism avoided becoming relativistic social science. In this case, it came to the edge and stopped. Cohen’s account is compared to the similar, but ‘empirical’, account of the same material in Marcel Mauss and Henri Hubert, which completed the transition.

Stephen Turner. 2021. "Epistemic Justice for the Dead." *Journal of Classical Sociology* 21(3-4): 307-322. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468795X211022051>.

Abstract: The classics of social theory have a peculiar status: our current list is the product of past academic strategizing, and the list of favored classics has changed. Currently there is a process of replacing them with older writers who better fit current concerns, and to cancel those who hold the wrong views, or are of the oppressor class, in order to provide epistemic justice for those who don't deserve their status and uplift those who were wrongly neglected. From an instrumental, careerist point of view, adapting to these changes makes sense. From the point of view of judgement, which differs from the capacity to produce, it does not. Exclusions narrow our range of reference and our capacity to assess in the present. We owe ourselves, and them, not only temporary, fashion driven justice but a larger capacity of judgement detached from the instrumentalization of scholarship.

Stephen Turner. 2022. "Digital Affordances and the Liminal." In *The Technologisation of the Social*. Edited by Marius Ion Benta and Paul O'Connor London/New York: Routledge, 98-111.

Abstract: The idea that the technologies one uses and the work experiences one has influence cognition is old, but somewhat vague, but focused on how technology induced generalizable habits of mind. Technology creates a familiar world, which changes in large and small shocks, rather than in rational steps. This kind of change, at the tacit level, has characteristics of liminality. Cognitive science provides some different vocabulary for discussing this problem that connects with several different strands of social theory, and points to various ways of conceptualizing the effects of digitalization. If we focus on the tacitization of skilled performance, we can see how the familiar is created and recreated, and identify processes by which this occurs, specifically pattern recognition in a liminal or limonoid state. In the past, and in the classic anthropology of the liminal, the familiar consisted of a world of common or shared objects, and the liminal states involved sacred ones. In the digital world, the choice of experience is voluntary and the worlds are diverse, but the effects of object induced involuntary pattern recognition are the same: they organize and reorganize cognition at a tacit, non-discursive, level.

The articles in the issue of *Quaestiones Disputatae* on Polanyi, listed in the [last issue of News and Notes](#), are not yet available. *Quaestiones Disputatae* does have [a new website here](#) and when this issue is available (projected for March 2022) articles should be on the website.

### **September 2021 Zoom Presentations/Discussions**

Just a week before the October 2021 *TAD* was published, there were four Polanyi Society-sponsored zoom presentations/discussions. These were well attended, lively discussions. Below is a brief description of each presentation; materials used in the sessions (essays, Power Points, outlines, etc.) and session recordings are available on the Polanyi Society website (with materials from earlier Zoom sessions) [here](#).

- (1) Andrew Grosso, "Polanyi among the Pluralists"

Abstract: Early in the twentieth century, a number of British scholars sought to describe an approach to social, political, and economic life that could serve as an alternative to both collectivism and individualism. This approach came to be known as “pluralism,” various forms of which were advanced by F.W. Maitland, J.N. Figgis, H.J. Laski, G.D.H. Cole, and G. Unwin. This paper examines some of the principal characteristics of the social, political, and economic thought of the English pluralists and compares them to the thought of Michael Polanyi, for the purpose of both (first) situating Polanyi’s efforts within their historical context and (second) exploring possible ways pluralist thought might be brought to bear on more contemporary social and political challenges.

(2) Martin X. Moleski, S. J. 2013 (Sept.-Dec.). *Ultimate Reality and Meaning*. V. 36, No. 3-5: 160-175. Published in 2020. <https://utpjournals.press/doi/full/10.3138/uram.36.3-4.160>.

Abstract: In this article, the author offers a reappraisal of Michael Polanyi’s understanding of ultimate reality and meaning, dropping the charge that Polanyi was functionally an atheist and assembling fresh material from primary sources in order to reach a more just assessment of the quality of his faith in a divine reality. In the second part of the article, the author takes a fresh look at the theological implications of Polanyi’s epistemology of tacit knowing and personal knowledge, no longer treating his assertions about ultimate reality as ill-fitting elements of an essentially secular philosophy but truly as the focal point of Polanyi’s most important insights.

(3) Andy Steiger, “Deciphering Humanity: What Polanyi and the Rosetta Stone Can Teach Us About Being Human”

Abstract: In 1799, the Rosetta Stone was discovered in Egypt. This unassuming black rock became the key by which to revive the then dead language of Egyptian hieroglyphics. For Polanyi, machines were the Rosetta Stone by which to decipher human purpose. Andy Steiger applied insights from Polanyi’s philosophy of a machine ontology to identify humanity’s purpose. The result demonstrated that the key to decoding a biological machine is understanding the distinction between static and dynamic purpose. By understanding the limits of static purpose and the potential of dynamic purpose, humanity can be deciphered. Although Polanyi does not directly apply his machine ontology to humanity, he does anticipate its conclusion.

(4) Charles Lowney, Eric Howard, Gábor Bíró, Panel Discussion: “Michael Polanyi and John Rawls in Dialogue”

Michael Polanyi wrote extensively on Liberalism. He models a good Liberal society on the sort of mutual authority and co-operation that takes place in science, and condemns central planning and top-down authority, both in economics and in Liberal social and political structures. A Liberal society progresses toward truth and justice by the exercise of public liberty, but this progress relies on traditions and traditional institutions, as dynamic systems, and a commitment of people within those traditions to transcendent principles. Polanyi thus forms a new understanding of Liberalism that stands in contrast to Classical and Neo-

Liberalism. John Rawls also develops a new model of how a good Liberal society should function. He, too, develops an understanding of the sort of rationality and freedom that is at work, and he displays the principles that should guide us in a Political Liberalism. In this panel discussion, three speakers working on Polanyi's Social, Political and Economic thought discussed what they find to be strong similarities or sharp contrasts between the thought of Polanyi and Rawls.

Gábor Bíró discussed Rawls' conception of the "Original Position," contrasting this with Polanyi's conception of all knowledge as personal. Can we ever actually extract ourselves from our lived situation and beliefs in order to place ourselves behind Rawls' "Veil of Ignorance" and structure our society in a fair way?

Eric Howard discussed similarities in Polanyi and Rawls' criticisms of the utilitarian and libertarian notion of private freedom. Both recognize private freedom (and its regulation via the "no harm principle") as an inadequate basis for social and political life, and see the emphasis on private freedom as a force that acts against social cohesion. In response, Polanyi develops the notion of Public Liberty, and Rawls develops the notion of Political Autonomy. Differences become manifest, however, when we see that public liberty takes place in the space of a commitment to dynamic traditions, which Rawls would consider "comprehensive moral doctrines," and Rawls distinguishes Political Autonomy from the Ethical Autonomy that depends on those doctrines. This can present a problem because social cohesion depends on common moral beliefs. Furthermore, this liberty, in Polanyi's view, invokes metaphysical principles by invoking transcendent values. Rawls, however, believes that Political Autonomy cannot rest on metaphysics. Do Polanyi's and Rawls' views thus become incommensurable?

Charles Lowney agreed that the idea of a completely "freestanding rationality," which Rawls endorses, makes no sense from Polanyi's epistemology, in which we are thoroughly engaged in a personal knowledge of reality. However, from an emergentist perspective, Lowney finds strong parallels between Rawls and Polanyi. For Polanyi, Rawls' conception of a (relatively) "freestanding" political rationality reflects a real emergent feature of a political society and acts as an umbrella over a variety of different social and cultural traditions, holding them together in a mutually beneficial political structure. This higher order level of meaning is something that we can think from, though it must be admitted—even as a higher-order view—that this development is an emergence from within the Liberal Tradition itself, and it cannot be cleanly divided from the notion of a comprehensive moral doctrine. From this emergent perspective, we can again ask (with Bíró) if we can inhabit the original position, behind a (relative) veil of ignorance, and we can see that we may successfully abstract from features of our own comprehensive doctrine and particular lived situation enough to recognize what is fair from our higher-level, Liberal, political, personal commitments. We can also ask again (with Howard) about the relation of Public Liberty and Political Autonomy. We can see that Rawls also relies on an overlapping consensus of "reasonable" doctrines, which can be the basis of social cohesion. And while Polanyi recognizes principles as metaphysical, if the notions of Truth, Justice, and Freedom can be bracketed out from metaphysics, and work as abstractly as Rawls suggests, then Polanyi's

Public Liberty might be conceived as a more concrete expression of Rawls' Political Autonomy.

### ***Science, Faith, and Society Conference***

In October 2022, several members of the Polanyi Society as well as other scholars attended the *Science, Faith, and Society* Conference focused on Polanyi's 1946 book and the social and political philosophy of Michael Polanyi. Due to the pandemic this conference which originally was planned as a Budapest event became a Zoom conference. This 3-day conference was a successful online event sponsored by the Research Centre for the Humanities, Institute of Philosophy (formerly known as, Hungarian Academy of Sciences) and contributed to the research project of the MTA-Lendület Morals and Science Research Group. The program organizers were Péter Hartl and Gábor Bíró. A book proposal using some conference-generated materials has recently been accepted by Routledge. Other materials may be published in journal issues.

Paper/presentation titles are listed below.

Martin Beddeleem (Aarhus University), "Order Without Orders: Redefining Authority in Liberalism"

Péter Hartl (Research Centre for the Humanities), "Central Planning of Science and Polanyi's Vision of Free Society"

Jon Fennell (Hillsdale College), "That Our World Might Endure: Polanyi's Primary Education"

Phil Mullins (Missouri Western State University), "*Science, Faith and Society* and Polanyi's Metaphysical Account"

Walter Gulick (Montana State University Billings), "From Scientific Truth to Personal Meaning"

Agnes Festré and Stein Ostbye (University of Cote d'Azur and The Arctic University of Norway), "Faith in Science: What Can We Learn from Michael Polanyi?"

Tihamér Margitay (Eötvös Lorand University, Budapest), "Liberal Knowledge Arguments against Dictatorship"

John Preston (The University of Reading), "World Views in Polanyi's *Science, Faith and Society*"

Stephen Turner (University of South Florida), "The Tragedy of the Liberal Theory of Science"

Daniel Paksi (Budapest University of Technology and Economics), "The Galilean Principle of Relativity: The Ultimate Fundament of Moral Inversion"

Oliver Keenan (University of Oxford, Aquinas Institute), "Polanyi in the 'Republic of Conscience': Academic Freedom and the Structure of Reality"

Gábor Bíró (Budapest University of Technology and Economics; Research Centre for the Humanities, Budapest), "Enlightenment is Dead, Long Live the Enlightenment: Towards a Post-critical Age of Reason"

Christopher Goodman (Independent Scholar) "The English and the Continent"

## **The Travel, Grants, and Projects Fund and the Endowment**

To simplify our accounting, the Polanyi Society recently consolidated several old funds into the Travel, Grants, and Projects Fund. Disbursements from this new consolidated fund may be made in memory of particular persons. The fund will also continue to support the participation of younger scholars in Society (in-person) meetings. Some new awards and projects aimed at younger scholars may soon be added.

The Polanyi Society Endowment was established a few years ago with a gift from the late Ann Herbert Scott, the widow of William T. Scott, the original Polanyi biographer. The Walter B. Mead estate in 2019 provided a substantial contribution to the Endowment. The Polanyi Society Endowment is slowly growing, and each year modest distributions help cover expenses.

Please support the Travel, Grants, and Projects Fund and the Polanyi Society Endowment by sending a tax-deductible contribution to The Polanyi Society, C/O Charles Lowney, Treasurer, 10 Jordan Street, Lexington, VA, 24450. Bequests and large donations are very important to the Society, but the many smaller donations to the Society, often made in conjunction with dues payment, are also significant and appreciated. Checks should be made out to the Polanyi Society and, if so intended, marked Travel, Grants, and Projects or Endowment. Unmarked donations will go toward general operating expenses. You can also directly access the Polanyi Society PayPal button (with accompanying tutorial) to make a donation:

<http://polanyisociety.org/paypal/donate.html>

All PayPal transactions for the Polanyi Society are is handled on the secure PayPal site.

---

## **Back Issues of *TAD* Available for Purchase**

A limited number of back printed issues of *TAD* are available for purchase as long as supplies last. The cost for a copy of issues up to and including Vol. 41:3 is \$5.00. A copy of issues from 42:1 through 46:1 (the final printed issue) is \$7.00. All prices include shipping and handling. For issues up to and including Vol. 39:2, contact Phil Mullins ([mullins@missouriwestern.edu](mailto:mullins@missouriwestern.edu)). For issues from 39:3 to 46:1, contact Paul Lewis ([lewis\\_pa@mercer.edu](mailto:lewis_pa@mercer.edu)). Payment should be sent to The Polanyi Society, C/O Charles Lowney, 10 Jordan Street, Lexington, VA, 24450. Checks should be made out to the Polanyi Society and earmarked for the back issues requested.