



POLANYI'S RAZOR: THE TACIT ANTITHESIS OF THE VEIL OF IGNORANCE

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Keywords: post-critical philosophy, Michael Polanyi, John Rawls, veil of ignorance, tacit knowing

ABSTRACT

Veil of ignorance theories suggest that an appraiser can be (i) completely (focally) aware of and (ii) completely ignorant about the appraisal she is making. This paper argues that Michael Polanyi rejected both of these premises and that he was developing an antithesis to the veil of ignorance model in his concept of tacit knowing. Rather counterintuitively, the latter concept did not refer to one but three kinds of appraisal: making a knowledge claim, making an aesthetic evaluation, and making a moral judgement. This paper shows how the Polanyian concept of tacit knowing clashes with the veil of ignorance model in the case of this third kind of appraisal, making a moral judgement. The first part of the paper portrays how Polanyi's Budapest years might have influenced his discovery of the tacit. The second part explores the evolution of the tacit knowing concept and identifies four stages in his relevant thought based on how he approached the tacit. The third part explains how the Polanyian concept of tacit knowing might be interpreted as a philosophical razor that is antithetical to the veil of ignorance model. The paper concludes by going into details about this antithetical relation and, by doing so, sharpening the razor.



Introduction

Commitment to the idea that philosophical inquiries should not ignore the social context of the topics being inquired into was common in the intellectual life of early twentieth century Budapest. While this commitment produced a sociological tradition (Demeter 2008, 2011, 2020) within Hungarian philosophy, it did not launch a philosophical school *per se*. People sharing this commitment were various, developing different philosophies and ideologies. One of the few social spaces that could draw them together was the intellectual salon of Michael Polanyi's mother, Cécile Polanyi. Tante Cécile's salon became an informal marketplace of socially sensitive philosophies, attracting Marxists, socialists, and liberals alike (Vezér 1986, Scott-Moleski 2005, Szapor 2005, Litvan 2006). This colourful milieu of social sentiments inspired the Polanyi siblings to develop socially sensitive philosophies themselves. Michael developed a humane

philosophy, Karl a democratic socialism (Gulick 2010, Dale 2014, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c, Cangiani and Thomasberger 2018), and Laura a feminist philosophy (Szapor 1997, 2005). During their university years, Michael and Karl Polanyi became founding members of the Galileo Circle (1908–1918, 1918–1919), a student organization fostering anti-dogmatism and sociological studies. While identifying the exact influence of these early social endeavours on Michael Polanyi's later ideas about the tacit seems to be an elusive task, the way he approached the idea of the tacit (as I will discuss in the next section) suggests that this background did play a role.

There were several informal gatherings, student organizations, and newspapers connecting with each other and mirroring similar ideas in early twentieth century Budapest. But this web of philosophical and political endeavours was anything but homogeneous. Although it connected people who shared the commitment to the idea that social context is important to philosophical inquiries, they took very different roads in the following years. Communists like Georg Lukács and Mátyás Rákosi, socialists like Karl Mannheim and Karl Polanyi, and liberals like Oszkár Jászi and Michael Polanyi were all affecting and being affected by this multifaceted network (Demeter 2008, 2011, 2020). The Károlyi government that seized power with the Aster Revolution of October 1918 might be seen as the political power representing a considerable part of this spectrum of social sensibilities, excluding radical leftists. The coalition government of social democrats and civic radicals was tied to the sociological tradition of the Hungarian philosophy of the period and, more precisely, to the Polanyi salon by several strings. The President, Count Mihály Károlyi, and the Minister of Nationalities, Oszkár Jászi, were close friends to the Polanyi family (Litvan 2006). Michael Polanyi became a Secretary of the Minister of Health in the short-lived post-World War I liberal government. When Károlyi was dethroned and the First Hungarian Republic was replaced by the communist regime of Béla Kun's Hungarian Soviet Republic, Károlyi and his sympathizers needed to flee from the country to avoid persecution. Michael Polanyi immigrated to Germany (1919) and then to the United Kingdom (1933), where the world-renowned chemist eventually became a professor of social studies (1948) and developed increasingly sophisticated ideas about tacit knowing.

Stages Towards the Tacit Dimension

While the full-blown version of Polanyi's grasp of the *tacit*, no doubt, only emerged with *The Tacit Dimension* (1966), a careful analysis of his early manuscripts and letters suggests that he was developing the concept of the tacit in four stages over more than three decades from the early 1930s. This section describes these stages and offers additional context to understand the increasing importance of the tacit in Polanyi's philosophy. Of course, no stadial history is free from the fuzziness of stages. That is certainly true of this historical account. Polanyi frequently republished selections of his related earlier essays and lectures as components of later books, which makes it particularly hard to identify stages in his thought. This essay nevertheless argues that four stages can be discerned. In the first stage (appearance of the tacit), Polanyi was led to the seeds of what later became the tacit through his critique of Soviet value theory. In the second stage (origins of the tacit), consisting of two thrusts, Polanyi was inquiring into social and epistemic problems and came up with solutions related to tacit knowing. The first thrust (social origins of the tacit) addressed the social origins of knowing and the unspecifiable and incomprehensible aspects of the act of knowing. The second thrust (epistemic origins of the tacit) addressed how spontaneous order creates a spillover effect of tacit knowing, enabling otherwise unsolvable problems to be solved. In the third stage of development (nature of the tacit), tacit knowing became Polanyi's central concern. He began developing narratives about

what tacit knowing is and how it works. In this stage, Polanyi provided narratives from various social realms with examples of tacit knowing. In the fourth and last stage (structure of the tacit), Polanyi developed an anatomy of tacit knowing to find out what parts can be identified and how these parts together constitute tacit knowing.

Polanyi's earliest philosophical inquiries were attempts to detect the core fallacies of the Soviet experiment and to suggest a different solution for Western civilisation based on the lessons learnt from these fallacies. From our point of view, one of the most relevant points of Polanyi's critique was his discussion of an implication of Soviet value theory. In *Collectivist Planning* (1940) included in *The Contempt of Freedom: The Russian Experiment and After*, he argued that "the compilation of statistics on objects consumed, comprising the number of handkerchiefs, spectacles, prayer books, and countless other kinds of merchandise, are as meaningless from this point of view as would be the valuation of the National Gallery by square yards of canvas or pounds of paint" (Polanyi 1940, 20). A summary of the amounts of these things is meaningless because it does not tell anything about the value of these things to individuals (Bíró 2019, 21). A summary of things is different than the things themselves and is different than the relations of things and people. As a value theory should be concerned about the relation of things and people, but the Soviet statistics do not tell anything about the relation of things and people, it is not a real value theory. This missing "relation" meant to Polanyi that qualitative aspects, including tacitly known aspects, are altogether missing from Soviet statistics. He considered this to be a failure that should be avoided if one seeks to develop a real value theory.

The 1940s can be seen as an intermediary stage in terms of how Polanyi approached the tacit. While the first stage (appearance of the tacit) was centred on the recognition that thought contains unspecifiable and incomprehensible elements, the second (origins of the tacit) was dominated by inquiries into the origins of these elements. At the second stage, two main thrusts can be discerned: one (social origins of the tacit) was portrayed in its most mature form in "What to Believe" (1947)² and the other in *The Logic of Liberty* (1951). In "What to Believe," Polanyi argued that knowing has three inherently interrelated aspects: *understanding* (or the *theoretical aspect*), *believing* (or the *confessional aspect*), and *belonging* (or the *social aspect*). These aspects cannot be separated from each other in acts of knowing. This "inseparability" reflects the importance of the tacit as an instance of unspecifiable and incomprehensible elements that affect knowing without the knower being completely aware of them. These elements came from the shared beliefs (confessional aspect) of the community to which the knower belongs (social aspect). And they are not add-ons but inherent aspects of each and every act of knowing. They cannot be veiled or ignored by the knower herself or by the philosopher who seeks to explain knowing. Polanyi emphasized the importance of belonging (or social aspect), as this aspect is the one that "principally determines which knowledge is true, and which is false" (Polanyi 1947, 154). The truth-value of a knowledge claim or of an appraisal, to use a more general term, is mostly determined by the shared beliefs of the community in which the knowledge claim is being evaluated. Veil of ignorance theories are basic models about how moral judgements are being made. They imply that, in order to be able to make a moral judgement, the appraiser needs to ignore partially or entirely her personal attachment to the issue being judged. For veil of ignorance theories, the truth-value of an appraisal is not explicitly affected by the appraiser's belonging to a community. There are, however, differences in this respect between "thin" and "thick" veil of ignorance theories. "Thin" theories, like Hume's *judicious spectator* (Hume 1739–1740/2007, T. 581) and Smith's *impartial spectator* (Smith 1759/1976, 129, 135), offer a permissive reading based on their grasp of objectivity, while "thick" theories, like Rawls's *justice as fairness*

(Rawls 1971), deny all ground for such a contingency based on a concept of universal objectivity (see the next section).

The other thrust (epistemic origins of the tacit) of the second stage was dominated by the *spontaneous order* narrative, reflected in its most advanced form in *The Logic of Liberty* (1951). According to Polanyi, one of the reasons why spontaneous order is a better way of ordering certain affairs than its corporate counterpart is that it provides epistemic synergy to the appraisals of individual agents. Every individual agent develops a personal *synopsis* about the world (Polanyi 1948a, 2). These *synopses*, shaped in human interaction in a community, overlap each other, and through this overlapping the knowing of each individual agent has an ongoing indirect effect on the knowing of others (Polanyi 1948b, 1). Part of this knowing is tacit knowing. And this spillover effect of tacit knowing is what makes epistemic synergy in a spontaneous order. Corporate order does not take advantage of this kind of spillover effect and epistemic synergy. In this system, the tacit knowing of individual agents does not have a role to play in the knowing of others. A single synopsis is made on the top without being aware of other possible synopses and their relations. Whoever is on the top only has access to her own tacit knowing but not that of others. That is why a spontaneous system performs better in adjusting relations than a corporate system of a similar size. Polanyi has arrived at the tacit through discovering an epistemic spillover effect that permeates spontaneous systems but lacks in corporate ones.

The 1950s marked the beginning of the third stage (nature of the tacit) in which the tacit became the central issue for Polanyi. In *Personal Knowledge*, Polanyi argued that while making a knowledge claim, moral judgement, or aesthetic evaluation, one is not *detached* from who she is and what she is doing. On the contrary, during these acts she is affected by the potential consequences of her knowledge claim, moral judgement, or aesthetic evaluation. This is *prima facie* an antithesis of the veil of ignorance theories, which seems to emphasize disengagement and distancing. However, one should not stop here but unfold Polanyi's argument about why and in what sense such "detachment" (Polanyi 1998, iv) is impossible. Polanyi suggested that making knowledge claims, moral judgements, and aesthetic evaluations are skillful acts subordinating particulars to an anticipated whole, to a concept of what is to be comprehended (ibid., 351). The person making a claim, judgement, or evaluation is not neutral about the outcome of these acts. She is affected both intellectually and emotionally. She is affected intellectually because through these acts she is carving out a personal reality from the infinite number of equipotential realities, that is, making the world in which she lives. Her personal reality—continuously refined in social interaction—is getting increasingly similar to (although never the same as) the objective reality. And she is affected emotionally because through these acts she is following her personal commitments leading—in her view—to an objective reality. What is at stake is the reality she believes in. And she feels for this reality.

Polanyi proposed that by building a personal reality, the "personal coefficient" (ibid., 17) present in these three types of appraisal "bridges...the disjunction between subjectivity and objectivity." The person making an appraisal believes that he can "transcend his own subjectivity" (ibid.) and can reach out to the objective reality. This duality, that appraisals are always already subjective and yet they are inherently made by referring to the objective reality, is again incompatible with what veil of ignorance theories suggest. The latter implies that there is no middle ground or trespassing between the subjective and the objective when making a specific type of appraisal, moral judgement. Polanyi implies that there is. For him, all types of appraisals are accompanied and driven by passions (ibid., 27)—passions to feel that one knows something (*intellectual satisfaction*), that one makes others believe in something (*persuasive desire*), and that one achieves something (*personal responsibility*). For Polanyi, these passions cannot be separated from appraisals (ibid.).

When making an appraisal, “a person commits himself to certain beliefs and appreciations, and accepts certain meanings by deliberately merging his awareness of certain particulars into a focal awareness of the whole” (ibid., 59). When focusing on the whole, we are becoming focally aware of a specific whole and “subsidiarily aware of its parts” (ibid.). Comprehension works like vision: fixating on a point helps us to see (comprehend) the details of that point but, at the same time, makes other points less visible (comprehensible). There is no perfect point on which to fixate. A person may (and is expected to) shift her focal awareness, and by doing so she also shifts her subsidiary awareness. Part of this shifting may result in some tacit elements becoming explicit (from subsidiary awareness to focal awareness) and some formerly explicit elements becoming tacit (from focal awareness to subsidiary awareness). Another part of this shifting does not involve trespassing the tacit/non-tacit divide. Tacit knowing can only reside in the field of subsidiary awareness. But for tacit knowing, moving out from subsidiary and entering into focal awareness always means a transformation from tacit knowing to explicit knowing.

Polanyi argued that a person *dwells in* a set of presuppositions, that is, a set of commitments about what focal and subsidiary awareness will follow, as she dwells in her own body (ibid., 62). These commitments cannot be asserted or articulated by the person having them because they are part of who (she thinks) she is. They are assimilated. Subsidiary awarenesses are being constantly fitted into a coherent focal awareness driven by the belief that this specific focal awareness opens a window to the objective reality (ibid., 63). She thinks and feels she has an obligation towards this objective reality. And by fulfilling this obligation, she is making her personal reality. This reality is not objective because she is making it through her commitments. But it is not completely subjective either because it is anchored in a vision of objective reality. Making an appraisal is a subjective striving towards an objective reality.

A person can follow various commitments. But her commitments are not wholly independent from the commitments of the society she lives in. A society supports certain commitments and represses others and, by doing so, supports the affirmation of certain personal realities and represses the making of others. This is, again, incompatible with the implications of the veil of ignorance theories. To an extent, a person can develop a personal reality that is quite dissimilar from those supported by her society. But only to an extent; eventually a hostile intellectual and moral environment would make her either change her commitments or leave her society.³ According to Polanyi, when making an appraisal about particulars, one is necessarily and tacitly entangled in a grasp of the whole. That is, again, incompatible with veil of ignorance theories that suggest that the agent is in control of what to ignore and not ignore when making an appraisal. “We can know more than we can tell” (Polanyi 2009, x). And we are not in control of this untold knowledge that permeates our knowing and being practices. Polanyi argued that “all thought contains components of which we are subsidiarily aware in the focal content of our thinking, and that all thought dwells in its subsidiaries, as if they were parts of our body” (ibid., xviii). Thinking has a “from-to structure” (ibid.). It is not a static state but a dynamic process coming from subsidiaries and going towards focality. Even “when originality breeds new values, it breeds them tacitly, by implication” (ibid., xix). Agents do not choose new values but “submit to them” (ibid.) by adopting them. They are responsible for choosing their beliefs, but they do not choose their beliefs from a *tabula rasa*. Agents submit themselves to a reality, and this submission grounds their beliefs and consequently their thoughts.

In the fourth, most mature stage, mirrored in *The Tacit Dimension* (1966/2009), Polanyi’s emphasis changed from the nature of tacit knowing to its structure (structure of tacit). He called the basic structure the two *terms* of tacit knowing (ibid., 9). The first is the *unspecifiably* or *tacitly* known or *proximal*, the

second is the *specifiably* known or *distal* term. In his view, tacit knowing has four *aspects* or relational *structures* that connect these two terms. The *functional* aspect means that “we know the first term only by relying on our awareness of it for attending to the second” (ibid., 10). We are attending to the second term, and by doing so we necessarily rely on the first. The function of the first is to help in attending to the second. For example, we get to know the moral qualities of the acts of a person by relying on our own awareness of them for judging moral character. The *phenomenal* aspect means that we only get to know the first term in the appearance of the second (ibid., 11). The first emerges as we are getting to know the second. For example, we get to know the moral qualities of the acts of a person by judging her moral character. The *semantic* aspect describes the process through which meaning is distanced from or displaced away from the knower (ibid., 12–13). The emphasis is shifted from the beginning to the end of the process of interpretation. For example, this occurs in getting to know the moral qualities of the acts of a person in terms of judging her moral character. And, finally, the *ontological* aspect describes “what tacit knowing is a knowledge of,” identifying what “comprehensive entity” (ibid., 13) the two terms constitute together through the process of *understanding*. For example, judging the moral character of a person is twofold: judging her moral character in terms of the moral qualities of her acts and judging the moral qualities of her acts in terms of her moral character.

This fourfold structure of tacit knowing presented in *The Tacit Dimension* (1966/2009) is incompatible with veil of ignorance theories that imply that the appraiser can be unaffected by the act of appraisal. The functional aspect of tacit knowing implies that, when making an appraisal, the appraiser relies on the attendance of her subsidiary awareness to her focal awareness. The phenomenal aspect of tacit knowing implies that, when making an appraisal, the appraiser gets to know her subsidiary awareness through her focal awareness. The semantic aspect of tacit knowing implies that, when making an appraisal, the appraiser goes from subsidiary to focal awareness. The ontological aspect of tacit knowing implies that, when making an appraisal, the appraiser relies on the joint attendance of her subsidiary awareness(es) to her focal awareness. None of these aspects are compatible with the veil of ignorance implication that the appraiser is unaffected by the act of appraisal.

Polanyi suggested that the integration of subsidiary awareness(es) creates an *interiorization* or *indwelling* (ibid. 17). We identify ourselves with what is being known by us. He also noted that such tacit indwelling cannot be replaced with an explicit corpus of knowledge. The elimination of the personal aspects would mean the elimination of the knowledge itself. In the third part of *The Tacit Dimension*, this descriptive account of appraisal was turned into a normative account. What had been framed so far as a general claim of human appraisal was starting to be treated as a claim laying down the foundations of what Polanyi called the *society of explorers* (ibid., 83). In such a society, “man is in thought” (ibid.), that is, driven by “imagination seeking discovery” (ibid., 79) and getting increasingly closer to reality. Explorers are controlled by a “mutually imposed authority” (ibid., 83–84) based on “chains of overlapping neighborhoods” (ibid., 72) that mutually impose different parts of the neighbors’ personal realities.

Cutting the Veils of Ignorance

The overlapping of personal realities is contrary to veil of ignorance theories that require decision-makers to abstract themselves from their personal niche, surroundings, and histories. For these theories, it is not true that “man is in thought” (ibid., 83). Man is seen either outside of thought or capable of decentring himself partly or completely from thought. In this respect, all veil of ignorance theories are not the same. David Hume’s *judicious spectator* (Hume 1739–1740/2007, T. 581) and Adam Smith’s *impartial spectator*

(Smith 1759/1976, 129, 135) reasoned that, when making a moral decision, the decision-maker imagines an average person (but not anyone specific) and asks how she would judge the situation. Moral judgements are based on our personal, internal conversations with this imagined average person. The decision-maker has access to some knowledge that is generally considered to be necessary for making the decision in a given society. She also has access to her personal embeddedness that is her motive to be engaged in an internal conversation with an average person. Nevertheless, although the decision-maker strives for objective moral standards, her motive for striving towards these standards is personal. These theories are commonly referred to as “thin” veil of ignorance theories.

“Thick” veil of ignorance theories, including the one presented in John Rawls’s account of *justice as fairness* (Rawls 1971), suggest that, when making a moral decision, the decision-maker asks how a *fair* (and therefore *just*) system would look like in any society. The decision-maker decides accordingly, without being aware of her past, present, or future embeddedness. Moral judgements are based on an “impersonal” grasp of the “objective” principles leading to *the* just society. The decision-maker purportedly has access to all the knowledge that is necessary for making that decision but does not have access to anything personal. She does not have (her own) morals, personal commitments, passions, desires, fears, and hopes. She does not have sentiments. She does not have any kind of personal attachment to the world! Most “thin” veil of ignorance theories can be made compatible with personal elements to a degree by referring either to the personal motives of decision-makers to strive for objectivity or to their circumscribed grasp of objectivity (objectivity understood as objectivity in a given society at a given time). However, “thick” theories, and most notably Rawls’s application of the model of choosing under a veil of ignorance in *A Theory of Justice* (1971), cannot be made compatible with personal elements by definition: personal elements are defined as factors necessarily leading decision-makers not towards but away from objectivity (objectivity understood as a universal objectivity, a so-called God’s eye view).

The relevant thrust in Polanyi’s writings was not explicitly framed as an antithesis of the Rawlsian model of the veil of ignorance. It could not be framed as such. Polanyi’s relevant papers were written up to the late 1960s while Rawls’s *A Theory of Justice* was only published in 1971. But, regardless of how it was framed, Polanyi’s philosophical framework presents a consistent antithesis to the veil of ignorance theories, including Rawls’s *justice as fairness*. How did Polanyi develop, from the thirties to the late sixties, a counternarrative that undercuts veil of ignorance theories?

Polanyi consistently argued against the “growth of mechanism” (Polanyi 1958/1998, 6), by which he meant the increasing popularity of mechanical views. He proposed that these views embrace a separation of reason and experience, and implied a specific model of validation: that theories (representing reason) should be tested by empirical evidence (representing experience). This commitment to empirical testing had produced a critical attitude in philosophy, an attitude overvaluing doubt (ibid., 283). This attitude became so ingrained both in the mind of experts and in public thought that attitudes of belief that could not be empirically validated had no chance against it. While some attitudes of belief were indeed attitudes of dogmatism and zealotry, others were attitudes of sensible and reasonable belief (ibid., 292). In Polanyi’s view, a critical philosophy, based on doubt, prevailed, and this denied the role of non-empirical belief in science and philosophy. His major project was to develop what he called a “post-critical philosophy” to counter critical philosophy and its bias against non-empirical belief. Some would even argue that the anti-Rawlsianism of Polanyi’s ideas was actually anti-Kantianism. And indeed, the Kantian rational being submitting herself to impersonal moral laws is very unlike the Polanyian sentient being submitting herself

to her personal commitments. Why choose Rawls rather than Kant as an antagonist to Polanyi, then? While both Kant and Rawls presumed the universalizability of morals, it was Rawls who traced back this universalizability to a universal capability of ignorance. And this central role of ignorance is what makes Rawls a more fitting antagonist to Polanyi than Kant. According to Polanyi, “man is in thought” (1966/2009, 83); the appraiser dwells in the appraisal as she dwells in her own body. The appraiser has no capability (universal or otherwise) to ignore this attachment. Making the appraisal is making herself. Ignoring (part of) herself would be not *indwelling* but “outdwelling” and not making herself but unmaking herself. The idea that detachment is necessary and possible for making an appraisal comes from an attitude of doubt.

Theories of veil of ignorance reflect this attitude of doubt. When making an appraisal, the appraiser is not supposed to have any kind of belief about what is going to happen, that is, what knowledge she will discover, what moral judgement she will eventually form, or what aesthetic evaluation she will make. The “objective” appraiser has no belief at all about the outcome of the appraisal. Hume’s *judicious spectator* (1739–1740/2007, T. 581) and Smith’s *impartial spectator* (Smith 1759/1976, 129, 135), for example, do not have any kind of belief about the outcome of the internal conversations in which they are involved. The Rawlsian appraiser also has no belief about the outcome of the appraisal (although she does have some belief about how to get to the ideal outcome). Polanyi’s appraiser was different. Polanyi insisted that “only if a claim lies totally outside his range of responsible interests can the scientist [or other appraisers] assume an attitude of completely impartial doubt towards it” (1958/1998, 291). But it never “lies totally outside.” It is always inside his “range of responsible interests” if he makes an appraisal. That is why he makes the appraisal. If it “lies totally outside,” he would not make the appraisal. Why would he? Why would anyone—even an abstract appraiser—engage in anything that he is completely ignorant about? For Polanyi, that makes no sense. His appraiser does not have an “attitude of completely impartial doubt” (*ibid.*) but an attitude of sensible and intelligible belief. But how does this become a philosophical razor? And what does it demarcate?

Polanyi’s razor is as follows. An appraiser can be neither completely (focally) aware of nor completely ignorant about the appraisal she is making. If a *prima facie* appraiser is completely (focally) aware of or completely ignorant about the appraisal she is making, then she is not an actual appraiser. Making an appraisal is a personal act anchored in the tacit dimension. The personal element of attitude cannot be bracketed, either by the appraiser or by some claimed-to-be objective spectator. It is integral to the act of appraisal. Thus, the processes of moral decision-making as mirrored in veil of ignorance theories are not appraisals in the Polanyian sense. They are shaved off by Polanyi’s razor.

Sharpening the Razor: Tacit as Unveilable, Knowing as Anti-Ignorant

Polanyi’s razor thus suggests that the concept of tacit knowing is an antithesis to the veil of ignorance approach. But the razor can be sharpened even further. The tacit element of knowing can be seen countering the “veilability” (the capacity to be “veiled”) of certain knowledge. Tacit knowing implies that parts of knowing cannot be veiled from each other in the course of a purely objective exercise. Tacit elements cannot be explicated. And what cannot be explicated cannot be veiled. Knowing itself can be seen as countering ignorance. For Polanyi, knowing, both tacit and explicit, requires a commitment from the knower towards what is being known. The knower (appraiser) believes that her knowledge (appraisal) is objective. She thinks she has an objective grasp of knowledge (or of morals or aesthetics). This provides the motive for the knower (appraiser) to be engaged in the act of knowing (appraisal). Without this personal belief, there is no knowing (appraisal). The knower (appraiser) cannot be ignored from knowing (appraisal).

This essay argued that Polanyi's concept of tacit knowing can be seen as an antithesis to the veil of ignorance model. The paper started with exploring the possible origins of the Polanyian tacit in the sociological tradition that dominated Hungarian philosophy in the first half of the twentieth century (Demeter 2008, 2011, 2020). It continued with providing a stadial history of Polanyi's engagement with the tacit from his earliest accounts in the thirties and forties to *The Tacit Dimension* (1966/2009) and *Knowing and Being* (1969). The essay then discussed Polanyi's concept of tacit knowing together with various veil of ignorance theories and defined Polanyi's razor as follows. An appraiser can be neither completely (focally) aware of nor completely ignorant about the appraisal she is making. If she is either, then she is not an actual appraiser. In the final section, Polanyi's razor was sharpened by showing that not just the two concepts (tacit knowing, veil of ignorance) but also their elements are antithetical. For Polanyi, tacit implied "unveilability," and knowing implied anti-ignorance. Veil of ignorance theories that implied that certain aspects of the appraiser can be "veiled" from the process of making the appraisal and that an appraiser can be ignorant about making the appraisal were thus antitheses to the Polanyian concept.

ENDNOTES

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²This essay has been published in *Tradition & Discovery* 46 (2): 21–28. For more about "What to Believe," see Mullins 2020 and Bíró 2020 in the same issue.

³Polanyi gave a detailed description of how society affects commitments through various social institutions, but this cannot be expounded here.

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