

## Polanyi Society Membership

*Tradition and Discovery* is distributed to members of the Polanyi Society. An electronic (pdf) version of the current issue as well as past issues back to 1991 are available on the Polanyi Society web site (<http://www.missouriwestern.edu/orgs/polanyi/>). 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](mailto: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) links to a number of essays by Polanyi.

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# REVIEWS

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Ted Peters and Gaymon Bennett, eds. *Bridging Science and Religion*. Theology and the Sciences. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003. Pp. xii + 260. ISBN: 0-8006-3625-2. \$17.00, paper.

Ted Peters, Professor of Systematic Theology at Pacific Lutheran Seminary, and Gaymon Bennett, of the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, have compiled an anthology that locates the dialog between science and religion in a global setting in which contextual concerns will receive their due. Comprised of thirteen essays grouped into three sections, this book begins with two chapters on methodology, i.e., how one goes about building a bridge between science and religion. The second section, “Constructing Scientific Spans,” contains four essays that begin with issues that arise from the theoretical and practical implications of the sciences and address such topics as evolution, genetics and neuroscience. The final section, “Constructing Religious Spans” contains seven essays by Christian, Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist and Jewish thinkers that begin the dialog with issues that arise from their religious communities.

This anthology promises more than it actually delivers. The strength of this work lies in its breadth. Whereas most books on science and religion address only the metaphysical issues raised by scientific work, this one also addresses the moral. Unlike most books on science and religion that work within the framework of one faith tradition (usually Christianity), this one incorporates perspectives of the major faith traditions, with chapters written by adherents to those faiths. The weakness of the work is its unevenness. Some essays are not very accessible for readers unfamiliar with the discipline. For example, Nancey Murphy’s essay on postmodernism requires the reader to already know quite a bit about the history of philosophy. Some essays are unsatisfyingly succinct (e.g., Laurie Zoloth’s essay on Judaism), whereas others are almost overbearing in the amount of ground covered (e.g., Peter’s essay on genetics). Some ac-

counts of the sciences are quite accurate, whereas others are not—which is only to be expected when the vast majority of the authors are not scientists (perhaps here is a lesson for all those writing in the field of science and religion: all work needs to be co-authored by a theologian and a scientist—unless one is trained in both discourses).

In spite of its flaws, this book makes at least three contributions to the field of science and theology. First, the book provides a lucid and succinct history of the development of this academic field (Chapter One). Secondly, it takes developments of postmodern philosophy into account. Murphy’s undeveloped suggestion that the best way to bridge science and religion is by examination of their methods will perhaps resonate most with readers of Polanyi. Finally, this book “complexifies” the field by bringing other religious traditions into the discourse. One implication of these essays, for example, is that different religions will resonate with different issues in the sciences. For example, Buddhism, given its inherent interests, will be more interested in the cognitive sciences than astrophysics, or Judaism will be more attuned to the ethical implications of science and technology, given its emphasis on justice in this world. The book thus points out fruitful directions for further work.

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Jeffrey Stout. *Democracy and Tradition*. New Forum Books. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004. Pp. xv + 348. ISBN: 0-691-10293-7. \$49.95, cloth; \$19.95, paper.

Jeffrey Stout, Professor of Religion at Princeton University, writes for a post 9/11 world in which questions arise about what kinds of people we are, as well as the role of religion in public life. Addressing his readers primarily as citizens of the United States, i.e., as people who accept “some measure of responsibility for the condition of society” (p.

5), Stout steers a course between the answers to these questions offered by liberal political theory (exemplified by John Rawls and Richard Rorty) and the “new traditionalism” of Alasdair MacIntyre, John Milbank, and Stanley Hauerwas. The former suggest that we are individuals for whom religion is a private matter and therefore has no place in public discourse, while the latter suggest that we are communally-formed people for whom faith is integral to our lives and for whom democracy is decidedly unfriendly. Finding both sets of answers problematic, Stout takes inspiration largely from John Dewey, Walt Whitman, and Ralph Ellison to argue that democracy is itself a tradition that can promote democratic virtues that are desperately needed in the contemporary world.

Stout makes his case in three steps. In the first part of the book (Chapters 1-2), he makes a case that democracy is not anti-virtuous, but instead transforms old world virtues. As cases in point, Stout suggests what two virtues, piety and hope, might look like when transformed by/in a democratic culture. Piety becomes the virtue that enables all people (hence its democratic transformation) to achieve a higher excellence, in part through recognition of their dependence upon gifts that can never be fully repaid (pp. 29-39). Hope, construed democratically, is engendered by working for at least small improvements, using democratic means in a spirit that is at once both critical and generous (pp. 58-60).

In the second part of the book, Stout criticizes the opposing factions of liberal political theory (Chapter 3) and the new traditionalism (Chapters 4-7), noting that both share a similar assumption, i.e., that “the political culture of our democracy implicitly requires the policing or self-censorship of religious expression in the political arena” (p. 84). Rawls’ commitment to arguing only on the basis of premises all reasonable citizens might agree to fails to realize “how much work candid expression and imminent criticism . . . perform in real democratic exchange” (p. 73). Rorty’s fear that introducing religion into public discourse will stop the conversation fails to realize that conversations stop for many reasons and that the reasons citizens actually share usually do not answer our pressing questions (pp. 87 and 89). Offering extensive criticisms of MacIntyre and Hauerwas, Stout contends that their “rhetorically-excessive” criticisms

of liberal democracy actually undermine public discourse. What is needed then is a third way.

Stout supplies that third way in the final part of the book, where he describes democracy as a form of “pragmatic expressivism that takes enduring social practices as a tradition with which we have good reasons to identify” (p. 184). This view of democracy permeates the book as a whole, not just the final section, so it is perhaps best summarized by drawing from the work as a whole. Doing so, one finds that democracy construed as a tradition exhibits several features. The first is that it is made up of practices that have moral substance, contra the proclamations of theorists and the fears of the new traditionalists. The moral substance of democratic practices lies in holding one another accountable by giving reasons for the norms one holds (p. 13). Democratic practice is, in short, analogous to a vigorous conversation that is open to all comers (p. 222). Stout does not have in mind all conversations, however, only public ones, i.e., those in which participants address one another as citizens on matters that pertain to the common or civic good (p. 93). In these settings, participants must give reasons for their stances, choices or preferences, reasons that will reflect commitments that individuals make and attribute to others (p. 209). Those reasons can derive from many sources, including one’s religious convictions, but an authentically democratic conversation has a Socratic character in which each partner respects the other’s convictions by interrogating those convictions and their implications (p. 72). Moreover, one might use different kinds of reasons in different settings. For example, one might personally arrive at a stance for religious reasons but use reasons that are non-religious in character when making a case for a different audience (p. 114). Moreover, at least two virtues are necessary in order to engage in this conversation well: the ability to speak civilly (207) and the willingness to recognize and defer to the moral authority of reliable (but not unchallengeable) witnesses, an authority based not on hereditary rank, but upon recognition of one’s interpretive skills (pp. 212-220).

Stout concludes by admitting the deficiencies of democratic practice and calling the readers to continue the hard work of democracy in the face of three powerful constituencies in contemporary Ameri-

can life (the business elite, “diaspora groups” and the cultural right). He acknowledges that democracy rarely lives up to its highest ideals (p. 289). He admits that democratic authority can devolve into a tyranny of an undiscerning majority (p. 281). He recognizes that one will have to live in tension with some who will never agree (p. 201), as well as in a nation that adopts policies that one finds deplorable (p. 299). Calling readers not to confuse the civic nation with the nation state, Stout argues that democratic citizens must “hold together contempt for and appreciation of” democracy (p. 290), and develop the virtues of self-trust and courage that enable one to resist culturally-prescribed roles (p. 293). The religious left must recover its energy and confidence (p. 300) and all people must work together to promote common activities at the local level, activities that will presumably nurture the virtues necessary for democracy to survive.

*Democracy and Tradition* is an engaging and provocative work. Stout is informed by his deep knowledge of the philosophical traditions, as well as his personal knowledge of and history with his opponents. There is a sense in which the book is the latest installment in an ongoing conversation between Stout, Rawls, Rorty, and Hauerwas. His treatment of them is, as usual, insightful, challenging, even-handed and sometimes playful. Moreover Stout draws on his own experiences as soccer coach and member of his local community to give concrete purchase to his ideas and proposals.

The book makes several contributions to the conversation about religion and democracy. First, his account of democracy’s substantive moral commitments cogently answers the criticism that democracy is morally empty. Secondly, his description of democracy as an ongoing conversation in which things that matter are negotiated creatively acknowledges both the validity of bringing religious convictions into public debate and the persuasive limits of doing so. In addition, his discussion remains at a concrete (pragmatic) level—which is where it needs to be. Finally, his discussion of the problem of moral disagreement (chapters 10 and 11) rightly argues that common morality is a goal to be achieved on an ad hoc basis. By shifting the focus from a matter of metaphysics to a matter of practice, Stout argues that saying something is true is to say something about what it means in a

particular discourse, not that it is metaphysically true. He thus tries to separate the matter of whether a statement is true or not from the issue of whether one is justified in believing that it is true. For Stout, we learn what is true, over time, by means of practice, (p. 255). There is therefore an objectivity to moral norms, but one that is socially grounded (p. 274), much like the rules that define sandlot baseball (p. 271).

Of course, questions remain. Are the moral commitments intrinsic to democracy substantive enough to sustain and reproduce democracy in each new generation? Permeating this work is a profound sense of and commitment to justice, but where does Stout derive the content for his notion of justice? While Stout’s attempt to separate notions of truth from justification and from metaphysics accomplishes much of what he wants it to do, one still wonders: is there nothing more to truth?

Readers familiar with Polanyi will find several affinities between his work and Stout’s, especially the recognition that knowledge and commitment go hand in hand (e.g., pp. 208, 218, and 233-236), what is involved in learning to see (e.g., pp. 220-221), and the fact that we often know more than we can say (e.g., 221, 234 and 237). One wonders, too, if Polanyi’s notion of universal intent might not help Stout come to a more satisfying account of truth, metaphysics and justification.

As always, Stout produces a work that addresses contemporary issues and thinkers with passion, skill and intelligence. His commitment to democracy and to justice is to be commended. One now waits eagerly for the dialog to continue (Hauerwas has already responded in print with a post-script to his *Performing the Faith*).

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