

THE POLANYI SOCIETY

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REVIEW OF POLANYI ON RHETORIC, THE SPECIAL
ISSUE OF PRE-TEXT, AN INTERDISCIPLINARY
JOURNAL OF RHETORIC

This special issue of PRE-TEXT, a journal for the interdisciplinary study of rhetoric, is devoted entirely to the thought of Michael Polanyi as it bears on rhetorical theory and language in general. It is an indication of the growing impact of Polanyi's thought in the area of rhetorical theory and is a manifestation of Sam Watson's efforts to address current discussions of rhetoric from a Polanyian perspective. Sam Watson, who teaches English at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, is the guest editor of this particular issue of PRE-TEXT. He is responsible both for conceiving of the scope of this project and for soliciting the essays. Prof. Watson, by avoiding the temptation to focus directly on Polanyi, has crafted a model of the way Polanyi's thought can be brought to bear on a particular area of inquiry.

The eleven articles, written independently of each other, can be read singly or in any order. But to capture the spirit of the project, it is important to read first Sam Watson's "Breakfast in the Tacit Dimension." He draws out the connections he finds in the essays, including an honest statement that some of the articles are only tangentially related to rhetorical theory. He doesn't force a comprehensive unity that the essays themselves do not warrant. His preface also gives paragraph-length suggestions (not summaries) as to the thrust of each of the articles.

Another major contribution of the editor is to provide a basic exposition of Polanyi's thought to aid readers unfamiliar with Polanyi. This helped make the other essays free from all but the most necessary expositions. After the preface the reader is spared what would become repetitious expositions in each of the articles. This strategy helps as much as anything else to make this a project that attends from Polanyi rather than to him.

This special issue features three articles, each written by a person long associated with Polanyi: Harry Prosch, William Poteat, and Robin Hodgkin.

Harry Prosch's essay, "Polanyi and Rhetoric," addresses the issue of Polanyi's view of rhetoric, not by trying to reconstruct a theory of rhetoric, but indirectly through a discussion of Polanyi's use of rhetoric. Starting with the assertion, "Polanyi's rhetoric was a disaster" (p. 189), Prof. Prosch discusses Polanyi's failure to capture the attention of the philosophers to whom much of his attention is directed. In the development of his essay

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Prosch illuminates some of the rhetorical strategies used by Polanyi and in the process draws out the connections between apprenticeship, community persuasive powers of language.

William Poteat's "Further Polanyian Meditations," written as an exercise on post-critical logic from the stance of post-critical logic, at times bears on the same issues of rhetoric raised by Prosch. Prof. Poteat discusses Polanyi's use of such terms as 'belief,' 'fact,' 'value,' 'method,' and 'logic' by exploring how Polanyi uses these concepts in ways that are at odds with their use in the philosophical tradition. Since much of Polanyi's refiguring of these concepts remained tacit rather than explicit reformulations, Polanyi's language could not but create difficulties of understanding for those in the tradition who take up these basic terms with their standard philosophical force. But Poteat goes beyond the difficulty that Polanyi's rhetoric presents from the stance of philosophical rhetoric. He does this by struggling with the difficulties of taking up a post-critical way of speaking even after becoming aware of the radical refiguring at work in Polanyi. Though Poteat offers no explicit instructions on how to do this, the entire article, which is a small part of an even larger meditation, is through its twisting and turnings a concrete expression of how difficult the process of writing out of a post-critical logic is even for one who is explicitly aware of the radical nature of Polanyi's variance from critical ways of figuring and speaking.

If this issue of PRE-TEXT did no more than make Poteat's article available to a wider audience not familiar with his privately circulated, book-length "Meditations," I would count Sam Watson's efforts to create this issue a success. (See the Polanyi Society Newsletter, Winter, 1982 for James Stines' review of Poteat's work.)

The third featured article, "Making Sense and the Means for Doing So," is a further elaboration by Robin Hodgkin of his theory of education, particularly as it relates to a Polanyian refiguring of the concept of competence as ". . . the potentiality of an organism to deploy varied resources and complex skills flexibly in a creative act" (p. 75). In pointing to the need for a playful use of concepts of toys, tools, and symbols within a potential space of exploration, he offers a fruitful alternative to the more explicit, behavioristic understandings of the competency oriented education that is becoming more and more a feature both in the public schools and in higher education.

The other eight contributors to this issue are James Reither ("Some Ideas of Michael Polanyi and Some Implications for Teaching Writing"), Diane Sautter ("Tacit and Explicit Tulips", Rembert Herbert ("Into the Tacit Dimension"), William Goding ("Polanyi and Peak"), Robert Scott ("The Tacit Dimension and Rhetoric"), James Wisser ("Michael Polanyi and the Problem of Toleration"), Loyal Rue ("Reconstructing the Conditions for Cultural Coherence"), and Dale Cannon ("The Primitive"/"Civilized Opposition and the Modern Notions of Objectivity").

Of these I want to mention two in the short space left because of their direct bearing on the issue's theme of rhetoric and writing.

In his article on Rhetoric and persuasion, Robert Scott also discusses some of the current issues in the field of rhetoric. This was particularly helpful to me,

along with Watson's preface, for understanding more specifically how rhetoricians who approach their inquiry post-critically are at odds with their more traditional colleagues.

One of the essays deals directly with the implications of Polanyi's view for the teaching of writing. James Reither suggests some concrete implications and applications for teaching writing as the development of a tacit process. As I read his suggestions I had a sense that they were consistent with practices that are already widely used in the teaching of writing, leading me to wonder if Polanyi's thought is perhaps not all that radical for teachers of writing. Prof. Reither suggests that the difficulties do not lie as much in the actual teaching of writing as in the theoretical accounts of how one comes to learn to write.

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CORRECTION: The special issue of PRE/TEXT is a double issue. The price, therefore, is \$6.00, not \$4.00, as mistakenly printed in the previous newsletter. The address for ordering is: Victor J. Vitanza, PRE/TEXT General Editor, Department of English, P.O. Box 19035, University of Texas at Arlington, Arlington, Texas, 76109. Persons ordering from overseas should send \$10.

A COMPARISON OF MODELS IN PHYSICS AND IN RELIGION
BY MICHAEL POLANYI

(The following text is excerpted from an unpublished manuscript of Michael Polanyi dated December 7, 1939. It was found by Prof. William Scott of the University of Nevada at Reno, who is writing a biography of Polanyi.)

Physicists say that the supreme proof for the validity of natural laws is that they make the world look tidy. No single piece of evidence is ever adopted against the general idea of a natural law, it is rather assumed that if a single fact or even more than one fact do not fit in, the weakness lies in the crudity of our generalisation which is not profound enough to allow for certain apparent exceptions. It is expected that a super-pattern will be found, revealing a more essential reality, which will comprise and comprehend the old evidence and the new one alike. This feeling of the provisional nature of all our ideas is fundamental, it is the ever vigilant guide of science to new planes of synthesis, in which more and more elements of thought, believed to be essential at a lower level, are resorted to by further abstraction.

Take for example the atomic model of Bohr. It contains electrons circling fixed orbits, with definite velocities. At this stage the energies of atoms seem inseparably connected with the speeds of the orbital motions. And yet in wave mechanics these same energy values reappear arising as the property of a more abstract substrate: the standing waves of Schrodinger, which reflect the interaction of nucleus and electron without any reference to an orbital motion. In the matrix mechanics of Heisenberg and Dirac even these waves have vanished; yet the same energy values can be deduced. At each of these three stages a part of the idea which appeared essential before, has been reduced to the role of mere scaffolding, it is removed and the essence retained in a purer form.

The idea of tolerance partakes of similar experience. It recognises that our imperfect expressions of truth cannot formulate any parts of it without distorting

some other parts; that, therefore, all honest expression of conviction is to be considered as an ore from which closer analysis is likely to be able to extract some truth which perhaps is not recognised anywhere else. In fact it seems likely that the most valuable source of inspiration for religious truth still remains the tradition of the Churches in spite of all the dross of ritual superstition and the glaring contradictions to common knowledge with which through which devotion is expressed. Teachers of the Church may often feel that they would prefer to dispense the wisdom of the higher levels, as it were the Heisenberg - Dirac matrix mechanics of religion in which the claptrap of Heaven and Hell (which correspond to the picture book level of atomic orbits according to Bohr) as well as the substance of God (which resembles the essentially unobservable waves of Schrodinger) would be resorted (sic) in favour of a purer doctrine of higher abstraction. But they may prefer to teach, as I do myself, in the case of atomic theory, in terms that can be understood, even though these are crude and less true.

NEWS AND NOTES

The Rev. Terrence Kennedy who did his doctoral thesis on THE MORALITY OF KNOWLEDGE: TRANSCENDENCE AND THE INTELLECTUAL LIFE IN THE THOUGHT OF MICHAEL POLANYI is now in Australia. His address is: Redemptorist Fathers, P.O. Box 77, Pennant Hills, N.S.W. 2120, Australia.

Jerome R. Ravetz who is Senior Lecturer and Head of the Division of History and Philosophy of Science at the University of Leeds published in 1971 SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE AND ITS SOCIAL PROBLEMS, Oxford University Press. This book, which seems to have been missed among us, expresses a major dependence upon Polanyi for his systematic development of science as craft work (p. 75). In fact, the entire book uses and depends upon Polanyi's notion of tacit knowing and the ways it functions in both the individual and social activity of science. It is also a contribution to the general problem of the nature of scientific thought and its social organization and impact that advances the evidence developed by Polanyi. Persons on the edge of the history and philosophy of science will find the references and bibliography in Ravetz's work especially helpful in seeing the growing support for an alternative philosophy of science.

Carl R. Rogers, distinguished American humanistic psychologist at the Center for Studies of the Person, 1125 Torrey Pines Road, La Jolla, California 92037, contributed a chapter, "Some New Challenges," to ADVANCES IN ALTERED STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS AND HUMAN POTENTIALITIES, Vol. I, Psychological Dimensions, New York: 1976. In this chapter, Rogers discusses the importance of Polanyi for developing a human science. Moreover, he does it by showing how the well known behaviorist B. F. Skinner, contrary to his intent, actually described his own becoming a scientist as being pulled by his subjective vision into a deeper and more significant view of reality.

Richard Gelwick's book, THE WAY OF DISCOVERY: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE THOUGHT OF MICHAEL POLANYI is being translated into Japanese and scheduled for publication in 1983. Apparently there is a significant interest in Polanyi in Japan since the request to Oxford University Press for publication rights was initiated by a press there. Prof. S. Nagao of Meiji University is doing the translation.

The special issue on Michael Polanyi in ZYGON, March, 1982 has received a wide response. Correspondence with Phil Mullins and the other contributors has arrived from not only Canada, the United States, and Great Britain but also Australia and Argentina. The

contents of the issue focus around issues in Polanyi's last book, MEANING. Single copies are available for \$5.00 and subscriptions for \$17.00 (overseas add \$1.50) by writing: Council on the Study of Religion, Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada N2L 3C5.

Tape recordings of Polanyi lecturing or in dialogue are needed. If you have tapes, the Polanyi Society will pay for copying or will have copies made and return your tape. Please contact R. Gelwick, PS General Co-ordinator.

R. Melvin Keiser, Prof. of Religion, Guilford College, Greensboro, North Carolina 27410, presented in August a major paper "Inaugurating Postcritical Philosophy: Creation and Conversion in Augustine's CONFESSIONS" at the annual meeting of the SOCIETY FOR VALUES IN HIGHER EDUCATION. The paper examines why Polanyi could claim Augustine as the originator of post-critical philosophy. Much more than the usual principle of faith precedes understanding, Keiser's paper shows how the structure of tacit knowing applies to the way Augustine's autobiographical account in the CONFESSIONS relates to Augustine's cosmology. It seems that Augustine's founding of knowing upon belief explains why there is an intrinsic connection for Augustine between his conversion and his understanding of God's creation of the world. Keiser concludes his paper with suggestions on how Augustine's "postcritical" method can help us in developing language for creation in our day.

Aaron Milavec has had a book, TO EMPOWER AS JESUS DID: ACQUIRING SPIRITUAL POWER THROUGH APPRENTICESHIP, Edwin Mellen Press, Lewiston, New York 14092 published this year. The book applies Michael Polanyi's analysis of how a cultural heritage is transmitted to show the divine-human dynamics that ground religious empowering. It develops this into its ramifications for Christian practice in raising children using scripture, praying, and worshipping.

ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

It has been a number of years since we have had a general meeting of the Polanyi Society. The growth of Polanyi's influence has been substantial during this period with many scholars contributing from many fields. The Polanyi Society has facilitated some of this growth and aims to reflect it. Now we need to assess our work and decide in what ways we should be going. Some persons are interested in a publishing program that would gather up the published and unpublished articles into Polanyi volumes readily available. Some persons are also interested in enlarging the title of our society to "Post-Critical Studies" in order to unite the various movements sharing Polanyi's general aims. Several people have offered to host a meeting on their campus. A number of people have recognized the need to inform better the academy about the range of Polanyi studies, the need for graduate research directors to help their students avoid duplication of earlier work, and to facilitate a more informed growth of the implications of Polanyi's thought. Such thoughts as these all point to the need for a national consultation with each other. During the years since the last meeting at Skidmore, the consultations at the AAR have provided an informal caucus for Polanyi Society planning. At this point, I would like to invite your proposals and assessments for a meeting that would help to guide us for at least the next five years.

Richard Gelwick
General Coordinator and
Editor for the Newsletter

AAR 1983

In the Winter 1982 Polanyi Society Newsletter it was reported that the Program Committee of the American Academy of Religion elected not to grant a program session at the 1982 annual meeting to the group of scholars who for several years have gathered there to discuss implications of Polanyi's thought. Although we will not have an official session, members of the AAR who plan to attend the New York meeting in December should note the following papers listed in the program by persons affiliated with the recent Polanyi Studies Consultation.

Jerry Gill, "Polanyi's Concept of Tacit Knowing and Cross Cultural Models of Religious Knowledge"

Walter Gulick, "A Listening Autonomy: Polanyi and the Claims of Feeling in Religious Meaning"

Richard Gelwick, "The Second Death: Nuclear War, Cosmology, and Eschatology"

The Gill and Gulick papers will be presented 2-3:30 p.m. on December 19 in Sutton Parlor Center (New York Hilton); the Gelwick paper will be presented in the 9-12 session on December 21 in Suite 534 (New York Hilton).

Some members of the AAR who have been active in the annual meeting discussions of papers using Polanyi are naturally disgruntled because the AAR Program Committee was not willing to allow a program unit this year. On behalf of the former Polanyi Consultation, I protested the absence of our program unit. Since there appears to be a continuing interest in having AAR meetings of persons interested in Polanyi at the annual meetings, we are working on several possibilities: a way to meet at the AAR as an affiliated society and application for a new program unit such as a consultation on "Post-critical Studies." We have just heard from the new executive director of the AAR, James Wiggins, about policies for 1983 in Dallas. Status on affiliated societies will be considered in the January Program Committee meeting of the AAR. Acceptance of other program units will depend upon the clarity, relevance, history of the topic or group, and demand. Your prompt response to the enclosed questionnaire will be very helpful in negotiating with the program committee. Please return immediately the questionnaire to the address given at the bottom of the page of the questionnaire.

Phil Mullins

QUESTIONNAIRE

Please check the options which you believe we should pursue. It is possible to pursue more than one option simultaneously.

----- Re-apply for official program status with the AAR as a consultation, seminar, or group in 1983 on "Post-Critical Studies".

----- Attempt again to secure "affiliated society" status for the Polanyi Society.

----- Plan a meeting in conjunction with the 1983 AAR annual meeting as a separate entity, such as immediately before or after.

----- Publicize papers by Polanyi scholars which are a part of regular program units of the AAR annual meeting in 1983.

----- Should pursue program on another topic: (Please fill in) _____

----- I am working on a paper and would like to participate in a section or program in 1983. My paper is on _____

Please also complete the section at the bottom of the page. Your response will be useful in the process of the AAR Program Committee if we re-apply for program unit status.

I have participated in program sessions at recent AAR annual meetings which focused on implications and applications of Polanyi's thought in religious studies and theology. These sessions were intellectually stimulating, valuable sessions. I strongly encourage the AAR Program Committee to support the continuation of such discussions.

(Signature)

Additional Comments:

Return to: Dr. Phil Mullins, Humanities Division, Missouri Western State College,
1000 Downs Drive, St. Joseph, MO 64507-2294