



# MY LENGTHY INVOLVEMENT WITH POLANYI'S THOUGHT: AN INTERVIEW WITH WALTER GULICK



**Phil Mullins and Walter Gulick**

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## ABSTRACT

*In this interview, Phil Mullins asks Walter Gulick about what originally attracted him to Polanyi's thought. What aspects has he felt might be improved and/or further developed? What is the ongoing import of Polanyi's accomplishments, and where does the Polanyi Society go from here?*

**Mullins:** Fifty years ago, in the fall of 1972, the first issue of the [Society of Explorers newsletter](#) was distributed to a small group of people who had indicated they were interested in the thought of Michael Polanyi and wished to form a network. Your name is on that list, and you indicated that you were interested in “Polanyi’s thought as it related to (a) philosophical psychology, (b) metaphysics, (c) theory, and (d) religious faith.” As a scholar, you have worked on Polanyi for a long time and have developed a number of ideas about what Polanyi was up to and where his ideas might be improved. You also have worked diligently for fifty years to promote an institution, the Polanyi Society, that has produced conferences, annual meetings, a journal, a website, and, in a word, a certain amount of stimulating conversation about Michael Polanyi. I happen to have known you for most of those fifty years, and I want in this interview to gather up some of the interesting twists and turns in your long study of Polanyi’s philosophical perspective. I also want to review your role in promoting the Polanyi Society and your vision about where the society as a small scholarly group should be headed in the post-pandemic academic world. You were the first board president, serving for seven years after the society became a legal entity, and you have been a major contributor to program planning for thirty years. But perhaps we should begin by having you briefly identify how you came to be interested in the thought of Michael Polanyi. Also, what made you, in 1972, identify the broad areas of interest you identified, and do these areas continue to be your areas of interest in Polanyi?

**Gulick:** A little background information should help illuminate how I developed interest in Polanyi. As a geology major at Pomona College in California, I was depressed during my sophomore year. I couldn’t figure

out what the point was to living. Summer work as a field geologist in Idaho certainly didn't help me answer that question. So, after graduation in 1960, I accepted a three-year appointment to teach at Tarsus American College in Turkey to determine what I wanted to do next. I thought I was going to be teaching general science courses, but they needed a math teacher, which in college had been my worst subject. Well, teaching trig, solid geometry, and matrix theory certainly didn't help me answer my lingering questions about meaning. However, as a senior at Pomona, I had taken a course in contemporary philosophy from Morton Beckner, an author (as was Marjorie Grene) of an early book on the philosophy of biology. On the basis of that one course (and strong interest), I was able to teach the introductory class in philosophy in Tarsus as a replacement for the regular teacher who was on sabbatical.

Teaching that course was illuminating and stimulating, so I decided to apply for a graduate degree in philosophy. I soon found out that what was being offered as philosophy in different universities emphasized logic and the analysis of language rather than the pursuit of wisdom, which is what interested me. Moreover, each department I corresponded with wanted me to take another undergraduate year of philosophy courses before being admitted to graduate work. I had taken two semesters of classes on the Bible at Pomona from Gordon Kaufman that were instructive but didn't really excite me. Nevertheless, I found out that courses at a theological seminary were offering material that was close to my true interests in meaning and value, and they didn't require me to take more undergraduate classes. So I ended up in New York in a joint program pairing Union Seminary with Columbia University. And it was in a bookstore on Broadway across from the Columbia campus in the fall of 1964 that I saw a new paperback by a Hungarian author with enticing chapter titles like "Order," "Skills," "Articulation," "Commitment," and "Knowing Life." Somewhat later I purchased Michael Polanyi's *Personal Knowledge*.

In the fall of 1964, I met a charming lady at Union, and after three weeks of dating I proposed to her. It took another week for her to say yes. With an emotionally powerful interest now added to a demanding set of courses and fieldwork, I did not find time to do more than peruse *PK*. Then, after Barbara and I were married in 1965, I needed to provide for us while she finished her degree, so I took a job as a TIAA group insurance administrator. Once she graduated, we moved up the Hudson to Tarrytown. Amid the sea of the *Wall Street Journal* and *New York Times* on the commuter train, I was the only person reading philosophy. It is thus not surprising that I decided to add a PhD to my MA. I returned to Claremont, where Granville Henry (just deceased in 2021) encouraged me to take Polanyi's work seriously. Doing so remained more of a hope than an actuality, for in the course of writing my 500-page dissertation on "Kant's Idea of Metaphysics," I tried to read all of Kant's published works I could get my hands on. And in addition to finishing the dissertation while teaching at Oregon State, I now had kids to help raise.

Thus in 1972, the possibility of actually reading more Polanyi prompted me to join the Society of Explorers. Given the work I was doing on Kant, you can understand why I listed metaphysics and philosophical theory as areas of interest related to Polanyi's work. I mentioned philosophical psychology because I intended to return to work on lived meaning. And in mentioning religious faith, I was pivoting back to my thesis at Columbia on faith as understood by H. Richard Niebuhr, Erik Erikson, and Willem Zuurdeeg. Today I do not disavow my interest in these areas as they relate to Polanyi's thought, but that is because I find most anything Polanyi has written to be of interest. But if forced to choose one topic, it would be how Polanyi handles the issue of meaning. For after I had moved to Montana, it was in reading *Meaning* during a sabbatical at the University of Delaware's Center for the Study of Values in 1981 that I became totally hooked on Polanyi's thought. My early interest in meaning has never abated. Indeed, now in Billings, I have

been doing a weekly local TV show titled *Callings* (a good Polanyian term) in which I interview guests about what gives their lives meaning and satisfaction.

The 1991 conference at Kent State celebrating the hundredth anniversary of Polanyi's birth provided another occasion that expanded my involvement with people excited by Polanyi's thought. Discussions there, particularly with Gabi Ujlaki of the fledgling Michael Polanyi Liberal Philosophy Association, led to my being granted a Fulbright to teach a semester in Budapest, a city then still recovering from its Soviet past. My experience there in 1993 deepened my appreciation of Polanyi's Hungarian roots. It also led to our hosting a Slovakian and two Hungarian exchange students, sources of great joy further tying us to the region.

**Mullins:** I recall responding to one of your annual meeting papers in the seventies that was concerned with poetry and making meaning; your background narrative puts this in a broader context, and it does seem that some of your recent writing focuses also on problems of meaning. But you have over the decades written prolifically on many topics touching aspects of Polanyi's thought. You have published [over thirty articles in \*Tradition and Discovery\*](#) (not to mention [about twenty TAD book reviews](#)—and you were the *TAD* book review editor for twenty-five years), plus there are a number of things in *Polanyiana*, *Appraisal*, and a host of other less directly Polanyi-related journals, and you have contributed essays to collections that became books. You appreciate Polanyi's philosophical perspective, but you have offered criticisms and interesting constructive amendments. You find Polanyi's discovery-centered revisioning of philosophy of science insightful. You are attuned to Polanyi's effort to revitalize liberalism, but perhaps more than any other scholar you have put Michael and Karl Polanyi together. Your own contemporary political philosophy and persistent activism moves beyond Michael Polanyi (and also outside the current Montana mainstream). You have linked Polanyi's thought to a variety of other contemporary thinkers and to emerging areas of inquiry such as biosemiotics and religious naturalism. Can you provide something of an overview of the ways in which you have taken up and retooled Polanyi's ideas? If not an "overview," can you at least comment very briefly on major areas of Polanyi's thought that you want to appropriate but amend in interesting ways? Perhaps you could begin by summarizing some of your criticisms of Polanyi's ideas about biology and evolution.

**Gulick:** I believe Polanyi's rejection of neo-Darwinian thought in Part IV of *PK* (see *PK*, 385) is unfortunate for a couple of reasons. First, it encouraged William Dembski and others to promote the thought that Polanyi rejected evolutionary theory and that his ideas could be used in support of creationist Christianity. However, Polanyi did not reject evolutionary theory; he only argued that natural selection and mutations (as they were discussed by most biologists in the middle of the last century) were inadequate to account for the development of new species and the advanced complexity evident in the historical record. He argued that some ordering principle is needed to account for the progress he discerned in evolutionary process.

But secondly, his notion that an active ordering principle is needed (*PK*, 382) unfortunately relies on taking machine development literally as a model for how the emergence of new species occurs. Indeed, both the creation of machines and the emergence of new species have telic aspects, but the former is intentionally purposeful while the latter is only incidentally so. Novelty which is actively intended is an example of what I term moderate emergence, whereas unintended preprogrammed changes like maturation are examples of weak emergence (see my "Forms of Emergence," [TAD 46/1 \[February 2020\]: 55–59](#)). Only planned development, as of a machine, can be explained by some preexisting ordering principle or purpose. The adjustments of species to changing niches giving rise to phylogenetic change is not governed by a preexisting

purpose or ordering principle, such as is used in specifying the operational principles of a machine to produce a planned outcome. Evolution occurs at a species level which lacks the purposefulness of an individual living being.

**Mullins:** Can you say a bit more about how you think insights from contemporary dynamic systems theory and biosemiotics help in reformulating and addressing some of the problems that interested Michael Polanyi in biology and in a reformulated biologically grounded philosophical vision that takes seriously human learning to be at home in the universe?

**Gulick:** Good question that I would broadly recast as follows: how is biology related to finding meaning in life? Let's go back again to evolution and emergence. The factors driving evolution are after-the-fact adjustments of living beings to environmental changes in ways that may or may not incidentally favor survival. The many factors involved in natural selection are better understood by chaos and complexity theory than by the determinative laws of physics and chemistry. And, of course, Polanyi also rejected the deterministic laws of most scientific accounts. But as we have just seen, his alternative reliance on ordering principles was not an adequate replacement. Biological evolution unfolds in nonlinear response to all impinging forces and properties, not just to those that contribute to fulfilling a design or ordering principle. So I agree with Marjorie Grene's late attack on Polanyi's progressivist account of emergent evolution (the view that humans are involved in some grand evolutionary purpose), but I take my critique beyond any of Grene's analyses of which I am aware.

Now if Polanyi had simply said that neo-Darwinian thought is not a complete explanation of how evolution has taken place, he would have been on solid ground. Such factors as horizontal gene transfer, genetic drift, symbiogenesis, the Baldwin effect, and geographical (and therefore reproductive) isolation also contribute to evolutionary change.

And although I disagree with his rejection of neo-Darwinian thought, it is also important to recognize that Polanyi developed two notions that illuminate the mechanisms by which evolution occurs: boundary capture and emergence. Both the intended and accidental use of otherwise uncommitted boundary conditions are factors in the emergence of novelty, whether we are speaking of machines or evolution. Machines and living beings each function according to what Polanyi terms rules of rightness that transcend the laws of physics and chemistry. When the rules of rightness are followed, machines and living beings function as emergent phenomena achieving purposes not available to lower levels of being.

The aspect of biosemiotics that most attracts me is that it focuses broadly on the meaning of signs for living things. It attends to how signs work at many different levels for living beings. Therefore, biosemiotics also does carefully attend to higher-level significance that is largely lacking in biology's lower-level attention to instinctual processes of signaling. Biosemiotics does not replace biology's understanding of such things as the chemical pathways within cells whereby metabolites initiate chemical cascades and operate according to self-regulating feedback loops. Rather it supplements and deepens some of Polanyi's insights. For instance, Polanyi writes, "Living beings function according to two always interwoven principles, namely as machines and by 'regulation'" (*PK*, 342). In perhaps overly simplistic terms, it can be said that traditional biology studies animals' bodies as machines, whereas biosemiotics takes a more holistic, ecological view related to Polanyi's notion of regulation. Thereby, context, interpretation, and choice gain a place in evolution and the rise of animal intelligence. Beneficial interpretation may be, as Polanyi recognized, stored through an animal's latent learning, but it may also take on historical significance as a species develops habitual

interpretive responses to predictable environmental factors. Biosemiotician Jesper Hoffmeyer's distinction between analog and digital codes enriches the view of meaning I borrowed from Susanne Langer and that I fuse with Polanyi's thought. Hoffmeyer notes that analog information provides an organism with "outside" contextual information while digital codes provide "inside" coping adjustments. In humans, language as a digital code opens up the past and future as resources for meeting challenges.

**Mullins:** As you have noted, emergence and levels are central to Polanyi's notions of anthropogenesis and the stratified universe. To what extent do you feel Polanyi has given an adequate account of these concepts?

**Gulick:** I see them as fecund notions that call for further development. At the very least, it is important to distinguish more clearly between emergence as a process and as a product. I previously mentioned my distinction between weak emergence (internally driven as in maturation) and moderate emergence (significant change caused by outside forces). In addition, I postulate a category of strong emergence involving autopoiesis and some robust forms of self-organization. The emergence of life and the creation of thought from brain activity are examples of strong emergence. I think the three types of emergence as processes coupled with nested frames of intention has an as yet unrealized capacity to serve as a general hermeneutical function comparable to Peirce's notion of immediate and dynamical interpretants. I leave it to you, Phil, and others to say whether I am interpreting Peirce correctly.

In speaking of nested frames of intention, I am simply referring to the assumptions, some very general, some increasingly specific, one uses in either interpretation or creativity. I find it difficult to distinguish ontological from epistemological levels, but I am more parsimonious than Polanyi in speaking of a stratified universe of ontological levels. Much that is ontologically distinct seems better understood as a matter of scope rather than level. For instance, the strong nuclear force which binds the fundamental particles of matter together operates at a vastly different scale than gravity, the force of which we are aware. But since both are in play throughout the cosmos, they are better seen as forces distinct in scale rather than as occupying different levels. Moreover, our language allows us to look at the same phenomenon in a variety of ways, but that does not justify one in speaking of different ontological levels. Bottom line: more work needs to be done in distinguishing ontological levels from conceptual distinctions created by different perspectives, disciplines, and assumptions. I am presently working on a new essay that recasts some of Polanyi's ideas about ontological levels, so stay tuned.

**Mullins:** We have disagreed in the past about how best to characterize Polanyi's understanding of reality. Briefly indicate how you characterize Polanyi's interpretation of reality in contrast to your own view.

**Gulick:** Anyone who has followed my discussions of Polanyi's ideas is well aware that I find his discussion about degrees of reality untenable. Famously, in *TD*, 32–33, Polanyi states that minds and problems are more real than cobblestones because they have the independence and power to manifest themselves in as yet unthought ways in the future. A protean notion of reality seems problematic in many ways. Suppose one solves a problem. Does it then lose its reality? If one answers "yes," then one accepts the anthropocentric view of a Protagoras that man is the measure of all things. If Polanyi had said problems and minds are more significant for humans than cobblestones, that would recognize the variable impact some things have on human experience. But "reality" or some similar term (existence? actuality?) is needed to refer to the persistent beingness of things apart from their potential or actual impact on humans.

Time for confession. My aim of setting forth a simple and coherent understanding of reality has not yet been satisfactorily achieved. I am still working on this matter. On the one hand, I have come to the point where I am willing to accord all things and relations available to thought or consciousness with the term “reality.” Then one needs to specify between such things as ideas about material reality, fictive reality, and delusional reality since the universality of the term “reality” renders the term by itself useless. On the other hand, I would term “existent” all those materially based things or forms of energy that potentially can be studied scientifically, whether or not we are aware of their existence. More controversially, I would like to limit the term “ontological” to aspects of the realm of existent things. My complaint about Polanyi’s usage is that he usually treats “reality” much in the universal way I suggest, but he does not subdivide it into types of reality. Thus, his tendency to ground reality in anthropocentric concerns, including the potential for discovery, seems to push his thought toward an idealism that, on most views of contradiction, clashes with the scientific realism that is evident in his philosophy of science discussions.

**Mullins:** Are you accusing Polanyi of promulgating an incoherent dualistic philosophy?

**Gulick:** Not at all. I’m suggesting that it is to his great credit that he shows in several ways how both a scientific realism and two kinds of idealism can coherently fit into a comprehensive philosophical worldview. The arc of his career-based study embraced the biological insights of a physician, the understandings of a successful natural scientist, the social concerns resident in politics and economics, the epistemological insights attendant to tacit knowing, and the philosophical importance of a synoptic vision lending meaning to life. The comprehensiveness of his worldview is one of his lasting achievements.

How does Polanyi connect these various pieces together? First, I submit that there is an underlying dualism in his thought, but that this is a virtuous recognition rather than a pernicious problem to be overcome. Personal knowing has both subjective and objective poles (*PK*, 300). This merely states the fact that we are embodied beings with particular agendas seeking connection with independent realities about which we aim to speak with universal intent. Personal purpose and receptive insight are united in Polanyian personal knowing.

The dualism of which I have just spoken is a variation on Cartesian *res extensa* and *res cogitans*. But isn’t admitting into one’s philosophy the distinction between extended thing and thinking thing, or more colloquially matter and mind, the great error that led modernism astray? The distinction is problematic only if matter and mind are each interpreted as a substance, that is, “a thing which so exists that it needs no other thing in order to exist” (Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*). Such an understanding of substance creates the problem of how the two are connected and encourages the development of schools of thought which choose one or the other substance as foundational. But Polanyi escapes the dichotomy between materialism and idealism by adopting both as comprising different levels of a comprehensive whole. That is, secondly, his theory of emergence allows for entities governed by different rules to coexist coherently. The law of contradiction need not apply between emergent levels. Mind is an emergent quality dependent on a very complex arrangement of matter and energy. There is no Cartesian chasm between the two in this formulation. Polanyi’s view is legitimated by his evolutionary account of anthropogenesis. It also accords with our very commonsensical observation of differences between matter and thought.

Third, and quite obviously, the evidence of perception attests to the distinction between matter and mind as concomitant realities. One need not appeal to Samuel Johnson kicking the stone to refute George Berkeley’s subjective idealism or bring up the notion of secondness in Peirce’s thought. Our ordinary

experience of the world attests both to the distinction between mind and matter and to their interdependence. One can use a term like Poterat's "mindbody" to emphasize the dependent interlocked nature of body and mind. But this neologism must not obscure the methodological differences between fruitful ways of analyzing and understanding the world of matter and energy in contrast to how the world of thought is interrogated and understood.

Fourthly, Polanyi's notion of ontological levels illuminates the different procedures appropriate for examining matter in contrast to emergent thought. Reductionism is a valuable process for advancing understanding in scientific investigation, as Polanyi recognized. Mathematical formulation can be useful in illuminating patterns and laws. However, Polanyi's assumption of scientific realism makes sense of the material world but not of the emergent world of the arts and humanities and the everyday usage of language. This latter world is oriented around human purposes and meanings. Some aspects of this world are simply constructed and can give rise to a limited version of subjective idealism. But Polanyian thought can also be used to make a good case for a version of objective idealism. The transcendent ideals of truth, beauty, and goodness have an intersubjective reality intimately tied to social and personal viability and flourishing.

**Mullins:** I want to relocate our discussion a bit to focus on some of the elements central to Polanyi's notions about tacit knowing that you have developed. Perhaps your best-known emendation of Polanyi's interest in tacit knowing is the way you have suggested talking about the "from-via-to" aspect of consciousness. Your account has been adopted by many scholars who make use of Polanyi's epistemology. Can you succinctly comment on your intentions in this innovation?

**Gulick:** My notion of the "via" represents yet another way in which Polanyian thought discloses and includes aspects of both scientific realism and several types of idealism. Already, Polanyi's "from-to" structure of consciousness honors the dependence of thought on embodied subsidiaries and processes. Presumably all animals can act intelligently in terms of a from-to structure. But what makes human agency different from the intelligence of other animals is the use of language—discursive symbolism. As Susanne Langer points out, we humans have an irrepressible need (except maybe in some meditative states or deep sleep) to impose symbols (interpretive words and images) on experience. The "via" recognizes that symbolism, whether imagistic or discursive, is what gives rise to conception rather than simple stimulus-response signaling meaning. Through conception, we can remember the past and plan the future. Through language, heightened social influence occurs, and out of that our whole cultural world blooms. The entire "from-via-to" process is essential to understanding some of the special qualities of human agency; it underlies intentional action as well as thought. I earlier indicated how different interests and assumptions contribute to framing the from-via-to process at the "from" level. Purposeful intention thus is largely rooted at the tacit dimension. Appropriate language to articulate this intention is evoked and expressed to make explicit our intended meaning. Without the "via" of language, there would be no human civilization or culture or cultural diversity as we know it. The scope and complexity of meaning would be seriously diminished. I believe the addition of the "via" to the human cognitive process is a step consistent with and helpful to advancing the impact of Polanyi's thought.

A future project for Polanyians would be to explain in more detail ways the "from" and the "to" help create experience. I think others are correct in suggesting that Polanyi's notion of tacit knowing is vaguely defined. In my 2016 article in *Social Epistemology* (30/3: 297–325), I distinguished nine still very broad sources, aspects, or functions involved at the "from" level. But as I state in that article, "Polanyi's references

to the tacit dimension are not motivated by a desire to give fine-grained information about the psychological or biological processes that make thought and intentional action possible.” Rather his intention in expanding Brentano’s notion of intentionality by adding the “from” to Brentano’s “to” was to provide a framework upon which the processes of personal knowing might be described. Polanyi’s notions of trick, sign, and latent knowing help illuminate tacit processes of the “from.” As Polanyi never tired of pointing out, he turned Gestalt ideas into an epistemology.

Not only is the “from” dimension chock full of elements and processes awaiting further specification; the “to” dimension of meaning also takes on varied forms. Again, Langer is helpful. Meaning can be primarily intellectual, rich in connotation and denotation. It can be primarily perceptual in nature. It can be imaginative, reflective, descriptive, or action oriented. The frameworks employed in thought shape and limit the “via” in certain ways that in turn focus the “to” in specific ways.

**Mullins:** Polanyi contended that the way thought has developed within modernism is the source of many of society’s problems. He proposed some important changes, and your work has proposed further modifications of some Polanyian ideas. What do you make of the way Polanyi has interpreted the course of history in the first two-thirds of the twentieth century? Are you convinced by his account of moral inversion as a contributor to the last century’s disasters and perhaps the malaise among intellectuals in this century’s first twenty years?

**Gulick:** Polanyi seems on target in his portrayal of the Enlightenment’s unintended destructive consequences. When skeptical doubt, useful in challenging superstition and unjust social arrangements, became married to scientific objectivity as the only reliable guides to truth, Western traditions of normativity could be and often were swept aside as merely subjective and unreliable. Once moral and religious constraints are interpreted as sneaky vehicles of elite control, as is voiced in Marxism (or other contemporary frameworks with a dynamo-objective coupling), the natural moral passions of humankind, enhanced by Christian values, are let loose in unrestrained ways toward utopian ends. Violence and totalitarianism become acceptable as a means of social melioration and control.

Such is the core of Polanyi’s theory of moral inversion. This theory provides his rationale for resurrecting normative belief both as a dependable moral guide and as an inevitable component of any framework of thought, including scientific thought. Overall, I find his insight to be quite brilliant as an account of the rise of individualistic nihilism as well as social dysfunction. My only caution would be against overemphasizing the importance of moral inversion as a cause of war. We humans are motivated by many interrelated factors. Thus, among the complex causal factors leading to World War I are the clash of empires with their secret alliances, nationalistic impulses of repressed groups within larger states, a pervasive mood that saw war as a cleansing force, and the militaristic intransigence of such figures as Kaiser Wilhelm II. Then the unjust reparations imposed upon the German people by the Treaty of Versailles was a key factor leading to the rise of Hitler and World War II, as Polanyi saw. My point is that moral inversion is best seen as a significant background influence that has been too easily overlooked when twentieth century events are analyzed.

**Mullins:** Your comments lead me back to the question of how you see Polanyi’s thought contributing to our ability to feel at home in the universe.

**Gulick:** Something I cherish in Polanyi’s thought is its richness and suggestibility. I can here mention only a few highlights. First, he recognized the importance of congenial social relations. He gloried in the

collaborative work of scientists and in inquiry generally. Would it not be wonderful if societies of explorers could become more abundant? He devoted a full chapter in *PK* in support of conviviality in social relations. The joy of learning and discovering is essential to any life well lived. Richard Gelwick aptly called Polanyi's thought a "heuristic philosophy." In particular, Polanyi affirmed the satisfaction of obtaining broader and deeper contact with reality: "Though powerless to argue with the nihilist, [a person alive to discovery] may yet succeed in conveying to him the intimation of a mental satisfaction which he is lacking; and this intimation may start in him a process of conversion" (*SFS*, 81).

Polanyi clearly saw that not just any form of society can adequately provide the freedom and support that would encourage social conviviality and allow the individual full freedom to seek discoveries. "Love of truth and of intellectual values in general will now reappear as the love of the kind of society which fosters these values," he wrote, "and submission to intellectual standards will be seen to imply participation in a society which accepts the cultural obligation to serve these standards" (*PK*, 203). Societies that seek the common good will flourish when many of their citizens are committed to public liberty rather than self-interest alone. "A free society is not an Open Society," Polanyi wrote, "but one fully dedicated to a distinctive set of beliefs" (*LL*, xviii).

In his old age, Polanyi sought to integrate his concern for these and other factors contributing to the satisfactions attendant to feeling at home in the universe. The vehicle he selected for such an accomplishment is an indwelt understanding of meanings: "Man lives in the meanings he is able to discern. He extends himself into that which he finds coherent and is at home there.... In order to hold these meanings securely in the reverence they seem to demand, contemporary man therefore needs a theory of these meanings that explains how their coherence is no less real than the perceptual and scientific coherences he so readily accepts" (*M*, 66, 68). I believe it is important not just to assert the reality of these coherences but build on what it is that makes values and cultural experiences worthy of reverence. One such factor is their ability to carry us away with their tacitly grounded emotional power. Here we are not just talking of facts, but of what is significant to us, what furthers our deepest desires and purposes. If such things are denigrated as merely subjective, the appropriate response is to assert that significance felt by a human for life-affirming values is far more important to being at home in the universe than mere so-called objective facts.

**Mullins:** Let us shift from questions about understanding Polanyi's ideas to questions about stimulating further interest in Polanyi as a rich thinker worth study today. You certainly have had an important organizational role in the Polanyi Society for many years. What you think the Polanyi Society should be doing in the next turn?

**Gulick:** I identify with the Greek notion of philosophy as a love of wisdom. That implies that one should try to grasp a little understanding of as much of what is going on in the world as possible. When I first finished graduate school, as an expression of my broad interest I tried to write articles on a variety of topics for a variety of groups. That turned out not so much to be an expression of wisdom as an adventure in fragmentation. For about four decades now I have found my academic home. It's with the Polanyi Society. For being one interested in many disciplines, I guess it was natural that I identify with and follow the thought of a polymath like Polanyi. Now I am at the point in my life where I am trying to integrate what I have learned and haven't entirely forgotten. My 2020 article "Toward a Comprehensive Interpretation of Aesthetics" in *American Journal of Theology & Philosophy* (42/2-3: 151-174) is one such attempt at integration. I think investigating the diverse sources of wisdom and working toward synthesis remains a worthy pursuit.

With regard to the immediate future of the Polanyi Society, I want first to commend the work of many scholars in excavating and interpreting the broad scope of Polanyi's accomplishments. We have already generated a rich public conversation. I think the major task of the society now is to find ways of connecting Polanyi's insights to contemporary issues and other thinkers. It is good that *TAD* is now publicly available online. The articles in the July 2021 issue of *TAD* written in response to the theme "Polanyian Reflections on the Current State of Democracy in the U.S." are exemplary models of what I think we should be doing. I am encouraged by the group of somewhat younger Polanyians who are ready to upgrade our web resources and expand our reach through social media. I applaud the members of the society for living up to the standard of conviviality Polanyi advocated. As my time in the society is phasing out, I am humbly grateful for the opportunity to have been instructed by Polanyi and for the many good exchanges with fellow Polanyians.