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The Polanyi Society

General Coordinator

Richard Gelwick
University of New England
Biddeford, ME 04005
(207)283-0171

General Editor-*Tradition & Discovery*

Phil Mullins
Missouri Western State College
St. Joseph, MO 64507

Book Review Editor

Walter Gulick
Montana State University--Billings
Billings, MT 59101

Art Studies

Doug Adams
PSR/Grad. Theol. Union
Berkeley, CA

Communication/Rhetorical Studies

Sam Watson
University of North Carolina, Charlotte

Education Studies

Raymond Wilken
Kent State University

Medical and Psychiatric Studies

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Quillen College of Medicine
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Philosophical Studies

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Bates College

Religious Studies

David Rutledge
Furman University

Member At Large

Harry Prosch
Skidmore College

UK Coordinator

John Puddefoot
Benson House, Willowbrook
Eton
Windsor, Berks SL4 6HL

Preface

For several years, I have encouraged any scholars who told me of their interest in Polanyi's political and economic ideas to consider putting together an article for submission to *TAD*. A few articles and reviews touching these areas have appeared earlier, but not many, although there have been a number of publications treating these areas outside *TAD*. We are fortunate in this issue to have two essays which explore some of this territory. Lee Congdon is a historian who has written much about the social milieu in which the young Michael Polanyi's thought began to grow; Walter Gulick reviewed his fine 1991 book, *Exile and Social Thought: Hungarian Intellectuals in Germany and Austria*, in *TAD* 23:2 (pp. 44-46). Congdon's article "Between Brothers: Karl and Michael Polanyi on Fascism and Communism," originally a paper delivered in Budapest, offers an interesting account of the sharply different perspectives of Karl and Michael Polanyi. While Michael's analysis of the problems of modern culture is likely well known by readers, Karl's account may not be so familiar. Congdon does a very nice job of contrasting perspectives, of relating each to the general context, and of reminding us of the links between these brothers. Struan Jacobs, who teaches social theory in Australia and is the author of "Michael Polanyi and Spontaneous Order, 1941-1951," has done careful historical work with a decade of early (nonscientific) Polanyi writing. He ferrets out Polanyi's ideas about order and public liberty which are foundational for Polanyi's broader discussions of economics, science and society. Jacobs documents the link between Polanyi and the ideas of the social and economic theorist F. A. Hayek, Polanyi's good friend, and shows some of the differences between Hayek and Polanyi's perspectives on order and liberty. Ron Hall's article, "The Primacy Of The Explicit: On Keeping Romanticism At Bay," was a provocative paper much discussed at a recent Polanyi Society meeting. As his title suggests, Hall argues for the importance of the explicit, questioning some of Polanyi's notions about wholly tacit knowledge and, particularly, warning against the inclinations toward Romanticism which Hall believes lurk in the hearts (if not the minds) of many Polanyians. Take a look also at the overdue review of David Rutledge's Polyanian book on the ecological crisis, at the report on the November 1997 Polanyi Society annual meeting (with an update on the Polanyi biography), the call for papers for the November 1998 meeting in Florida, and, last but not least, the "News and Notes" section which provides interesting, recent bibliographic information.

Phil Mullins

Tradition and Discovery is indexed selectively in *The Philosopher's Index* and *Religion One: Periodicals*. Book reviews are indexed in *Index to Book Reviews in Religion*.

NEWS AND NOTES

The Twentieth World Congress of Philosophy will be held August 10-16, 1998 in Boston, Massachusetts. This is an opportunity for members of the Polanyi Society to show the contributions and implications of Polanyi's philosophy. Richard Gelwick has arranged for the Polanyi Society to have a session at the World Congress with presentations. Individuals may also submit papers to the 44 sections ranging from Theory of Knowledge to Philosophy and Children. Every major area of philosophical inquiry has a call for papers, including both theoretical and applied fields. A representative of the World Congress attended the November 1997 Polanyi Society annual meeting to encourage Polanyi Society participation. For detailed information about this meeting, contact: Congress Secretariat, American Organizing Committee, Inc., Boston University, 745 Commonwealth Ave., Boston, MA 02215; tel. 617-353-3904; fax. 617-353-5441; email. paideia@bu.edu; internet. <http://web.bu.edu/WCP>. Besides the hotel accommodations, dormitory rooms at Boston University will be available for those who register early. Anyone wishing to present a paper or organize a panel at the Polanyi Society session must contact **Richard Gelwick** immediately at the address on the inside *TAD* cover, by phone (207-283-0171, x 230) or email: rgelwick@mailbox.une.edu.

There will be a weekend conference, sponsored by the UK journal *Appraisal*, titled "Michael Polanyi Today" on April 17th and 18th of 1998 at University of Sheffield, UK. Bed and breakfast accommodations are available. *Pro rata* terms are available for those who cannot attend every session and for non-residents. Papers, which do not have to be narrowly focused on Polanyi, are invited. Forward proposals and inquiries to **Richard Allen**, Editor, *Appraisal*, 20 Ulverscroft Rd., Loughborough, Leich. LE11 3PU, England or write Allen at his e-mail address (Richard_Allen_21@compuserve.com). By phone, Allen can be reached at (44) 01509 215438.

The fourth number of *Appraisal* came out in October of 1997 and included a number of articles on Polanyi and other thinkers including the following: **Martin X. Moleski, S.J.**, "Illiative Sense and Tacit Knowledge: A Comparison of the Epistemologies of John Henry Newman and Michael Polanyi" (Part II); **Phil Mullins**, "Michael Polanyi and J. H. Oldham: In Praise of Friendship"; **Chris Goodman**, "Polanyi and Liberal Neutrality" (also in *TAD*, 23:3) and **Phil Mullins**, "More on Macmurray and Polanyi." Also included were **Robin Hodgkin's** review of R. T. Allen's new collection of Polanyi essays, *Society, Economics, Philosophy: Selected Articles* and **R. T. Allen's** review of the collection of papers from the Polanyi Kent State Polanyi Conference in 1991, *From Polanyi to the 21st Century*, which Richard Gelwick put together.

Two special numbers of *Appraisal* (Vol. 1, Supplementary Issues 1997, Parts I and II) came out late in the Fall of 1997 with the papers from the March, 1997 conference on "Fundamental Beliefs and Presuppositions" held in the UK. Included were the following papers touching upon Polanyi's thought: **R. T. Allen**, "On Presuppositions and Presupposing"; **Chris Goodman**, "Wittgenstein and Polanyi on Meaning"; **Martin X. Moleski, S. J.**, "Self-Emptying Knowledge: Michael Polanyi's Vision of the Moral Foundations of Scientific Revolutions"; **John Preston**, "Feyerabend's Polanyian Turns"; **Robert Brownhill**, "Polanyi and Interpretative Frameworks" and **Julian Ward**, "Polanyi's Ontological Hierarchy." Inquiries about *Appraisal* subscription or purchase of individual numbers can be directed to Richard Allen at the address listed above.

Polanyiana, Vol. 5, No. 2, 1996 published last Spring is another English edition (accidentally not noted in the last *TAD*) of the periodical of the Michael Polanyi Liberal Philosophical Association centered in Budapest. Included were the following articles: **R. T. Allen**, "Polanyi's

Overcoming of the Dichotomy of Fact and Value”; **Mary Jo Nye**, “Scientific Practice and Politics: A Preliminary Look At Blackett and Polanyi in Manchester” and **Stephania Ruzsits Jha**, “Michael Polanyi's Integrative Philosophy.”

Recently, the new edition of *Polanyiana*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 1997 has been issued. This number is a Hungarian translation of all the articles in the 1982 special edition of *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* (17:1) which was dedicated to discussion of Polanyi's ideas about religion. Information about *Polanyiana* is available by writing (or phoning or faxing) the editors **Márta Fehér** and **Éva Gábor**, Michael Polanyi Liberal Philosophical Association, 1111 Budapest, Műegyetem rkp. 3. K. I. 59. Phone (36 1) 463 1181 Fax: 463 1042. Information about *Polanyiana* is available on World Wide Web at the following address:

<http://www.kfki.hu/chemonet/polanyi/> **Complete copies of all of the articles in *Polanyiana* Vol. 5, No. 2, 1996 and Vol. 6, No. 1, 1997 (noted above) as well as Vol. 5, No. 1, 1996 (noted in TAD 23:2) and Vol. 3, Number 3, 1993 (an issue in Hungarian) are available at the *Polanyiana* WWW address.**

Brian Gowenlock, until recently professor of chemistry at Heriot Watt University, Edinburgh, and a one-time pupil of Polanyi sent the following comment after reviewing the record of Polanyi's correspondence contained in the *Guide to the Papers of Michael Polanyi* in *TAD* 23:1 (also available now at the Polanyi Society World Wide Web site: <http://www.mwsc.edu/~polanyi/>):

I found the list of correspondents on pp. 11-12 quite fascinating. It interested me that there was no mention of his colleagues and collaborators such as E. C. Bangham, M. G. Evan, C. E. H. Bawn, R. A. Ogg. I recall visits to Manchester in the '46- '48 period of Herman Mark and Linus Pauling but they do not seem to have been involved in the correspondence at that time. Also M. P. presided at a lecture

given in the university by Emil Brunner during that period--again no specific mention in the list of correspondents. The range of his correspondents with their wide diversity of interests and standpoints is, however, the most striking feature.

Robin Hodgkin's article “Making Space for Meaning” which treats John Macmurray's thought in relation to Langer, Winnicott and Polanyi appeared in *Oxford Review of Education* (23:3 (1997): 385-399. It will also appear in Harry A. Carson, *The Post Modern Thought of John Macmurray: The Primacy of the Person as an Agent in a Field of Agents* (forthcoming 1998 from The Humanities Press).

Harold Turner has done a lengthy review of Joan Crewdson's *Christian Doctrine in the Light of Michael Polanyi's Theory of Personal Knowledge* in *Stimulus*, (5:1 (February, 1997): 12-19).

Havey Birenbaum has recently published *The Happy Critic: A Serious But Not Solemn Guide To Thinking and Writing about Literature* (Mayfield Publishing Co, 1997) which he describes as a textbook in many respects Polyanian.

Jere C. Moorman presented a paper on William Poteat and humor (“Imagine A Man Who Is Note Sensitive and Melody Deaf”) to the annual meeting of the International Society of Humor Studies in Sydney, Australia.

During December of 1997, participants in the electronic discussion group sponsored by the Polanyi Society were surprised to receive much e-mail from a librarians' discussion list. Many list subscribers removed their names from the Polanyi list to stop the flood. John Apczynski, moderator for the Polanyi discussion list, reports that somehow the librarians' discussion list which is also on a Saint Bonaventura University computer, absorbed the Polanyi list! The damage has now been repaired. If you signed off the list, it is now safe to sign back on. Information about the discussion list is on page 43.

Report on 1997 Annual Polanyi Society Meeting

The three sessions of the Polanyi Society annual meeting held on November 21 and 22, 1997 in San Francisco involved more than forty people. The two sessions with formal papers and responses were typical for annual gatherings: there was more to say than time to say it. The dinner honoring Charles S. McCoy was a convivial occasion at which McCoy's exploits in a long academic career were roasted.

The annual business meeting treated several topics. Ann Scott gave a brief history of the work of her husband Bill on a Polanyi biography, running from the request for a biography from Magda Polanyi down to the present. Since Bill is now incapacitated, Martin Moleski will carry on the work of preparing two versions of the manuscript in which Bill has invested many years. Moleski will put in order a complete edition of Bill's lengthy manuscript; this work will likely eventually become part of the Polanyi Papers at the University of Chicago and may perhaps also be available to scholars elsewhere. Moleski will also be working on an abridged edition that may be attractive to a university press.

Richard Gelwick requested help in developing Polanyi-related papers for the Twentieth World Congress of Philosophy to be held in August 1998 in Boston; a representative of the Congress briefly described the meeting. There was some discussion of an effort to put together in 2001 in North America an international conference on Polanyi's thought. Phil Mullins reported that members of the Society are today doing a better job of remembering to pay annual dues; nevertheless, there is room for further improvement. There was some discussion of the Polanyi Society web materials assembled by Mullins; he was asked to add a FAQ file (frequently asked questions) to the material.

The discussion of possible paper or session topics for the 1998 annual meeting included the following: the significance of Polanyi's thought for business; teachers as practitioners, using Polanyi's ideas to help students; Polanyi, Hayek, and their economic ideas. Phil Rolnick reported that Craig Roberts, an early Polanyi student who has written much about politics and economics and been prominent in U.S. government, might be willing to do a keynote paper focusing a session; Rolnick will initiate further discussion with Roberts. It was agreed that the planning committee will explore these possibilities but the call for papers will also entertain other topics.

Call for Papers for 1998 Polanyi Society Meeting

The Polanyi Society will have its 1998 annual meeting in conjunction with the November 21-24, 1998 annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion/Society of Biblical Literature in Orlando, Florida. The Polanyi Society session or sessions will likely be on the evening of Friday, November 20, and the morning of Saturday, November 21.

As the report above on the 1997 meeting indicates, several topics were discussed for the 1998 meeting. Although some of these possibilities are being explored, the committee planning the annual meeting has not yet made any firm decisions. Proposals of any sort are invited, although proposals treating topics proposed in the 1997 meeting (and at earlier meetings) are especially sought. The deadline for receiving proposals is March 27, 1998. Please be aware that the planning cycle for the Polanyi Society annual meeting must conform to the process which the AAR/SBL annual meeting (which accommodates about 7000 people) sets forth. Also remember that some topics proposed for Polanyi

Society annual meetings (e.g., discussing how to teach Polanyi and how to teach in a Polanyian style) may be treated in papers included in a regular AAR/SBL meeting session (e.g., a paper on Polanyi and pedagogy might fit into the AAR Academic Study and Teaching of Religion section--see the AAR Call for Papers).

Since Marty Moleski, the annual meeting convener, is on sabbatical and will not be in the U.S., please mail, fax or e-mail paper and or session proposals (or questions) to Phil Mullins. Moleski can be reached only at his regular e-mail address (moleski@canisius.edu) in the Spring semester. Proposals should include a title and a 250 word abstract which can be used in AAR/SBL publications as well as used in *Tradition and Discovery* and on the Polanyi Society web site.

Phil Mullins
Missouri Western State College
St. Joseph, MO 64507

e-mail: mullins@griffon.mwsc.edu

fax: 815-271-5987

Submissions for Publication

Articles, meeting notices and notes likely to be of interest to persons interested in the thought of Michael Polanyi are welcomed. Review suggestions and book reviews should be sent to Walter Gulick (see addresses listed below). Manuscripts, notices and notes should be sent to Phil Mullins. Manuscripts should be double-spaced type with notes at the end; writers are encouraged to employ simple citations within the text when possible. Use MLA or APA style. Abbreviate frequently cited book titles, particularly books by Polanyi (e.g., *Personal Knowledge* becomes *PK*). Shorter articles (10-15 pages) are preferred, although longer manuscripts (20-24 pages) will be considered.

Manuscripts should include the author's name on a separate page since submissions normally will be sent out for blind review. In addition to the typescript of a manuscript to be reviewed, authors are expected to provide an electronic copy (on either a disk or via e-mail) of accepted articles; it is helpful if original submissions are accompanied by an electronic copy. For disks, ASCII text as well as most popular IBM and MAC word processors are acceptable. Be sure that electronic materials include all relevant information which may help converting files. Persons with questions or problems associated with producing an electronic copy of manuscripts should phone or write Phil Mullins (816-271-4386). Insofar as possible, *TAD* is willing to work with authors who have special problems producing electronic materials.

Phil Mullins
Missouri Western State College
St. Joseph, Missouri 64507
Fax (816) 271-5987 E-mail: mullins@griffon.mwsc.edu

Walter Gulick
Montana State University, Billings
Billings, Montana 59101
Fax (406) 657-2037

Between Brothers: Karl and Michael Polanyi on Fascism and Communism

Lee Congdon

ABSTRACT Key words: fascism, communism, socialism, nihilism, liberalism, economics, Soviet Union, Michael and Karl Polanyi

This article explores the Polanyi brothers' publicly-stated views--and private debates--concerning the nature and origin of fascism and communism. In that connection, it examines their rival estimates of the Soviet regime.

Karl and Michael Polanyi were members of a remarkable Hungarian family of Jewish origin. In the early years of our century they participated actively in Budapest's spirited intellectual and cultural life, principally through their association with the Galileo Circle, a radical student organization that chose Karl as its first president. From the beginning, however, the brothers approached the problems of society in different ways. Like many of the Galileoists, Karl looked to socialism for solutions, and, as a result, developed a lifelong interest in the causal effect of economics on historical events.

While by no means underestimating the importance of economics, Michael believed that the causes of the modern social crisis lay elsewhere, namely in the false and subversive ideas that had taken hold of the modern mind. As early as 1917, in an article that appeared in the sociological review *Huszadik Század (Twentieth Century)*, he argued that the Great War was not the result of a clash of economic interests. "The war is bad business," he wrote. "The state, however, becomes engaged in war not as an association of interests, but as an idea; what is bad business for an association of interests is health-giving nourishment for an idea. Business demands rational investments; an idea clamors for bloody sacrifices."¹

Both of the Polanyi brothers served in the Austro-Hungarian army, but in the midst of the revolutionary and counterrevolutionary upheavals that followed the armistice of 1918, they left Hungary. Karl emigrated to Austria, where, eventually, he joined the editorial staff of *Der Österreichische Volkswirt*, a left-leaning weekly modeled after England's *Economist*. From his flat near the Danube, he observed with approving eyes the rapid transformation of the old imperial capital into "Red Vienna"; the wide-ranging socialist experiment was, he often remarked, "one of the high points of western civilization."²

Polanyi was not the only Hungarian emigré intellectual to make his new home in Vienna. In his immediate circle of friends were Oszkár Jászi and Aurel Kolnai, the latter a brilliant young social thinker who eventually made his way from psychoanalysis to phenomenology and from atheism to Catholic Christianity. His childhood friend Georg Lukács, a dedicated communist and author of the widely discussed *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein*, was also there, as was Béla Balázs, the communist poet and dramatist who would soon turn to film theory. So too were Paul Szende, the lonely and studious pioneer of *Ideologiekritik*, and Lajos Kassák, leader of a Hungarian avant-garde that maintained close ties to Walter Gropius's Bauhaus.³

Indeed, several Hungarians, including the multi-talented László Moholy-Nagy, gained international reputations as Bauhaus members. For them, Weimar Germany offered greater opportunities than truncated Austria. That was true for Michael Polanyi as well. Having studied in Karlsruhe before the war, he went straight to Germany, where, in 1923, he joined Fritz Haber's Institute for Physical Chemistry and Electrical Chemistry. There he devoted most of his time to his professional work, establishing himself firmly as a respected member of the scientific community. Nevertheless, he maintained his lively interest in social and political questions. With his countrymen Eugene P. Wigner, Leo Szilard, and John von Neumann, he organized a group to discuss Soviet Russia.⁴ That was in 1928, five years before he left Nazi Germany for England and the University of Manchester.

Not long after Michael assumed his new responsibilities in a new country, Karl left Vienna to face a more uncertain future in London. "Teaching and lecturing on the themes well known to you," he wrote to a friend on the eve of his second emigration, "seems my only chance."⁵ Fortunately for him and his family, he was able to eke out a living by conducting extension and tutorial classes for the Universities of Oxford and London and, later, at R. H. Tawney's invitation, for the Workers' Educational Association (W.E.A.). He organized his classes, as well as his contributions to various publications, around the related themes of world crisis and the rise of fascism, the latter a term he applied indiscriminately to the Italian, German, and Austrian regimes, and also, with some reservations, to the governments of Poland, Yugoslavia, Greece, and Portugal.

What had happened, the elder Polanyi informed his students, was this: During the nineteenth-century era of laissez-faire, political democracy and competitive capitalism had maintained an uneasy co-existence, but eventually their incompatibility became manifest and, in an effort to democratize the economy, the state passed social legislation and permitted the organization of trade unions. Recognizing a threat to their interests, capitalists reacted by intervening in governmental affairs; the result was deadlock and a consequent malfunctioning in both the political and economic spheres.

In an effort to break that deadlock, capitalists attempted to subject the political to the economic order, fascism being the result. In Soviet Russia, the communists assayed a different solution; they sought to subject the economic to the political order. Where the fascists preserved capitalism by destroying democracy, the communists destroyed capitalism by limiting democracy. In Polanyi's opinion, the latter had discovered the more promising approach, for in 1935 (on the eve of the Great Terror), he insisted that one could clearly discern "the tendency towards Democracy" in the U.S.S.R.⁶

It was, in sum, Karl's position, first outlined in 1933 in a *Volkswirt* article entitled "Wirtschaft und Demokratie,"⁷ that the divorce between a market economy and political democracy was at the heart of Liberal Europe's crisis. Only during the Second World War, however, did he provide a full statement of that position--in *The Great Transformation*, the major achievement of his long life.⁸ "The great transformation" of his title was that changeover from a competitive (i.e., market-dominated) to a cooperative (i.e., planned) society. According to Polanyi, the former was an historical anomaly. While markets were to be found throughout human history, never before had they constituted the core, the very essence, of the economy. He relied heavily on the researches of Bronislaw Malinowski and Richard Thurnwald to substantiate his claim that in existing primitive societies--which he tended to romanticize--and past civilizations, economies had always been "embedded" in society, had always, that is, been subordinated to broader social (i.e., human) purposes and controls.

With the coming of industrialization and the theory of economic liberalism, however, that arrangement was reversed, society becoming a mere appendage of an impersonal economic mechanism. Indeed, the market could not function smoothly until it completed its takeover by transforming money, labor, and land into commodities. “But labor and land,” Polanyi insisted, “are no other than the human beings themselves of which every society consists and the natural surroundings in which it exists. To include them in the market mechanism means to subordinate the substance of society itself to the laws of the market.”⁹

By that act of imperialism, the market, and those who defended it, set a seal on the institutional separation of society’s economic and political spheres and hence on man’s alienation from himself. For man, Polanyi held, was not an economic but a social being, one who realized the fullness of his humanity only in those cooperative human relationships which preserved but transcended both economic and political activity.

The separation of economics and politics was, then, the outstanding characteristic of market society, but, as the record of the past showed, it was not natural. Even economic liberals conceded as much when they signaled their approval of government intervention to prevent monopolies from driving out competition. More to the point, “society” had from the first sought to protect itself from the threat of disruption, or even complete destruction, by fighting and winning battles for government action in the form of tariffs, factory laws, and the legalization of unions.

Polanyi made much of the failure of the interventionist Speenhamland Law of 1795 to obstruct the coming of market economy. As a government plan to supplement low wages, it had the unintended effect of depressing wages even further and of subsidizing employers. Yet because Speenhamland blocked the way to a competitive labor market, the logic of economic progress dictated that it be swept away in 1834. The law, according to Polanyi, was the last stand of that old-fashioned paternalism which, from its point of view, rightly feared both the market’s revolutionary dynamics and the working class’s consequent self-organization.

Such fears were not exaggerated, for the market was revolutionary in its operation and effect and the working class was destined to become the historical proponent of that epochal recognition which Polanyi attributed to Robert Owen: the reality of society. An atheist, Owen believed that the Christian era had ended and that the individual freedom it conferred no longer sufficed. He “recognized that the freedom we gained through the teachings of Jesus was inapplicable to a complex society. His socialism was the upholding of man’s claim to freedom *in such a society*.”¹⁰

Thus recorded, Owen’s revelation appears to be ambiguous, but what Polanyi seems to have understood it to mean was that the division of society into economic and political spheres could not stand, that society, as a union of persons attempting to live together in harmony by balancing those and other spheres, took precedence over individuals. When a conflict arose, individuals would have to subordinate their will to the will of the collectivity. Unfortunately, according to Polanyi, few people recognized the truth and import of Owen’s discovery. As a result, nineteenth-century efforts to protect society remained unplanned and uncoordinated. Such efforts were not yet the product of that new consciousness that Owen had achieved and attempted to awaken in others.

But as consciousness began to develop, as workers began to understand that even when the market improved their economic condition it disrupted their social existence and hence dehumanized them, they grasped at last that their interests were those of society as a whole and that they therefore bore a special responsibility for the fate of the Western

world. All the more so when the Slump hit and the final remnant of the self-regulating economy, the gold standard, lost its hold. For who, better than working class people, could see that protracted unemployment had exposed the bankruptcy of anti-interventionism?

Because of their unique suffering under conditions created by a market economy and their consequent consciousness of society's reality, the workers embraced socialism, "the tendency inherent in an industrial civilization to transcend the self-regulating market by consciously subordinating it to a democratic society."¹¹ As matter-of-fact as those words appear to be, they expressed Polanyi's creed, since for him socialism was a religion, or to be more specific, the final revelation of that progressively-revealed Faith which also encompassed Judaism (which brought knowledge of mortality) and Christianity (which offered knowledge of individual freedom).¹²

Not everyone, of course, shared Polanyi's commitment to socialism. Many, particularly those who stood outside the working class, looked to fascism as the best alternative to liberalism and a market economy. Where once he had argued that fascism was capitalism in its death agony, the Hungarian now concluded, more reasonably, that it was anti-capitalist and that, like its competitor socialism, it had recognized the reality of society. It too was a religion, but one that denied the brotherhood of man and reformed the market economy by suffocating political freedom.

If there was hope for a planned and democratic society, one could find it in Soviet Russia. Because that country called itself "socialist" Polanyi continued to admire it, *particularly*, it should be noted, under Stalin's rule. Socialism in one country, according to him, had "proved an amazing success."¹³ The "Second" or "Stalin" Revolution that began with the collectivization of agriculture heralded the great transformation. Whatever his personal failings, Stalin presided over a new society that had transcended the market society of the nineteenth century.

II

Michael Polanyi did not accept the argument his brother advanced in *The Great Transformation*, witness his own contribution to economic theory, *Full Employment and Free Trade*.¹⁴ In that marvelously lucid little book, he offered a carefully reasoned defense of "the principle of neutrality," understood as "a variant of the principle of separation of economics from politics."¹⁵ That principle, which reflected a recognition of the totalitarian danger lurking in an excessive concentration of power, had, he argued, "recently fallen into discredit: partly on account of its abuse by those who upheld it to bar the State from fulfilling its humanitarian obligations; and partly through the influence of Marxist Socialism which has weakened the sense for the ordered division of powers which alone can preserve society from arbitrariness, corruption and oppression."¹⁶

In reaction to that passage, Karl fired off a letter to his brother in which he protested that "separation of politics and economics is not the charge leveled by 'Marxian' socialism against a market economy, but it is mainly **my**--non-Marxian formulation of the characteristic of 19th century society."¹⁷

But if, as Michael contended, one could not explain the rise of fascism as a response to the separation of the economy from politics, how could one account for it? The younger Polanyi agreed with his brother Karl, of course, that the Liberal Europe of their youth had broken down and that fascism was one product of the resulting crisis. In his judgment, though, there were deeper reasons for that crisis--reasons of a spiritual/intellectual nature. More

specifically, he attributed it to the descent of liberalism into nihilism.

Michael's argument was this. Because it failed to recognize its own dependence upon unspecified--indeed, unspecifiable--knowledge, modern science had come to believe that only those claims which could be precisely stated and successfully demonstrated could be held to be "true." At first, he conceded, that belief produced a liberating effect, for the earliest liberals enlisted it in their campaign to discredit a religious authority that had sometimes stood in the way of freedom and progress. Up to a point, that is, skepticism had served a useful purpose.

Once having shown, however, that religious beliefs were not demonstrable, and thus that religious tolerance was necessary, liberals went on to question moral principles as well. When they too proved incapable of demonstration, the specter of nihilism began to haunt Europe. Radical doubt had turned on itself by undermining those very transcendent ideals--Truth, Justice, Mercy--which liberalism had initially attempted to serve. For, as Polanyi pointed out, "you cannot prove the obligation to tell the truth, to uphold justice and mercy. It would follow therefore that a system of mendacity, lawlessness and cruelty is to be accepted as an alternative to ethical principles on equal terms."¹⁸ The political manifestation of such nihilism was totalitarianism, both fascist and communist.

That was so, according to Polanyi, because men's moral passions, which the humanitarian reforms of the past two centuries had done much to intensify, had not disappeared with their belief in moral ideals. Instead, by a process he called "moral inversion," those passions sought clandestine outlets. They disguised themselves as "science," "history," or "national destiny"; castigating the so-called hypocrisy of "bourgeois" morality, they asserted their validity on grounds of their lack of self-deception. On a personal level, this moral inversion produced the bohemian immoralist who, precisely **because** of the totality of his contempt for all moral standards, demanded respect and admiration. That is why, for example, the late Simone de Beauvoir asked us to recognize in the Marquis de Sade our moral superior.

When transferred to the political arena, moral inversion produced fascism, which, according to Polanyi, was nothing other than the operation of homeless moral passions within a purely materialistic framework of purposes. In that sense, though, fascists and communists were brothers under the skin, for Marxism too was the result of a moral inversion. It enabled "the modern mind, tortured by moral self-doubt, to indulge its moral passions in terms which also satisfy its passion for ruthless objectivity."¹⁹ While mocking the acknowledged moral concern of liberal reformers, Marx channeled his far more demanding moral passion into a scientific theory of historical inevitability. Thus Marxism too was a form of political nihilism and could be combatted only if liberalism recognized and assented to moral ideals which could only be upheld on the basis of an undemonstrable faith.

III

It was, then, their differing accounts of fascism and communism and their rival estimates of Soviet Russia that distanced Karl from Michael Polanyi. To the one, the U.S.S.R. had taken the lead in the great transformation to a new society in which the economic and political orders would both be democratic. A return to Liberal--market--society was as undesirable as it was impossible.

To the other, the Soviet Union constituted the best available evidence that the principle of absolute doubt led to moral nihilism and political totalitarianism. He believed that a restoration of the Liberal order was desirable and

possible--if liberalism reaffirmed admittedly undemonstrable moral ideals as an act of faith. That is why he greeted news of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution with such enthusiasm. The essence of the Revolution, he wrote after Soviet forces suppressed it, was the Hungarian communists' renewed loyalty to the moral ideals that had originally induced them to join the Party. If moral renewal could occur in the very heart of darkness--the Stalinist state--it could, he hoped, occur in the non-communist world as well. To that renewal he devoted the remainder of his life.

Endnotes

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⁴Richard Gelwick, *The Way of Discovery: An Introduction to the Thought of Michael Polanyi* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 35.

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⁸Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957).

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 71.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 258A.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 234.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 258A.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 247.

¹⁴Michael Polanyi, *Full Employment and Free Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷Letter of Karl Polanyi to Michael Polanyi, November 1, 1945, Michael Polanyi Papers. Department of Special Collections, University of Chicago Library. Quotation used with permission

¹⁸Michael Polanyi, *The Logic of Liberty* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), p. 97.

¹⁹Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), p. 228.

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Michael Polanyi and Spontaneous Order, 1941-1951

Struan Jacobs

ABSTRACT Key words: dynamic order, liberty, science, spontaneous order, Friedrich Hayek, Wolfgang Kohler, Michael Polanyi.

Polanyi's theory of spontaneous order is set in historical context, analyzed, and compared to Friedrich Hayek's version.

Spontaneous social order, the subject of extensive scholarly discussion in recent times,¹ is generally considered to have been named by Friedrich Hayek. Ross has representatively written in this regard: “The term *spontaneous order* appears to have been coined by F. A. Hayek in *The Constitution of Liberty* (1960), though he made use of the concept in earlier discussions of economic phenomena.”² Similarly, Hamowy found Hayek first using the *notion* in an economic context, in “The Use of Knowledge in Society” (1945), and then coining the name “spontaneous order” in *The Constitution of Liberty*.³ A related suggestion is that Hayek was responsible for resurrecting the idea itself this century, Roche having written that “One of Hayek’s greatest discoveries and the keystone of his entire work on law and economics is the concept of ‘spontaneous order.’”⁴

The present paper is a contribution to the historiography of spontaneous social order, dealing with the relatively neglected writings on such order of Michael Polanyi.⁵ The paper intensively investigates Polanyi’s pertinent writings from 1941 to 1951, the decade in which he formed his understanding of spontaneous order and dealt with the topic most thoroughly.⁶ These works will be studied in a mainly chronological sequence, leading to a comparison of his use of the idea of spontaneous order with that of Hayek.

Were such authors as Ross and Hamowy correct in their priority claim about Hayek’s terminology? Ironically, the very documentation furnished by Hamowy implied that a thinker other than Hayek had originated the expression and previously examined the object - Polanyi. Hayek’s essay of 1945, “The Use of Knowledge in Society,” spoke of the “price system” as having emerged “spontaneously”,⁷ which some readers might say insinuated the idea of spontaneous order, but the essay neither explicitly describes nor analyzes the object. *The Constitution of Liberty* marks the first appearance of “spontaneous order” in a work of Hayek, although its role is minor, being used on only two pages, one of them reproducing a passage from Polanyi’s *The Logic of Liberty*.

This work of Polanyi, an essay-collection published in 1951, predated Hayek’s *The Constitution of Liberty* by almost a decade and, indeed, several of the essays had been published in journals well before 1951. While Hamowy observed that “Polanyi discusses the relation between individual liberty and spontaneously attained social order in “Manageability and Social Tasks,” in *The Logic of Liberty ...*(1951)”,⁸ curiously he never noticed that Polanyi had coined the name “spontaneous order” and explicitly theorized on the subject long before Hayek. Another commentator who referred to Polanyi in the context of explicating Hayek was John Gray, writing of “the history and theory of science ...where the idea of spontaneous order was (as Hayek acknowledges) ...put to work by Michael Polanyi.”⁹ (Gray explained that he had learned of Polanyi’s contribution to the topic in a “Personal communication” from Hayek.¹⁰) But Gray was non-committal on whether Hayek, Polanyi, or some other figure originally named such order, and he

suggested that, unlike Hayek, Polanyi only worked with the idea of spontaneous order in respect to science.¹¹

There is indirect evidence of Polanyi as the source of Hayek's idea of spontaneous social order. Not only did Polanyi identify and systematically discuss the phenomenon years before Hayek; they were also acquaintances, conversant with each other's work from the 1930s, both men, for example, having participated in a symposium in Paris in 1938 to discuss Walter Lippmann's lately published, *The Good Society*.¹² An important article by Polanyi on social order appeared in the journal *Economica* in 1941 when Hayek was its editor.¹³ Polanyi was among the 36 participants at the inaugural meeting of The Mount Pelerin Society in 1947, organized by Hayek. Polanyi had stints as a visiting professor at the University of Chicago from 1950, the year in which Hayek was appointed to a professorship there.¹⁴ Hayek in a general acknowledgement in *The Constitution of Liberty* listed Polanyi among his intellectual benefactors whose name would have appeared more often "If" as he put it "I had regarded it as my task to acknowledge all indebtedness and to notice all agreement."¹⁵

"The Growth of Thought in Society": Dynamic Order

"The Growth of Thought in Society", published in 1941, stands out as Polanyi's seminal study on the present topic.¹⁶ The essay was conceived with a view to getting beneath the surface characteristics of free and totalitarian societies to explain their substantial differences. More immediately, Polanyi was answering the movement in Britain against pure science which had been nurtured, and was propagating ideas expressed, by Nikolai Bukharin, Boris Hessen, and other Soviet delegates to the International Congress of the History of Science of 1931 in London. The movement, led by Lancelot Hogben, J.D. Bernal, and J.G. Crowther, was animated by three main concerns. Denying the distinction between pure and applied science, it indicated that research often is, and always should be, undertaken in response to practical social needs. The case was put to scientists that they join the fight for a form of government that would direct scientific research to that purpose and away from the delusory "disinterested search for truth."¹⁷ Scientists were to cease claiming intellectual freedom for themselves as inquirers, and accept once and for all that research has to be controlled for the benefit of society.

Seeing in these ideas a fateful misunderstanding, Polanyi responded by basing his constructive doctrine on a multiform theory of truth, according to which pure science is but one of several different ideals of truth in society. He determined to investigate the kind of social structure best fitted to serve these ideals and to support the "intellectual and moral order of society" (G 429). His first and basic step involved contrasting two ways in which orders arise in nature and society, two "methods of achieving" ordered arrangements (G 433). On a couple of pages of "The Growth of Thought in Society", Polanyi applied "spontaneous" and cognates to one of these modes, writing variously of "spontaneous ordering", "spontaneously arising order", "spontaneously attained order", and "spontaneous mutual adjustment" (G 432, 435). In this particular essay, however, he never used the locution "spontaneous order" as such, preferring the terms "dynamic order", "dynamic system", and "dynamic forms of organization" (G 435ff.). Polanyi represented "dynamic order" as grounded on freedom and spontaneously emerging from mutual adjustment of free actions. Illustrative cases of this order included water in a jug, "perception of Gestalt", "evolution of the embryo from the fertilised cell", and "the entire evolution of species [which] is commonly thought to have resulted from a continued process of internal equilibration in living matter, under varying outside circumstances" (G 432-33). Of the ordering of individual particles of liquid in a container, Polanyi explained:

no constraint is applied specifically to the individual particles; the forces from outside, like the resistance of the vessels and the forces of gravitation, take effect in an entirely indiscriminate fashion. The particles are thus free to obey the internal forces acting between them, and the resultant order represents the equilibrium between all the internal and external forces (G 431).

The other mode in which order arises Polanyi described as “planned order”, involving the exercise of authority over members of a group. Each element in a planned order is assigned a particular position and deprived of freedom “to stay or move about at ...pleasure” (G 431). Among examples cited by Polanyi were formal gardens, machines, and a company of soldiers on parade.¹⁸

It was not Polanyi’s purpose to make a case for one of these kinds of orders being superior to the other in an absolute sense. Each has its rightful place and proper function. The advantage of planning is in its typically being the more efficient approach to ordering a small group of units, whereas units in large numbers admit only of being ordered spontaneously. They are “alternative and opposite” ways of arriving at order; one severely curtailing freedom as the other relies on freedom. Having different functions, Polanyi expected the methods would seldom compete “with each other” (G 433). He envisaged them combining in the way that is typical of “mutually exclusive elements”, one occupying “gaps left over by the other.”¹⁹

As befitted the purpose of his paper, Polanyi had more to say about dynamic orders than about the other sort, dynamic ones being less obvious than planned and having been neglected by social analysts. Being interested in dynamic orders in society and culture, rather than in nature, Polanyi first looked at the competitive economy, paying particular attention to mutual adjustments among producers. Their aim is to enhance profits on the sale of their resources and to acquire the resources of rival producers, employing these more profitably. Each decision by a producer alters his demand “on the market of resources” as well as what he offers to consumers, affecting prices of “resources and consumers’ goods” and triggering adjustments by other producers. These he referred to as “the ‘internal forces’ through which individual producers interact”, the tendency of successive mutual interactions being for producers to use resources “to the greatest satisfaction of the consumers” (G 436).

Then Polanyi turned to common law as a dynamic order “in the intellectual and moral heritage of man” (G 436). A judge deliberating on a case is indirectly in contact with many predecessors, consciously and unconsciously referring to their decisions, along with “statute, precedent, equity and convenience” and the general drift of social opinion. The judge aims at a decision possessing “the force of conviction”, reached after the various legal and social “bearings” of the case (precedent and the rest) have been assessed “in the light of his own professional conscience” (G 436). The convinced decision, adding to the body of law, is the judge’s “interpretation of the Law as it stood before”, a further light on it. At the same time, “Public opinion also has received a new response and a new stimulus”, and future judges are set “new directions for their ...decisions.” Common or case law, Polanyi explained, “arises by a process of direct adjustments between succeeding judges”, one judge’s decision referring to and modifying past judicial decisions, analogously to “consecutive decisions of individual producers acting in the same market” (G 436).

The dynamic order of greatest interest to Polanyi was science, with knowledge claims expressed by past and present scientists in textbooks, journals and public discussions conditioning, and being affected by, recent discoveries. Underlying scientists’ judgments and results are traditional methods and standards (reliability and precision), subject to personal interpretation. Making use of current knowledge as a resource, the scientist was seen

as resembling “a judge referring to a precedent.” But, Polanyi indicated, in personally selecting “a problem to” test his ability (unlike the judge who is *presented* with a problem case to decide), and later in trying to convince colleagues to accept a discovery, the scientist behaves more like a “business man, first seeking the most profitable application of his resources and then soliciting the consumers’ approval for his goods.” The dynamic orders of business and common law are consequences of different “methods of adjustment (‘internal forces’).” Judges adjust to one another’s decisions by means of *consultation*, *competition* forces business adjustments, while scientists adjust through competition and consultation together (G 437).

Polanyi characterized science as predominantly a “cognitive” dynamic order, law a “mainly normative” one, with other dynamic orders of culture - “language, writing, literature ..., pictorial and musical [art]; ...medicine, agriculture, manufacture” - involving both these characters.²⁰ “In each field” generations pass on “a public mental heritage.” Through consultation, competition, or a combination of the two, new participants adjust to achievements in their sector. “Then, when they suggest their own additions or reforms, they return to the public and claim publicly that these be accepted by society - to become in their turn a part of the common heritage” (G 438).

Did Polanyi’s idea have a traceable source? Whereas Hayek is seen as having derived his concept of spontaneous order from Scottish Enlightenment figures (the contribution of Polanyi, as we noted, having been almost entirely overlooked by Hayek scholars), Polanyi’s writing gives no reason to think the Scottish thinkers were an influence on him.²¹

Gestalt psychologist, Wolfgang Köhler, was the one source Polanyi cited in his 1941 essay, indicating he had taken Köhler’s name “dynamic order” and modified its meaning to suit his own needs (G 432, 435). The importance of Gestalt psychology in the development of Polanyi’s thought can be inferred from a remark in *The Tacit Dimension* that his “ideas were first given a systematic form in *Science, Faith and Society* in 1946” where he “considered science ...as a variant of sensory perception”,²² his understanding of perception as the model for science being that of Gestalt psychology.²³ The index of Köhler’s *Gestalt Psychology* (1929, reprinted 1947) gives several references for “dynamic”, “dynamics”, and “dynamic order” as opposed to “enforced order” (or “prescribed order”).²⁴ What were the grounds of Köhler’s distinction? In Chapter IV of the book, “Dynamics as Opposed to Machine Theory”, he noticed that *physical* orders (these not social orders were his interest) are determined in two main ways, one involving freely interacting internal forces (“dynamic” factors), the other elements under “rigid constraints” (“topographical” factors). Köhler’s examples of dynamic order included distribution of electric charges on an insulated conductor, the planetary system, oil in water, and the organization of sense experience. Steam engines, most machines, and movement of water in a narrow pipe were cited as “enforced orders.” The distinction is one of degree, orders being categorized according to the relative influence of dynamic forces and rigid constraints, the maximum topographical influence permitting movement in only one possible direction, as a cylinder prescribes the movement of a piston.

Polanyi’s distinction between orders cuts across that of Köhler. As against Köhler’s reliance on different degrees of internal, freely interacting elements and external, rigid determinants, Polanyi was differentiating orders according to whether they result from human design and contrivance. He assumed (not altogether convincingly) that designed orders limit members’ freedom and that non-designed or dynamic ones do not. A broader distinction than Köhler’s, which covers natural and technological orders but not social ones (although there is no reason why it could not be extended to these), Polanyi’s applies to all three.

“The Span of Central Direction” (1948) and “Manageability of Social Tasks” (1951)

Polanyi began explicitly using the term “spontaneous order” in “The Span of Central Direction” (1948, reprinted 1951), contrasting order of this kind against “corporate order”, which was the distinction of 1941 differently designated. The thesis of the essay, as he later conveniently summarized it, affirms there are certain tasks “which if manageable can only be performed by spontaneous mutual adjustments”, tasks no corporate order is equipped to undertake (M 170). Specifically, industrial production excludes the possibility of central planning, daily decisions about allocations of materials to each plant in response to changes in supply and demand lying beyond the capacity of corporate administration. Imposing corporate administration on a system of modern industrial production would drastically reduce the number of industrial units or their activities. Polanyi produced a quantitative demonstration that “the administrative powers of a corporate body” are in a ratio of 1:n in relation to the scale “of the administrative task involved in the conduct of a modern industrial system of production”, where n denotes the number of productive units in the economy.²⁵ To put 100,000 productive businesses under central control would, on Polanyi’s reckoning, reduce business adjustments and the overall rate of production to the fraction, 1/100,000. He noted his conclusion on central planning was stiffer than even that of Hayek, L. von Mises, and F.H. Knight: “The rigorous free-traders ...who urgently warn against the danger of enslavement by economic planning, thereby imply (often without intending it) that economic planning is feasible, though at the price of liberty.”²⁶

In “Manageability of Social Tasks,” Polanyi surveyed the principal spontaneous orders in society, developing certain points from his earlier essays and adding new thoughts. He observed that members of a spontaneous order exercise their own initiative “subject ...to laws which uniformly apply to all of them”, without explaining whether the laws in question are general across society or specific to the order.²⁷ For the first time he indicated that some of the content of his spontaneous order idea had been presaged by Adam Smith, with no suggestion, however, of a personal debt. Smith had used the concept of self-co-ordination with reference to market activity; Polanyi was also applying it to cultural practices (M 154, 160, 170).

The competitive economy, major spontaneous order of the free society, Polanyi divided into five mutually adjusting orders: plant managers bargaining with disposers of, respectively, labour, land, and capital; purchases by consumers “adjusted to the market conditions created by previous purchases”; and plant managers competing “for the demand of consumers” (M 161).

His account of common law as an “intellectual” spontaneous order borrowed freely from his discussion of a decade earlier. Involving consecutive adjustments of judges’ decisions to previous decisions “and to any justified changes in public opinion”, the legal order’s “scope and consistency” are increased through the application and reinterpretation of its basic rules (M 162). But whereas Polanyi in 1941 had presented the order of common law as “precisely analogous to the relationship between the consecutive decisions of individual producers acting in the same market”, now he wanted to contrast the accomplishments of the two orders (G 436). The critical difference is that whereas “an economic system of spontaneous order co-ordinates individual actions merely to serve the momentary material interest of its participants, an orderly process of judicature deposits a valid and lasting system of legal thought” (M 163). In regard to the spontaneous order of science, Polanyi had previously described two modes by which scientists co-ordinate their activities, *consultation* with “professional opinion” and *competition* for personal

advantage, resembling law and business respectively. In this essay he included *persuasion* as a further form of mutual adjustment in science. Intellectual, as distinct from economic, spontaneous orders are each ruled by their body of “professional opinion”, whereas in the “Growth of Thought” essay he had spoken of authority being exercised by “influentials” of the cultural circle in each order.

Let us examine the case of science to further elucidate Polanyi’s theory. A good way into this is to use Barry’s distinction between the historically most important concepts of spontaneous order, a diachronic one of “*evolutionary growth*” of institutions and cultural objects and a synchronic notion of “complex aggregate structure[s]” of activities.²⁸ What part of science did Polanyi regard as subject to spontaneous ordering: the research *process* (Barry’s “growth”) or the knowledge claims that are the *product* of research (Barry’s “aggregate structure”) (or both)? That he was talking about research is evident in his article, “Foundations of Academic Freedom” (1947), which discusses scientists’ work on problems of their own choosing as an order of intellectual activities that achieves the optimum “utilization” of scientists’ efforts relative to the goal of exploring for and exploiting opportunities for discovery. Efforts are co-ordinated as each scientist independently adjusts her “activities to the results hitherto achieved by others.”²⁹ The outcome is an ordered *process* rather than an order or system of recurrent practices, a “dovetailing” of many acts of self-adjustment undertaken in response to an evolving intellectual situation. The spontaneously ordered *growth* of science is what Polanyi had in mind.

It might be questioned, however, just how spontaneous the Polanyian order of science is, for he believed scientists are hemmed in by a number of stringent social constraints. Professional opinion and peer pressure exclude many possible starting points and lines of investigation, exerting “a profound influence on the course of every individual investigation.”³⁰ The unofficial rulers of science decide appointments, publications, and funding. “By their advice they can either delay or accelerate the growth of a new line of research. They can provide special subsidies for new lines of research at any moment.” They produce a “constant re-direction of scientific interest.”³¹ The possibility is raised of markedly different degrees of freedom and constraint existing in spontaneous orders. An order may be other than centrally directed without its members enjoying great freedom.

Spontaneous Order and Freedom

Part of the rationale of Polanyi’s theory of dynamic/spontaneous order was to shed light on political subjects. He believed that vital activities undertaken in a self-ordering manner define the difference between liberal-democracy and totalitarianism. And turning to his interpretation of freedom, it is seen to be bound up in the account of such order. “The Growth of Thought” essay introduced a distinction between “private” and “public” liberty. “Private” liberty is the condition of being left to one’s own devices with no externally defined purpose to serve, while “public” liberty, a necessary property of spontaneous order, connotes that people have the opportunity to act in the way they personally judge to be appropriate to a given ideal end, not having to comply with “another’s instructions ...as is the subordinate official’s duty” in a planned order. Among the points made are that “responsible public liberty” limits “irresponsible private freedom”, that they “stimulate each other”, and that liberal society protects “Irresponsible privacy, solitary habits, non-conformity and eccentricity” as sources of independent thought and activity from which the public can benefit (G 438).

“Manageability of Social Tasks” (1951) unfolds further implications. Acts of private liberty, undertaken in response to personal desires, and not judged as socially detrimental, are neither punished by authority nor censured

by public opinion. Public liberty is akin to private liberty in allowing people to act independently but differs from it in having a predefined purpose and a public responsibility. In the various intellectual spontaneous orders, judges, scientists, and others make use of public freedom to form judgments and act as they see fit, guided by and dedicated to what Polanyi referred to as spiritual realities. It is liberty based on general laws, unhampered by specific commands.

Connections between the two liberties traced in this discussion (1951) include public liberty as an historical-causal condition of private liberty with the shackles of serfdom broken after public liberties were established in law and commerce. A negative relation is erosion of public liberty by “private nihilism” - (ab)use of private freedom to reject truth and science, beauty and art, justice and law - ending up with tyranny (M 158).

It is important, Polanyi believed, that both freedoms be protected, but public freedom is the more characteristic of liberal society. Private liberty is not unknown in totalitarian states, unlike public liberty whose grounds they deny. Democracies provide extensive public freedom but may curtail private freedom through exercise of “social ostracism” (one thinks in this context of Tocqueville and J.S. Mill and their fears concerning majority tyranny). According to Polanyi, Soviet citizens under Stalin had more private liberty than the English last century. He wrote, “A free society is characterized by the range of public liberties through which individualism performs a social function, and not by the scope of socially ineffective personal liberties.”³²

What is the case for public liberty? So far as Polanyi was concerned it is not provided for people to behave as they wish. Judges and scientists may enjoy their work but they are not given public liberty for this reason. Business people are not provided with the right to accumulate and use capital for their own pleasure. To ground and justify such liberty, Polanyi explained, calls for beliefs “in the validity and power of things of the mind and in our obligation” to serve and pursue these mental objects.³³ One assumes he was referring to these beliefs and obligations when he spoke of “fiduciary foundations” and “transcendent ground[s]” of public liberty and the free society.³⁴ One example of an object of belief and obligation would be “the possibility of knowing the truth and the obligation of telling it” (M 193), others being implied by his proposition that the “primary aim” of public liberty is the promotion of a “good society, respecting truth and justice, and cultivating love between fellow citizens.”³⁵ In short, most of the mental objects appear to be ideals, along with corresponding beliefs in their reality.

A matter on which Polanyi was not explicit, which is nevertheless important for determining his overall position, is whether public liberty extends throughout the free society, enabling *all* citizens to act on relevant beliefs and pursue ideals to promote a “good society.” Or was he suggesting this liberty is only available within spontaneous orders for members to pursue systemic ideal objects? Polanyi’s 1941 essay appeared to locate public liberty squarely in spontaneous orders, notwithstanding that one such order - the market economy - involves most if not all citizens of society as a whole. It may have been this essay that led Prosch to remark that Polanyi’s general public supported truth, justice, and the other ideals without itself being actively involved in their pursuit, the ideals being “embodied in the free communities of scientists, artists”, etc.³⁶ But if that were Polanyi’s view in 1941, it would appear he had surrendered it by 1949. Connecting public liberty to the pursuit of ideals (and to market activity), he spoke of ideals and of beliefs that are “held in common by” all citizens of the free society (e.g. “that man is amenable to reason and susceptible to the claims of his conscience”),³⁷ and one assumes Polanyi meant that all citizens of the free society have public liberty relative to the ideal ends of the society. He affirmed, “the free society *as a whole*” is supportive of and supported by citizens earnestly endeavouring to live according to their fundamental moral beliefs (truth, justice, and love of humanity).³⁸ And he similarly wrote, “The general foundations of coherence and freedom in society may be

regarded as secure to the extent to which men uphold their belief in the reality of truth, justice, charity and tolerance, and accept dedication to the service of these realities.”³⁹ Among these ideal objects and corresponding public liberties, one imagines that the likes of charity, tolerance, and philanthropy exist in the wider society, not confined to spontaneous orders. At another place, Polanyi represented members of spontaneous orders as an ““oligarchy”” of those “who primarily make use of the public liberties in Western society”, the adverb implying public liberties are *also* part of society (M 196).

The general public is morally and financially supportive of the activities and achievements of the various spontaneous orders. For example, in regard to the order of scientists Polanyi observed:

The ideas and opinions of so small a group can be of importance only by virtue of the response which they evoke from the general public. This response is indispensable to science, which depends on it for money to pay the costs of research and for recruits to replenish the ranks of the profession. Clearly, science can continue to exist on the modern scale only so long as the authority it claims is accepted by large groups of the public.⁴⁰

Is the relation symmetrical, such that people in spontaneous orders work for the benefit of society in return for its support? We noted Polanyi saying that public liberty is primarily aimed at producing a worthy society, citizens cultivating truth, justice, and fellow-feeling. Did he think that those in spontaneous orders seek this aim directly, or indirectly through pursuing their order’s ideal(s)? The text suggests a positive answer to the second question. For according to Polanyi, public freedoms in the various spontaneous orders serve, and receive their justification from, the end of each order, which being described by him as “ultimate” suggests he looked on it as an end in itself (M 198). It would appear from this that Polanyi was confused and confusing when he claimed that members of spontaneous orders have creation of a good society as their “primary aim.” That members of a Polanyian spontaneous order are dedicated to the object of their order rather than to some external so-called “primary aim” is confirmed by several of Polanyi’s remarks. For example: “Scientists, judges, scholars, ministers of religion, etc. are guided by systems of thought to the growth, application, or dissemination of which they are dedicated” (M 194). He contended that actions of participants in spontaneous orders are directed by their “professional interests” and “professional dut[ies]”, and explained that “All these persons engaged in forming various systems of spontaneous order, are guided by their standard incentives *which do not aim at promoting the welfare of the social body as a whole.*”⁴¹ Which suggests Polanyi meant that participants in spontaneous orders are motivated by professional duties rather than by improving society. If use of public liberty in spontaneous orders for pursuing their ends also serves to enhance the “good society”, it only does so indirectly. Besides which, there is nothing to guarantee such an outcome, Polanyi holding that the consequences on society of activities in the spontaneous orders cannot be known in advance.

Polanyi’s Use of Spontaneous Order Compared to that of Hayek

Given the standing of Hayek as this century’s pre-eminent theorist of spontaneous order, it is worth comparing his use of the idea with that of Polanyi. Hayek’s most extensive discussion of the subject appears in *Law, Legislation and Liberty*, where he repeatedly described the free society as a spontaneous order, a fact that prompts one to ask whether Polanyi similarly applied the concept to liberal society as a whole. An affirmative answer may appear to be implied by our argument above that Polanyi regarded *public liberty* as a property of the *free society* as well as of its constituent spontaneous orders. Against this, however, Polanyi’s writings from 1941-1951 never explicitly

describe the free society as such an order. The Index of *The Logic of Liberty* confirms this by listing several page numbers against “spontaneous order in society” while never mentioning “spontaneous order of society.” There is one place in *The Logic of Liberty*, in an essay “Foundations of Academic Freedom”, where Polanyi may have appeared to insinuate a view of the free society as a spontaneous order. He wrote:

all contacts with spiritual reality have a measure of coherence. A free people, among whom many are on the alert for calls on their consciences, will show a spontaneous coherence of this kind. They may feel that it all comes from being rooted in the same national tradition; but this tradition may well be merely a national variant of a universal human tradition. For a similar coherence will be found between different nations when each follows a national tradition of this type. They will form a community of free peoples. They may argue and quarrel, yet will always settle each new difficulty in the end, firmly rooted in the same transcendent ground.⁴²

Apart from this vague suggestion, which Polanyi never developed, one is hard put to find any other “support” in his writings from 1941 to 1951 for the idea of the free society being such an order, besides which the idea itself conflicts with his characterization of a spontaneous order in society as one whose members “mutually adjust their *full-time activities* over a prolonged period.”⁴³ Polanyi’s featured examples of such order all exhibit this last property (law, science, production in the free market).⁴⁴

Now turn attention to law. Polanyi’s spontaneous order of law consists of adjustments between the successive decisions of judges. Hayek saw the universal rules of just conduct (the “nomos” of private and criminal law) as the underlying “basis of the spontaneous order of society at large.”⁴⁵ Commonly, Hayek scholars believe he saw these rules as forming a spontaneous order of law,⁴⁶ and several considerations support their interpretation. These include Hayek’s belief that many legal rules have emerged spontaneously, his noting that “numerous ...spontaneous sub-orders or partial societies” exist in a free society, and his inclusion in this society of a “multiplicity of grown and self-generating structures.”⁴⁷ He specifically cited law among society’s spontaneous growths, along with morals, language, and money. Given all this, it may come as a surprise to learn that the copiously detailed index of *Law, Legislation and Liberty* mentions neither “spontaneous order of law” nor “law as a spontaneous order.” And it could not have been otherwise because, in that work, Hayek never described the rules of just conduct as a spontaneous social order. What he said was they form the *foundation* of the spontaneous order of the free society. He repeatedly differentiated in *Law, Legislation and Liberty* between the spontaneous order of actions of the free society and the rules of justice underlying the order.⁴⁸ It is possible he saw the rules of justice as part of the spontaneous order, but he definitely did not see them collectively as equivalent to it. He made this patently clear in another work, differentiating between “the systems of rules of individual conduct and the order of actions” resultant from adhesion to those rules, stating they “are not the same” in spite of being “frequently confused” as in “the term ‘order of law’.”⁴⁹

The explicitly designated spontaneous orders with which Hayek chiefly dealt were society and catallaxy. He distinguished them conceptually while connecting them causally, stating that the free society is “held together by ... economic relations” and that “modern society [is] based on exchange.”⁵⁰ Of the free market he claimed it is “probably ...the only comprehensive order extending over the whole field of human society.”⁵¹ Similarly with Polanyi, who considered the market as the most extensive of all the free society’s spontaneous orders (or as he envisaged it at one place, a set of interacting spontaneous orders).

Polanyi threw the pluralism of the free society into sharper relief than did Hayek in terms of the number of spontaneous orders he identified and discussed. Besides the market economy, and in addition to science and law as intellectual spontaneous orders concerned with spiritual reality, Polanyi noted “language and writing..., Literature and the various arts ...; the crafts, including medicine, agriculture, manufacture and the various technical services; the whole body of religious, social and political thought” (M 165). One finds a different form of pluralism accentuated by Hayek, his conception of the catallaxy or spontaneous order of the market emphasising the multiplicity of self-chosen purposes, whereas in Polanyi’s account of this and other spontaneous orders individual choice and freedom are subordinated to one overriding goal. As Polanyi put it: “Freedom of science, freedom of worship, freedom of thought in general, are public institutions by which society opens to its members the opportunity for serving aims that are purposes in themselves” (M 193). The idea of spontaneous order as ruled by a sovereign goal is not to be found in Hayek who stated that “not having been deliberately made by men, a cosmos has no purpose” although “its existence may ...be...serviceable in the pursuit of many purposes.”⁵² It is significant that Hayek in *Law, Legislation and Liberty* never described enterprises such as science and the arts as spontaneous orders, but as organizations. His likely reason for this was they are directed to a single goal, unlike spontaneous orders which in his view are serviceable with respect to an indefinite number of participants’ purposes.

Finally, a few words on the freedoms Polanyi and Hayek respectively ascribed to spontaneous orders. The public freedom of Polanyi is defined with reference to public aims, whereas Hayek’s liberty, essentially personal and negative, is freedom under the law, secured by the rule of law or, what comes to the same thing, by rules of just conduct that are universal in respect of being “equally applicable to all.”⁵³ These rules delineate and protect the domain of free action of each individual, prohibiting classes of actions deemed to be harmful, and coercing anyone who intrudes. They are domains permitting individuals to use their knowledge for self-chosen purposes. This may appear to approximate what Polanyi described as “private” freedom, which he looked on as irresponsible and selfish, but there is an important difference, which is that Hayek included public ideals among the possible objects of the freedom he supported, meaning that freedom for him may serve selfless purposes just as well as it serves selfish ones. While freedom under the law proves vital in Polanyi’s market order and, one assumes, in his other orders as well, “public” freedom, the primary one for him, is defined less by these laws and more by the aims of spontaneous orders. Such aims, unlike purposes in Hayek’s two main spontaneous orders (society and catallaxy), are predetermined, not objects of choice. Hayek’s free society is not held together by common aims or purposes, other than that of securing the abstract order, but by rules of just conduct. Polanyi subordinated private liberty to public, public liberty providing its justification. “Freedom of the individual to do as he pleases, so long as he respects the other fellow’s right to do likewise, plays only a minor part in this theory of freedom.” Accordingly, the “free society is not an Open Society, but one fully dedicated to a distinctive set of beliefs.”⁵⁴

Polanyi and Hayek’s interpretations of a free society are found to differ, Polanyi emphasizing the responsible exercise of freedom in the service of (mostly) ideal ends, Hayek the use of knowledge in pursuit of freely chosen purposes. Polanyi saw the moral life of citizens of the free society as largely owing to their “civic contacts” in society, the citizen’s “social responsibilities give him occasion to a moral life from which men not living in freedom are debarred.”⁵⁵ The responsibilities he referred to concern truth, justice and other ideal ends. For Hayek, also, morality is embedded in society, the difference being that in his case rules sustain morality, not ends. “It was a repertoire of learnt rules which told him [the individual] what was the right and what was the wrong way of acting in different circumstances” and, again, “the only common values of an open and free society were ...those common abstract rules of conduct that secured the constant maintenance of an equally abstract order which merely assured to the individual

better prospects of achieving his individual ends.”⁵⁶ Morality in Polanyi’s case is the constrained, considered pursuit of ideal objects; in Hayek’s it is respecting customary rules in the pursuit of personal purposes.

Endnotes *

*The author is indebted to Drs. Michael James and Michael Leahy for their helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper.

¹ For a clear historical survey of writings on spontaneous order see Norman Barry, “The Tradition of Spontaneous Order,” *Literature of Liberty* 5 (1982): 7-58.

² Ian Ross, “Foreword,” in Ronald Hamowy, *The Scottish Enlightenment and the Theory of Spontaneous Order* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), 3.

³ Hamowy, *Scottish Enlightenment*, 3 and n. 1, referring to Friedrich Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 160-61. Here are some further details. In “Economics and Knowledge” (1936), reprinted in Friedrich Hayek, *Individualism and Economic Order* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1949), 33-56 Hayek spoke of “a problem of the *division of knowledge*” (50) as the fundamental problem of economic science and of the social sciences in general, the problem of “how the spontaneous interaction” (50) of people with fragments of knowledge bring, for example, prices into correspondence with costs.

In another essay, “The Use of Knowledge in Society” (1945), reprinted in Hayek, *Individualism and Economic Order*, 77-91 Hayek asked how people are able to co-ordinate (a key term in the analysis of spontaneous order) their actions in a system of dispersed knowledge of particular facts, and he noted in regard to the market that the price system is crucially involved (84-5). Hayek illustrated this suggestion in terms of a relative scarcity raising the price of a raw material such as tin, prompting manufacturers to appropriately respond as they try to maintain profit levels by using tin more sparingly and introducing substitutes. He wrote, “The whole acts as one market, not because any of its members survey the whole field, but because their limited individual fields of vision sufficiently overlap so that through many intermediaries the relevant information is communicated to all”, *Ibid.*, 86 emphasis added. This no doubt is what Hamowy was referring to when he suggested the concept of (as distinct from the term) spontaneous order originally appeared in Hayek in “The Use of Knowledge ...” essay of 1945.

⁴ George C. Roche III, “The Relevance of Friedrich Hayek,” in *Essays on Hayek*, ed. F. Machlup (Hillsdale: Hillsdale College Press, 1976), 10. Other writers who suggest the term “spontaneous order” was coined by Hayek and that he resurrected the theory of it in this century include: D. P. O’Brien, “Hayek as an Intellectual Historian,” in *Hayek, Co-ordination and Evolution*, eds. J. Birner and R. van Zijp (London: Routledge, 1994), 346-47; Shirley Letwin, “The Achievement of Friedrich A. Hayek,” in *Essays on Hayek*; Barry, “Tradition of Spontaneous Order,” Naomi Moldofsky, “The Problems Reconsidered, 1920-1989,” in F. A. Hayek, *Order - With or Without Design?* (London: CRCE, 1989); Raimondo Cubeddu, *The Philosophy of the Austrian School* (London: Routledge, 1993).

⁵ Even in Polyanian exegesis the idea of spontaneous order has been the object of scant attention. Representatively, Harry Prosch, *Michael Polanyi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986) mentions

spontaneous order on only two pages (273, 288), and says very little about the related idea of ‘polycentricity’ (178, 183-4, 194, 198, 273, 283). William Casement, “Michael Polanyi’s Defense of Spontaneous Order,” in *Terrorism, Justice and Social Values*, eds. C. Peden and Y. Hudson (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), is ahistorical and narrow in its coverage. Terry Hoy, “Michael Polanyi: The Moral Imperatives of a Free Society,” *Thought* 58 (1983): 393-405 says nothing about spontaneous order, nor does Richard Gelwick’s introduction to Polanyi’s thought, *The Way of Discovery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).

⁶ Concerning Polanyi’s writings subsequent to 1951, there is no reference to “spontaneous order” in his magnum opus, *Personal Knowledge* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958) although the idea may be hinted at from 212-22, and on 321. The idea appears in his “The Republic of Science,” *Minerva* 1 (1962): 54-56, 65, and the expression “spontaneous order” is to be found in his and Harry Prosch’s *Meaning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 204-206, 208, 211-213.

⁷ Hayek, *Individualism and Economic Order*, 88. Also it is unclear from what Hayek subsequently said about the matter whether his idea of spontaneous order even in *The Constitution of Liberty*, much less in his earlier writings, had significant content. See F. A. Hayek, *Law, Legislation and Liberty* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), vol. I, 2 where he explained that part of his reason for writing this work was a belief that there had “never been” adequate exposition of the distinction between “a self-generating or spontaneous order and an organization.”

⁸ Hamowy, *Scottish Enlightenment*, 40 n. 7.

⁹ John Gray, *Hayek on Liberty*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 35.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 256 n. 21.

¹¹ This claim of Gray’s is historically incorrect. So is Lee Cronk’s statement that “Polanyi (1941, 1951) applied the idea to the social process of science” (in fact he applied it to numerous spheres of society) and that Polanyi “appears to have been the first to use the term spontaneous order (1941)” (in the work being alluded to Polanyi used a different term to designate the concept). We shall clarify these matters later on. My quotations are from Cronk, “Spontaneous Order Analysis and Anthropology,” *Cultural Dynamics* 1 (1988): 286.

¹² Friedrich Hayek, “The Transmission of the Ideals of Economic Freedom,” in Hayek, *Studies in Philosophy, Politics and Economics* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967), 199 n. 3 (rewrite of an essay published in 1951).

¹³ See Gray, *Hayek*, 257 n. 3. Conversely, Polanyi reviewed books by Hayek for *Economica*, including *Individualism and Economic Order* (reviewed in 1949) and *The Counter Revolution in Science* (reviewed in 1953). For bibliographic details see Prosch, *Polanyi*, 336, 338.

¹⁴ Fritz Machlup, “Friedrich A. von Hayek,” in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences: Biographical Supplement*, ed. David L. Sills (New York: The Free Press, 1979), 277.

¹⁵ Hayek, *Constitution*, 415-16.

¹⁶ Certain elements of the idea of spontaneous order were nascent in essays of Polanyi published in 1939, “The Rights and Duties of Science,” and 1940, “Collectivist Planning.” These were republished as part of a collection, *The Contempt of Freedom* (New York: Arno Press, 1975 (repr. of 1940 edition)). In particular, see 5, 8, 10-11, 35-44. The concept of such order was, however, as yet (1940) embryonic and unnamed.

¹⁷ Michael Polanyi, “The Growth of Thought in Society,” *Economica* (1941): 428 (hereafter referred to in the text by the initial G).

¹⁸ It may be objected that plants and inanimate objects are not possessed of freedom to stay put or move about. In the case of inanimate objects Polanyi was probably alluding to their moving with or without impediment, but it is hard to make out what he meant in respect to plants.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 433. For later discussion of these points see: Michael Polanyi, “The Span of Central Direction,” first published in 1948, reprinted in Polanyi, *The Logic of Liberty* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), 134; and Michael Polanyi, “Manageability of Social Tasks,” in *Logic*, 156-7 (signified in the text by M).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 438; cf. Polanyi, “Manageability,” in *Logic*, 165.

²¹ There are two references to Adam Smith in Polanyi’s *Logic* (154 and 170), but they do not suggest intellectual indebtedness. Perhaps the idea of spontaneous order was “in the air” through the 1930s and 40s. In 1940, Polanyi (*Contempt of Freedom*, 36 n. 1) made approving mention of the discussion of “cultivation of liberty under the law” in Walter Lippman’s *The Good Society* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1938). Lippmann did not use the precise expression “spontaneous order”, although he came close to it when he distinguished between “The associations into which men group themselves spontaneously” and bodies that “are deliberately contrived and organized” (*Ibid.*, 309 emphasis added). See also n. 12 above for reference to Hayek’s interesting historical reminiscence.

²² Michael Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967), ix.

²³ For the importance of Gestalt in Polanyi’s, *Science, Faith and Society* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1946) and usage of the terms “spontaneous” and “dynamic” see 33-4, 38, 47, 52, 59.

²⁴ Köhler, *Gestalt Psychology* (New York: Liveright, 1929, repr. 1947). The Index has an entry for “spontaneous association” (262ff.), and a notion “spontaneous grouping” (144). There is mention of “stationary state” (136) in the body of Köhler’s book but not of “spontaneous order.”

²⁵ Polanyi, “Central Direction,” *Logic*, 114.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 122.

²⁷ “Manageability,” 159; cf. Polanyi, “Growth of Thought,” 441.

²⁸ Barry, “Tradition of Spontaneous Order,” 11.

²⁹ Michael Polanyi, “Foundations of Academic Freedom,” reprinted in Polanyi, *Logic*, 34.

³⁰ Michael Polanyi, “Self-Government of Science,” (1942), reprinted in Polanyi, *Logic*, 53.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 54.

³² “Manageability,” 158; cf. *Logic*, v and vi.

³³ *Ibid.*, 193; cf. *Logic*, v, 97, 102, 194.

³⁴ *Logic*, vi, and 46.

³⁵ “Manageability,” 198. The exception to this is the free economy, its producers and consumers motivated by personal gain, not ideals.

³⁶ Prosch, *Michael Polanyi*, 280. This also appears to be the Prosch-Polanyi view in Chapter 13 of *Meaning* (200, 204) where they talk of “enclaves” of freedom. But this work includes the idea of the general public functioning as a spontaneous order “with respect to its government” (211-13), which is an aberration, having not appeared in Polanyi’s previous writings.

³⁷ Michael Polanyi, “Scientific Convictions” (1949), *Logic*, 29.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 29 (emphasis added). See also, *Logic*, 45-6.

³⁹ Polanyi, “Foundations,” 47.

⁴⁰ Polanyi, “Self-Government,” 57.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 194; cf. “Growth of Thought,” 445.

⁴² Polanyi, “Foundations,” 46.

⁴³ Polanyi, “Central Direction,” 115, emphasis added.

⁴⁴ See, for example, *Logic*, 157ff, 159-65, 185, 194-6. Admittedly, not all of Polanyi’s lesser, unanalyzed, examples of such order involve full-time activities: *Logic*, 116, 165-6; and “Growth,” 438.

⁴⁵ F. A. Hayek, *Law, Legislation and Liberty* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), vol. I, 125. See also vol. I, 43-6, 98, 104-5, 112.

⁴⁶ Scholars in this category include: Naomi Moldofsky, “The Problems Reconsidered,” 29; Ulrich Witt, “The Theory of Societal Evolution,” in J. Birner and R. van Zijp eds Hayek, *Co-Ordination and Evolution* (London: Routledge, 1994), 187; and John Gray, “Hayek, Spontaneous order and the Post-Communist Societies in Transition,”

in C Frei and R. Nef eds. *Contending With Hayek* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1994), 37.

⁴⁷ Respectively, Hayek, *Law*, vol. I, 47, and *Ibid.*, vol. III, 140.

⁴⁸ See n. 45.

⁴⁹ F.A. Hayek, "Notes on the Evolution of Systems of Rules of Conduct," in *Hayek Studies in Philosophy*, 67.

⁵⁰ Hayek, *Law*, II, 112, and I, 45, respectively.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, I, 115.

⁵² F.A. Hayek, "The Confusion of Language in Political Thought," in *Hayek, New Studies in Philosophy, Politics, Economics and the History of Ideas* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), 73-4.

⁵³ Hayek, *Law*, I, 107. See C. A. Hoy, *A Philosophy of Individual Freedom* (Westport: Greenwood Press, n.d.), 9ff.

⁵⁴ Polanyi, *Logic*, vi.

⁵⁵ Polanyi, "Scientific Convictions," 30.

⁵⁶ Hayek, *Law*, III, 157 and 164 respectively; see also III, 166-68.

Notes on Contributors

Lee Congdon is Professor of History at James Madison University and the author of *The Young Lukacs* (1983) and *Exile and Social Thought: Hungarian Intellectuals in Germany and Austria, 1919-1933* (1991). He is nearing completion of a new book, *Final Destination: Hungarian Intellectuals in England, 1933-1983*, in which Karl and Michael Polanyi are principal figures.

Ronald L. Hall is Professor of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Francis Marion University, where he has taught since 1973. He is the author of the book *Word and Spirit: A Kierkegaardian Critique of the Modern Age* (Indiana University Press, 1993). Several of his articles have appeared in *TAD*, including, most recently, a dialogue with Walter Gulick (*TAD* 22:3) about *Word and Spirit*.

Struan Jacobs teaches social theory at Deakin University, Australia. Researching in history of ideas, philosophy of science, and social philosophy, he is presently studying aspects of Polanyi's metascience, and further inquiring into relations between the social ideas of Polanyi and Hayek.

The Primacy Of The Explicit: On Keeping Romanticism At Bay

Ronald L. Hall

ABSTRACT Key Words: wholly tacit, wholly explicit, Romanticism, Enlightenment, politics, speech
Polanyi's claim that a wholly tacit knowledge is possible is contested. Polanyi's praise for the tacit, and his critique of the ideal of total explicitness, harbors a threat of Romanticism, which, in turn, may become a threat to the value of the explicit itself, and ultimately a political threat, something that Heidegger's anti-Enlightenment philosophy and political life manifested all too dramatically. Polanyians must not lose sight of the primacy of the explicit for personal existence, something that Polanyi's work need not undermine, and indeed, that has the resources to affirm and support.

As my detractors are quick to point out, the wheels of my mind's mill grind exceedingly slow. In evidence of just how correct they are, I offer this: I have been thinking about a single sentence of Michael Polanyi's for a quarter of a century, and only now am I beginning to see something in it that I never saw before. The passage I refer to is from Polanyi's 1964 essay "The Logic of Tacit Inference," an article I first read in 1969. Often quoted as a kind of epithet of his epistemology of tacit knowing, it runs as follows: "...all knowledge is *either tacit or rooted in tacit knowledge.*"¹

I know that in saying what I am about to say that I am taking a risk of being charged with suffering from a god-complex. But—perhaps in evidence that the charge is warranted—I won't let this stop me. The fact is that I am convinced that my slow grinding mind also, on occasion at least, grinds exceedingly fine. But of course, you must be the judge of this. As for me I take comfort in what Kierkegaard was fond of saying: "a bold venture is half the battle." So let me boldly venture forth and hope that in the following I do not err in trying to put too fine a point on so seemingly small a remark.

In my own self-examination, I have wondered why this passage made such a lasting impression on me. The conclusion that I have reached is not flattering. In those early days of my philosophical apprenticeship, I was under the suasion—perhaps I still am—of what J. L. Austin once called the worship of neat and tidy dichotomies. In any event, I think that I got stuck on this passage from Polanyi simply because I was expecting it to read otherwise. I thought surely it should read: "...all knowledge is either **tacit or explicit.**" The fact is, Polanyi's innovative way of putting the point took me by surprise, a bit like I was taken this past summer when Bruce Haddox showed up unexpectedly at my home in St. Augustine; I didn't expect to see him, and at first I did not see **him**; that is, it took me a second look to re-cognize him.

Well it took me more than a second look to reckon with Polanyi's disarming epistemological perspective. Even now I am continuing to discover its implications. But let me not get ahead of myself--what a strange metaphor.

The question I want to raise now is simply this: Where does the explicit figure in Polanyi's sweeping claim that "...**all** knowledge is either tacit or rooted in the tacit?" (emphasis is mine). Like all texts, of course, this one has a context. So let me refresh your memories by quoting the larger passage:

Now we see *tacit knowledge* opposed to *explicit knowledge*; but these two are not sharply divided. While tacit knowledge can be possessed by itself, explicit knowledge must rely on being tacitly understood and applied. Hence all knowledge is *either tacit or rooted in tacit knowledge*. A wholly explicit knowledge is unthinkable.²

The focus of Polanyi's epistemological interest is found in the last sentence. As is well known, the axe that Polanyi has to grind is with what he takes to be the mistaken ideal of scientific objectivism. That ideal, as I would put it, is something like what Heidegger once called the aim of modernity to complete Plato's dream of unveiling being in its absolute presence: being as it is in itself before a detached observer. In Polanyi's terms, this is the ideal of a totally explicit knowledge, an ideal he claims is demonstrably incoherent, even "unthinkable!"

For me, the word "totally" (or sometimes "wholly") in Polanyi's critique of the epistemological ideal of "totally (wholly) explicit knowledge," figures ever as much as the word "explicit." But since "totally" just means what it means in relation to what it modifies, in this case "explicit," and since the focus of this essay is on the primacy of the explicit, I must take a moment to say what I am taking Polanyi to mean by the word "explicit."

The first thing to note is that "explicit" is a slippery term. To make something explicit often means to make it clear, to explain it in detail; but most of the time it is tied up with saying something. But there are degrees of explicitness: for example, often when we do say something, we are asked to be more explicit as though we are beating around the bush in what we do say. Here the "explicit" is contrasted with the "implicit." In this case, what is not said, for example, "You're fired!" is implicit in what is said, as in, "perhaps you need to look for work elsewhere." And sometimes "explicit" is associated with the, "offensive," the "pornographic," as in movie ratings that warn of explicit language, or sex, or violence. (Perhaps the idea of "explicit language" strikes you, as it does me, as odd.)

But my task here is not to formulate (if this means to make wholly explicit) the precise meaning of "explicit." (Does it have a (one) precise meaning?) The term "explicit" is just too dense for such an analysis. In fact, I wish that Polanyi had not made as much use of it in the way that he did as he did. My claim in this essay is that his use of the term has led to untoward consequences, most notably to a depreciation of words/language/articulation/the explicit. Well, what **uses** did Polanyi make of the term "explicit"? I emphasize "uses" because I do not find one consistent use. Sometimes he uses it as synonymous with his term "focal," just as he conflates the use of "tacit" with "subsidiary." But in general, he is consistent in associating the explicit with saying, or telling, just as he is in associating the "tacit" with what we cannot tell, or say. The Polyanian mantra is: "We know more than we can say (tell)." On Polanyi's logic, tacit knowledge is knowledge we have but cannot tell, just as explicit knowledge is knowledge that we can, and sometimes do, tell. As we might put this, Polanyi's most consistent use of "explicit knowledge" is knowledge that is mediated by articulate forms, the most important of which is language. This is exactly the way that Marjorie Grene defines "explicit knowledge" and distinguishes it from "tacit knowledge." She put it as follows:

All *explicit* knowledge, however crystallized in the formulation of words, pictures, formulae, or other articulate devices, relies on the grasp of meaning *through* its articulate forms: on the comprehension that is its tacit root. And wholly tacit knowing, as in skills, is still a grasp of significance, though without the mediation of articulate utterance.³

If anyone knew Polanyi's mind, I suppose it was Marjorie Grene. And in view of the fact that I am interested

here not only in what Polanyi said, but in how he is interpreted by his disciples, I will adopt a definition of the explicit based on her definition. I will say that for Polanyi, the articulation of words is a necessary but not a sufficient component in the constitution of **all** explicit knowledge. While the articulate and the explicit are not identical, there is no explicit knowledge apart from the mediation of words.

In this light, how do we define “totally explicit?” Our definition allows us to say that the ideal of a wholly explicit knowledge pictures articulation as both the necessary and sufficient components in knowledge: whatever can be known can be articulated, put into words, and exhaustively so. By making articulation a sufficient (as well as necessary) condition for knowledge, this ideal of a totally explicit knowledge leaves no room for the inarticulable, the tacit.

Polanyi’s argument runs something like this: it is impossible to achieve a wholly explicit knowledge, since the tacit, the inarticulable, as well as the articulated, are necessary for explicit knowledge. If the inarticulable component is necessary for explicit knowledge, then, articulation alone could not be sufficient for it. Hence, there is no wholly explicit knowledge.

At the same time, Polanyi goes in a different direction with regard to the tacit. This is a major complaint I have against his position. While he does not think that there can be a wholly explicit knowledge, he does think that we can and do have a wholly tacit knowledge, a knowledge in which articulation is not even a necessary component. It is this move, I think, that positions Polanyi, and his aftermath, for a fall into romanticism. But I will return to this point.

Staggeringly enough, the ideal of “total explicitness” is almost universally and uncritically embraced by both practicing scientists and **laymen** in post-Enlightenment modernity—if I may be permitted to use such an obvious religious allusion. But the allusion does seem appropriate, for in modernity scientists have ascended (quite literally!) to the place of the high priests—if not the gods—of knowledge and truth in both their own and in the popular imagination; meanwhile, the rest of us, the epistemological laity, merely acquiesces to their pronouncements.

For Polanyi, however, the objectivistic epistemological ideal is an illusion, a patent contradiction. And this is nowhere more clearly seen than in the actual practice of science, as Polanyi, a practicing scientist, should have known. Thanks to a unique set of circumstances however, Polanyi’s practice of science was blessedly isolated from theoretical discussions of science. When he emerged from his isolation, he could not believe what science was saying about itself. He set out to right this disastrous mistake, a mistake that threatened to destroy not only the practice of science but human culture itself.

The angle that he took was not unlike Heidegger’s or Wittgenstein’s: he focused on practice rather than theory, on doing instead of thinking, on the use of tools. When the practices of scientific research and experimentation are noticed in the way that Heidegger noticed the work of the cobbler or that Wittgenstein noticed our use of ordinary language, that is, when we “look” instead of “think,” it is clear that total transparency is impossible. Our practices are essentially embedded in unspecifiable components, not the least of which is our own embodiment. This is the tacit (inarticulable) component in practice, a component that is ineluctable. If science is first and foremost a practice, and of course it is, then the ideal of total explicitness is unthinkable.

On this point, Polanyi seems indisputably correct: “A wholly explicit knowledge is unthinkable.” And despite the fact that the objectivistic ideal still dominates in science, and even has considerable currency when scientific or

ordinary conversations turn theoretical, more and more intellectuals are coming to embrace Polanyi's claim as correct. Indeed, many find in Polanyi's critique of objectivism support for one or another form of anti-modernism, perhaps even support for one or another form of romanticism. His position has even been embraced by many who call themselves postmodernists. Amongst these groups, so much has Polanyi's attack of the ideal of total explicitness won the day that the tacit no longer stands in need of defense and acknowledgment. But this defeat raises a question, at least for me: for those who embrace this defeat of the ideal of total explicitness, does this victory of the tacit come at the expense of devaluing the explicit? At one point, Polanyi certainly seems to suggest just this: "If everywhere it is the inarticulate which has the last word, unspoken yet decisive, then a corresponding abridgement of the status of spoken truth is inevitable."⁴

Critical to answering this question of whether Polanyi has "abridged the status" of the explicit is what we take Polanyi to mean when he says that tacit knowledge is "opposed" to explicit knowledge. As the text we are considering clearly indicates, one thing that he doesn't mean to mean is that the tacit and the explicit are sharply divided. What do we make of this? The answer is, I believe, found in the next sentence: "While tacit knowledge can be possessed by itself, explicit knowledge must rely on being tacitly understood and applied." As I read this, Polanyi is claiming that tacit knowledge can be sharply divided from explicit knowledge but not vice versa. Explicit knowledge requires the tacit in a way that the tacit does not require the explicit. We may call the principle at work here the epistemological primacy of the tacit. What this amounts to saying is that Polanyi thinks the ideal of a wholly explicit knowledge is unthinkable, but that the idea of a wholly tacit knowledge is perfectly intelligible.

But Polanyi himself is not as settled with this as it might seem. We see this in his discussion of "ineffable knowledge" in *Personal Knowledge*.⁵ Hedging a bit in describing the ineffable domain, he says that it is "[t]he area where the tacit predominates to the extent that articulation is virtually impossible..." (87). And backing off a bit further from completely and sharply separating the tacit from the explicit, he goes on to say: "When I speak of ineffable knowledge, this should not be taken literally and not as a designation of mystic experience..." (87). But even with this qualification, he hesitates further: "Even so my attempt to speak of the ineffable may be thought to be logically meaningless..." (87). To counter the charge of meaninglessness, he says: "...strictly speaking nothing that we know can be said precisely; and so what I call 'ineffable' may simply mean something that I know and can describe even less precisely than usual, or even only very vaguely" (87-88). And then the final hedge: "To assert that I have knowledge which is ineffable is not to deny that I can speak of it, but only that I can speak of it adequately" (91). (And we cannot help but wonder here what an adequate speaking would be; would it be a wholly explicit speaking? If so, perhaps Polanyi is his own worst enemy. But that would be nothing new for most of us.) At this point, it looks as though Polanyi's notion of the ineffable is not in fact as sharply divided from the explicit as it first appeared. In fact, it almost looks as though he is arguing that there could not be a wholly tacit knowledge.

Here a crucial distinction for Polanyi must be noted: the distinction between animal and human knowing. Polanyi is fond of drawing a continuous line from the knowing of animals and infants (that is, prelinguistic human beings) to mature personal knowledge and at the same time acknowledging an enormous difference between the two. It looks to me that the idea of a wholly tacit knowledge figures for him just at the animal/human divide/continuity.

Since animals and infants do not have language, but they do have knowledge, their knowledge is wholly tacit. Polanyi says as much:

The ineffable domain of skillful knowing is continuous in its inarticulateness with the knowledge possessed by animals and infants, who, as we have seen, also possess the capacity for reorganizing their inarticulate knowledge and using it as an interpretative framework.⁶

Since animals have no language which could denote anything, we may describe all meaning of the kind that is understood by animals as existential.⁷

Does it follow from the fact that animals and infants possess a wholly tacit knowledge that mature speaking persons do also? Here I find Polanyi again very unsettled, perhaps even confused. He certainly wants to say that language, or the powers of articulation, account for the enormous gulf that exists between the kind of knowledge that persons possess (can we call this **personal** knowledge?) and the kind of knowledge that animals possess. At one point he puts it: "...if linguistic clues are excluded, men are found to be only slightly better at solving the kind of problems we set to animals."⁸

The key passage however is as follows: "Nearly all knowledge by which man surpasses the animals is acquired by the use of language."⁹ He says "nearly all" to indicate that human beings must possess a slight advantage in inarticulate powers over the animals otherwise they would not have acquired language in the first place. Otherwise our inarticulate powers are continuous with those of the animal. Can we thus conclude from this that almost all human (personal?) knowledge, that is, the knowledge that human beings as such possess is explicit or grounded in the explicit? Or to put this in a slightly different way, once a human being has acquired language is it possible for him or her to possess a wholly tacit knowledge?

In his 1967 essay, "Sense-Giving and Sense-Reading," Polanyi introduces a paradigm case of human knowing, an aspect of which he takes to be wholly tacit: the traveler. This traveler visits a country never before seen, reports his first-hand experiences by letter to a friend who in turn tries to appreciate the experiences second-hand. According to Polanyi these three events constitute three stages of tacit knowing, the first of which is wholly tacit. He says:

The *first* is an intelligent understanding of sights and events, the *second* the composing of a verbal account of this experience, and the *third* the interpretation of this verbal account with a view to reproducing the experience which is reported.¹⁰

In my paradigm of the traveler we have met a purely tacit knowledge of an experience; both its subsidiary and its focal awareness were tacit. At the next stage, this focal awareness of an experience was introduced subsidiarily into a communication which was a piece of explicit knowledge, the meaning of which was tacit. *All knowledge falls into one of these two classes: it is either tacit or rooted in tacit knowledge.*¹¹

Now surely something is wrong here. Are we to believe that the traveler experiences the scenery in the same way as an animal or an infant? Isn't the traveler relying on his or her linguistic framework to take in the things that he or she sees, hears, smells, feels? Cats, dogs, cars, trees, ponds, mailboxes, streets, etc. are after all names. If Wittgenstein and others are right, we cannot see a cat as a cat, know that it is a cat, without knowing how to use the word "cat." Our human experience, **our world**, unlike the animal's environment, is structured through and through by words. The

experience of the traveler is a tacit experience all right, but not a purely or wholly tacit one. It is, we might say, a tacit experience that is rooted in the explicit. This is in fact just what makes it so very different from the experience of the animal.

I conclude that Polanyi is not only mistaken in thinking that the traveler's initial experience is wholly tacit, but also confused. I say this because in some places Polanyi asserts as his own point of view just the point I am now using against him. He says in no uncertain terms:

...we are aware of language in all thinking (in so far as our thinking surpasses that of the animals) and can neither have these thoughts without language, nor understand language without understanding the things to which we attend in such thoughts.¹²

I do not doubt that much of our intelligence is wholly tacit, wholly continuous with animal intelligence. But I would call this pre-personal, not personal knowledge. But this makes Polanyi's interest in developing a theory of **personal** knowledge deeply problematic. If his concern really were to provide us with an account of the kind of knowledge that persons as persons possess, then perhaps he would have been more helpful if he would have encapsulated his epistemology as follows: **All personal knowledge is either explicit or rooted in the explicit just as all personal knowledge is rooted in a pre-personal (animal?) tacit ground.**

But even this will not quite do. We cannot simply relegate the tacit to the animal in us. There is also, as I already said, a personal tacit dimension that is not coterminous with animal inarticulateness. The tacit before speech is quite different than the tacit after or between or within speech. The fact that my dog does not speak to me is not disturbing; the fact that my wife will not speak is. And this does not even touch on the necessity of reading between the lines in what she does say—a different kind of silence. There is quite literally a world of difference between animal and human silence. The tacit dimension in the personal context is a tacit that is rooted inextricably in the explicit.

In any case, what I am suggesting here is that Polanyi would have been wiser had he adopted the principle of the epistemological primacy of the explicit rather than the tacit. Adopting such a principle need not, indeed must not, entail abandoning Polanyi's profound insight that in speaking we always say more than we know and know more than we say. With this corrective to the craving for total explicitness, Polanyi could have, and in my opinion should have, embraced the epistemological primacy of the explicit. He should have done this, if for no other reason than to be consistent with his interest in developing a theory of **personal**, as opposed to animal, knowledge. But there are other, more pressing reasons.

Before I detail these other reasons, let me say a word about the way that I am using the term "primacy." As I see it, the explicit (what is mediated by words) is **primary** in the sense of being more important, more central to, more definitive of, personal knowledge than the tacit. Without the explicit there would still be knowledge (animal/infant knowledge), but no **personal** knowledge, that is, no knowledge that only persons as persons have. And this is so even though the tacit is clearly and necessarily the primordial ground of the explicit in personal knowledge and even though much of what we as persons know is common to what animals know and not therefore strictly speaking uniquely personal.

But let us return to these other reasons I just mentioned for adopting the principle of the epistemological primacy of the explicit over the tacit. To see these, we must turn to the issue of romanticism. I have been keeping this matter at bay too long now.

“Romanticism” has many meanings. What I mean by it in this context is something like what Whitehead meant in his famous chapter in *Science and the Modern World* entitled “The Romantic Reaction.” The movement was a reaction to the eighteenth century, to the Enlightenment, to its scientific naturalism, its mechanism, its reductionism. I am in sympathy with this romantic reaction to the Enlightenment in this respect: I think the romantics rightly object to the strain in the Enlightenment that threatens to eclipse the human reality, call this the Enlightenment’s technological bent, its impulse to improve the human reality by transforming it into something other than itself, into something mechanical.

The irony of the Enlightenment tendency toward mechanization is not missed on the astute romanticist. Romantics are certainly aware that the leveling reductionism of the Enlightenment that threatens the human reality itself finds its impetus in a passionate moral humanism. This Enlightenment humanism was born and developed in the wake of a rational skepticism that freed human beings from the authority of the gods. In this eclipse of the gods, human beings assumed the role of making the world a better place; and with god out of the way, the sky was the limit. This optimistic humanism generated a dream of better living through chemistry, a dream of bringing good things to life through technology. But, as the romanticist passionately protests, the dream turned into a nightmare, the moral passion turned into a moral inversion. It produced a darkness more frightening than did the eclipse of the gods, it produced the terrifying possibility of the eclipse of the human itself.

While it may not be obvious where to put Polanyi in this debate, it does seem clear that many of those attracted to his work fall somewhere in the camp of Enlightenment critics, if not into the camp of romanticism itself. I say this after looking over a stack of back issues of *Tradition and Discovery* that I keep in my office. With few exceptions, the assumption of Polanyians is that what Polanyi means by “post-critical” is identical with “post-Enlightenment.” (The one exception to this that I did find was Andy Sanders’ piece in which he asserts: “...Polanyi remains firmly rooted in the tradition of the Enlightenment.”¹³ But even here, the concern is exclusively with epistemological issues and not with the broader humanistic concerns of the Enlightenment—concerns that are most clearly manifest in its political ideals.

I found that the tendency among Polanyi scholars is not only to identify post-critical with post-Enlightenment, something I myself have often done. I also have noticed another assumed identity: more often than not, the term “Enlightenment” is used interchangeably with the term “Modernity.” But let me quickly add, many Polanyians stop short of identifying the term “post-Enlightenment” with the term “post-modern.” Indeed, this latter movement has come under sharp criticism by Polanyians, including myself. Nevertheless, most Polanyians do see modernity as “the problem,” and Polanyi’s post-critical perspective as its solution.

Dale Cannon, whose work I admire very much, wrote an essay in *Tradition and Discovery* that goes right to this point. The essay was written in honor of our mutual teacher Bill Poteat, someone who showed me the dark side of the Enlightenment/Modernity, “the shadow of it” as I once called it an article of my own.¹⁴ It is the title of Dale’s article that caught my eye: “Haven’t You Noticed That Modernity Is Bankrupt?”¹⁵ Whether we have noticed it or not, Dale is sure that modernity is indeed bankrupt, a conclusion that has lead him in the direction of what he calls, after

Parker Palmer, “spiritual formation,” and toward an interest in what we might call a forerunner of the protest of romanticism, the monastic movement.¹⁶

Suffice it to say that I cannot imagine a single Polanyian disagreeing with the claim that modernity is indeed bankrupt. Indeed, once Harry Prosch went to great lengths to disassociate himself completely from “modernism”: “...I think I have clearly exhibited how far my views are from anything that could be called ‘modernism.’ No ‘modernist’ would have me, I’m sure.”¹⁷ I am sure that any good Polanyian would be proud to say: “No modernist would have me.”

Some of us have tended to locate the essence of Modern\Enlightenment consciousness in the philosophical position of Descartes. Many of us have seen in his rationalism the perfect instance of just that epistemological ideal of total explicitness that Polanyi is concerned to discredit.

Descartes has indeed become so much the demonic embodiment of Modernity, that adopting his positive evaluation of clarity and distinctness has become the sure sign of our “modernism.” Ben Ladner, for example, in his essay in honor of Poteat, and in an effort to demonstrate that he is not stuck in the assumptions of Modernity, says that the goal of understanding, which is inseparable from its pre-reflective, ambiguous, somatic ground, is **not clarity!**¹⁸ And Araminta Johnston jumps all over Charles Taylor for associating clear articulation and explicitness as the marks of rationality.¹⁹

Is Polanyi’s so-called “victory of the tacit” a victory over clarity, over explicitness, over rationality? Is it a victory over the Enlightenment and over Modernism? Well we certainly cannot doubt that the Enlightenment’s drive for mastery and control has had its devastating consequences. It has, we might say, brought out the beast, the monstrous, in us. But my question is this: are we Polanyians, who stand more clearly within the romantic protest against the scientific naturalism of the Enlightenment than within the Enlightenment itself, in need of keeping our incipient romanticism at bay?

I worry about this because I see more and more just why my good friend Jim Steins sees so much in common in the work of Polanyi and Heidegger.²⁰ I think that he, and others like Maxine Greene,²¹ are right to see and to note these parallels. I worry about this not just because Heidegger is, despite his protest notwithstanding, a romantic, but because in his life we see the hard existential dangers of his wholesale romantic, anti-modernist rejection of the Enlightenment.

Heidegger is convinced that the Enlightenment and hence the modern age is utterly and completely bankrupt. For him, and I think decidedly unlike Polanyi himself, this bankruptcy included the humanistic political ideals of the Enlightenment, its ideas of individual rights and freedom. For Heidegger, freedom was always conceived through the eyes of Nietzsche, as a will to power and domination. This is really, for him, the source of productionist metaphysics, technological nihilism, and ultimately the dehumanism of the modern age. Rationality, clarity and distinctness, the drive for explicitness, and so forth, were for him simply modes of nihilistic calculation, signs of the will to power. All of this made Heidegger sick, or, as he put it, homesick, homesick for a more authentic, more human existence.

But, as Michael Zimmerman has convincingly shown in his book *Heidegger’s Confrontation With Modernity: Technology, Politics, Art*, Heidegger’s anti-Modernism, his anti-Enlightenment sentiments, fueled his reactionary politics. Drawn to soil, to the earth, to blood, to family, to the hearth, to the nation-as-one-family, etc. he fell for National

Socialism. How did this happen?

The long and the short of it is that Heidegger failed to see that the Enlightenment was not completely bankrupt. He failed to see that the humanistic and political ideals of freedom and reason, constitutionally protected individual rights, and even a good measure of autonomy, are essential for a human civil society. But most importantly, he failed to see that the element of a civil society that is most fundamental, that is absolutely indispensable is the freedom of speech. Call this the political expression of the epistemological principle of the primacy of the explicit. Freedom to speak is a bedrock human freedom; it is a freedom that implicitly respects a plurality of voices, that values public debate and dissent, that grants respect for rational adjudication between opposing ideas, that prizes clarity and precision, that values argument. These are Enlightenment values; they are public values; without them, a civil human society is impossible.

Heidegger could not however bring himself to see the political ideals of the Enlightenment as anything more than further manifestations of the struggle for domination and control. For him all political debates, all honest rational discussion, are simply disguised calculations, deceptive techniques for domination and manipulation. Since words, for Heidegger, are finally no better than techniques of deception and domination, he longed for a new beginning, a new more immediate existence. I see this as a romantic longing for the mysterious, the transcendent. He wanted to return to the ground of our being, to an original experience of immediacy, to a level before words, to a level prior to the subject/object distinction that is implicit in the logical structure of language. Can we say his romantic urge was a longing for the wholly tacit? In this new existence, we will stop controlling things, stop trying to master them; we will simply let things be; we will relate to things as the authentic artist does, especially the lyric poet. In our new more authentic being, we will become lyric poets of being.

Well can you imagine a bunch of lyric poets in Congress? This would leave Mr. Jefferson laughing. Certainly there is a place in the coffee house or parlor for poetry readings, for ruminations, for meditations, for getting in touch with our feelings; indeed, such poetry may be indispensable for the health of the soul. But imagine trying to conduct the affairs of state (or science, or even life for that matter) in the language of lyric poetry? What seems to be needed for public affairs is argument, reason, precision, logic, persuasion, clarity, as well as passion and commitment. A civil society cannot run on the basis of aesthetics; it is essentially ethical through and through. As such, it requires declaration, and must remain open to objection and dissent. Declaring oneself before another requires the explicit; it is perhaps its essence.

The romantic dream that aesthetic immediacy can save us from the threat of the Enlightenment's drive for control, for total explicitness, for mastery, sets us up, as it did Heidegger, for political disaster. When reason, clarity, explicitness, are no longer granted their voice in public debate, when our words are devalued as techniques of control and dominance, the only alternative, when it comes to making policy, when it comes to deciding on the social, economic, and political arrangements, and so forth, for a society will be a recourse to brute (animal?) power, that is, to force and violence. It is such a recourse, as I see it, that is the root of modern nihilism.

If recourse to brute power is all that we have, then the only thing to do is to take our place behind the power structure that enforces the values we think should be promoted. In this respect, National Socialism fit the bill for Heidegger, for if nothing else this reactionary political movement was clearly a rejection of the ideals of the Enlightenment.

What Heidegger did not see, and what romanticism in general does not see, is the danger of not seeing that our words are our humanness; they are what sets us apart from the animals, they are the basis of our culture, of our personal knowledge, of our human life together. But they can only be vested with their rights within a certain kind of world. It was this world that the Enlightenment envisioned, at least partially. It was because of this vision that the Enlightenment placed such a high value on the explicit. Without such a high value on the explicit, force and violence will replace rationality; without a high evaluation of our words, the basis of civil agreement will be gone. In the end, it is words that hold us together, not blood, not earth, not family; it is words that establish laws, covenants, marriages, declarations of independence, constitutions, but most importantly our conversations together. Without these conversations, we truly are not human.

Let me leave you with two remarks, one from my own hand, the other from the hand of a more noted romantic. I say first to Polanyians who are tempted to romanticism, and most emphatically I say it to myself: let us be more equivocal in our critiques of modernity, and in particular, more careful in our attempts to ground the explicit in the tacit, lest we end in political disaster; and let us be more mindful of what we long for. Finally, I quote Frederick Hölderlin, the romantic poet who was Heidegger's mentor. I quote him, however, in the hope that what Hölderlin says can be used to quite different ends than those of Heidegger; I quote it as an inspiration to all of us to take a second look at the Enlightenment: "Where danger is, also grows the saving power."

Endnotes

¹ Michael Polanyi, "The Logic of Tacit Inference," *Knowing and Being: Essays by Michael Polanyi*, ed. Marjorie Grene (University of Chicago Press, 1969, p.144.

² "The Logic of Tacit Inference," *KB*, p. 144.

³ *KB*, p. xv.

⁴ *PK*, p.71.

⁵ *PK*, pp.87ff. Succeeding quotations from this discussion in the paragraph are simply noted in parentheses.

⁶ *PK*, p.90.

⁷ *PK*, p. 90.

⁸ *PK*, p.70.

⁹ *PK*, p.95.

¹⁰ “Sense-Giving and Sense-Reading,” *KB*, p. 186.

¹¹ “Sense-Giving and Sense-Reading,” *KB*, p.195.

¹²*PK*, p. 101.

¹³Andy F. Sanders, “Tacit Knowing--Between Modernism and Postmodernism: A Problem of Coherence,” *TAD*, Vol. XVIII, No. 2, p. 15.

¹⁴Ronald L. Hall, “In the Shadow of the Enlightenment, The Plight of the Humanities in an Age of Scientific Objectivism,” *TAD*, Vol. XIII, No. 1, pp. 19-25.

¹⁵Dale Cannon, “Haven’t You Noticed That Modernity is Bankrupt? Ruminations On the Teaching Career of William H. Poteat,” *TAD*, Vol. XXI, No. 1, p. 20.

¹⁶*TAD*, Vol. XXI, No. 1, p. 24.

¹⁷ Harry Prosch, “Those Missing ‘Objects’,” *TAD*, Vol XVII, Nos. 1&2, p. 20.

¹⁸Ben Ladner, “Who Said What,” *TAD*, Vol. XXI, No. 1, p. 9.

¹⁹Araminta Stone Johnson, “Theory, Rationality and Relativism,” *TAD*, Vol. XX, No. 3, p. 18.

²⁰Jim Stines, “Chaos Theory, William Poteat's Polanyian Explorations and Indwelling,” *TAD*, Vol. XVIII, No. 1, p 17.

²¹Maxine Greene, “The Problematic of the Humanities: The Clues and Cues of Michael Polanyi,” *TAD*, Vol. XIII, No. 2, pp. 11ff.

Reviews

David W. Rutledge, *Humans and the Earth: Toward a Personal Ecology*. New York: Peter Lang, 1993. Pp xi + 210. \$39.95 ISBN 0-8204-2212-6.

What are the sources in Western culture of the abuse of the natural environment so evident in our time? David Rutledge claims in *Humans and the World* that the ecological crisis has emerged from a lengthy historical process, but that alienation of humans from themselves and their environment has been a special, and pathological, result of modernist/critical thought of the past 400 years. He attends especially to the roles religious belief and practice have played as the milieu in which modernism arose and as themselves supporting the separation of humans from their natural environment. He also proposes a remedy: in order to heal themselves and nature, humans should reappropriate an appreciation of themselves as embodied persons integrally a part of nature.

Humans and the Earth is a book that reflects the character of David Rutledge: thorough and thoughtful, fair and judicious. Rutledge is knowledgeably grounded in the vast literature of the ecological movement, and he provides a balanced, well documented account of many of its findings. One gains an accurate view of the scope of the book from the titles of its five chapters: "The Ecological Crisis in Post-Critical Perspective," "Attitudes to Nature in the West," "The De-Naturing of God and Humanity," "Revisioning Nature and Spirit," and "Revisioning Human Understanding."

Rutledge is, of course, far from alone in chronicling the destructive results of the dualisms associated with modernism. The dichotomies of modernism are many: matter/mind, fact/value, science/humanities, nature/history, body/spirit, determinism/freedom, etc. In *Sources of the Self*, Charles Taylor offers an insightful approach to these dichotomies. He carries out an historical examination of a particularly portentous and problem-

atic dualism: the increasing separation of an interior self from an exterior world. He finds Homer and subsequent Greek thinkers to write about a public world in which persons are engaged. Descartes and Locke, in contrast, describe the self in terms of interior cognitive functions which effectively make both attitudes of care and moral judgments merely subjective preferences. The self is thereby disengaged from the world (and, necessarily, from nature). Consequently, solipsism becomes a threat that both continental rationalism and British rationalism must seek to avoid. A feeling of alienation, a key issue in the 19th and 20th centuries, is another byproduct of the inner/outer dualism.

Rutledge's account differs from Taylor's in that he concentrates more on religious and humanistic than on philosophical contributions to the alienation of humans from nature. Not that he neglects the impact of science and philosophy. After having noted the sacramental, fearful, contemptuous, unmindful, and romantic attitudes taken toward nature by some in the Western tradition, Rutledge claims that

Our ecological crisis is particularly indebted to three additional conceptions of the natural world that remain influential among us: (1) the *anthropocentrism* of the Greek and biblical traditions that assumes human superiority over nature; and (2) the *mechanism* of the scientific revolution of the 17th and 18th centuries that affirms the complete passivity of nature; and (3) the *utilitarianism* of the technological revolution of the last two centuries, which applies the earlier notions to the use and control of the natural world for human benefit. (47-48)

The role of science and technology in dominating nature, as undergirded by economic incentives, is thus duly acknowledged. But believing that "religion is still a most pervasive way of shaping a society's deepest convictions"

(18), Rutledge spends much analytical energy in unweaving the strands of Judaism's and Christianity's influence in creating the ecological crisis.

Many analyses of Western religions' influence on the environment begin with Lynn White's famous 1967 article alleging that Genesis 1:28 ("fill the earth and subdue it;...have dominion") sponsored the exploitation of nature, enabling us to regard it as a resource for human use. Rutledge's take on the ensuing debate is that an "awareness of the complexity and mutual entanglements of ecological history" (65) has been a helpful legacy of the discussion.

More problematic than any particular biblical passage in Rutledge's view are a number of Christian convictions "that seem to make ecological thinking virtually impossible today — emphasis on a heavenly afterlife, a completely transcendent deity, the radically historical character of divine revelation, or a dualism of soul/body (or spirit/matter)" (66).

Christianity has tended to be centered on salvation history rather than on the immanence of God in the creation, on redemption through Christ from the sinfulness of this world rather than on God's incarnation in Christ and the availability of the Holy Spirit as signs of God's presence in the natural realm. Nomination, Calvinism, and Enlightenment thought have in common a view that separates God from nature. Creedalism, which emerged as the prevalent form of Protestant and Catholic orthodoxy (or neo-orthodoxy), may be seen as the equivalent in the theological realm of mind/body dualism in the philosophical realm.

Rutledge catalogs some biblical resources that can be utilized on behalf of Jewish and Christian ecological vision. His greatest interest, however, is in showing how a Polanyian perspective (or more precisely, a Poteatian perspective incorporating key aspects of Polanyi's thought) orients thinking and acting in a way which does not bear the wounds of dualism but rather is supportive of ecological vision.

I want to explore the possibility of a contempo-

rary use of faith meaning "reliance," which affirms the traditional understanding of faith as relying upon God, but also connects us with current understandings of how each person relies upon his or her body in order to have any commerce with the world, other people, or even God. (115)

A Polanyian emphasis on the embodied character of all knowing is developed by Rutledge to support an immanent faith as the primordial ground of the religious life. Affirmations of transcendence are seen as convictional statements rooted in embodied human experience. Rutledge refers to the rubrics of orality, temporality, embodiment and limitation as characteristics of all acts of knowing, including religious knowing. As fallible, finite human beings, we stand before God whose involvement in history and nature is known in mindbodily behavior rather than in purely mental terms. Knowing that our mindbodies are part of the created nature order, we can no longer imperiously subject nature to the abusive treatment modernism has encouraged.

What is one to make of Rutledge's Polanyi-influenced ecological vision? I offer four observations.

First, I question whether the revisioning of humans as mindbodies rather than as souls or minds housed in a body would do as much to support ecologically sensitive decision making as Rutledge apparently believes. Just as humans treat inanimate nature as a resource, so people treat other people as resources all the time, as our existence in a world marked by market strategies, downsizing, and similar bottom line considerations demonstrates. Climbing over others to reach "success," combating others to the point of war, manipulating others to satisfy our "needs" — the list of the ways in which humans exploit humans could be extended indefinitely. Moreover, people treat their own bodies with disdain on a daily basis, as smoking and other sorts of abuse illustrate. A recent poll indicated that an astonishing number of people would take massive doses of steroids or other drugs which would likely end their lives within five

years if the practice would allow the person to be an Olympic champion. People mistreat their minds just as much as their bodies, as an examination of the inconsequential or even toxic check out line magazines and typical videos will reveal.

These considerations suggest to me that egocentric satisfaction of desires is the greatest contributor to ecological degradation, not the mind/body spirit. Remedies for this malady would include a type of personal transformation not necessarily distinct from the Christian emphasis on redemption that Rutledge seeks to replace from centrality with an immanent God revealed in nature. Let me put my concern in the form of a rhetorical question: is not a greater contributor to the ecological crisis human sin rather than a faulty metaphysics?

Rutledge claims he will deal with the ecological crisis through the help of the humanities as well as by relying on a post-critical perspective. My second observation is linked to a third point concerning how the humanities contribute to ecological vision. An army of humanists has tackled dualistic thinking without having made any consistent or marked change in the way nature is treated. The romantic poets of the early 19th century are one notable example. John Dewey's *Experience and Nature* and Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* are just two of the influential works of this century predicated upon replacing a subject-object dichotomy; post-modern thinkers have revealed reason's role in the domination of others and of nature. All this worrying about dualisms and domination has helped support some efforts toward conservation, recycling, and the like, but the cumulative effect of the humanities has not seemed to alter our consumerism with its attendant exploitation of nature, wasting of resources, and creation of pollution. Does this not suggest, once again, that to solve the ecological crisis primary attention is best directed toward the redirection of human desire and its satisfaction? The complicity of our economic systems, capitalist or communist, in creating the crisis should not be overlooked, inasmuch as they are mechanisms of desire satisfaction with an insidious inertia of their own.

Third, I wonder whether the four characteristics of the humanistic perspective Rutledge discusses actually advance the cause of ecological vision. Indeed, some of the characteristics seem to me to work against the Polanyian embodied thinking he later advocates. The four characteristics he extols as providing an alternative to "the science of ecology and the public reporting of it in the media" (11) are as follows: (1) an emphasis on language as central to human understanding and to comprehension of nature, (2) an employment of narration in interpreting nature, (3) an interpretation of texts (written documents or other readable patterns) as the fundamental business of the humanities, and (4) through this interpretation a location of the network of values contribution to environmental problems. But since all communication, humanistic or scientific, relies on language and the interpretation of texts (as understood in the broad metaphorical way Rutledge adduces), his emphasis on language does not seem significant or helpful. Moreover, for the most part Rutledge's treatment of the ecological crisis is more analytical than it is narrative in style, unless one uses "narrative" in an extremely broad sense that would include scientific discourse as well as Rutledge's analysis within its purview. In brief, his summary of his humanistic approach is misleading with respect to how Rutledge actually proceeds.

My major concern with these four characteristics, however, is that they seem largely mentalistic in character. Rutledge claims he is attacking a modernist assumption in our intellectual tradition, namely, the view that "thought or meaning is primary, and language is the secondary reality which serves to dress up thought so that it can go outside the mind" (12). At the present time, however, a sort of 'panlinguagism' is the orthodox view. The view Rutledge critiques is close to the view Polanyi would affirm: "We can know more than we can tell." We dwell in embodied inarticulate skills that link us to the evolutionary course of nature. To privilege language, narrative, texts, and values (as known through analysis) is to favor thought over action, abstract reflection over embodied involvement in nature. Hence there is, at the very least, some tension between the humanistic ap-

proach Rutledge claims he is using and the Polanyian perspective he advocates later in his work.

Despite my concern with these issues, I affirm, fourthly, the general thrust of Rutledge's book. Understanding knowledge as the product of an embodied mind, though it will not solve the ecological crisis, better supports ecological vision than any of the modernist dualisms he list. His historical and analytical work is generally astute and helpful. *Humans and the Earth* would be reliable, thought provoking selection for a course in environmental ethics or religion and ecology.

Walter Gulick
MSU-Billings

WWW Polanyi Resources

The Polanyi Society has a World Wide Web site at <http://www.mwsc.edu/~polanyi/>. In addition to information about Polanyi Society membership and meetings, the site contains the following : (1) the history of Polanyi Society publications, including a listing of issues by date and volume with a table of contents for recent issues of *Tradition and Discovery*; (2) a comprehensive listing of *Tradition and Discovery* authors, reviews and reviewers; (3) information on locating early publications; (4) information on *Appraisal* and *Polanyiana*, two sister journals with special interest in Polanyi's thought; (5) the "Guide to the Papers of Michael Polanyi" which provides an orientation to archival material housed in the Department of Special Collections of the University of Chicago Library; (6) photographs of Michael Polanyi.

Electronic Discussion Group

The Polanyi Society supports an electronic discussion group exploring implications of the thought of Michael Polanyi. For those with access to the INTERNET, send a message to "owner-polanyi@sbu.edu" to join the list or to request further information. Communications about the electronic discussion group may also be directed to John V. Apczynski, Department of Theology, St. Bonaventure University, St. Bonaventure, NY 14778-0012 E-MAIL: apczynski@sbu.edu PHONE: (716) 375-2298 FAX: (716) 375-2389.