

Tradition & Discovery

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Preface

The November 2004 annual Polanyi Society meeting was a memorable one. The last issue of *TAD* featured papers from one of this meeting's sessions. This issue features the papers from the other session. The essays here by Dale Cannon, David Rutledge and Esther Meek are about Meek's 2003 book, *Longing to Know: The Philosophy of Knowledge for Ordinary People*. Some twenty years before the publication of this book, Esther Meek wrote a dissertation, *Contact With Reality: An Examination of Realism in the Work of Michael Polanyi*. Marjorie Grene was her mentor. This dissertation slowly but surely stirred up great interest among Polanyi scholars. There was an annual meeting session in November 1999 on "Polanyi's realism." Andy Sanders served as guest editor for an issue of *TAD* (26:3 [1999-200]) that published the revised versions of papers in this discussion. The issues, however, have not been settled and they come up in sharper form in questions about knowing God in Meek's *Longing to Know*. Both Cannon and Rutledge acknowledge what a careful Polanyi reader Esther Meek is, but they go on to raise questions about Meek's Polanyi and the problems of pluralism and the nature of post-critical thought. Meek's response to Cannon and Rutledge is certainly one that rises to the challenges put forth. In sum, these essays carefully parse important issues of Polanyi interpretation and application.

The November 2005 annual meeting (p. 5) celebrates the publication of the new Polanyi biography (*Michael Polanyi--Scientist and Philosopher*) by Moleski and Scott and also explores the Hungarian roots of Polanyi's philosophy of religion. News and Notes provides details on the biography as well as other information on deaths, publications and the digital archives.

Be sure and note--see the inserted sheet--that the Polanyi Society web page address is changing as well as my e-mail to which dues will be sent.

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 long-awaited Polanyi biography, *Michael Polanyi: Scientist and Philosopher* by William Tausig Scott and Martin X. Moleski is now available from Oxford University Press at <http://www.us.oup.com/us/catalog/general/subject/ReligionTheology/PhilosophyofReligion/?view=usa&ci=019517433X>.

Joan Crewdson died in late May at the nursing home in Oxford where she had been living for the last 2 years. Joan, along with Drusilla Scott and Robin Hodgkin, both of whom died 2 years ago, was one of the pioneers of interest in Polanyi in Britain. All three knew him well, and helped to form the Convivium Society in 1974. When the original committee broke up in 1979, Joan carried on, mostly by herself, editing and publishing *Convivium* until 1989, and then hosted, at her home in Oxford, the meetings of the new publications committee until that was dissolved in 1994. The October issue of *Appraisal* will include appreciations of Joan Crewdson. If you knew Joan and wish to provide a comment, send it to Richard Allen (rt.allen@ntlworld.com).

Three papers, originally written for the 2003 Polanyi Society annual meeting in Atlanta, recently appeared in an issue of *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* celebrating this journal's fortieth year. Bibliographic data and the abstracts of the essays appear below:

Richard Gelwick, "Michael Polanyi's Search for Truth: Michael Polanyi's Daring Epistemology and the Hunger for Teleology," *Zygon* (Vol. 40, No. 1 (March 2005): 63-76.

Abstract: The linking of Michael Polanyi's name with a center (now changed to another name) at Baylor University that espoused intelligent-design theory calls for examination of Polanyi's teleology. This examination attempts to put Polanyi's epistemology in the perspective of his total philosophical work by looking at

the clarification of teleology in philosophy of biology and in the framework of three major features of Polanyi's thought: open and truth-oriented, purposive but open to truth, and transcendent yet intelligible. The conclusion is that Polanyi would not support intelligent-design according to the nature of his theory.

John Apczynski, "The Discovery of Meaning Through Scientific and Religious Forms of Indwelling," *Zygon* (Vol. 40, No. 1 (March 2005): 77-88.

Abstract: Because of similarities between some implications of Michael Polanyi's theory of personal knowledge and intelligent design, claims have been made that his theory provides support to the project of intelligent design. This essay contends that, when Polanyi's reflections on a teleological framework for contextualizing evolutionary biology are properly understood as a heuristic vision, his position contrasts sharply with the empirical claims made on behalf of intelligent design.

Walter B. Gulick, "Polanyi on Teleology: A Response to John Apczynski and Richard Gelwick," *Zygon* (Vol. No. 1 (March 2005): 89-96.

Abstract: Michael Polanyi criticized the neo-Darwinian synthesis on two grounds: that accidental hereditary changes bringing adaptive advantages cannot account for the rise of discontinuous new species, and that a teleological ordering principle is needed to explain evolutionary advance. I commend the previous articles by John Apczynski and Richard Gelwick and also argue, more strongly than they, that Polanyi's critique of evolutionary theory is flawed. It relies on an inappropriate notion of progress and untenable analogies from the human process of scientific discovery and the fact that in physical systems minimal potential energy is most stable. Yet within a life of commitment to transcendent values humans can directly experience purpose and meaning, and in developing this notion Polanyi makes his greatest contribu-

***Tradition and Discovery* Digital Archives**

The collection of back issues of *Tradition and Discovery* that is available electronically is growing. You can access the current and many old issues of *TAD* on-line from the Polanyi Society web page (<http://www.missouriwestern.edu/orgs/polanyi/>). If you go to the home page, you will find a link to the digital archives that now includes pdf versions of *TAD* issues from the present back through Volume 18, Number 1 (Fall or 1991). You can download a full issue or a particular article from the table of contents. Presently, the digital archives is password protected but eventually the Society should open access to the archives. Members who wish to use the archives can get the password by e-mailing Phil Mullins (mullins@missouriwestern.edu).

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. MLA or APA style are preferred. Because the journal serves English writers across the world, we do not require anybody's "standard English." 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. Consistency and clear writing are expected.

Manuscripts normally will be sent out for blind review. Authors are expected to provide an electronic copy as an e-mail attachment.

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Electronic Discussion List

The Polanyi Society supports an electronic discussion group that explores implications of the thought of Michael Polanyi. Anyone interested can join. To join yourself, go to the following address: http://groups.yahoo.com/group/polanyi_list/join. If you have difficulty, send an e-mail to Doug Masini (masini@etsu.edu) and someone will see that you are added to the list.

2005 Polanyi Society Annual Meeting

This year's annual meeting of the Polanyi Society will be held in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on November 18 and 19, 2005. As in past years, our meeting technically will be an "Additional Meeting" held in conjunction with the annual meetings of the American Academy of Religion and the Society for Biblical Literature. For additional information on the AAR/SBL, go to <http://www.aarweb.org/annualmeet/default.asp>. The request to the AAR/SBL for space is pending, but we anticipate again this year being granted both a Friday night session running from 9:00-11:00 p.m. and a Saturday morning session running from 9:00-11:30 a.m. As soon as it is available, the location of the meeting will appear in the next TAD and will be posted on the Polanyi Society web site (<http://www.missouriwestern.edu/orgs/polanyi/>).

Friday, November 18, 2005

9:00 p.m.—11:00 p.m.

Theme: Discussion of *Michael Polanyi: Scientist and Philosopher* by William T. Scott and Martin X. Moleski

9:00 Reflections on the complex process of the book's creation with Martin Moleski, Canisius College, and others

9:45 Group discussion: What about the book most stimulated your thought or produced new insights into Polanyi's life and thought?

Phil Mullins, Missouri Western State University, opening commentary and moderator

Saturday, November 19, 2005

9:00 a.m.—11:30 a.m.

9:00 Theme: The Hungarian Roots of Michael Polanyi's Heuristic Philosophy of Religion

Moderator: Paul Lewis, Mercer University

Panelists:

Richard Gelwick, Bangor Theological Seminary

Les Muray, Curry College

Andy Sanders, University of Groningen

11:00 Business Meeting

Walter Gulick, Montana State University-Billings, presiding

“Longing to Know If Our Knowing Really Is Knowing” Reflections on Esther Meek’s *Longing to Know: The Philosophy of Knowledge for Ordinary People*

Dale Cannon

ABSTRACT Key Words: Esther Meek, Michael Polanyi, epistemology, knowing ordinary things, personal participation in knowing, perceptual integration, knowing God, modernism, post-modernism, post-critical, authority in knowing, scripture as authority, religious pluralism.

*These reflections summarize and critically respond to Esther Meek’s **Longing to Know: The Philosophy of Knowledge for Ordinary People** (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press/Baker Book House, 2003. Pp. 208. \$16.99. ISBN 1-58743-060-6). The book seeks to explain on the basis of the ideas of Michael Polanyi how ordinary acts of knowing happen to work, how they are indeed instances of genuine knowing, and, in comparison with them, how knowing God can possibly work and be a live possibility. Meek’s argument’s most vulnerable premise is its unquestioned acceptance of Scripture as an authoritative guide, which directly raises the question whether Meek’s position is fully post-critical in the sense identified by Polanyi, and indirectly raises the question how Meek is able to handle religious pluralism.*

Esther Meek

For those convinced of the ongoing philosophical relevance of Polanyi’s insights, a new publication by the author of one of the first Ph.D. dissertations on Polanyi (and one of the few) to be completed in a graduate department of philosophy, *Contact With Reality. An Examination of Realism in the Work of Michael Polanyi*, (Temple University, 1983; synopsisized in *Tradition and Discovery*, XXVI:3, 72-83) is welcomed with high expectations. In the judgment of some, Meek’s dissertation offers one of the finer accounts of Polanyi’s overcoming of the acosmism or worldlessness of modern epistemological reflection through his reconceptualization of human knowing from *mental* “correspondence to reality,” to *embodied* “contact with reality.” There Meek stresses how knowing for Polanyi is an embodied relational acquaintance with realities never fully captured by any explicit account, for we recognize something as real precisely in virtue of what she dubs the IFM effect (its range of tacitly apprehended Indeterminate Future Manifestations). Anything written by Meek relating to Polanyi is consequently more than likely to be worthy of serious attention.

Audience and Purpose

The rhetoric and argumentation of *Longing to Know* is not addressed, at least not primarily, to professional philosophers or even students majoring in philosophy. It does not discuss alternative contemporary theories in the manner of an introductory philosophical textbook; nor is it written in the conventional mode of philosophic disputation among contending views. Neither does it present an explication or defense of Polanyi’s ideas by focusing on Polanyi. Rather does it focus on reflectively illuminating our ordinary largely unreflective experiences of knowing, against a background of many years of pondering and deeply appropriating Polanyi’s understanding of knowing. The book is written, as the title indicates,

for the edification of ordinary people (among whom Meek includes herself) who long to comprehend on a well-reasoned but commonsense, experiential basis (keeping to a minimum abstract theoretical reasoning) how ordinary acts of knowing happen to work, how they are indeed instances of genuine knowing, and, in comparison with them, how knowing God can possibly work and be a live possibility.

It's fair to say that Meek's primary purpose in writing the book is to show *how it is possible to claim with reasoned confidence that one can know God*. But to get there, she must first establish that we do know, and can claim with confidence that we do know, ordinary things – and to do that in a postmodern context where the very possibility of knowing anything outside ourselves has been called into question. While she illuminatingly explores the nature and structure of a huge diversity of ordinary acts of knowing, she returns repeatedly to focus in particular on knowing her auto mechanic, Jeff, and on knowing him as reliable for keeping her car in good running shape. She chooses this focus “to stand for every single ordinary act of human knowing . . . because it was ordinary and everyday” (40). From that basis she constructs an extended analogy between the features of this ordinary, workaday, epistemic act and the epistemic act of knowing God. As well, she spends a good bit of time challenging what many take to be barriers preventing recognition of the analogy – e.g., the presumption that faith and reason are wholly distinct and the notion that there is some sort of mystical access to God that is wholly distinct from ordinary knowing. (Actually, she contends that more than an analogy is involved, for she asserts that they are “fundamentally *the same kind of act*” [39, my emphasis]. In any case, she makes clear that she is not asserting an analogy between her auto mechanic and God, only between the structures of the epistemic acts in each case.) Meek comments: “It's a somewhat amusing proposal, but one that offers tremendous hope. In fact we do know our auto mechanic. If it can be shown that knowing God involves the kind of knowing that we already do, then, yes, we can (and do) know God” (41).

Taken-for-granted Assumptions

Meek wrote the book while serving as an adjunct professor of philosophy at Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis, and it is fair to say (partly on the basis of her own testimony) that the book directly reflects her personable, compassionate style of teaching within that context. Covenant Theological Seminary represents a fairly conservative Evangelical strand within the Reformed Protestant tradition, a tradition strong both on nurturing communal relationships in a safe, trusting environment and on adhering to the authority of Scripture as the revealed Word of God – and, implicitly I would add, adhering to the authority of the Reformed tradition's eye for reading and ear for hearing Scripture (i.e., the Reformed tradition's interpretive sensibility toward Scripture) as the revealed Word of God.

With regard to the authority of Scripture, she writes, “Historically, to be a Christian is necessarily to affirm that certain things are true about God, about humans, and about reality. . . . We affirm that the Bible is God authoritatively telling us the way things are” (22). “When it comes to knowing God, I trust what the Bible says. In fact, I trust it to tell me what I'm feeling as well as what it leads to” (104). “The Bible told me what to do when I first wanted to be right with God” (104). “I have learned to trust the Bible to interpret to me my own experience. The result is that I understand myself more profoundly” (105). Summing up she states, “Scripture is God's authoritatively guiding us to truth about himself, ourselves, and his world” (195). I'll have more to say about this affirmation of the authority of Scriptural authority in what follows. But it is important to note at this stage that, while Meek does acknowledge that not all Christians agree on basic convictions (e.g., p. 144f; let alone agreement between Christians and non-Christians), it doesn't lead her to qualify her affirmation in any way.

This strong affirmation of Scripture’s authority is not just an interesting feature of the background to the book, however. It is the central premise on which Meek’s argument rests that we can indeed know God. Nothing is said to identify it as in any way specially vulnerable to critical challenge, nor is much ventured in its support. The closest thing to support for the affirmation comes, first, implicitly in what might be called a pragmatic argument over the course of the entire book concerning what results when one entrusts oneself to the authoritative guidance of Scripture. (Because Meek doesn’t explicitly allude to this pragmatic argument, I am hesitant to say she intends it as such.) This basic argument is briefly summarized on p. 150: “All those who have struggled to understand who he [God] is by piecing together the pattern of their lives and of this world in light of Scripture’s guidance come to acknowledge the existence of a divine person who seriously outranks them.” (A few examples of such persons are given over the course of the book.) And independently she appeals to the coherence and consistency of the Scriptural witness on p. 163: “In healthy measure my claims about God hang on my trust in the words of the Bible’s writers, which though recorded over millennia consistently unite to affirm that Jesus is God and that he will return to save and to judge.” At no point does Meek acknowledge, or venture to take up and answer, what serious counterarguments have been or might be made to either of these arguments.

Personal Authorial Presence

Primarily Meek’s affirmation (of the divine authority of Scripture) but occasionally also other things both said and unsaid within the book reflect, and at times take for granted, the cultural milieu of Covenant Theological Seminary – perhaps more even than Meek may realize. Meek in no way attempts to hide or obscure this milieu – say, by framing her argument in the distancing impersonal rhetoric of a disincarnate “objective” reflection. Instead, she seeks to have her reader realize (as Polanyi and others have taught us) that thinking and knowing are always incarnately situated in specific places, times, contexts of personal stories and personal relationships, and ongoing traditions of speaking and practice, and that there is no knowing without some actual incarnate knower who ventures (commits herself) with universal intent to be personally and vulnerably present in her knowing in relation to other knowers.

Accordingly, in a very definite and deliberate sense, Meek as author has chosen to be personally present to the reader in the book, refusing the characteristically modern temptation to absent her person from her reflection and knowing by writing “objectively.” Similarly, she welcomes and encourages her reader to become similarly present in her/his own reflection and knowing – and to bring along a companion. In the Foreword she writes, “I have in writing this book told numerous stories and offered many examples from my own life. Please match my stories with your own. My heartfelt longing for this book is that it will lend significance to your own longing for reality and for truth, that it will guide your search, and that it will give you hope” (11). Please note: this kind of authorial presence is no accidental quirk in the rhetoric of Meek’s book. It is a form that is called for by the content she seeks to convey: it “reduplicates”¹ that content in a manner similar to Polanyi’s own self-avowals in Personal Knowledge. The fact that the *how* of what she writes is no less important than the *what* of what she writes is not just implicit either:

So if this model of knowing is new to you, then here is what is going on as you read this book. The words in this book and the experiences of your world are like the surface details of the Magic Eye [3-D pictures, that appear to be a random pattern of tiny colored shapes until the observer attends from them at a certain distance to a focus beyond the surface, when a three dimensional scene emerges into view]. You are struggling to make sense of your life and of my words. I, also by way of these words, am a coach giving directions, suggesting how to

make sense of things, holding forth the hope of what that “sense” will look like, teaching you how to see, and giving you opportunities to practice your skill. If I were with you in person, I would also be able to give you feedback about how you’re doing: “Now you’re getting it!” Or “No, that’s not quite right,” and so on. But whether I am alongside you in person or in the words of this book, in order for you to learn, I must offer myself and my thoughts in my words, and you must struggle to get inside my words, or get my words inside you and figure out from the inside what they mean. (56)

If you, the reader, don’t feel her caring, encouraging presence as you read, guiding you along, you’ve missed something essential:

I’ve decided that my students learn best and try hardest when they know I love them, when they don’t feel threatened. . . . A student recently paid me a backwards compliment: he said, “You’re not safe!” He meant that I blend my scholarly and what you might call my motherly approach in such a way that he can’t tell where the boundaries are. Yet that is what binds his heart to learning. (92)

Intimate Teaching Style

It is also worth noting that the rhetoric of the book both reflects and creates the ambience of a quiet, safe, supportive, non-disputatious, home-like setting that is cognizant of a wider, unsettling, post-modern context where diverse world-views clash and discredit each other, critics flay one another with deconstructive weapons, and supposed experts on knowledge call into question the very possibility of knowing anything at all. But while these threatening perspectives are acknowledged and from time to time are taken up, the contentious force of their questioning is distant, not present. Here there is time and room and support enough in which to discover one’s natural equilibrium and bring to mind what common-sensically we know very well but in the press of intellectual debate we lose touch with.

Meek’s teaching style as exhibited in the book reminds me of the style of Socrates in Plato’s *Meno* where he gently but skillfully educates from an uneducated slave boy an understanding of how to go about drawing a square double the area of an initial square. Socrates doesn’t directly give him the answer – let alone expose him to the skeptical arguments posed earlier in the *Meno* that are capable of bringing inquiry to a standstill – but instead encouragingly midwives him step by step to a place where the slave boy can grasp for himself the answer, how he got there, and that he indeed knows it. This teaching style is a genuine strength that is all too rare in the modern university. In important respects it is often a practical necessity to accomplish the breakthrough Meek is aiming to accomplish in her students. As such, I want to compliment and praise her for it. However, often our greatest strengths have shadow sides to them. Could the nurturing protective care of Meek’s teaching style might also be a liability if, while building their confidence in knowing God, her students are never effectively exposed to how rationally vulnerable that confidence in knowing God may appear in light of the soul searing counterarguments of modernity and postmodernity encountered in their full strength?

Post-Critical or Pre-Critical?

The issue I raise here is not a tangential one to Polyanian concerns. It is a question as to whether the book and its author, despite its apparent mastery of the self-absent ironies of the modern critical intellectual

ethos, have really fully confronted and fully realized the disturbing and disconcerting impact of the modern critiques of faith. To put it in a nutshell, is the book fully *post-critical*, or is it in fundamental respects still *pre-critical*? Has it really faced the problematic juggernaut of the modern critical tradition? Polanyi identifies what he is doing in *Personal Knowledge* as seeking to discover and stake out a *post-critical* philosophy, one that does not attempt to revert to a reaffirmation of some pre-modern faith perspective, nor one that would circumvent the baptism of fire that is the heart of the modern critical “tradition.” Rather, a post-critical philosophy, as I understand what Polanyi meant, is one that has passed through the searing critiques of modernity, continues to affirm what genuine insights there are in those critiques (those of Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud among them), and yet reaffirms *with a chastened faith*, and draws upon, the original wellsprings of one’s intellectual passions.

Further evidence bearing on the possibility that *Longing to Know* is still in some respects pre-critical is Meek’s identification of *the ideal of certainty* for knowledge to qualify as knowledge² as the source of modernity’s and post-modernity’s epistemological problems. But is this really the source of our problems and the obstacle to the recovery of confidence in our ordinary acts of knowing? According to Polanyi’s own analysis, as I understand it, what makes the modern critical tradition *critical* is not its quixotic pursuit of certainty but its adherence to an attitude of critical suspicion and methodological doubt as the guarantor of respectable claims to knowledge, especially suspicion and doubt directed toward what is assumed to be the inveterate tendency of human subjectivity to distort and color findings of objective fact. A rationally certain, wholly justified explicit proposition would of course pass the test. However, the effective censor here is not the ideal of certainty but an *a priori bias* to critically call into question and force any candidate for belief to provide convincing impersonal justification that will defeat and overcome the methodological bias of critical doubt. That is what makes the modern critical intellectual ethos critical, anti-traditional-- a “tradition” that would bring an end to tradition-- based methodological faith as such--and hostile to the tender, inarticulate intimations of truth that Meek contends (and that I agree) are central to knowing. As well, that is what has recently transformed the modern critical enterprise into a host of post-modern deconstructings of whatever modern ideas have been assumed to have passed the test of critical scrutiny.

I do not presume to know Meek’s own response to this question (Is her book fully post-critical in the sense Polanyi intends?) and would very much like to learn it. I seriously doubt that anyone who has really bought into (sold his soul to?) the modern critical tradition will be persuaded to the contrary by Meek’s book. But perhaps it is unfair to suppose that that is one of its aims. It is significant, however, that no mention whatsoever is made in *Longing to Know* of the enormous body of modern critical biblical scholarship that is widely presumed to have undermined confidence in the divine authority of Scripture, or how one might go about defending and reaffirming the strong position of biblical authority Meek takes in light of that body of scholarship. (By no means do I mean to suggest that the latter is impossible. Others have sought to do so and/or are now seeking to do so. No mention is made of those efforts here, however – not to speak at all of the relative merits of the cases they make.) Yet the assumption of the authority of Scripture as the principal reliable means of access to knowledge of God is the kingpin on which Meek’s central argument for how we can know God hangs. Given that assumption, most everything else flows fairly smoothly and unproblematically. But what about readers who are not already favorably disposed toward it, or readers who are inclined to be favorably disposed but who are only too aware of, and who have not yet found an effective counter to, the serious arguments that have been lodged against it (quite apart from those who are looking for certainty under the old modern model of knowledge)?

A Rich Vein of Examples and Metaphors to Mine

The book itself is gracefully written and very readable. Meek has thoroughly absorbed and made her own Polanyi's understanding of knowing – so well that I find it hard to imagine any better introduction to the basics of what it involves. So often with secondary expositions of Polanyi's epistemology, Polanyi's own examples are employed again and again. Not so with Meek (or hardly ever): her text is full of an enormous range of novel, incredibly apt, down to earth, current, vivid examples, many exceptionally relevant to young people today, and stories of ordinary acts of knowing that would be readily recognizable to anyone (in our culture at least) – all beautifully illustrating each general point she sets out to make. Anyone seeking new examples to explain Polanyi's insights will find Meek's book a rich vein to mine. The many aspects of what it is to know Jeff, Meek's auto mechanic, is an extended, vivid example developed throughout the book in 15 out of its 25 chapters. But other examples range the gamut from figuring out how to view Magic Eye pictures, finding out what went “bump in the night” (a zucchini fell off a window sill and turned on the kitchen faucet), breast feeding an infant, learning to see what was never seen before under the tutelage of a visual artist, understanding Einstein's theory of relativity, “laying out” for a frisbee, recognizing a copperhead snake on a path in the woods, stalking muskrats along with Annie Dillard, Mark McGuire recovering from a batting slump, assessing the risk of surgery, baking bread, solving cryptograms, figuring out that my car needs a new steering pump, and many more. Situations from at least 12 movies are discussed, some repeatedly (each time in greater depth). Lots of stories of people coming to faith and/or losing faith are told. And all of this conveyed with a delightful sense of humor!

Moreover, Meek employs novel metaphors to articulate Polanyian insights in fresh ways. For example, in reference to her proposed switch in models of knowing, she states, “We're no longer wearing an epistemological straitjacket; we're wearing an epistemological leotard” (55). To emphasize the indispensable role of the knower's personal involvement in knowing, she poses this figure: “If a statement is a dot, the act of knowing is a vector to and through the dot. It's like laying out for a Frisbee” (57). In bringing out the personal coefficient to all knowing, she writes, “All stated facts, even $2 + 2 = 4$, crest an unstabile active human effort much as a skin crusts a cooling cup of hot chocolate. Like so many shining electrical bulbs, truth claims tap into a current without which they would not be what they are” (58). A sampling of other fresh metaphors follows: “It is just the ‘messiness’ of it [human knowing] that tells us that we engage the real. Again I speak misleadingly, when I say “messiness”: only from the point of view of an impossible and sterile ideal of fully articulable and justifiable knowledge it is messy. From within our everyday experience it is the lived and sensed rootedness of our acts of knowing.” (143). “The clues that make up our integrations, you might say, are liable to get their feelings hurt if you forget them. They are happy being subsidiary, but you ignore them or take them for granted at your peril” (171). “Knowing takes commitment to that which is yet to be discovered, a kind of pledge of good faith. The lover can see, is permitted to see. The seeing only ever follows and responds to the wanting, the longing, the personal, self-giving pledge” (177).

The Overall Structure of Meek's Argument

Overall, Meek aims to displace our inherited modernist model of knowledge with an alternative model. On the inherited model, knowledge is limited to what can be put into words, as “depersonalized, disembodied pieces of information [thus *already* known] explainable only by reference [according to strict logical

relationships] to other depersonalized pieces of information” (63), and justified – specifically, rendered rationally certain beyond any shadow of skeptical doubt. When applied across the board, this model, as Meek points out, not only leaves precious little, if anything, to count as knowledge, including all advances from unknowing to knowing found in learning and discovery (scientific and otherwise), but it makes havoc in discrediting vast ranges of ordinary everyday acts of knowing that we rely on as such to make it through our days. Nor will it serve to legitimate itself as an accurate account of knowledge; there’s no way that this model can certify itself as the essence of knowledge, let alone do so with certainty. Thus she concludes, “If a key kind of knowing doesn’t fit our model, it’s not right to discredit the knowing; it’s right to discredit the model” (63).

Meek sets out the alternative model with care over the course of most of the book, assisting the reader to understand and securely grasp each of its aspects with the help of numerous concrete examples. My summary of it in what follows is just that, a summary noting only the highlights, for Meek’s actual account is much richer than I can begin to convey here. From a static, depersonalized model with emphasis on fully articulated, ideally certain propositions, she introduces us to the model of an embodied, active, reaching out of the human person, never certain but nevertheless confident, to comprehend and engage the real, only certain aspects of whose knowing activity can be articulated: “Knowing is the responsible human struggle to rely on clues to focus on a coherent pattern [“a making sense of things that opens the world to us” (50, 56)] and submit to its reality” (53 *et passim*). In another context, I have identified this shift in models as a shift from understanding knowledge as exclusively representational to understanding it as primarily acquaintance or relational knowledge, leaving representational knowledge as derivative from and dependent upon the primary type.³

Meek identifies in this model a three-fold structure, each crucial component of which is lost on the modernist model because of its tacit, never fully articulable aspects: (a) our responsible, more or less skillful struggle to make sense of the known (which regularly results, transrationally, in a transformation of our sense of what we can rationally expect of the world), (b) the clues on which our knowing subsidiarily relies (i.e., lives in and through), in our world, in our bodies (especially as we indwell and extend our reach into the world), and in the direction and guidance we receive from others, and (c) the coherent patterns which our responsible struggle to know reaches out to apprehend, that disclose us in contact with objective realities over against us (coherent centers or agencies of ongoing activity – e.g., a copperhead snake on the path before me – that respond to us, decisively shaping the interpretations we give them, both in terms of their present profundity and their future possibilities), to which we must submit as real. Meek’s extended account of how we move from an integration of mostly inarticulate clues to a coherent pattern through which an objective, self-disclosing reality becomes manifest is remarkably insightful and pays careful and repeated examination. She fills out and renders more coherent much of what Polanyi leaves unclear or incompletely developed on these same points. While the realist epistemology she articulates, with its stress on the fallible, partial, and perspectival hold we have on things, is akin to critical realism, its stress on the confident, evolving contact we have with things, as distinct from achieving some definitive representation of things, is akin to direct realism. In effect, Meek’s exposition shows Polanyi’s position to be identifiable with neither of these alternatives and in some sense to lie outside of both of these well-known positions.

Meek’s discussion in chapter 20 of how the inevitability of mistakes in our knowing do not vitiate our contact with reality is particularly insightful – indeed, how despite being mistaken in this or that respect, we can, at least in most cases, still legitimately claim to know a thing, how mistakes themselves can often be turned to positive epistemic effect, and how a consideration of things from different perspectives brings to light how we can move beyond them. On the former model mistakes were simply non-knowledge; on the new model,

mistakes are things we learn from, shortcomings or partialities in our grasp of the real, and occasionally serendipitous keys that unlock a whole new understanding of things we thought we knew well. Importantly, Meek returns toward the end of this chapter (20) and in the following chapter (21) to affirm the partial truth and continuing subordinate importance of the former model's insistence on rigor in our scrutiny of claims to know, their justification (especially once its false ideals of certainty and explicitness have been deposed), and the bases on which we arrive at our conclusions.⁴ She goes on to devote a chapter to dealing with doubts and apparently contrary evidence concerning what we are striving to know, another to our ethical obligations to what we seek to know, and still another to the hope that undergirds the model of knowing she is offering:

On a model that required certainty, certainty ended up dying, and little hope seemed to remain for knowing anything, let alone knowing God. An extended look at ordinary human experience in knowing has helped us to see that knowing happened, to see how it works, and to see how we can reasonably hope by means of it to access the real. The misguided quest for certainty was in the end the very thing that blinded us to the substantial grounds we have for confidence in our efforts to engage the world. We cannot be exhaustively certain; nor would we want to pay its price. The alternative to what is in fact sterile certainty is a very fertile capacity to engage and evoke reality. We need not mourn its demise when *confidence* waits in the wings to replace it. And confidence is a concept that accords better, and not only with the risky efforts of our ventures. It also accords better with the prospect of their success. It restores hope. (181)

Following each stage of Meek's exposition of the alternative Polanyian model of knowing (specifically, in the last sections of chapters 7 through 23) she returns to and emends her account of knowing Jeff, her auto mechanic (begun in chapter 4), and, in analogy with it, her account of how it is that we can know God. Her stress is on the ordinariness of such knowing and a continuity across all types of knowing in opposition of those who would assert that knowing God entails a different or special kind of knowing.

Some writers, for example, have stressed that knowing God, as distinct from other kinds of knowing, involves a peculiar sort of mystical experience, that it relies upon some authoritative word as a source of knowledge, that it requires a commitment (that can be at times obstinate), and/or that it demands some sort of faith (an entrustment of ourselves beyond what we can presently justify). Meek's response to these supposed distinguishing marks is, first, to explain that, as long as ordinary experience is not limited to a narrow empiricist conception where everything is supposed to be explicitly specifiable, there is no need for religious knowing to appeal to any non-ordinary sort of "mystical" experience (actually, in accord with her Reformed Protestant tradition, she seems dismissive of any notion of "mystical" experience as such). Second, she explains how each of the other three marks, properly understood, are involved in ordinary non-religious acts of knowing, including (following Polanyi's account) scientific knowing; they aren't opposed to rationality (commonsense, ordinary rationality) but rationality in crucial respects depends on them.

Thus, in a manner fundamentally similar to how we know ordinary things such as the reliability of an auto mechanic, knowing God, according to Meek's account, involves a responsible ongoing struggle to rely on clues, drawn from the full range of our experience and the words of trustworthy guides (God meets us, according to Meek, in the Word, in the world, and in ourselves [195]), to focus on a coherent pattern of overarching meaning through which the transcendent reality of God begins to disclose itself to us and we submit to its reality. In her own words,

Coming to know God is like this. You hear a friend describe what the Bible says about God and about why you need to know him. It makes surprising and humbling sense of our experience. It makes sense of your significance and glory; it makes sense of your brokenness. It holds the prospect of being the very thing you've been longing for. You decide to take the risk and reach out to Jesus Christ, asking him to forgive your rebellion and trusting him to save you. . . . Our study of the Bible, combined with your experiences of our selves and our world over time, builds our grasp of who God is. We grow in knowing him as we try to do what he says to do. So it is that knowing God, like knowing an auto mechanic, involves a moving from unknowing to knowing, and at each point of contact fresh decisions to trust and follow are called for. (67-68)

Further,

The pattern of God's ways and words [to the apprehension of which her efforts at integrating clues are directed] stretches to the very edges of my life experience and greets me each new day with fresh installments. The grand drama of redemption recorded in Scripture lends meaning to my human experience. In light of it I recognize my dignity as a human, the inherent worth of my efforts in this world, and the longing for glory and restoration that my pain and brokenness cry out for. Plus, integrating to the pattern of the God of Scripture takes "coherent center of agency" [Meek's characterization of realities that disclose themselves through the patterns of our perceptual integrations] to a new level! (122)

Meek is careful to take account of the genuine struggles that people of faith have in maintaining a confident sense of the reality of God: desert periods in which God's presence is not felt, challenges to one's faith from others, and encounters with the presence of evil in one's own experience and that of others. Her treatment of these is both genuine and insightful.

The one difference she does introduce between knowing God and knowing an auto mechanic is that of an obstacle, a "bentness" (human rebellion against God), in our nature that keeps us from recognizing God (see, among other places, pp. 94-95). We do not always want what is good, and these desires unavoidably influence how we dispose ourselves in integrating the clues that shape our knowing and acting. As a result, we see what we want to see, and not necessarily what is there to be seen. So what we see is sometimes "bent" or distorted, unsubmitive to God. Thus our "bentness" cannot but cloud our knowing. But this "bentness," according to Meek, is curable. "But that is the point of the life-giving message of the good news of Jesus Christ. The one to whom we are resistantly blind is perfectly positioned to cure our blindness" (165). Hence we need to ask for help from wise guides and divine grace with the orientation of our hearts. Nevertheless, this "bentness" in our nature, she contends, does not contradict the structural similarity between the two kinds of knowing.⁵

The Possibility of Being Religiously Mistaken

Could such a supposed knowing of God as Meek expounds and defends be comprehensively wrong or wrong in significant respects? Meek responds:

In healthy measure my claims about God hang on my trust in the words of the Bible's writers, which though recorded over millennia consistently unite to affirm that Jesus is God and that he will return to save and to judge. Could they have been wrong? It's possible. Could I be mistaking their import? Possibly; certainly in some measure. Can I nevertheless see that I am involved in an act of knowing with respect to God—an integrative pattern making to which I submit as it engages me in the world? Profoundly yes. Can I come to understand better, increase my skill at knowing God? Yes. My knowing will inevitably benefit when I study the Bible and the world carefully, think through my "inner game," trying to embody what my coaches are saying. (163-164)

So Meek does acknowledge fallibility here. While she does admit that her understanding of the reality of God is resistant to contrary interpretations of events and experiences that would discredit Scriptural claims (as are virtually any of our non-religious convictions, she is careful to note), this obstinacy of belief, she clarifies, is not immune to every conceivable counterattack. She also points out that the Bible doesn't portray God as calling his people blindly to obey. For example, she points out how it appeals to the empirical testimony of God's mighty acts and the beneficial results from living faithfully in relationship with him. Nor, she says, is the basis for her theological understanding simply a matter of trusting the words of the Bible, her parents, and her teachers, for her own experiences of having lived as a Christian for many years has led to new and fresh ways to apply Scripture to her experience.

I wonder, however, how much Meek has considered in this connection the sort of error that can arise from self-reinforcing systems of implicit belief, as in the Azande belief in Witchcraft that Polanyi discusses in *Personal Knowledge* (to which Meek makes no reference). Polanyi there remarks (*PK* 294),

I conclude that what earlier philosophers have alluded to by speaking of coherence as the criterion of truth [on which Meek has placed so much, though not exclusive, emphasis] is only a criterion of *stability*. It may equally stabilize an erroneous or a true view of the universe. The attribution of truth to any particular stable alternative is a fiduciary act which cannot be analyzed in non-committal terms. . . . [T]here exists no principle of doubt the operation of which will discover for us which of two systems of implicit beliefs is true—except in the sense that we will admit decisive evidence against the one we do not believe to be true, and not against the other.

This comment, of course, does not resolve the issue, but it does raise the possibility that one can have a comprehensive religious interpretation of life and the world that is entirely coherent as understood from within (i.e., makes sense of experience, even more apparent sense than other religious views as comprehended from that perspective) and that is, nevertheless, fundamentally in error – error that, according to Polanyi, cannot be non-committally and neutrally (in independence from a competing world view) determined as such. Other, apparently contradictory views will seem to be in error, just as this view will seem to be in error from their perspective. This raises the thorny problem of religious pluralism, the problem of the apparent conflict between competing religious claims, and Meek has offered us precious little insight as to how to approach dealing with it.

The Problem of Religious Pluralism

After carefully working through Meek's argument on behalf of knowing God, I am left thinking that it would be possible to mount an exactly parallel argument – changing only a few words and names and references to sacred scripture but no essential element in the structure of the argument Meek presents – on behalf of knowing, say, the *Dao* in Chinese Daoism, the *Dharmakaya* in Mahayana Buddhism, *Allah* in Islam, or *Brahman* in Vedantic Hinduism – indeed, as no less “coherent centers of agency” than the God of the Bible. Perhaps more disturbing, would it not be possible to mount an argument culminating in knowing my ultimate blessing in the Celestial Heaven according to Mormonism, attaining to complete “clarity” in Scientology, or realizing mystical identity with the Mother Goddess in Wicca? I can well imagine a follower of one of these alternative religions enthused with what appears to be a possibility of demonstrating that one can *know* whatever the ultimate reality is conceived to be in these religions. (I ponder these possibilities not simply as an amateur in the comparative study of religions but as one who has studied and taught in the discipline of the comparative study of religions, utilizing a methodology of systematic disciplined empathy, for over 30 years.) What would stand in the way of mounting any of these arguments? Has Meek presented a basis for ruling out any such argument as significantly less plausible for those respective followers than her argument comes across as being for Reformed Protestants?

Meek does at least say this: “It [the Bible] tells me that this Jesus is the only way to God, and that the only way to know Jesus is through God's telling us about him in the Bible, and God the Holy Spirit's making me understand. What the Bible tells me makes sense of my experience that Christianity alone is different from all other futile efforts to reach God” (87). These other religions could, of course, make a similar claim, but some representatives in fact do say that their faith is not an exclusive way to at-onement with ultimate reality. Meek goes on to write,

Could the world be not God's clothes, but God, as some pagan religions hold? This makes less sense of my experience. If all that is real is God, then either God is not good, or evil is good. What is, is good, and is God. But that makes no sense. . . . It makes more sense to see ourselves and our world in broken relationship to God, rather than as God. Of course that means God must be a person, rather than a force, and persons rightly expect things of you. Rather than face this painful thought, many people opt for the force. But the question is not which is more comfortable, but which makes better sense of my experience. (88)

Without going into point by point detail here, my first thought is that this hardly represents an empathetic understanding or a fair appraisal of any of the sophisticated pantheisms of which I am aware or of their respective conceptions of morality. In any case, there are several other religious traditions which hold to a person-like conception of the ultimate reality akin to Meek's understanding of the Christian God – e.g., Islam, Vaishnava Hinduism, Sikhism, and Jodo Shinshu Buddhism. I.e., Christianity is hardly unique in this respect.

One of the points I wish to make is that if we are to assess apparently contradictory religious claims between different religions fairly and justly, we need to do our very best to make sure we have understood them to the satisfaction of knowledgeable, reflective, mature insiders plus level-headedly and carefully listened to how such insiders respond to the critical issues we raise. (As well we need to be aware of how vulnerable our own tradition, as may be seen and understood by others, is to their critical evaluation.) Very often what appears

to be a significant difference between one tradition and another is not the difference it appears at first to be (and may not be the contradiction it first appeared to be), and what appears to be agreement on digging deeper may turn out to harbor a significant disagreement.

Let us suppose for the moment that this kind of inter-religious inquiry can be mounted and that disciplined empathetic understandings can be developed all around – a big “if.” If so, it would mean that we are not just left with contradictory counterclaims; there would be something of a quasi-neutral ground on which to inquire. (It would not be non-committal, but a ground of mutuality opened up by an overlap of our commitments.) What can we hope to determine thereby? My surmise, based on considerable efforts made in this direction by myself and others, is that a lot can be learned about not only commonalities and divergences far beyond what is evident on the surface but also how capacious, coherent, and profound are the explanations of the life issues that the great religious traditions other than our own offer (less so for the alternative traditions mentioned above). What are we to make of that? I am myself inclined to confess my agnosticism regarding where we are likely to end up. On some issues we will come to mutual understanding and agreement. On other issues we will come hopefully to mutual understanding but disagreement, possibly learning that we aim at fundamentally distinct but not necessarily contradictory goals. On still other issues we may come to no clear resolution or nothing close to agreement as far as we can determine. Meek is inclined to simply take the apparent Scriptural word that Jesus is the only way as settling the issue. I realize that Scripture says this, but I am not so confident that I fully know and understand what it means and how it is to be applied in this context.⁶

Might it be that the Daoist, the Buddhist, and the Hindu have just as much legitimate *claim to know* their ultimate reality as does Meek along with her fellow Reformed Protestants on the sort of basis that she claims she knows, especially given that there is no neutral, non-committal basis for determining which is true and which is false? Does a positive answer to this question necessarily entail the contradiction that Meek believes it must? All of this raises anew in my mind one of the longstanding issues over Polanyian interpretation: Do religious realities exist (or not) independently of our commitments, or are they sustained in being as it were (“validated,” to use one of Polanyi’s terms) by our commitments?⁷ Clearly Meek wants to say that they do exist independently, though we cannot refer to them non-committally (just as we cannot refer to any reality non-committally), and I have been and still am inclined to agree. However, the issues that I am raising here constitute an important set of evidence against this position, or at least on behalf of qualifying it. There are two matters touched upon in Meek’s overall argument that directly bear upon this: the analogy with Magic Eye pictures and her account of the role of authoritative guides for our knowing.

First, Meek makes a great deal of the case of Magic Eye pictures, which first appear as a two-dimensional field of minute meaningless random colored figures. The directions tell us to look with patience for a meaningful three-dimensional pattern to appear several inches beyond the surface of the picture. Lo and behold, at least for those of us who are not Magic Eye picture challenged, a three-dimensional image, say, of leaping dolphins then appears. The curious thing to me, which Meek doesn’t begin to explore, is the status of the three-dimensional image: what sort of ontological status does it have? We sometimes call such things “virtual realities.” They only exist actually for those who actively integrate the visual clues to their appearance, and then only for the moment in which we do (and, of course, in our memories of having done so). In any case, they don’t exist independently of our integration in the way that the marble owl sitting above me on my window sill does. Yet, quite reliably, they appear again and again in consistent ways as we return to the integration that occasions their appearance, so we can say that their potential knower-dependent virtual existence exists independently of anyone’s present actual integration.

Now I can imagine that Meek would concede that the religious realities of religious traditions other than Christianity (as she understands it) have at least this sort of virtual reality for their adherents; they *know* it at least in this sense. The trouble is, I can imagine that those adherents would concede that God for her, the God she claims to know, has at least this sort of virtual reality too. And as well I can readily imagine both sides conceding that the others *believe that* the “virtual reality” that they thereby “know” isn’t just virtual, but that it exists (or the reality to which it refers exists) independently of their integration. What is it, on the Polanyian grounds that Meek adduces, that enables us to mark and tell the difference between virtual reality and independently existing reality? Meek would no doubt appeal to the way the latter manifests itself inexhaustibly, that it comes across as a center of self-initiating and self-disclosing activity towards us, and even that it comes across as being cognizant of us even as we are of it. But what is to prevent adherents of other traditions appealing in pretty much the same way to the same sort of features of the religious realities they claim to know? Some adherents of which I am aware actually do so. What are we to make of that? Meek doesn’t seem to allow for that possibility, let alone indicate how she might respond. Is she open to genuine inter-religious dialogue on this matter? On the basis of *Longing to Know*, it doesn’t seem so.

Second, Meek makes a strong case (chapter 13) for the role of authoritative guides in everyday commonsense knowing, both by way of traditions of practical knowing (e.g., the practical know how passed on among auto mechanics) and teachers/mentors who provide us with direct instruction. She points out how this is involved in science too, as well as in Christian life and learning. Specifically, in Christian life and learning Sacred Scripture plays an indispensable, crucial role in this respect, especially in the Reformed Protestant tradition in which she stands. The Bible for her is the instruction book for Christians. The issue I wish to raise pertains to the status of the guiding authoritative word. Is it a pointer to truths that are ultimately accessible directly and/or independently of the pointer, or is Scripture itself truth (or at least an essential part of the truth)⁸ as far as human beings are concerned?

Søren Kierkegaard drew a distinction (in his *Philosophical Fragments*, among other places) between a socratic teacher and an apostolic teacher (and ultimately, behind the apostle, the God-man, Jesus Christ). A socratic teacher, like in the story from Plato’s *Meno* alluded to earlier, is the occasion for the student coming to understand certain eternal truths, but he (the socratic teacher) is inessential to the truth itself. He is merely, as it were, a pointer to the truth that the student must come to apprehend for himself. And when the student has done so, the student stands, at least in respect to that truth, equal to the teacher and the teacher, as it were, drops out of the picture. An apostolic teacher, or the word of an apostolic teacher, to the contrary, is not a mere occasion or pointer for the student; he is essential. The student’s relation to the truth passes through the teacher’s word and is only accessible through that authoritative word. On receiving the truth in question, the authoritative word of the teacher doesn’t drop out of the picture.

Meek doesn’t seem ready to recognize such a distinction and conflates the two types of teacher into the second type (perhaps her interest in minimizing the difference between knowledge of God and knowledge of other sorts is a factor in this connection). She writes, for example,

Once we have personally developed a skill, the authoritative word no longer seems to operate in a grand void, as it did when we were novices. . . . We no longer have a sense of blindly trusting words we hardly understand. We have achieved our own pattern of world experiences and thus accessed the real. We now interpret aright for ourselves our bodily sense. But actually, in our personal success we have not left the guiding words behind. We

have only come to live in the words, embody them. They are no longer outside us; they are inside us. (101)

Although she doesn't quite say it here, I get the impression from this and what else she writes in this chapter that generally Meek holds that we don't grow in our knowing beyond the words of our authoritative guides. I think that is simply not true, at least in many cases. Yet I am ready to concede that it would have to be true in the case of Meek's strong affirmation of Scriptural authority.

But if so, how does that not leave us in the situation of the Magic Eye pictures? Being ineradicably dependent on the depiction of God given in Scripture and having no (or very little) independent access to the reality of God, what is it that makes God thus depicted more than a virtual reality for us (not just three-dimensional and more or less static, but active and dynamic and self-disclosing as well, both to us and simultaneously to others who entrust ourselves to the same Scripture)? I would really like to know. In *Personal Knowledge* (pp. 196-199) Polanyi talks about the Christian mystic's effort to "break out" of our normal conceptual framework in seeking an ecstatic vision of at-onement with God. This would seem to point to a means of independent access to the reality of God beyond present representations, including those of Scripture, while nevertheless relying on the Christian conceptual framework as a pointer to that reality. But Meek's denegation of mystical experience seems to close off this possibility, at least in her judgment. So, again I ask, what is it that makes knowing God more than knowing a virtual reality, and that would differentiate knowing God in a clear and decisive way from knowing the *Dharmakaya* through reliance upon Buddhist scriptures (which, by the way, Buddhists insist are just pointers) or knowing *Brahman* through reliance upon the Vedas, etc.?

A Concluding Note

Despite my many questions and critical reservations, I think *Longing to Know* is important and valuable for many reasons, for the reasons I have already given as well as for others I have not given. One of the most important reasons of all, in my judgment, that I have not mentioned earlier is the confidence and incentive to reflect and inquire philosophically with Polanyian resources that *Longing to Know* conveys to ordinary folks who already happen to rely, or who are ready to rely, on Scripture in the way Meek does. From what I am learning of the popular reception the book is receiving in many and widening circles, this is something to be celebrated and encouraged. If anything is able to combat the anti-intellectual, close-minded tendencies of much of right wing Protestantism, insiders reflecting and inquiring philosophically will do so probably more effectively than anything else.

Endnotes

¹ On the concept of 'reduplication' and its purpose, see Søren Kierkegaard's *The Concluding Unscientific Postscript*.

² According to Stephen Toulmin, the root problem of the modern idea of rationality is not the ideal of certainty by itself but the ideal of a theoretical, person-and-culture-invariant (context independent) – i.e., *mathematical* – formulation of the explanatory principles underlying what appears. This is the specifically modern take on (i.e., interpretation of) *universality* as an essential requirement of knowledge, in addition to *certainty* and *necessity*. Meek alludes to these three, but focuses almost exclusively on certainty as the source

problem. In any case, Toulmin's point about universality surely is a matter to be taken into account in addition to the methodological doubt at the heart of the modern critical tradition that I go on to describe. See Toulmin's *Return to Reason* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

³ Dale Cannon, "Construing Polanyi's Tacit Knowledge as Knowing by Acquaintance Rather than Knowing by Representation: Some Implications," *Tradition and Discovery: The Polanyi Society Periodical* 29:2 (2002-2003), 26-43. Meek does not utilize this terminology, but I believe it replicates fairly well the shift she articulates. Meek's account of the new model of knowing alludes (e.g., in reference to Einstein's Theory of Relativity) to the derivative status of representational knowledge relative to acquaintance knowledge, to use my terminology, but she does not develop an explanation of their relationship to any extent. To some extent this can become a problem in so far as Meek's account of the integrative patterns to which our efforts at knowing are directed seems to conflate perceptual patterns immediately experienced and explanatory structures beyond immediate experience that we formulate in theoretical explanations. The two are not the same and it is not clear on Meek's account how they are not the same, though perhaps she could account for the latter in terms of impersonal "coherent centers of agency" that are disclosed through specific perceptual patterns. Yet Meek's account of a tree understood as conforming to impersonal laws that govern its behavior versus the tree understood "as a thing made and moved by the utterly faithful words of an infinite person for his own delight" (144) would seem to leave little room for a scientific explanation (or at least not much appreciation for one).

⁴ Meek does not, however, bring out what truth still lies in the representational understanding of knowledge that the old model exclusively emphasized.

⁵ The category of "bentness" becomes interestingly problematic in reference to persons occupying perspectives (e.g., religious world views) other than our own, whereby we are tempted to attribute the obstinacy of their belief structures to their "bentness." Meanwhile, relative to our lack of empathic understanding of them we may be no less "bent" than they are, if not more so.

⁶ I say this partly from having come to realize that there often can be found much that is worthy of profound appreciation in traditions other than my own – even things I can learn and appropriate without compromise as a Christian – but partly also from coming to realize how this very passage of Scripture, among others, can easily become a pretext for inhospitality, lack of charity, and an unreadiness for empathy toward persons and practices that are simply unfamiliar and strange. On the other hand, I am not at all in favor of mindless tolerance and relativism. What is key here is more sensitive discernment, not less.

⁷ Maybe we could say this about the ultimate reality in its "manifest aspects" (what Hindu's call *saguna Brahman*) while ultimate reality in its "unmanifest aspects" (*nirguna Brahman*) transcendentally exists independently of our merely human apprehension and our capacity to represent it.

⁸ This would make Scripture a representative or representational truth of Revelation, to be taken at its divinely authorized word. It would represent truth that is directly inaccessible, at least as far as this life is concerned. Knowledge by acquaintance of such truth would not be possible, only knowledge by acquaintance of its representation in Scripture.

“Knowing as Unlocking the World”

A Review Essay on E. L. Meek’s *Longing to Know: The Philosophy of Knowledge for Ordinary People*

David W. Rutledge

ABSTRACT Key Words: Polanyi, tragedy and knowledge, Enlightenment, evil, sin, integration, scripture, knowledge and submission, CS Lewis, deductive reasoning, inclusive, exclusivism.

This review essay begins by describing why one should read Esther Meek’s Longing to Know: The Philosophy of Knowledge for Ordinary People (Brazos Press, 2003), then raises questions about the absence of tragedy in her view of knowledge; how ordinary knowledge of things differs from knowledge of God; whether one can “prove” the Messianic nature of Jesus; and whether Meek’s inclusive epistemology can support an exclusivistic soteriology.

Esther Meek’s *Longing to Know* is a delightful book for readers who appreciate authors with humor, competence, *chutzpah*, and a solicitous concern for them — the reader. Meek has written a helpful guide for those with doubts about the possibility of knowing the truth — especially those Christians with doubts about the possibility of knowing God. She has also written the most helpful introduction to the central features of Michael Polanyi’s work since Richard Gelwick’s *The Way of Discovery*, published almost thirty years ago.¹ Since Dale Cannon has written a thorough description of Meek’s book for this same occasion,² I will select a few issues on which I think further comment is necessary, without attempting an exhaustive analysis of her argument. Let me begin with a confession that I am a fan, and tell you why you would profit from reading *Longing to Know*.

Why You Should Read this Book

Meek’s desire to communicate engagingly to a lay audience is unusual in contemporary scholarship, and we can be grateful for her success.³ She begins where she intuits her audience is, in the middle of a confusing mixture of assured feelings and nagging doubts about its beliefs, and Meek deftly recounts how our culture has arrived at this unfortunate juncture. The underlying problem, she avers, is our modern obsession with *certainty*: for a belief to be true, it must take the form of a statement that can never be doubted, one that is absolutely clear and explicit in what it asserts (Ch. 3). Such an obsession has rendered it all but impossible to claim to know moral convictions, aesthetic judgments, religious beliefs, historical assertions, or most of the everyday claims that give both structure and point to human lives. Believing that people have been misled down the path of absolute certainty, she shows how an attention to ordinary knowing will help people to *know* truth, to be *confident* in that truth, and by knowing it to *transform* their thinking and living. She aims to reassure people in the acts of knowing they already perform, every day, and to suggest by stages that such knowledge is a doorway to the most profound philosophical and religious truths. By organizing each of her twenty-five short chapters in a similar way, and supplying topics at the end of each chapter for “Further Thought and Discussion,” she makes it easy for those not familiar with terms like “epistemology,” “infallibility,” or “post-modernism” to navigate the book.⁴ The Polyanian definition which unites her chapters is a shrewd summary of his central concepts: “Knowing is the

responsible human struggle to rely on clues to focus on a coherent pattern and submit to its reality.” Taking each part of this rubric in turn, she unpacks its constituent parts and implications, repeating central terms and phrases until the reader can finally say, “Oh, I see it!”, and share Meek’s confidence.

Esther Meek is wonderfully inventive in conveying her ideas in fresh ways that are far removed from the sterility of academic jargon: “We’re no longer wearing an epistemological straitjacket; we’re wearing an epistemological leotard” (55) – a metaphor a male scholar might never have imagined. Or, “Our coherent pattern corresponds to the real as a key does to a door, not as a photograph does to its subject.” (141) Or, “I personally have felt the lovely resolution of reuniting the ivory tower with the world of everyday human experience, seeing the jewels of the one return to the streets of the other, where they belong” (185). Or, in a typically provocative sentence: “We can profitably compare the act of knowing to a wedding ceremony” (177). Faithful to her subtitle, she draws her examples from gardening, auto mechanics, throwing a frisbee, watching movies and listening to music, studying Magic Eye 3-D pictures, breast-feeding, her husband’s prostate cancer, making bread, and many others, equally quotidian. And one never has the feeling that Meek is talking down to you, that this “ordinary” style is a condescension. She shows the awareness and patience of an experienced teacher who has taken the time to actually notice what students are interested in, and how they learn best. *Longing to Know* can be read as a kind of sampler of good teaching practice, and everyone interested in education could benefit from reading its eloquent pages. I will use this book with students, and recommend it to adult church classes, for whom it seems especially well suited.

Some Issues that Invite Further Reflection

Though I am a fan of the book and urge you to read it, there are a few pages that did not feel entirely right, where I found myself searching for other integrations of the clues Meek offered. By and large, these questions arose not with her straightforward explication of Polanyian concepts, which I thought she handled well, but with concepts at the margins of her philosophical analysis, or passages having to do with the application of these views on knowing to theology. While I know my present audience is not interested in focusing solely on theological issues, some of them may lead us back to important observations about Meek’s appropriation of Polanyi. Let me begin with what she acknowledges is often a stumbling block to confident faith in God, the problem of evil.

The Tragedy of Knowledge. In his well-known history of modern Christian thought, James Livingston names *optimism* and *a belief in progress* two of the distinguishing marks of the eighteenth century Enlightenment.⁵ The “light” of reason promised to shine on all of the old superstitions and ignorances of humanity, leaving nothing but firm knowledge and happiness. With this new knowledge humanity could finally banish the scourges of disease, prejudice, slavery, and cruelty, leading the world to a light-filled future of order, peace, and prosperity. Since the contemporary economic and political philosophies of the west had their origins in the Enlightenment, and since the seemingly limitless resources of the new American continent supplied all the raw materials necessary to put these dreams into practice, it is little wonder that modern western thought has remained thoroughly optimistic, right up to recent years.

And yet, one of the minor chords in the western symphony is a reminder that when humans come into knowledge, they lose their innocence, and often enter into tragedy, into suffering. In the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (c.1700 bce), Enkidu gains wisdom and the “thoughts of a man” in his heart, and so loses his closeness with

nature and the creatures who had been his companions.⁶ A few centuries later, in *Genesis 2* and *3*, man and woman follow the advice of “the shrewdest of all the wild beasts that the Lord God had made,” ate of the fruit, and their eyes are opened, and they gain knowledge of good and evil.⁷ But the gain in knowledge also brings about their downfall, from companionship with God to exile and suffering. A few centuries later, Sophocles tells how the Chorus of *Oedipus the King* begs the king not to insist on knowing his past, not to learn who he really is. But he demands to know, and brings judgment crashing down on his head: “Oedipus, damned in his birth, in his marriage damned,/ Damned in the blood he shed with his own hand!”⁸ A few centuries later, the apostle Paul contrasts “the wisdom of the world” with “the folly of the cross,” declaring that “God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom” (I Cor. 1.25), as human wisdom leads only to death. And many centuries later, the lesson is learned again as Dr. Faustus gives up his soul and eternal happiness for knowledge of the world, in Goethe’s shadow-filled play. And finally, we might note an occasion from July, 1945, on the deserts of New Mexico, when humans exploded the first nuclear device and Robert Oppenheimer, the leader of that effort, recalled at that moment the words of the Bhagavad-Gita: “We have become Death, the destroyer of worlds.”⁹

One lesson that could be drawn from this minor theme that winds through western thought is that any talk of knowledge that leaves the “messiness” of the human knower behind, that forgets the “foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart” when it talks of knowledge, is not true to the deepest levels of our cultural experience. Enlightenment canons of reason elevated a discarnate Mind as the arbiter of knowledge, an objective Rationality from which all mistake, all error, had been eliminated. By following the scientific method carefully, it was believed, one could achieve certain knowledge without any shadows, without any pain, anguish, or guilt. Michael Polanyi showed how wrongheaded and confused the ideal of complete objectivity was, and how impossible it is to separate the knower from her knowledge. This understanding Meek captures in *Longing to Know*, and captures well. I do not find, however, a sense of the tragic in her view of knowledge, and I wonder if here she hasn’t been *too* faithful to Polanyi, for we don’t find it there, either! One of the fascinating things about Polanyi, given his roots in central European Judaism and the way that Hitler’s war against the Jews affected his family, is that he says little about how great knowledge does not guarantee morality, or even simple decency. I have read his letters in the Chicago archives to relatives trying desperately to escape Germany, as Michael tried to help them get the necessary papers and contacts to come to England. He certainly lived the tragedy of the Holocaust in a way that most of us cannot imagine. And yet, he was a scientist, and his thought continued to focus on the possibilities of knowledge with minimal attention to its entanglement in moral issues.¹⁰ If part of the horrors of modern forms of evil is traceable to an obsession with a technical rationality divorced from moral roots, must not epistemology reflect on those roots?

In *Longing to Know*, the closest Meek comes to examining how knowledge might be related to evil is in a chapter called “Getting it Wrong” (ch. 20), and in her closing chapter, “Known by God” (ch. 25). The primary word she uses to describe ‘getting knowing wrong’ in the earlier chapter is “mistake,” and she doesn’t raise the issue to the general philosophical level of asking “Is knowledge always a good thing?” When society is faced today with decisions about genetic engineering, about privacy in the digital age, about developing new biological and chemical weapons to keep ahead of terrorists, it seems important to me to ask this question, and know how to work toward an answer. On p. 195, Meek hints at some of the issues I have mentioned when she states briefly that “our knowing is warped, especially when it comes to knowing God, because of human rebellion against God.” And “another reason we make mistakes in any area of knowing is that our character is bent” (164). I would like further reflection, however, on “mistake,” “error,” “sin,” “guilt,” and “tragedy” in relation to “knowing.” We need to know more about how all our knowing – everyday, scientific, moral, artistic – might be “warped.” A final example touching my concern is provided in a quote near the end of *Longing*:

“Actually, I think God is involved not just in our knowing him, but in our knowing anything at all – auto mechanics, copperheads, golf swings, Spanish, and the Pythagorean theorem. When knowing happens and the world is truthfully engaged, God has been at work.” (196) If God is the “lure” that attracts us, that makes us long to know, then how do we **fit God** into our knowledge of Rwandan genocides, of terrorist beheadings, of the Holocaust, of the United States dropping nuclear bombs on Japanese cities – the end of a long train of sophisticated knowing? It would seem that either we must discount these things as examples of knowing, or conclude that ‘God has been at work’ in them. Meek says we are “bent,” that sin has marred our initial innocence, but according to scripture, that sin entered the human equation in an act of knowledge. I would like very much to discuss these issues further with Dr. Meek, especially given her clear sensitivity to genuine questions about faith and reason.

Auto Mechanics “On Steroids.” One of the most charming features of *Longing to Know* is how the author repeats, over and over like the refrain to a song, ‘Knowing God is like knowing your auto mechanic’ (74, 61, 78, 45, 112, 123, etc.). We get to know her mechanic Jeff fairly well, and this competent, trustworthy, likeable person serves as a convenient stand-in for the believer’s religious knowledge of a good and caring God. Just here, however, the theological underpinnings of Meek’s epistemology raise questions for me. If we use personal knowing of the sort that Meek has described in her book as a description of all acts of human knowing, then she would seem to have established a strong argument for a natural theology, for a general revelation that makes God accessible to the human mind, when that mind is properly understood and employed. If knowing is ‘the responsible struggle to rely on clues to focus on a coherent pattern and submit to its reality,’ then knowing God *does* become just like knowing my auto mechanic – just on a larger scale. She includes a qualifier now and then: “...integrating to the pattern of the God of scripture takes [me]...far beyond knowing my auto mechanic” (122), and “Yes, knowing God is a pattern-making that draws together every aspect of our lives. Knowing an auto mechanic is a pattern that encompasses a range of far smaller proportions” (74). Yet she never directly addresses the question of just how the two differ. By and large, Meek’s equivalency of the two patterns of knowing is quite direct, as when she continues the last sentence quoted: “But knowing God, when it comes to embodying a struggle for a coherent pattern, is no different in kind from knowing your auto mechanic” (74). Thus it appears that the integration necessary to know God is simply much, much greater, involving far more clues, than ordinary knowing, but *structurally*, the acts are identical: “It is important to see that the fact that people rely on the Bible as an authoritative guide when it comes to knowing God in no way sets knowing God apart from any other ordinary act of knowing” (105).

If I understand Søren Kierkegaard and Karl Barth correctly, this symmetry Meek posits between ordinary knowings and knowing God is highly suspect for Christian theology. It is precisely the Otherness of God, the hiddenness of God’s essential nature, the inscrutability of the divine, that they tried to recover from scripture (Genesis 22; Exodus 3, 19, 33; Isaiah 55). These theologians insisted that revelation is an uncovering by God, not a discovery by human beings; God initiates, while humans wait.¹¹ If knowing God is like knowing my auto mechanic *simpliciter*, then a ‘leap of faith’ is unnecessary. Esther is resolutely opposed to separating religious knowing off into a form of mysticism or intuition (pp. 41-42), and she is obviously aware of the Barthian, very Protestant way of talking of God’s special revelation, so I hope she will comment further on how knowing God is *not* like knowing your auto mechanic! This is, I believe, a profound issue for any philosophical theology, which is what Meek teaches in seminary – how far can human knowing take us in an effort to know God? She *implies*: all the way.

Clearly part of her answer will include the role of scripture, which she refers to in the quote above, and

which occupies a prominent place in her epistemology. Thus I am in effect asking also for a hermeneutics that will explain how scripture (as well as the liturgy of worship and the teachings of the Church) can serve as “clues” to God, awaiting integration by the believer, if God must remain mysterious. (It is not enough, of course, to invoke the incarnation here, for the mystery of Christ is not less than the mystery of God, despite his human form – Trinitarianism insists on this.) Given her emphasis on the compatibility of ordinary knowing with knowing God, a curiosity of Meek’s treatment of scripture in *Longing to Know* is its resolutely pre-critical, or a-critical (or is it post-critical?) stance. She speaks, for example, of John the Baptist hearing a voice from heaven at Jesus’ baptism, quoting Luke to supply the words he hears. In Luke’s gospel, however, it is Jesus who hears the words, not John (167-168). She refers to the story of Jesus talking with disciples on the road to Emmaus, and comments: “And think how it would have felt to realize that the one who had been expounding the Old Testament to you was the one who had written it!” (111). Here scripture has become a text outside of history, with all of its events occurring simultaneously, Jesus in the first century and also the author of the Torah. The Prologue of John’s gospel (‘the Word is God’) becomes the hermeneutic key for reading the accounts of Jesus’ life. While this is wholly orthodox Christian theology, it is unorthodox epistemology, sharpening the question of how knowing this Jesus, who is simultaneously Lord of the universe and first-century Jewish rabbi, is like knowing her auto mechanic, who remains resolutely just “Jeff.”

A more fertile, and more Polanyian, approach to scripture would be to examine the degree to which historical-critical scholarship in the mid-to-late nineteenth century reflects (unconsciously, of course) the epistemological paradigm of critical philosophy. To focus on historical criticism’s attempt to track the ‘historical Jesus’ in an effort to overcome the purely doctrinal reading of the gospels that was common in earlier generations, would be revealing. This approach elevates critical reason, privileges the “objective” historical fact above the affirmations of faith, and often makes the scientific perspective on reality definitive for interpretation (as in Bultmann’s demythologizing program). To uncover this covert Cartesianism in historical criticism would establish firmer grounds for Meek’s pre-critical use of scripture. Though not a biblical scholar, I believe that the work of Hans Frei, of literary critics of the Bible, and of canonical critics like Brevard Childs all are attempting to get beyond the limitations that have become apparent in historical criticism.¹² Meek’s approach would seem perfectly suited for such a task, and it would relieve some of the uneasiness her basic biblicism provokes in me.

To return to the question of this section: does reason move on the same level when knowing an auto mechanic, and when knowing God? Both are persons, in some sense, but isn’t the prevalence of symbol, metaphor, and paradox in religion a sign of a necessary shift that must occur in our thinking? Is this shift adequately captured by “integration”? On p. 110, she moves directly from her Magic Eye example of finally seeing dolphins on a formerly imageless page, to the mind-bending experience the earliest Christians must have had in recognizing the identity of Jesus: “Can you put yourself in their sandals? It makes my spine tingle to think of it! Wave after wave of understanding broke over them: It was Jesus! Jesus was alive! Dead men do rise again – if they’re divine! Jesus is the Son of God!” And she ends this chapter with: “It confirms that knowing God falls right in there with other bona fide specimens of knowing” (112). So is what happened to the disciples structurally just like what happens when we see the Magic Eye dolphins – just “bigger”? I invite Dr. Meek to say more about differences between Jeff and God, from an epistemological perspective.

On “Proving” Jesus. One of the elements of Meek’s revisioning of epistemology most problematic to her modern audience is undoubtedly the insistence that knowing involves submission, that “knowledge is acknowledgement:” “the human knower’s exercise of profound responsibility involves him in submitting to

the authoritative reality of the pattern he chose” (147). “It means submitting to being retaught” (146). We moderns, especially modern Americans, do not like to *submit* to anything, as the word immediately conjures up images of oppressive authority, depriving us of our absolute and total freedom. Meek conveys the eloquent Polanyian sense of commitment and calling, which moves us beyond objectivism’s avoidance of responsibility: “The technique of our redemption is to lose ourselves in the performance of an obligation which we accept, in spite of its appearing on reflection impossible of achievement. We undertake the task...because we hope to be visited by powers for which we cannot account in terms of our specifiable capabilities. This hope is a clue to God....”¹³ Because our knowing puts us in contact with reality, a reality that will continue to surprise us in its future manifestations, the proper attitude of the knower is one of humility, of patient listening, of willingness to be led. Meek’s final chapter meditates on how an act of coming to know, “when all is said and done,” is really “*an act of coming to be known*” (192, italics in original).

Despite my admiration for the way she expresses this, Meek surprised me by moving quickly from “...to know God is to submit to him,” to an attempt to *guarantee* acknowledgement of Jesus’ identity as the Christ. Using a familiar syllogism from C.S. Lewis’s *Mere Christianity*, she repeats the claim that “whatever Jesus was, he simply could not have been a great moral teacher. For Jesus repeatedly claimed to be God. We are left with three possibilities: either he is a liar, or he is a lunatic..., or he is who he claims to be – supreme Lord” (150-151). What disturbs me about this passage is not the many hermeneutical problems with this way of reading the New Testament text, nor the shallowness of Lewis’ argument, but the fact that it seems very much an attempt to prove Jesus’ divinity, an argument for God that seems to me in strong tension with her earlier insistence that Christian thought should avoid the modernist obsession with establishing truth on a foundation of rational argument: “Certainty – that fat old carrot that’s been tantalizing us for centuries – is a misguided ideal” (34). She says further that the “old model of knowing” stresses deductive reasoning, in which “you move from statements that are called premises to a statement called a conclusion. The conclusion of a deductive argument follows necessarily from the premises: if the premises are true, the conclusion has to be true also” (75). This old model, because it was touted as the only form of legitimate knowledge, has misled us, and Meek is passionate in trying to escape the limits of this model to honor the mystery of God. Yet in her use of Lewis’ argument about Jesus’ divinity – and perhaps also in her response to the theodicy problem with evidence from morality (151) – Meek seems to me to fall back into the apologetic game of attempting to “prove” God rationally.¹⁴ Perhaps it is simply difficult for any of us to avoid “nodding off” into critical rationality occasionally.

Inclusive Exclusivity? Finally, I want to comment briefly on an issue that Dale Cannon deals with more extensively in his paper, Meek’s attitude to non-Christian ways of knowing God. As indicated earlier, I think *Longing to Know* articulates, in faithfulness to Michael Polanyi, an epistemology that makes sense of knowing in religion, as in other areas of life. In this sense, her book is *inclusive*, showing how we can be confident in all sorts of acts of knowing, from auto mechanics to God. At the same time, however, she accepts the Bible telling her “that this Jesus is the only way to God, and that the only way to know Jesus is through God’s telling us about him in the Bible...What the Bible tells me makes sense of my experience that Christianity alone is different from all other futile efforts to reach God” (87). In other words, her book is *exclusivistic*, in showing that only Christian knowings are finally true and complete.

In some passages, Meek draws a very close relationship between all knowing and God, such that one concludes that for her, God is the final goal of knowing, the horizon that infuses all our knowing with meaning and future significance: “You and I both, in our words and resoundingly in our action, make statements about

God. All humans worship...something. [ellipses in the original] ...In fact, I'd like to suggest, worship is the epistemic act of making sense of the whole of our lives" (73). The structure of human knowing, which she has carefully examined and (she implies) is universal in humanity, is not dependent on cultural contexts for its essential truth, and gives her hope and confidence — it liberates her from the strait-jacket of modernist philosophy. It also leads to a recognition of a divine horizon that is the most comprehensive integration of the clues that life gives us. And yet, she abandons this structure when she turns to God, and uses scripture as her basic authority instead. We do not, at this point, understand the final stage of human knowing by examining the embodied minds of sense-making individuals, but by reading scripture in a straightforward, pre-critical way. What justifies this change?

The result of this particular scripturally-mediated epistemology is religious exclusivism: "Jesus is the only way to God." There is no effort to consider other ways of reading scripture – not just other contemporary approaches, but other ways that we find in the history of the Christian Church. The left-wing of the Reformation, for example – the Anabaptists, Mennonites, and others – became convinced that the Bible was not the 'Word of God,' but the Christ who lives in the hearts of believers is "the Word of God." This frees scriptural passages like "I am the way, the truth, and the life" from their narrow textual locus, so that the Christ who "desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (I Tim. 2.4) is the Christ who Christians worship. This allows, of course, for a very different attitude toward peoples of other faiths — all of whom, according to the doctrine of creation, are children of the one God. Thus I think Meek owes readers an account of how a general description of knowledge ends by suddenly becoming a particularistic defense of one religion.

A final tribute. The questions I have raised should not obscure the very real delight I have had in reading this book. I will continue to use it and recommend it because of the soundness of its exposition of a Polanyian perspective on knowing; because of its almost perfect pedagogical pitch; and because of its passionate commitment to a confident Christian faith. Thank you, Esther; we all should do so well. Read her book!

Endnotes

¹ Richard Gelwick, *The Way of Discovery: An Introduction to the Thought of Michael Polanyi* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1977).

² "Longing to Know If Our Knowing Really Is Knowing," by Dale Cannon. Posted on the website of The Polanyi Society at <http://www.mwsc.edu/orgs/polanyi/>.

³ "...I want this book not to read like a textbook, but rather like a personal meditation." (p. 9)

⁴ Problems for a reader are the book's lack of an Index, and the lack of notations in the text for the "Notes" Meek gives at the end of the book. It also would help, perhaps, if the book gave a few more references to Polanyi's work, for though she depends on the features of his philosophy of personal knowledge throughout the book, she only refers to his writings in the first entry under "Notes." A reader unacquainted with Polanyi would find it difficult to follow up her discussions in his work.

⁵ James C. Livingston, *Modern Christian Thought*, vol. 1: *The Enlightenment and the Nineteenth Century*, 2nd ed., (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1997), pp. 8-9.

⁶ *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, trans. N.K. Sandars, rev. ed. (NY: Penguin, 1972), pp. 64-65.

⁷ Genesis 2-3, in *TANAKH: A New Translation of The Holy Scriptures According to the Traditional*

Hebrew Text (NY: Jewish Publication Society, 1985).

⁸ Sophocles, *The Oedipus Cycle: An English Version*, trans. by Dudley Fitts and Robert Fitzgerald (NY: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1977), p. 63.

⁹ From a PBS broadcast on Oppenheimer's life, on the explosion of the bomb: "Recalling the scene, Oppenheimer said: "A few people laughed, a few people cried, most people were silent. There floated through my mind a line from the "Bhagavad-Gita" in which Krishna is trying to persuade the Prince that he should do his duty: "I am become death: the destroyer of worlds."" Quoted on <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/bomb/peopleevents/pandeAMEX65.html>

¹⁰ In *Personal Knowledge* (University of Chicago Press, 1958), Polanyi gives a subtle and telling analysis of Marxism's combination of moral passion with 'scientific objectivity,' but it is only this combination which concerns him (pp. 227-235). The problem of knowledge itself as a possible source of a certain kind of tragedy, or corruption, is not seen. I have a clear memory of Bill Poteat, in a seminar on Polanyi, describing Polanyi's lack of a sense of the tragic. Poteat saw this as an element of Enlightenment optimism in Polanyi, due to his thoroughly scientific training.

¹¹ A Catholic theologian, John Haught, also writes: "Rational arguments diminish the mystery of God, seeking to bring it under the control of the limited human mind." *God After Darwin: A Theology of Evolution* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000), p. 34.

¹² See Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), and J. A. Sanders, *Torah and Canon* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972).

¹³ Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, p. 324.

¹⁴ Critics of revealed or innate morality – I'm thinking here of sociobiologists, for example – would reply that our "sense of outrage at things not the way they are supposed to be" (151) is simply the result of our having been raised to think in terms of right and wrong. Cultural anthropologists – Jared Diamond, for example – might also point to the fact that his New Guinean field work subjects do not feel **moral** outrage at the things we do. Thus the attempt to prove God on the basis of a moral sense runs into the same problems that traditional arguments for the existence of God do: the arguments are constructed in a system of rationality which will not allow admittance to the very features that Meek wants to emphasize (embodiment, relationality, unspecifiability, etc.). See, for example, David Sloan Wilson, *Darwin's Cathedral: Evolution, Religion, and the Nature of Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

***Longing to Know* and the Complexities of Knowing God**

Esther L. Meek

ABSTRACT Key Words: *Longing to Know*, Polanyi, Scripture, the authority of Scripture, the modern higher critical tradition, religious exclusivism, principled pluralism, knowing, epistemology.

This response to papers on my 2003 book, Longing to Know, presented at the Polanyi Society's November 2004 meetings, addresses two primary concerns about the book's argument: first, that the book's argument depends on an inappropriately unquestioned commitment to the authority of Scripture that falls short of the adjustment required by modern higher critical biblical scholarship; and second, that the book's argument implies a religious exclusivism that overlooks the fact that the model of knowing it defends suits competing religious positions equally well. I argue that LTK's strategy is more sophisticated than has been represented, and that the commitment to Scripture as an authoritative guide in knowing God, as over against the commitment to modern higher critical scholarship, may be reasonably justified as a consistent elucidation of the Polyanian model of knowing. I argue that, indeed, the Polyanian model of knowing may be applied to or by competing religious claims, where the claim that we must treat all such claims as having equal validity must itself be treated as a religious claim. In fact, Polanyi's argument about competing scientific claims makes more sense of how we may (yea, must) maintain the rightness of our own position while acknowledging respectfully the disagreements of others.

I am delighted to have this opportunity to profit from the response of my Polanyi Society compatriots, people whom I class both as friends and authoritative guides, to my work in *Longing to Know: The Philosophy of Knowledge for Ordinary People*.¹ Dale Cannon from the beginning has seemed to understand my vision and aid it with characteristic gracious resourcefulness. And I am happy now to invite David Rutledge and the rest of you more deeply into the conversation. My hope is that together we may move our Polyanian approach forward to farther ranges of application and value, and that our discussion at this juncture will be part of that.

While many helpful issues have been raised by Cannon and Rutledge, I have chosen to focus on what I believe to be the respondents' primary concerns regarding *LTK*. These are, first, the role that the author's implicit commitment to the authority of Scripture plays in *LTK*'s main argument, and second, the implications of the *LTK* argument for the author's religious exclusivism. To this I append a few shorter comments. In light of the professional orientation of this group, not to mention a proper sense of the limits of my own expertise, I will attempt in my answers to keep close to a Polyanian and philosophical analysis.

But first, I want to tell you a little of what has developed since the book's publication, in order to invite your good counsel about next steps I might take.

A Call for Conviviality Regarding the Future of LTK

Cultural healing. Since the publication of *LTK*, I have grown in conviction concerning the value of these proposals concerning how knowing works for aiding people in the Western tradition who are often "blinded" by a default misimpression concerning knowledge that keeps them from cashing in on their own

human inclinations and best insights when it comes to knowing. I think this affects every domain of life that involves knowing—which is of course every domain. After all, I reason, I got into philosophy because I believed that its influence on all of us is pervasive. So it stands to reason that something like a faulty vision of knowing would have a pervasive and unfortunate effect; and it stands to reason that people in all their avenues of knowing/living need epistemology therapy; and that therefore such an offered corrective holds the prospect for even something so grand as cultural healing. I do not mean to be presumptuous. But I, with most of you, believe with passion in the value of what Polanyi was doing.

What I have found most delightful has been the evolving challenge to try these proposals out on every skill group I can get my hands on. My belief is that if you—artist, counselor, teacher, engineer, business person—will give me an hour to sketch my proposals and to tell me about your line of work, I can start to help you do what you do better and with greater delight. Case in point: David Finnamore, a recording engineer in Nashville, became enthralled with *LTK*, to the point of blogging his proliferating *LTK* insights.² He writes that as a result of *LTK* he does his job better, faster, and has more fun. Or another, a professor of psychiatry at Loma Linda University, Dr. William Roth, wrote that *LTK* offered the best description of the psychotherapeutic act that he has found in 35 years of reading psychological literature.³ Or dermatological surgeon and artist Dr. David Clark, currently on leave from University of Missouri Columbia to pursue his interest in painting, who testifies that *LTK* explains better than anything else what he does when he teaches surgery, and helps him connect it with his art.⁴ Jere Moorman, on reading *LTK*, found that it revived his excitement for the prospect of applying Polanyian insights to the business industry; under his guidance I actually debuted a pilot business seminar called *Epistemology for the Workplace*, with 50 people in attendance. I have yet to pursue this exciting avenue further, but I do have a request to teach an Epistemology in Business course this summer. I have the growing rudiments of a series I am calling “*LTK* and...” which I hope I may profitably develop at some future point. Any Polanyian knows and delights in the wide applicability of the Polanyian model; what I hope you may help me with is further connections and applications, so that together we may extend the healing cultural impact of this vision of knowing.

Next books. I also am interested in your guidance concerning next stages beyond *LTK* for me as an author, and for this message. One thing that makes *LTK* such an odd book is the number of things I combine in it: exegesis of the Polanyian epistemic model, attempt to engage ordinary people in philosophy, and work in what is called preevangelism.⁵ I can imagine that you like I sometimes wish that these could be broken apart. If they were, what would be the next step, developing which aspect, how would it be packaged, and to target what audience? I covet your guidance in answering these questions.

One such book would be a sort of Polanyi-meets-the-road book. It would feature my lived explication of the Polanyian model sans the explicit and thematic application of the model to the question of knowing God. I wonder how to package such a book to make it a powerful resource for philosophy and people in many different disciplines. I welcome your guidance in this.

One next step I have in mind I want to call *Covenant Epistemology*. In it I wish to make the case for taking the interpersonal relationship, intrinsically covenant-shaped as it is, as paradigmatic for all knowing. This would be to develop my Chapter 22 in *LTK*: “The Ethics of Knowing.” Obviously I mean it to be compatible with the biblical theological claim that all that exists does so in covenant relationship with a personal and interpersonal God, but again, I want to make the case that we will unleash our effectiveness in all instances of knowing if we craft each more along the lines of interpersonal relationship. I want to move toward claiming that

interpersonal knowing is actually life giving and healing, in addition to being the way that we may more responsibly approximate an accurate understanding of the known. If *LTK* shows that knowing God is like knowing your auto mechanic, *Covenant Epistemology* hopes to show that knowing your auto mechanic is like knowing God.

I value your insight on these matters. I do sincerely want to further Polanyi's popularity and the interests and appeal of this Society along the way. My respondents concur in affirming what I do with Polanyi, which makes me very happy. Now let's think together about where to go from here.

The Problem of Commitment to the Authority of Scripture

Cannon's concern. Dale Cannon construes *LTK's* primary purpose as showing "how it is possible to claim with reasoned confidence that one can know God" (p. 7). In light of this construal Cannon argues that "the assumption of the authority of Scripture as the principal reliable means of access to knowledge of God is the kingpin on which Meek's central argument for how we can know God hangs" (p. 11). Cannon notes that I devote practically no attention to the relative merits of this claim, to the "serious counterarguments [that] have been or might be made" (p. 8) in response to what he terms my "taken for granted assumptions" (p. 7), and to "the enormous body of modern critical biblical scholarship that is widely presumed to have undermined confidence in the divine authority of Scripture" (p. 11). He indicates that commitment to the authority of Scripture is "specially vulnerable to the critical challenge." (p. 8). Thus, Cannon believes, the strength of the *LTK* is only that of its kingpin premise, which is a weakly supported premise. He also notes that this oversight prevents persons who take modern critical biblical scholarship seriously from profiting from the book.

Cannon further suggests that *LTK*, though displaying "apparent mastery of the self-absenting ironies of the modern critical intellectual ethos" [I do not feel confident that I know what he means by self-absenting ironies], has perhaps not "really fully confronted and fully realized the disturbing and disconcerting impact of the modern critiques of faith," (pp. 9-10) and thus perhaps is not fully post-critical but rather is still "in fundamental respects still pre-critical" (p. 10). If this is true of *LTK*, he argues, then *LTK* is not true to Polanyi's own post-critical vision.

I feel it important to address two things at the outset in response to assumptions I sense lie behind my respondents' comments. First: the understanding of Scripture as God's authoritative self-revelation that I wished to exemplify I took to be, not distinctively evangelical, but rather the historic position of the church. Second: I also took Scripture to have a fundamental underlying coherence. This means that some of the problems I sense that my respondents' have with *LTK's* use of Scripture are not problems we share. I believe that one's stance on the integrity of the biblical text is shaped by the philosophical commitments of the sort I allude to in this response, so perhaps what I do say here may help a little with what I don't.

LTK's agenda is more specific. To begin with, I believe Cannon's construal of *LTK's* purpose fails to represent the more sophisticated and specific approach of the book. In light of its actual purpose, my implicit commitment to Scripture as an authoritative guide, while it is indeed something that I mean to model and recommend, does not play the kingpin role in *LTK's* primary argument that Cannon attributes to it.

LTK's targeted audience. First, *LTK* explicitly targets people who are interested in believing what

Scripture has to say concerning God but who are prevented, as I was, by a certain set of epistemological issues that I now can help resolve utilizing Polanyi's insights. Thus I do address people most like me, and cherish the perhaps fragile hope or thoughtless arrogance to believe that in "doing me" well, I can also help others. My concern in this book from the outset is explicitly not concerns regarding textual criticism, biblical hermeneutics, the case for the veracity of Scripture, or even the merits of it as an authoritative divine self-revelation per se, but only as these profit from a liberating Polanyian reconstrual of knowing.

I chose also to target a younger audience. I have many former students now serving on college and university campuses, talking daily with 20-somethings. My former students report that the burning questions are epistemological. But these take the form of: Whom can I trust? Will you be there for me? and How may I live authentically? For these younger people, some of the questions that concerned me at their age don't concern them. Into this category, I venture to suggest, falls the need to address the questions associated with the modern critical tradition.⁶

LTK's approach. Had the book been a professional philosophical paper, it would have properly "fenced the thesis," as I call it: I would have named explicitly those perhaps even intimately related domains and applications which I take to fall outside this work's thesis. In light of my effort both to write popularly and also to offer a philosophically reputable work, I agree that in another edition I would do well to offer this sort of qualification, along with suggestions of possible lines of response and avenues for further study. But *LTK* is one aid in the journey of coming to know; it naturally leads to further questions that fall outside the domain of the book, questions that readers will have thereby been awakened and liberated to pursue. People with live questions about the relative merits of the findings of modern higher criticism with respect to Scripture need to move beyond *LTK* to study with the experts in that field, both the ones in the modern higher critical tradition, as well as the work of "anti-intellectual, close-minded" evangelical scholars.⁷ Careful further work concerning the veracity of Scripture will have to include also the philosophically sophisticated work of numerous evangelicals in both biblical studies and philosophy.

LTK's purpose. *LTK*, then, is first of all concerned to remove a specific epistemological barrier that unnecessarily prevents people from further considering Christianity. The barrier is a "default mode," a metaepistemology, among ordinary Westerners, that sees knowledge as "statements and proofs" from which knowledge of God is excluded. This metaepistemology has divorced not only faith from reason, and science from faith, but science from art, mind from body, knowing from doing, knowing from both knower and known. We in the Western tradition suffer an angst directly stemming from these disconnects, and appropriately painful, as well as prohibitive not just for considering Christianity but for effective knowing of every kind.

My purpose therefore was to address this epistemological barrier with my Polanyi-informed epistemic proposals. For me this doubled as a specific kind of preevangelism, rising to the challenge thrown down to the Christian church in the West by the late missiologist Lesslie Newbigin. Newbigin argued that people in the West were not able even to hear the message of the good news of Jesus Christ unless first their ears were unstopped through a radical epistemic preevangelism. Here in his own work Newbigin appropriated Polanyi's critique of doubt (with additional and explicit application to the hidden modernist assumptions underlying higher critical biblical scholarship, by the way), Polanyi's epistemic proposals, and his realism.⁸ But the point is that *LTK's* goal is preevangelism, not evangelism: with the success of this epistemological and also minimal (in the philosophical sense) effort, the deed in view is done. So the primary argument and mission in *LTK* is preliminary, and it is philosophical.

The structure of LTK's argument. In my primary argument for a Polanyian understanding of knowing as superior to and dismissive of the prevailing Western default mode, I appeal repeatedly and by copious examples to everybody's epistemic experience in every area of life. My respondents seem to agree that this has been effectively managed.

To this argument *LTK* appends the persistent personal application of the model to knowing Jeff the auto mechanic and to knowing God. With regard to both, and in contrast to my elucidation of the model itself, the author consistently speaks in the first-person. This is important to note. Concerning both Jeff and God, I am offering a description of the relevant features of my own epistemic acts to make the simple point that they conform to the *LTK* model of knowing. This I take to be profoundly consistent with my preliminary and philosophical agenda. In applying the *LTK* model to knowing God, I illustrate its application in my life. I describe the way I rely on Scripture as an authoritative guide in the act of coming to know God. I employ the illustration of how I use Scripture as a guide as much to confirm the *LTK* model as to employ the model to elucidate the lived experience of knowing God.

The role of examples of personal use of Scripture as an authoritative guide. Cannon generates a list of quotes from *LTK* in description of my "taken-for-granted assumptions" (p. 7). Virtually every quote he has lifted from a context in which each was deeply embedded both in a personal application and with thoughtful intentionality compared to a key epistemic element of the *LTK* model. I believe Cannon would acknowledge that in context each appeal to this Scriptural authoritative guide is as situated and embodied and for this reason epistemically legitimate and thoughtful as my trusting my car to Jeff. But the disembodied list can't help but suggest that the author exhibits an irresponsible devotion to this out-of-vogue authority. And it also suggests a less philosophically sophisticated, and more carelessly managed argument for knowing God than I believe is to be found in *LTK*.

Some of my rationale for this approach to Scripture in LTK. But now, *why* do I employ this first-person description of my use of Scripture, as opposed to a formal defense? First of all, it is to make the case of the similarity to my trust in my auto mechanic, or in any other ordinary acts of knowing in which we always encounter, at some level, implicit trust in some authoritative guide. On the one hand, people often feel that relying on a book to tell you about an intangible God is defective and suspect epistemologically, falling outside the default ideal of knowledge as authority-free, adequately supported, empirically based statements. In this respect I wanted to *raise* the perception of Scripture to the level of "ordinary."

In another respect, I wanted to *lower* the perception of Scripture to the level of "ordinary." I hoped to address, in the alignment of trusting Scripture as an authoritative guide with my reliance on testimony in other cases, the sometimes extreme skepticism which assumes the Bible is speaking only "mythologically" or "theologically" (i.e., not truly or historically) until proven otherwise. This skeptical approach does not comport with the vast span of ordinary acts of knowing. In most of our ordinary affairs, we trust guides implicitly with nowhere near the scrutiny and suspicion that many people feel obligated to maintain uniquely and inequitably regarding Scripture. To be sure, when one is considering embracing Christianity, the stakes are much higher, the risks and rewards are out of this world. Scripture itself indicates that the centrality of the human heart, bent as it now is toward rebellion against God, inclines us to find ways to avoid submission to God. But my epistemological point remains: knowing God is an instance of ordinary human knowing.

Secondly, I did so to show how we do indeed employ and have to employ the matrix of authoritative guides *from inside the matrix*.⁹ However we may have responsibly or irresponsibly arrived at our reliance on such authority, however risky may have been our decision to trust it, in order to utilize that authority we have to trust ourselves to it wholeheartedly. I think the modern era's philosophical suggestion that we are true to our epistemic obligations if we rely on our claims only in measure proportional to the strength of our evidential support for them is, from an ordinary life point of view, naïve. How my husband could have followed this with respect to his prostate surgery I have no idea. How do you have a 50% prostate cancer surgery? Life is full of situations in which you cannot hedge your bets.

Thirdly, within a coherent Scriptural vision, consistency requires making epistemological sense of-and obeying even you can't make epistemological sense of-Scripture's claim concerning its own authority. God and not I, Scripture and not I, says and has the right to say that God sets the standard, that Scripture testifies to and has the authority to testify to its own authority.

Fourthly, these last assertions, viewed from the outside, can't be expected to make the sense that they do only from the inside. Following Polanyi, I think we could helpfully delineate a focal and a subsidiary approach to the authority or veracity of Scripture or any other authoritative guide. The whole point of the Polanyian approach is to call attention to and entitle us to the subsidiary inside approach, and to show why the focal one doesn't fit aptly with human experience, except in the temporary mode of destructive analysis. I was seeking to do justice to and model this Polanyian approach in *LTK*.

Fifth, the Polanyian understanding of knowing as the lived trajectory of wholehearted, risky, unqualified confidence in God's promise actually opens the Bible-reader's eyes to note things the Bible indicates about knowing God, to which the prevailing epistemic model has blinded us. To give you just one example: I finally feel I appreciate how the gift of eternal life with God is in any way proportionate to my belief. I'm not talking about my meriting eternal life; I'm talking about finally seeing why it isn't so ludicrous that "just believing" is something God would want to honor. For the act of believing is the risky, responsible orientation and integrative struggle of our whole lives toward the partially hidden focus of Scripture's God, the sketchy pattern we then submit to as a token of reality. Fruitful resonances such as this, when we juxtapose the Polanyian model alongside the Scriptural text, confirm the Polanyian model.

LTK's apparent blindness to the implications of modern biblical scholarship. This leads me to consider Cannon's further comments about modern critical biblical scholarship being widely presumed to have undermined confidence in the divine authority of Scripture, and his concern that *LTK* may after all be pre- rather than post-critical. Cannon asks: "Has [*LTK*] really faced the problematic juggernaut of the modern critical tradition?" He describes Polanyi's post-critical initiative as "one that does not attempt to revert to a reaffirmation of some pre-modern faith perspective, nor one that would circumvent the baptism of fire that is the heart of the modern critical 'tradition.' Rather, a post-critical philosophy, as I understand what Polanyi meant, is one that has passed through the searing critiques of modernity, continues to affirm what genuine insights there are in those critiques (those of Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud among them) and yet reaffirms, *with a chastened faith*, and draws upon the original wellsprings of one's intellectual passions" (p. 10).

Cannon and the critical tradition in biblical scholarship. I confess I am mystified by Cannon's reverence for the modern critical tradition in biblical scholarship while at the same time apparently applauding Polanyi's devastating critique of the modern critical tradition. In his very next paragraph, while raising a

question about my fixating on what I call the ideal of certainty (a case of literary metonymy, I may say—nothing more), Cannon says, “According to Polanyi’s own analysis, as I understand it, what makes the modern critical tradition *critical* is not its quixotic pursuit of certainty but its adherence to an attitude of critical suspicion and methodological doubt as the guarantor of respectable claims to knowledge...an *a priori bias* to critically call into question and force any candidate for belief to provide convincing impersonal justification that will defeat and overcome the methodological bias of critical doubt.” He implies rightly that Polanyi saw the need to challenge, and successfully challenged the hidden, controlling, constrictive presumptions of the modern critical tradition. If so, how was the author of *LTK* or anyone else to imagine that this success of Polanyi’s did not pertain to the modern critical tradition in its application to biblical studies? The burden of proof lies with showing why biblical scholarship or, indeed, all things religious, should be excepted from the blessings of the Polanyian critique.

Is LTK pre-critical? Regarding the question of *LTK* being post- and pre-critical: Would we not agree that the Polanyian effort “toward a post-critical epistemology” consists in this challenge of the fundamental philosophical presumptions in the context of which alone the apparently devastating critical scholarly products of the Enlightenment survive? If so, how is it appropriate to cast Polanyi own work as “emerging from the searing critiques of modernity with a chastened faith”? Why “chastened”? Why not rather “restored”? And if restored, why do we have to see them as searing critiques which we pass through in order to be responsible scholars?

As far as being pre- or post-critical, then: I have been suggesting, first, that Cannon must himself choose whether he wants to be critical or Polanyian with respect to biblical scholarship. Second, I deny that Polanyi’s post-critical stance in general has any of the chastened or seared about it with respect to the prevailing epistemological paradigm. “Chastened” and “seared” are of course pictorial. Cannon’s use of them leaves it to me to express their concrete meaning. In the context of his work I believe they indicate having conceded the legitimacy of the enlightenment rationalist assumptions that have exercised such a stranglehold on our knowing in every domain.¹⁰ If so, Polanyi does the exact opposite of acting chastened.¹¹ A postmodern position might deservedly be called chastened, but not a postcritical one in the Polanyian sense. In fact, Polanyi seems to fit Cannon’s description of “reverting to a reaffirmation of some pre-modern faith perspective” in calling us to Augustine’s *Credo ut intelligam*, and is in this respect pre-critical himself. None of us Polanyians take his approach as anything other than liberating restoration to ourselves and to the world.¹²

Compare the approach of reformed epistemology. Indeed we may note the affinities of the Polanyian approach to that of those philosophers of Dutch Reformed tradition who with their continual, “Why suppose that we must...?” questioned the unquestioned tenability of a modernist metaepistemology, and in so doing inaugurated not only reformed epistemology and reaccredited religious belief with rationality, but freed the entire epistemological enterprise to fresh pursuits.¹³

On the assumption that reformed epistemology has shown persuasively that you and I are within our epistemic rights and thus rational in believing in God, my colleague Robert Frazier argues, we may also be seen to be rational in believing that such a God might reveal himself in word and deed, as humans do, and do so in such a way as to ensure that his hearers understand him correctly, as humans do as well. In fact, when we look at what Scripture says about itself and about its status as God’s self-revelation, this is just what we find described and enjoined for our belief.¹⁴ If there is rational room for a straightforward coherent understanding of the text, why should our stance regarding it be guilty in the absence of rigorous proof, rather than innocent until proven guilty?

While my professional training and expertise in regard to modern higher critical biblical scholarship is indeed minimal, I do have a graphic recollection of a visit to Covenant Seminary of German biblical scholar Eta Linnemann, whose early work as a Bultmannian critic, my colleagues reported, had contributed to critical consensus with respect to Scripture.¹⁵ Now in this later period of her life, she was lecturing in the States to retract her earlier claims. A small, rotund woman with the look of a *Hausfrau*, she stood on a stool in order to see over the podium, and read her lecture in halting English. At one point, memorably, she took her Bible and put it over her head, and her wrinkled face broke with the widest of grins.¹⁶ Even from within the complex hermeneutical matrix one may, indeed one must, choose one anchor of normativity over another.

LTK and the Problem of Religious Pluralism

Is LTK inclusivist or exclusivist? I turn now to consider the second main criticism of *LTK*. Cannon questions whether my epistemic proposals in their application to knowing God allow for the possibility that they might be comprehensively wrong or wrong in significant respects, the kind of error that can arise, as with Polanyi's Azande example, from self-reinforcing systems of belief (*PK* 294). He rightly notes that *LTK* offers little insight concerning how to approach dealing with "the thorny problem of religious pluralism, the problem of the apparent conflict between competing religious claims" (p. 15). What is more, he believes that someone in another faith tradition such as Buddhism or Wicca could mount an exactly parallel argument for knowing the god in their tradition (p. 16). Do not other faith traditions have as much of a claim to know as I defend on behalf of Christians? And how might I say yes to this without this "necessarily entailing the contradiction that Meek believes it must [I 'm not sure of the referent of this contradiction--]?(p. 17). And if I maintain an exclusivist position, how may I do so without giving offense, and without undervaluing the tremendous resources and insights to be had in other religions? (p. 17).

LTK describes all acts of knowing, including defective ones. Although I did not feel it was germane to *LTK*'s targeted purpose and audience to discuss religious pluralism in depth, in fact I do agree that the *LTK* model identifies features common to all acts of human knowing. I have persisted in talking about acts of knowing rather than about knowledge precisely because every act of knowing seems to get part of it right and part of it wrong. If the act has the Polanyian features, I think it is appropriate to term it an act of knowing, even if it is partially mistaken. (Thus, Nash's delusions in *A Beautiful Mind* count as defective acts of knowing.) This means that I take people engaged in other religions as thereby engaged in acts of knowing. I concur with Polanyi's statement, quoted by Cannon, that "the attribution of truth to any particular stable alternative is a fiduciary act which cannot be analyzed in non-committal terms...[T]here exists no principle of doubt the operation of which will discover for us which of two systems of implicit beliefs is true—except in the sense that we will admit decisive evidence against the one we do not believe to be true, and not against the other." (p. 15; *PK*, 294).

The fiduciary nature of principled pluralism. We must realize that in this discussion, however, we speak of not *two* but *three* conflicting sorts of religious positions, stable alternatives that cannot be analyzed in non-committal terms but which highlight the fiduciary nature of all attributions of truth, not just in religious matters. The alternatives are that Position A is correct and Position B is mistaken; that Position B is correct and Position A is mistaken; the third is the position that the rectitude of one position over another is undecidable and that therefore both A and B are equally valid.

I would call this third position *principled pluralism*. I am not sure whether Cannon means to espouse it or not. I do not believe that principled pluralism is uniquely or substantively entailed by the Polanyian approach. Although it carries about itself an air of neutrality and fairness, principled pluralism also could be systematically in error, can be tenaciously held, and when it comes to attribution of truth is in fact not analyzable in non-committal terms. But Polanyi's positive and repeated and post-critical (and pre-critical; also biblical) claim is that the holding of the truth of a position is a fiduciary act. He doesn't say that it can't be decided. He says it can't be decided noncommittally.

The risky responsibility of the epistemic act. One of Polanyi's foremost post-critical (and pre-critical; also biblical) claims is the profound role that human responsibility and risk play in all acts of knowing. Attempts to hide from ourselves the reality of our responsibility as a factor in our knowing are both ignoble and delusional. Yet, Polanyi believes, more often than not in the Western epistemological tradition an ideal of total "objectivity" and personal uninvolvement is something we have sought, perhaps in a continued effort to get ourselves as knowers off this uncomfortable hook.

The *LTK* model implies that both an Azande witch doctor, a Bible-believer, and a principled religious pluralist are engaged in acts of knowing. But having acknowledged the fiduciary nature of attributions of truth, let us not now pretend to avoid the fiduciary act, and let us go about our faithful holding of truth claims with humility and respect. In Cannon's language, all of us have an equally legitimate claim to know, in the sense of being personally responsible for these fundamentally fiduciary acts. But in the spirit of Polanyi, may we not shrink from the "Here I stand: I cannot do otherwise" of the fiduciary act in religion even as we would not in scientific discovery.

In scientific discovery, Polanyi makes the case that people holding conflicting positions can be expected to defend their positions in the heat of intellectual, persuasive passion. This is just a description of what happens, and what we may expect to happen, and for Polanyi points to the fundamentally fiduciary character of scientific claims. I do not see him anywhere say that in the name of sympathy and tolerance a scientist must surrender his/her passionate claim with universal intent unless it is a position of principled pluralism. If this would be out of court in science, why must we suppose it to be different in religion? Why indeed? The burden of proof lies with those who must account for this proposed inequity.

Scripture confirms de facto pluralism, not principled pluralism. I may thus describe the *LTK* model as implying that people in all religious and philosophical and worldview positions are involved in acts of knowing. What is more, the Bible indicates that this plurality of religions is exactly what I may expect to find. I learned from Calvin to see that humans are incurably religious and that one may expect to find an array of mutually conflicting religious positions.¹⁷

If, as Dale suggests, a person of another religion successfully applied the Polanyian model to his/her own act of knowing¹⁸, would this not weaken my case for the value of its application to knowing the God of the Bible? Would it require that I, to be consistent, adopt a principled pluralism with respect to other faith commitments? I think not. But if not, why does the aura of impropriety linger above religious exclusivism?

A Polanyian account of exclusivism's aura of impropriety. I believe we may account for it, once again, utilizing Polanyi's distinction between focal and subsidiary. We may embody a committed position of any sort, including religious, or we may climb outside of it and engage in focal scrutiny of it. But the animal looked at

from the outside ain't the same animal lived from the inside. There's a reason why the temporary status of destructive analysis feels uncomfortable and even contradictory. First, we are scrutinizing focally what is meant to be lived from inside. Second, by inference from earlier paragraphs here, if we truly think that this outside analysis is assumption-free, we are not being honest with ourselves. On the other hand, to embody subsidiarily a risky commitment to the truth of one's claim can feel uncomfortable, perhaps because we in the Western tradition have for so long attempted to deny the risky epistemic responsibility that powers all our claims to know.

I embody the words of Scripture in my longing to know God. Scripture says Jesus alone is Lord. From the inside, how could I imagine calling a being God who was not Lord, who did not call the shots both epistemically and salvifically? It would make no sense to deny to him such authority, especially when he claims it. I do not need to appeal only to Jesus' claims about himself, or that of the members of the early Church. I simply note the first of the Ten Commandments: *No other gods*.

Mission and witness. But also, from the inside, I believe I know God's heart. Scripture says also that he chose me sovereignly and unconditionally, and that if he hadn't, I would be lost. His exclusivity liberates and transforms me. From within the rich matrix of my fiduciary act, I may identify and participate in his mission. His mission is so much more than sympathy expressed in efforts to find common ground between conflicting religious systems, but Christ-like, proactive, unconditional love, that might include answering, not the abstract questions spawned by a non-existent neutral ground, but the live, authentic, and desperately heartfelt questions to which only a lived and passionate response may be seen to be fitting.¹⁹ I am called to witness. "Mission" and "witness" are words that only make sense within and out of the lived trajectory of a fiduciary act.

I firmly believe that it is far more respectful to a person of another faith tradition to acknowledge that he or she believes as he or she does because he or she thinks it is true, and that he or she believes that what I believe is false. I have a problem with the disrespect of trying to tell someone that what they believe is only privately true or as equally "valid" as my own position.

Diamond mining. I also learned from Calvin (and many others in the Calvinian tradition) that the Lordship of Christ even in this broken between-time before all things are restored, means that I can expect to find truth (inevitably tangled up with error) everywhere, because not one inch of the world falls outside his domain.²⁰ This doctrine of "common grace" fuels confidence and delight, not to mention respect and care, in my work in comparative philosophy, as it would for studies in comparative religion. Surrendering this fiduciary biblical commitment would make me worse at showing respect for people who differ from me, not better. It requires humility of me. So does the radical contingency of my own insight: according to Scripture—apart from God's opening anyone's eyes, human rebellious disobedience to him completely prevents us from knowing him—something I hardly mention in *LTK*.²¹

I'm sorry. For all that, I concur that disrespect for persons of other traditions seems grievously to accompany religious exclusivism. I also freely admit both my own failure to represent another's position accurately, as noted by Cannon, and my need to learn from him and others how to improve this. I also admit the bent in my heart that prompts the evil intending of such a misrepresentation (which would be more than a principled pluralist might concede concerning religious exclusivism, oddly enough.) However, I believe all mark-missing of this sort, apart from the telltale oddness of "outside" and "inside" stances, has nothing inherently to do with religious exclusivism, and more to do with selfishness and bad manners, and with the inability to distinguish between disagreement and disrespect.

In summary then: to deny the equally fundamentally fiduciary nature of a principled pluralism is both mistaken and contrary to Polanyi's best lights; to deny or withhold commitment because of the fundamentally fiduciary nature of a religious exclusivism such as is consistent with the reading of the biblical text as a coherent canonical whole is epistemically unwarranted, naïve, and contrary to Polanyi's best lights. Better to bear the reproach of a milieu in which such a commitment is unpopular and often ridiculed, than to believe it philosophically reputable, religiously acceptable, or, in the end, culturally healing, to attempt to do otherwise.

Fiduciary realism. But as a final word: The author of *LTK* has come to be noted for elucidating and championing Polanyi's realism. It is possible so to focus on the fiduciary aspect of all epistemic acts that we lose sight of their realist intent. A Polanyian realignment of our sights, I believe, shifts the fiduciary to subsidiary status, where we experience it as the situated, embodied, lived, risky, passionate, trajectory toward the focal, partially hidden, partially disclosed, ever beckoning objective reality. That we are not in fact deluding ourselves in this is confirmed by key indicators of our successful contact with reality: we experience a wide range of indeterminate future manifestations (just had to get that in here somewhere!). If Polanyi's realist contribution is to use such tantalizing phrases to describe the work of science, perhaps mine may be considered the none-too-creative noting of the aptness of this description for the act of coming to know the objectively real God described in Scripture.

The Tragedy of Knowing

David Rutledge asks me to elaborate concerning the tragedy of knowing and the relationship between knowledge in evil. He argues that the Enlightenment was optimistic about knowledge, but that there is a minor chord recurring in human history: knowledge involves losing innocence and leads to tragic consequences. He wonders, I believe, whether *LTK* does enough justice to this tragedy. He also thinks Polanyi doesn't do enough justice to it either.

To begin with, I think that knowing is a good thing. It is our nature. It's what we were made to do, and we were made to find joy in doing it. I do not apologize for the exuberance of *LTK*. To suggest that knowledge only comes with loss of innocence is to get the original story wrong: knowledge, the best knowledge, is had in innocence. Humans were made to know, and to know joyfully and healingly in the world. The abuse should not discredit the intended use.

It is true that I did not talk very much in *LTK* about sin or about what theologians call the noetic effects of sin. This was a conscious choice in light of my intended audience. I think Polanyi's model of knowing beautifully accounts for the normative dimension of knowing which renders human knowing so vulnerable to human rebellion.

Knowing for Polanyi is fundamentally a responsible human act of commitment. I mean that knowing is responsible in two ways. The knower is always responsible *for* the act; he or she may or may not always behave responsibly *in* the act. The moral dimension of knowing is ever present—we are always responsible for the act. In fact, I mean to say that without the moral dimension, the act would not be constituted as such, for all knowing involves a fiduciary act. Thus our responsibility or irresponsibility, our wisdom and foolishness, our expertise and our ignorance, our rebelliousness or our submission, radically shape our knowing. It can make us better or worse at knowing. Accordingly, our act of knowing will be better or worse for the object we intend to know.

We in the Western tradition have come to deceive ourselves with respect to this moral foundation of all knowing. We have separated knowing from its moral root, and exalted it to supremacy, unbesmirched (so we thought) by association with things moral. For a long time we did not see the irony of the moralism of modern philosophy's claim that knowledge is and should be *amoral*. To the extent that we recognize our mistake now, it seems to us that epistemic sins committed on such a moral amoral pretext were (and are) that much more horrible for their irony. No matter how in denial we may be of the foundational role of the moral in knowing, the foundational role of the moral in knowing remains operative.

The epistemic act as described by Michael Polanyi is viable precisely because it reincorporates personhood and responsible moral choice as driving factors in knowing.

In his discussion of knowledge and evil, I wonder whether Rutledge has confused evil knowing and knowing evil. It is possible responsibly to know evil things such as death camps and genocides. Such instances of knowing would not themselves be intrinsically evil. On the other hand, if it was irresponsibly motivated or carried out, the act of knowing would indeed be defective. whether the claim in question concerned Mother Theresa or Auschwitz.

Epistemologists, it would seem, are involved with responsibility in knowing at yet another level. To build and promote an epistemic model that authentically represents the fundamental role of morality and stewardship in knowing—that is our responsibility. May we be found faithful.

Mystical Experience and the Hiddenness of God

Cannon believes that I denigrate mystical experience. I apologize for misleading anyone concerning this. I do react to the word “mystical” to the extent that it smacks of an inappropriate epistemic bifurcation of knowledge and other modes of apprehension. The problem is not the practice; the problem is the bifurcation. Having rejected the bifurcation, the testimony of mystics is something I read avidly, expecting and being confirmed in my expectation that they sometimes have more aptly described the epistemic act than have those caught in an alien rationalism. (I see this in the work of Simone Weil, to name just one). I then expect to find similar features in even the most mundane and the most scientific efforts to know. Since Dale has done much to encourage my attention to such writers, I am anxious to clarify this point.

Routledge expresses concern that I do not do justice to God's mystery—this seems connected somehow to what Dale thought about *LTK* and mystical experience. I feel that as a result of my appropriation of the Polanyian understanding of knowing and of reality, I am more attuned to God's mystery, not less. I want to say that there is way more mystery about all ordinary acts of knowing than we have been acculturated to think. I hardly know Jeff, my auto mechanic. The integrative vector of our epistemic acts, ironically, moves us from unknowns to unknowns: It begins with clues that we can only partially name, to which we must relate in inarticulably fresh ways; it moves toward a focus that is yet undiscovered and once discovered is only partially known, ever capable of surprising us with indeterminate future manifestations. When we know God, we lay hold of the hem of his garment, and we can expect to be in for a wild ride. There is plenty of room for mystery here, precisely because he is real.

Soon after my uprooting and move to Western Pennsylvania a few months ago, I was asked to lead devotions at the faculty retreat. My colleague suggested that I do it on knowing God. My immediate reaction was to think *I don't know God*—despite having written a book about it. I was at a stage in the transition where I knew precious little—not my phone number, nor my dentist, my colleagues' names, or even which way was north. I marveled at the interconnectedness of knowledge of God and knowledge of self with which Calvin begins his *Institutes*. But I also realized that it is possible to trust someone, even to sense his presence, in an enveloping fog that obscures much of his character in addition to his plans. We may know that God is good, for example, without knowing much of what that good looks like. My text was the description of Abraham in Hebrews 11. Abraham went out, not knowing where he was going, because he considered him faithful who had promised.

The Safety of the Kitchen Table

My nurturing approach to philosophy is another aspect of my work in which Dale has personally encouraged me. It is quite true that at this age I have given up all pretense to be something other than what I am. I have found it hopeless to try, and much smarter to play to my strength. So, yes—I am a philosopher mom. But I believe we must be alert to and reject an inappropriate assumption that the nurturing safety of the kitchen table implies either mindlessness or professional timidity or philosophical naivete. Both philosophically and pedagogically, and in defense of my gender and home commitments, I object to that hidden alignment.

I am prepared to argue in this vein that we will be better at all of our knowing for the subsidiary anchor of “being at home,”—earthy, embodied, kitchen-table home—a concept of personal presence in which, by the way, I think people in Eastern religious traditions may be our guides. I have gained much from Dale's putting me in touch with Parker Palmer and others who argue for a reciprocity of persons, at once profoundly embodied and profoundly epistemic, as essential to education and knowing. I live this out with as much intentionality as I know how to because it is Polanyian, it is biblical, it is rehumanizing, it is effective, and it epistemologically superior.

For that matter, how could you possibly argue that any twentysomeone²² in these days of globalized communication is or could be protected from either modernism or postmodernism, or diverse worldviews? If my philosophical kitchen table offers a port in the storm, it is hardly in danger of being outmoded by a glutted market.

But I am happy to report that, in connection with my work I see more people going out the kitchen door into further philosophy and scholarly study and engagement of ideas than I do people coming in the door in search of a mindless safe harbor—in fact, there's nobody in this latter category. There is nobody hiding under my kitchen table. Recently I enjoyed a reunion with a student whom I taught in 2000, now a pastor in Charlotte. He said: “You ruined my life! And I'm so glad you did!”²³

Endnotes

¹ Brazos, 2003. Hereafter *LTK*.

² ltkmore.blogspot.com.

³ Personal correspondence.

⁴ Clark expressed this in my presence to a couple other M.D.s.

⁵ Preevangelism refers to issues that need to be addressed with a hearer before the good news of Jesus Christ can be communicated to that hearer. I talk about *LTK* as preevangelism a little later in this piece.

⁶ Thus, with reference to my later discussion of *LTK*'s pre- or post-critical positioning, *LTK* may be more post-critical than pre-critical or critical.

⁷ Cannon suggests this prevailing perception without disputing it. (p. 14) However, I note that there are many evangelicals who have more degrees after their name than I do. Two hundred or so of them are meeting concurrently in the Institute of Biblical Research; this past week five or six hundred of them gathered in the meetings of the Evangelical Theological Society and the Evangelical Philosophical Society. *LTK*, by the way, I am told, will have been quoted from extensively by philosophy professor and widely published author J.P. Moreland in one of ETS's plenary sessions. While he may be evangelical, and while I may not be fully sympathetic with his apologetic approach, one can hardly call Moreland anti-intellectual. Perhaps it is we who need to reconsider the relative philosophical merits of an evangelical stance.

⁸ *Proper Confidence: Faith, Doubt and Certainty in Christian Discipleship*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1995.

⁹ I have tried to flesh out our reliance on authoritative guides in "Learning to See: The Role of Authoritative Guides in Knowing," *TAD* (forthcoming).

¹⁰ Cannon also references critiques such as Nietzsche's and Freud's. On the one hand, these critiques challenge the assumptions of modern critical scholarship as Polanyi's does. On the other hand, Polanyi's approach, I believe, offers a helpful and superior alternative to these reductivist and self-undermining attempts.

¹¹ Actually, I believe that Polanyi himself set a precedent for this apparent inconsistency by exercising it himself. I believe that when he himself turns to religion he deserts his own insights; in the realm of religion, he has less of the robust confidence of restoration and more of the seared chastening about him. But in this I would maintain that this stems not from the system but from a failure to apply it consistently.

¹² In this respect, I would like to suggest that the more important term in Polanyi's title is not *post-critical* but rather *personal*.

¹³ I have in mind the work of Nicholas Wolterstorff and Alvin Plantinga, and their formative collection of essays, *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*. (Notre Dame, IN: University Press, 1983). It is important to note, as Wolterstorff does, that Dutch Calvinism offered a "postmodernism" of its own from long before the Enlightenment hegemony. As Vern Poythress, theologian at Westminster Seminary says, we have a hermeneutic of suspicion more radical than any (personal correspondence). What is more, it was commitment to Scripture that prompted scholarly superiority in epistemology. A biblically shaped viewpoint prompted the insight into the fundamentally pretheoretical and religious commitments driving the enlightenment ideal—Plantinga quotes Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck in developing his response (p. 64f) [see also Wolterstorff's recent recounting of the story in "Reformed Epistemology," in D.Z. Phillips and Timothy Tessin, eds. *Philosophy of Religion in the 21st Century*; Claremont Studies in the Philosophy of Religion (Palgrave, 2001), p. 48].

¹⁴ Informal conversation.

¹⁵ These were the comments of New Testament scholars Robert Yarbrough and Hans Bayer, who had done their work in Germany.

¹⁶ Eta Linnemann, *Historical Criticism Of The Bible: Methodology Or Ideology?* Robert W. Yarbrough, trans. (1990).

¹⁷ John Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion*, Ford Lewis Battles, trans. (Library of Christian Classics Ed.) Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960, Book I, Chap. 3.

¹⁸ They may not actually be able to do this, for philosophical reasons: my epistemology may suit the biblical worldview in such a way as to prevent it being desirably transferred to another one.

¹⁹ Vern Poythress, Ph.D. Professor of Systematic Theology, Westminster Seminary, Philadelphia, in personal communication.

²⁰ *Institutes*, though the latter phrase is Abraham Kuyper's, possibly his Stone Lectures, 1900.

²¹ Why did I choose not to name the role of the Holy Spirit in the epistemic act? Because I think the Spirit superintends the removal of epistemological impediments or any other sort of impediment. The key thing about the book would not be my mentioning him so much as occasioning his work. Had I appealed to the critical role of the Holy Spirit in knowing, I would not have written the book. But this extreme in reasoning seems counter to Scripture also. God uses even unwilling candidates to further his purposes.

²² My target audience. The term is the title of a book written by one of my students, Doug Serven, who now serves as a campus minister at Oklahoma University. (www.twentysomeone.org)

²³ I am grateful to my husband, Jim, for faithful counsel and editorial scrutiny of this piece. Also, thank you to John Frame, Hans Bayer, Vern Poythress, Byron Curtis, Dru Johnson, and Bob Frazier for lending time and expert counsel in conversation with me on these matters.

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Polanyi Society Membership

Tradition and Discovery is distributed to members of the Polanyi Society. A password accessed electronic (pdf) version of the current and many past issues is available on the Polanyi Society web site (<http://www.missouriwestern.edu/orgs/polanyi/>). This periodical supercedes a newsletter and earlier mini-journal published (with some gaps) by the Polanyi Society since the mid seventies. The Polanyi Society has members in thirteen different countries although most live in North America and the United Kingdom. The Society includes those formerly affiliated with the Polanyi group centered in the United Kingdom which published *Convivium: The United Kingdom Review of Post-critical Thought*. There are normally three issues of *TAD* each year.

Annual membership in the Polanyi Society is \$25 (\$10 for students). The membership cycle follows the academic year; subscriptions are due November 1 to Phil Mullins, Missouri Western State University, St. Joseph, MO 64507 (fax: 816-271-5680, e-mail: mullins@missouriwestern.edu). Please make checks payable to the Polanyi Society. Dues can be paid by credit card by providing the card holder's name as it appears on the card, the card number and expiration date. Changes of address and inquiries should be sent to Phil Mullins. New members should provide the following subscription information: complete mailing address, telephone (work and home), e-mail address and/or fax number. Institutional members should identify a department to contact for billing. The Polanyi Society attempts to maintain a data base identifying persons interested in or working with Polanyi's philosophical writing. New members can contribute to this effort by writing a short description of their particular interests in Polanyi's work and any publications and /or theses/dissertations related to Polanyi's thought. Please provide complete bibliographic information. Those renewing membership are invited to include information on recent work.

WWW Polanyi Resources

The Polanyi Society has a World Wide Web site at <http://www.missouriwestern.edu/orgs/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) digital archives containing many past issues of *Tradition and Discovery*; (4) information on locating early publications not in the archive; (5) information on *Appraisal* and *Polanyiana*, two sister journals with special interest in Polanyi's thought; (6) 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; (7) photographs of Polanyi; (8) five essays by Polanyi.

REVIEWS

Paul Avis, *God and the Creative Imagination: Metaphor, Symbol and Myth in Religion and Theology*. London and New York: Routledge, 1999. Pp. ix+197. ISBN 0-415-21503-X. \$34.95, paper.

During a time when the divide between left and right, liberal and conservative, tolerant and dogmatic is on the increase, refreshing is a book that advances the *via media*, or middle way, as a method for theological reflection. Paul Avis relies on a variety of sources from philosophy of science, especially the thought of Michael Polanyi, the Romantic poets and thinkers, anthropology, and literary theory to develop his thesis that “the greatest truths can only be expressed in imaginative form—through images (metaphor, symbol and myth)” (8). In short, Avis draws an analogy between the incarnational and sacramental character of Christianity and personal knowledge. The material world, held imaginatively, is a gateway to Christian revelation.

Against the contemporary suspicion of figurative and imagistic thinking, Avis recognizes that the elements of myth in the Bible and Christian belief are not only compatible but essential to a full-blooded, orthodox faith. Without the balance of mythic realism, Christian theology strays into the inadequate thought of liberalism or conservatism. It is through myth that the deepest human experiences are reflected, and that the most personal is rendered universal.

Myths are informative but not definitive, descriptive but not veridical. This is a critically realist concept of myth; it entails that in our experience of the world (expressed partly in myths) we are in touch with reality; but it acknowledges that as subjects we play a part in constructing our perception of reality and that, therefore, perceptions have to be checked, the deliverances

of experience require to be scrutinized by all available means, interpreted, evaluated and criticized in the light of all our relevant knowledge (130).

The Spanish writer José Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955) described faith as the unquestioning acceptance of something to which the conscious mind often cannot assent. It is through imaginative apprehensions of truth that faith is derived, but is it subjected to, even challenged by, cognitive thought. Faith arises out of a continual cycle of doubt and belief, where our most cherished beliefs are shattered and refashioned over and over again by the conscious mind, before being once again put to rest as faith, but never for long. Faith and its cousin, belief, result from a creative act of the will, always being put to the test, each time running the risk of loss.

Another Spanish writer, Miguel de Unamuno (1864-1936) wrote “*la fé no es creer lo que no vimos, sino crear lo que no vemos*”, faith is not believing what we did not witness, but creating what we do not see. Playing with the verbs *creer* (to believe) and *crear* (to create), Unamuno succinctly summarizes the dynamic role the imagination plays in faith development. In his book, Avis goes one step further, and I believe, would adapt Unamuno’s words to state: faith is believing what we witnessed, but does so by creating what we do not see out of the fodder of what we do see. To use Avis, fact is interpreted in the context of meaning, indeed fact and interpretation are fused by our symbolizing capacity and imaginative grasp of the truth.

...there is a vital difference between a literal statement and a true statement...
[We have learned from] St. Augustine that God is a poet and from William Blake that God is an artist too. What do you have to do

to get on the wavelength of a poet or artist? You attune your spirit to beauty, you listen intently to the imagination, you reach out to form, you turn towards the radiance of the inspired word, you open your being to the aesthetic vision (157).

Faith and revelation, according to Avis, result from the creative interaction between imaginative vision, true-life experience, and the discipline of critical thought. But it is the imagination that is the matrix of faith, and unless we are alive to the symbolic language of revelation (myth), we will (and too often do) misunderstand its language. Instead of adopting an objective, rationalist approach to faith, or one that discards critical thought for subjective, unscientific ideals, Avis calls us to walk a third and wholly fiduciary path, the middle way: mundane, worldly, created realities are the vehicles and means of the divine presence and purpose when apprehended through the imagination.

Christian truth is both immanent in the world and transcendent of the world... The world is bound to God in ontological dependence, yet preserved at an epistemic distance that gives scope for human freedom, created contingency, and divine involvement in revelation and redemption (9).

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Philip Clayton, *Mind & Emergence: From Quantum to Consciousness*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004. Pp. viii + 236. ISBN: 0-19-927252-2. \$65, £35 hardcover.

I must admit my heart sank when I read the title. Not another book on how Quantum Mechanics can explain the mystery of consciousness! The second half of the title however is misleading. It is in fact

superfluous. Clayton has written a book, or more accurately an extended essay in five chapters, on mind and emergence. To be more specific, he is advocating an ontology that endorses the reality of minds. His prose is lucid and convincing. But then again I agree with the position that he is seeking to defend. Clayton asserts that it is widely believed that there are only two ways of comprehending mental events: physicalism, which asserts that all mental properties can be reduced to physical properties, and dualism, in which a mind is a non-physical entity. Clayton asserts that emergence undermines this dichotomy. It undermines both the sufficiency of physics and the attempt to cut mind off from nature. Within an emergence account, reality is made up of the same sort of stuff, but it has various distinct levels, structured by part-whole relations, each level of which generates new properties. Clayton admits this is not a new idea. The claim that reality is hierarchical is as old as Western philosophy, but for most of the last hundred years reductive physicalism has become the dominant account, and advocates of emergence have largely been ignored. In a reductive physicalist account we may believe that our thoughts have a causal impact in the world, but in reality all the real causality takes place at the physical level — i.e., all causation is ‘upward’. This undermines human agency.

In the account that Clayton seeks to defend, mental properties are dependent on physical properties, but our thoughts can exert a ‘downward’ causation upon the world. How can such a theory be said to be in accordance with the findings of modern science? It is pointed out that scientists have increasingly realised that in the development of complex physical systems, phenomena emerge that cannot be derived from laws of physics. Living organisms are systems that create and maintain order via energy inputs from their environment. Eventually living systems emerged that were capable of acting in accordance with conscious purposes. A strong supervenience theory of mind is a de facto epiphenomenal account in which mind has no effect in the world. In a strong emergence account persons are intentional and teleological — i.e., the universe generates conscious beings that possess mental

attributes, which can become motivated by rational and moral considerations. Classical philosophers speculated whether there could also be, beyond the level of mind, a level of spirit. When kings ruled the Earth, God was conceived as the King of Kings. In an age of deterministic physics, God was known as the Divine Watchmaker. Clayton suggests that our age tends to conceive God as a higher level principle. But if God does not exert any influence until organisms manifest mental causality, this is inconsistent with the assumption that it was God who created the universe within which that causality emerged.

These are big questions, and while this book is one the clearest discussions of these questions in the current literature, you cannot help feeling that their significance is left somewhat in the air. Personally, I found this book both exciting and disappointing. It is exciting because I believe his central claim is correct. It is disappointing because he is unlikely to persuade anybody who does not already share his assumptions. I feel that this could have been a brilliant book, indeed a classic, but it is merely very good. It would have been better if it would have been either shorter, for example three extended lectures, or much longer, supplying much more detailed accounts of both the intellectual background and contemporary work in science. Having said that, if you are interested in what Polanyi has to say about emergence, it is a must read. Like so much of Polanyi, his scandalous claim that reality is layered and emergent verges on orthodoxy in many circles these days, and Clayton acknowledges the contribution that Polanyi makes to this debate. I am going to put *Mind & Emergence* on my favourite books shelf, but more because it supplies us with an elegant introduction to a contemporary hot button issue – when, you may ask, were the questions it addresses not hot button issues! – than because it launches a devastating attack upon enemy territory. Clayton leaves too many questions unanswered and addresses too few of the objections. It serves however as a signpost showing us a way out of the bleak landscape of reductionism. The philosophical importance of such signposts cannot be underestimated.

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