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Submission Guidelines

Articles, meeting notices, and notes likely to be of interest to persons interested in the thought of Michael Polanyi are welcomed. Manuscripts normally will be sent out for blind review.

- Articles should be sent to Paul Lewis at lewis_pa@mercer.edu.
- Book reviews should be sent to Walter Gulick at wgulick@msubillings.edu.

All manuscripts should be submitted as a Microsoft Word file (.doc or .docx) attached to an email message and formatted as follows:

- double-spaced, with 1" margins
- in a reasonable typeface (Times New Roman 12 is preferred)
- with paragraphs indented 0.25"

As to other matters of style:

1. *Spelling*: We recognize that the journal serves English-speaking writers around the world and so do not require anyone's "standard" English spelling. We do, however, require all writers to be consistent in whatever convention they follow.

2. *Citations*: We recognize that Polanyi's work connects with scholars who work in diverse disciplines and typically use different style guides such that we are "fluent" in different conventions for citations, capitalization of titles, and so forth.

- Our preference is for Chicago's parenthetical/reference style in which citations are given in the text as (last name of author year, page number), combined with bibliographical information at the end of the article.
- Endnotes should be used sparingly and be placed before the reference section.
- To the extent that our software allows, we will, however, accept other styles (e.g., APA or MLA) so long as the author is consistent and careful in following it. The main point, of course, is to give the reader enough information to locate and engage your sources.
- We do encourage one exception to this practice. Polanyi's major works may be cited parenthetically. For example: Polanyi argues that (*TD*, 56). Full bibliographical information should still be supplied in the references section since many of us may work with different editions of his works. If you take this option, please use the following abbreviations (note that abbreviations are italicized):

| | | | |
|------------|---|-------------|--|
| <i>CF</i> | <i>Contempt of Freedom</i> | <i>SFS</i> | <i>Science, Faith, and Society</i> |
| <i>KB</i> | <i>Knowing and Being</i> | <i>SM</i> | <i>Study of Man</i> |
| <i>LL</i> | <i>Logic of Liberty</i> | <i>STSR</i> | <i>Scientific Thought and Social Reality</i> |
| <i>M</i> | <i>Meaning</i> | | |
| <i>PK</i> | <i>Personal Knowledge</i> | <i>TD</i> | <i>Tacit Dimension</i> |
| <i>SEP</i> | <i>Society, Economics, and Philosophy</i> | | |

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PREFACE: WELCOME TO *TRADITION & DISCOVERY* 3.0

This issue marks the third major iteration of *TAD*. We started life as a Polanyi Society newsletter and then became the modest academic journal that we have been for so many years. Now, we enter into a new era (for at least a year) in partnership with Faithlab, a publishing and website business in Macon, GA. David Cassady and Jean Trotter have, in consultation with the *TAD* Editorial Board, designed this new look for *TAD*. You can learn a bit more about them at <http://www.faithlab.com/aboutus/>.

This new partnership allows us to produce a more professional quality journal that can be expanded beyond 60 pages when needed. Most exciting, we get a new e-reader version that can be downloaded onto iPad, Kindle, and Nook readers (see page 64 for details on how to access this version). In offering our content in e-reader form, we extend our tradition of electronic innovation for we were one of the first academic journals to offer access to our content as downloadable pdf files from our website, a practice that will continue alongside the e-reader version.

Aside from making available a new form of electronic access, we have upgraded how we mail print copies. Issues will now be mailed first class, which means that they will come to you quicker and can be forwarded when you are away—so hopefully we will have fewer missed/returned issues. *Mailing first class does mean, however, that we can only mail issues to members whose dues are paid up.* See News and Notes, as well as the enclosed flyer, for information on how to keep *TAD* coming to your mailbox.



This issue contains a number of quality essays that began life as presentations at the Poteat conference of June 2014. Gus Breyspraak serves as guest editor for this section of the journal. His introduction to the three articles can be found on page 8. I am grateful to him for his hard work in pulling these together.

Next comes Andrew Grosso's review article on Thomas Pfau's *Minding the Modern*. Grosso's extensive summary provides us with a very helpful introduction to Pfau, who will be joining us for a Saturday morning symposium at this year's annual meeting. Society members will discuss his work and Pfau will respond. Pfau is the Alice Mary Baldwin Professor of English and professor of German at Duke University, with a secondary appointment on the Duke Divinity School faculty.

Note as well that we have two meetings planned this year: the aforementioned annual meeting in Atlanta in November and a June 2016 conference at Nashota House in Wisconsin to celebrate the 50th anniversary of *The Tacit Dimension*. More information on these meetings can be found on pages 6 and 7. Get updates, too, at www.polanyisociety.org. Finally, do attend to the request for donations to the Travel Fund found and in News and Notes. Two meetings in this time frame puts pressure on funds, so please consider donating.

Paul Lewis



NEWS AND NOTES

Dues Must *Now* Be Current to Continue Receiving Print Copies of *Tradition & Discovery*

We have now changed the format of the journal so as to

- produce a more professional-looking product that is easier to read
- increase, when needed, the number of pages per issue.
- provide an e-reader version of the journal for iPad, Kindle, and Nook.

We will also mail the journal first class, rather than bulk, so that issues will arrive sooner.

These upgrades come at a price, however, for we will be mailing print copies only to those Polanyi Society members whose dues are up to date.

Overseas members will receive only electronic versions of each issue and will be notified when the next issue is available.

We remain committed to Open Access publishing, and so *Tradition & Discovery* will still be accessible to anyone from the Society webpage.

However, if you want to continue to receive a print copy of the journal, be sure to renew your membership to the Polanyi Society!

How to Keep *Tradition & Discovery* Coming to Your Mailbox

Pay your membership this year. *If you have not already paid your dues for 2015-2016, then you must do so by December 1, 2015 in order to continue to receive print copies.* Rates remain the same as always: \$35 regular, \$25 library, and \$15 student.

Residents of the United States can join or renew by using a credit card through PayPal (<http://polanysociety.org/register/join-renew.php>) or sending a check made payable to the Polanyi Society to Polanyi Society, c/o Paul Lewis, Roberts Department of Christianity, Mercer University, 1501 Mercer University Drive, Macon, GA 31207. Those living outside the U.S. must use PayPal.

Travel Fund Donations Needed

Because the Polanyi Society will be sponsoring two conferences in barely more than a year, we need to replenish the Travel Fund to enable young scholars' participation in Atlanta and Madison, Wisconsin. *We need not be reminded of how much the continuing accomplishment of the Society's goals depends upon actively involving those who are presently, or have recently been, engaged in their academic studies.*

Already we are looking forward to the involvement of an impressive number

of new, talented, and young participants in the Atlanta conference. But the task of making this happen in the midst of the increasing burden of student loans, the escalation of travel costs, and virtually non-existent college resources to facilitate such involvement, is a daunting challenge.

Approximately \$4,000 in new contributions will be needed to meet our anticipated needs. One person has pledged to match dollar-for-dollar the first \$300 contributed. Any amount donated will make a difference.

Please send your tax deductible contribution to Polanyi Society, c/o Paul Lewis, Roberts Department of Christianity, Mercer University, 1501 Mercer University Drive, Macon, GA 31207. Checks should be made out to the Polanyi Society and earmarked for the Travel Fund.

E-Reader Version Now Available

TAD now comes with access to e-reader versions for iPad, Kindle, and Nook. In order to download your e-reader version see the instructions on page 64 of this issue (they can also be found on www.polanyisociety.org)

***Tradition & Discovery* Is Now on Facebook**

As we move into the electronic, social media era, a new member of the *TAD* editorial Board, David James Stewart, has created a *Tradition & Discovery* Facebook page that will allow us to post notices there. If you are Facebook user, search for

Tradition & Discovery, like us, and invite friends to join. If you are not a Facebook user, become one!

Recent Works of Interest

The latest issue of *Appraisal* (vol. 10, no. 3 March 2015) is now available and contains the following articles: James Beauregard, "Michael Polanyi and the Practice of Contemporary Science;" Charles Conti, "Wittgenstein's Vital Lie;" Abigail Klassen, "Critiquing Strawsonian Selves;" Daniel Paksi, "The Meaning of Randomness: The Laplacian Faults of Neo-Darwinians According to Michael Polanyi;" Karl Simms, "Hermetic Poetry and the Second Person;" and a review of Elio Sgreccia, *Personalist Bioethics: Foundations and Application*. *Appraisal* is the journal of a sister society, The British Personalist Forum.

This could be your last print copy of *Tradition & Discovery*!

Beginning with the February 2016 issue (Vol. 42:1) *Tradition & Discovery* will be mailed only to those whose dues are current.

See the PREFACE and NEWS AND NOTES

for information on how to keep *TAD* coming to your mailbox!.

2015 ANNUAL MEETING PROGRAM

This year's Polanyi Society annual meeting will be held in Atlanta on November 20 and 21. Like last year, we will have three sessions. Any changes to times and location, along with downloadable versions of papers, will be posted on www.polanyisociety.org. Check the website for the latest information. Following is the program in outline:

Friday, Nov. 20, 4:00-6:00 pm (Atlanta Room 5, Sheraton Downtown)

Matt Sandwisch, Baylor University, "Connections between Michael Polanyi and Virtue Epistemology"

Adam Johnson, Fort Mill, SC, "Created to Know: A Comparison of the Epistemologies of Michael Polanyi and Francis Schaeffer"

Stan Scott, University of Maine, Presque Isle, "The Tacit Dimension in Biblical Metaphor: 'The Kingdom'"

Robert Hyatt, Whittier NC, "Polanyian Philosophical Resources for Mental Health Professionals Dealing with Trauma Related Pathologies"

Jon Fennell, Hillsdale College, "Polanyi's 'Illumination': Aristotelian Induction or Peircean Abduction?"

Francesco Poggiani, Pennsylvania State University, "Polanyi and Peirce on Truth and Responsibility"

Saturday, Nov. 21, 9:00-11:30 am (Room 309, Hilton Downtown)

9:00-11:15: Symposium on Thomas Pfau's *Minding the Modern*

Martin X. Moleski, SJ, and Phil Rolnick will discuss Pfau's work, to be followed by a reply from Pfau and general discussion. Andrew Grosso will moderate.

11:15: Business meeting

Saturday, Nov. 21, 8:00-10:00 pm (Harris Room, Hyatt Regency)

Walter Mead, Illinois State University, "Theological Implications of Polanyi's Philosophy of Knowing"

Lucila Crena, Regent College, "A Polanyian Witness in an Age of Mistrust: A Majority World Perspective"

Matthew O'Sullivan, Hillsdale College, "Rules of Right Practice or Contact with Reality? Michael Polanyi and George Lindbeck on the Purpose of Theological Propositions"

Celebrating 50 Years of The Tacit Dimension

POLANYI STUDIES: PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

Next year, the Polanyi Society will sponsor a conference to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the publication of Michael Polanyi's *The Tacit Dimension* and to assess the legacy of Polanyi's philosophical efforts. The conference will also provide opportunities for senior and junior Polanyi scholars to collaborate in the exploration of the many subjects and themes identified in Polanyi's writings.

The Society invites proposals for papers that examine Polanyi's contributions to the areas of epistemology (including tacit knowing), moral philosophy, intellectual history, aesthetics, religious and theological studies, embodiment, semiotics, economics, and socio-political orders. Younger scholars and those in the early stages of their study of Polanyi are especially encouraged to submit proposals. Initial proposals should be no more than 250 words, and can be sent to Andrew Grosso (atgrosso@icloud.com).

The deadline for submission of proposals is Monday, 30 November 2015; proposals submitted after this date will be considered only if the conference schedule can easily accommodate additional presentations.

The conference will be held 8-11 June 2016 (Wed-Sat) at Nashotah House Theological Seminary in Nashotah, WI (west of Milwaukee, just off of I-94 on the way to Madison). The nearest international airport is General Mitchell International Airport (MKE) in Milwaukee (about 45 minutes away).

There will be a one-day workshop on Wednesday, 8 June, for those interested in reviewing or learning more about Polanyi's philosophical work. Senior Polanyi scholars will facilitate various sessions on Polanyi's life and the principal ideas in his major works. Graduate students and those new to Polanyi studies are especially encouraged to participate in this one-day workshop.

The registration fee is \$275; this includes access to all conference sessions (including the workshop on Wednesday), plus all meals and receptions. The registration fee does not include lodgings. A limited number of guest housing accommodations will be available on the campus of Nashotah House, and there are also several hotels in the immediate vicinity. A limited amount of financial aid is available for those unable to meet the cost of registration, accommodations, and travel; for more information about financial assistance, please contact Phil Mullins (mullins@missouriwestern.edu).

Additional information regarding the schedule for the conference, accommodations, and other details will be available on the website for the Polanyi Society (www.polanyisociety.org) and will also be published in future issues of *Tradition & Discovery*. Those interested can also contact Andrew Grosso (atgrosso@icloud.com).



INTRODUCTION TO FURTHER EXPLORATIONS OF POLANYI AND POTEAT

Gus Breyspraak, *Guest Editor*

The following three articles are drawn from the June 2014 conference, *The Primacy of Persons*, which marked the opening of the collection of unpublished manuscripts, letters, and other writings related to William H. Poteat at the Yale Divinity School Library. William H. Poteat's writing and teaching reflected a long "apprenticeship" to Michael Polanyi of whom he said, "My debt to Polanyi is long and conspicuous."¹ He was also an influential ally of Polanyi.

The conference, sponsored by the Polanyi Society, drew some 35 former students, colleagues, friends, and others influenced by Poteat's publications. Participants, including several from Europe, enjoyed three days and evenings of convivial and vigorous intellectual exchange about topics that included overviews of Poteat's thought and development, explorations of his relationship to other figures in modern thought, applications of his thinking to various areas including philosophy, medical ethics, psychiatry, and theology, and recollections of Poteat's teaching and influence on students beyond the classroom.

The conference opened in the Day Missions Room of the YDS Library with the presentation of several gifts to the Yale Divinity School: a sculpture and a painting by renowned Greek artist Evangelos Moustakas, along with a framed, illustrated collection of original haikus about Poteat by internationally known haiku composer, Zoe Savinas, Moustakas' wife. Moustakas, a Greek sculptor, had a profound influence upon Poteat and became a close friend. They first met in Athens in 1968 when Poteat encountered a small sculpture of Alexander the Great and his steed Bucephalos that Moustakas had done. This encounter, a kind of "epiphany," occasioned a short essay, "The Voice of Orpheus," and eventually inspired Poteat's *Polanyian Meditations: In Search of a Post-Critical Logic*, where he developed his innovative conception of "mindbody" as the root and ground of all sense-giving and sense-reading.²

These gifts were acquired by Elizabeth Eidenier with donations raised from friends of Poteat, many of whom attended the conference. They were graciously accepted by Jennifer A. Herdt, YDS Associate Dean for Academic Affairs. During the opening

session, a display of the Poteat collection was presented by Martha Smalley, the Library's Director of Special Collections.

All of the conference papers, as well as videos of the presentations and lively discussions, are posted at www.whpoteat.org. The Poteat website also gives other information about Poteat and will be an important resource for further scholarship in future years. Some of the papers discuss Polanyian influences on Poteat. Dale Cannon and Ron Hall are editing several papers for a planned volume on Poteat's philosophical anthropology. Other papers from this interesting conference may be published in a future issue of *Tradition & Discovery*, which has focused on Poteat's work in the past (see 20:1, 21:1, 27:3, 35:2, 36:2, and 40:2).

Participants and those who continue to benefit from the website and conference papers are grateful to the conference organizers, Dale Cannon, Walter Mead, and James Van Pelt, as well as the many donors to the conference fund, who together made this successful event possible.

The three papers that follow this introduction were selected for publication together in *TAD* because of their central focus on relationships between Poteat and Polanyi, two major intellectual innovators of the last century. The papers in this issue begin with Polanyi Society President David Rutledge's welcome and overview of Polanyi for participants who may have been relatively unfamiliar with Polanyi and his influence on Poteat. Then Phil Mullins and I sketch out the substantial personal contacts between these two men, showing a deep personal relationship between them over at least the twenty years of Polanyi's active and productive life. Finally, you will find David Rutledge's second contribution to the conference, which probes Poteat's debts to Polanyi, his differences with him, and his contributions to philosophy that took him beyond Polanyi.

Endnotes

¹William H. Poteat, *Polanyian Meditations* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1985), 8.

²See Poteat's "Moustakas within His Ambience," in the collection, *The Primacy of Persons and the Language of Culture: Essays by William H. Poteat*, edited by James M. Nickell and James W. Stines (U of Missouri Press, 1993), 271-276; and his "Prologue" to *Polanyian Meditations: In Search of a Post-Critical Logic* (Duke University Press, 1985), 1-10. There is a striking description by Poteat of Moustakas' creative genius in action in *Recovering the Ground: Critical Exercises in Recollection* (SUNY Press, 1994), 68-70.

WHO WAS MICHAEL POLANYI? A PRIMER FOR POTEAT SCHOLARS



David W. Rutledge

Keywords: humanism, communism, discovery, critical realism, Gestalt psychology, tacit knowing, fiduciary, calling

Abstract

Full appreciation of Bill Poteat's work requires an understanding of Michael Polanyi. This essay briefly recounts Polanyi's biography, then describes central features of his thought, especially the centrality of discovery, commitment, and tacit knowing. It then reports on Poteat's own summary of Polanyi's thought in his major work, Polanyian Meditations.

While this paper may seem unnecessary to readers of *Tradition & Discovery*, there are actually scholars now coming to Poteat directly, without having gone through Polanyi first. And yet Polanyi is essential for appreciating a major portion of Bill's thought, as *Polanyian Meditations* makes clear. So this will be a primer for some, and a refresher for more "mature" scholars; my aim is to highlight features of Polanyi's story relevant to Poteat's story.

Michael Polanyi was born in Budapest in 1891 to a large non-practicing Jewish family which was relatively wealthy during his childhood. He grew up fluent in German, French, English, and Hungarian, and had a broad, classical education. He completed his medical training, served as a doctor in World War I, and served briefly in the government after the war, but his interests shifted to physical chemistry, in which he received his PhD in 1919.¹ What strikes one about Polanyi's background is the cultural richness of the central European humanism shared by assimilated Jews prior to World War II, giving him an acute intelligence and high standards. He could read Latin and Greek as an adolescent, read widely in the literature of four languages, and had a

life-long interest in politics and social issues. Among his friends and acquaintances were Karl Mannheim, George Lukács, Arthur Koestler, and his brother Karl Polanyi; his first scientific paper was published at 19; a second paper employing the new quantum mechanics received a very positive evaluation from Albert Einstein, to whom it was sent before publication; at the age of 23 he was first offered a position in the Kaiser Wilhelm Gesellschaft in Berlin, which he had to decline because of his military commitment. Beyond the extraordinary character of his early training and environment, Michael Polanyi also had a deep sense of responsibility for western society, such that his later move from science to social science and philosophy seemed natural to him.

During his ten years as a member of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute in physical chemistry in Berlin, his research “focused mainly on three areas: adsorption of gases on solids, x-ray structure analysis of the properties of solids, and the rate of chemical reactions,” and it was here that his international reputation in science was established, and here that he experienced what would always remain for him a model of intellectual community (Mitchell 2006, 1). It was also in this period that Polanyi had the first experience that was to lead him eventually to the writing of *Personal Knowledge*. While in Germany and again after moving to the University of Manchester when Hitler came to power, Polanyi had travelled to the Soviet Union several times to academic conferences, and in 1935 he had a conversation about the social role of science with Nikolai Bukharin, a major theoretician of the Communist Party. Bukharin declared that the belief in pure scientific research was an aberrant result of capitalism, and that in the future, Soviet scientists would spontaneously pursue research that would benefit the latest government plan, due to the internal harmony of a communist society. Polanyi states that “in 1935 I could still smile at this dialectical mystery mongering, never suspecting how soon it would show terrible consequences” (*SFS*, 8).

Polanyi was not naïve about communism—he had read a great deal of Marx and engaged in intense discussions with family members on various aspects of socialism from his youth on—in fact, his sister-in-law (Karl’s wife Ilona) had been imprisoned once in Vienna for her communist sympathies. Polanyi had opposed a strong movement in England to place science at the service of society in imitation of the Soviet model. But until Russian biologists began to be imprisoned for declining to practice science in accord with Bukharin’s vision and appealed to western science in their defense, Polanyi did not realize that he had no philosophy of science to support his beliefs. The allegiance of western intellectuals to philosophical skepticism, and their romance with the utopian dreams of communist rhetoric, left them unable to respond to the ruthless realities of the Soviet situation. Polanyi therefore increasingly began writing to respond to this challenge, becoming more and more interested in the social sciences and philosophy: “Marxism has challenged me to answer these questions.... Like the Marxist theory, my account of the nature and justification of science includes

the whole life of thought in society” (*SFS*, 9). In 1947 Polanyi was invited to give the Gifford Lectures that would become *Personal Knowledge* ten years later, and in 1948 he finally moved from Chemistry to Social Studies at Manchester.

This is the Polanyi that Bill Poteat first read in 1952—a distinguished scientist who had left his science behind in an effort to respond to the skepticism, reductionism, and determinism of western thought. Note that these men come to a similar problem from very different directions: Poteat from a study of French philosophy of the 17th century, namely Pascal and Descartes, and Polanyi from a response to a critical political problem of the 20th century, namely the challenge of Soviet Marxist-Leninism. In a very real sense, Poteat had identified a problem in western thought that later would help produce the phenomenon that Polanyi confronted, namely a militant Marxism. That there are wide differences between these men is not surprising, given this history; what is remarkable is that Poteat sensed the resonances between them, and was able to capitalize on them in developing his own thought.

So what are the beliefs that Polanyi articulated in answer to the challenges of his day? Before looking at Poteat’s own answer to this question, I note some characteristic features of Polanyi’s work:

1. He sees scientific knowledge as paradigmatic for all forms of knowing. Though a critic of certain of its forms, and though he sees similar processes operating in all forms of knowledge, Polanyi remains a firm believer in the greatness of science: “Nothing is more certain in our world than the established results of science.”²
2. He emphasizes the practical activity of scientists doing their research, and his books are replete with such examples. This means a focus on the process of discovery, rather than the ultimate codification of those discoveries in formal, abstract results. This is a feature of his work that is unavailable to non-scientists like Karl Popper, or Thomas Kuhn; Mary Jo Nye (2011) shows this feature clearly.
3. He sees the history of science as an important guide to the nature of scientific activity, and uses historical references frequently, de-emphasizing efforts to formalize the scientific method. We might summarize these last two points by saying that Polanyi emphasizes the situatedness of knowledge, both within the person and within society.
4. Polanyi can be described as a realist—I would say a critical realist—in his views on the external world:

We can account for this capacity of ours to know more than we can tell if we believe in the presence of an external reality with which we can establish contact. This I do. I declare myself committed to the belief in an external reality gradually accessible to knowing, and I regard all true understanding as an intimation of such a reality which, being real, may yet reveal itself to our deepened understanding in...unexpected manifestations (*KB*, 133).

We never completely grasp or understand this reality—it remains to some degree “hidden” and continually surprises us—but we do actually “make contact” with it, as the progress of science shows: Newton’s confirmation of Copernicus’ theory of heliocentrism came 144 years after the theory was published, and thus affirmed the reality and power of human knowing to sense coherences and see extrapolations far in the future.

5. Another characteristic of Polanyi is that he traces knowing back into its pre-articulate roots, establishing a continuum in knowing that accredits the reality of evolution without surrendering the distinctiveness of human achievement. The behavior of apes, rats, chickens, and infants becomes relevant in Polanyi’s mind to such questions as “How is it that we can apprehend order and patterns in the world? How can we acquire a thousand-fold multiplication of our cognitive abilities through the use of words?” (*PK*, 69-131, 327-380). Polanyi here ignores the traditional “logic/psychology” distinction to reach a comprehensive view of living things figuring out their world.
6. Finally, let me say something about the idea that seems most associated with Michael Polanyi among scholars, namely the tacit dimension of knowing. A particularly important ingredient in his thought was supplied by Gestalt psychology, which established the powerful habit of the mind to integrate the parts of a visual field to a whole, a form or shape having meaning (Gelwick 1977, 26-27; see also, of course, *TD*). While the psychologists had interpreted this mechanistically as the internal equilibration of external stimuli, Polanyi saw it as a clue to how a person intentionally seeks order in the world. Thus the part-whole elements of Gestalt were re-interpreted by Polanyi to indicate two kinds of awareness, a focal awareness of things immediately before us in vision and consciousness, such that we can describe their particular features, and a subsidiary awareness of various background elements of a situation which are integrated by the person into the focal object to which he or she is attending. Gestalt psychology was describing the pre-articulate form of human knowing,

which in a responsible scientist can be seen as part of the process of discovery, by which unspicifiable clues are indwelled so that their joint meaning might be perceived through the mind's integrative powers.

Through such strategies, Michael Polanyi re-inserted the human person and her history into discussions of science and discussions of knowing; unfortunately, he accomplished this outside the academic guild while relying on such a wide variety of disciplines and suggesting such radical implications that few were able to grasp the import of "personal knowledge." One who did see its import was William Poteat; perhaps an appropriate way of continuing this sketch of Polanyi is by using Poteat's own list of the "decisive motifs of his [Polanyi's] thought, those that caused him to wish to and enabled him to mount and sustain a polemic against the critical tradition of the Enlightenment" (Poteat 1985, 136; hereafter *PM*). Poteat describes them in pages 136-146 of *Polanyian Meditations*, and though his specific aim there is to show that Polanyi's thought is sustained by images that are "at bottom biblical in derivation," he nevertheless gives us an acute summary of Polanyi's philosophy. He identifies (a) the personal, (b) knowing as obedience and responsibility, (c) the fiduciary mode of our being mindbodily in the world, (d) our calling, and (e) the inexhaustibility of what is real as the "decisive motifs" of Polanyi's thought. Let me take up each of these themes in summary fashion:

- a. One reason that Polanyi's thought puts off so many professional academics is that he always speaks out of "his own personally centered, self-transcending mindbodily integrity in the world" (*PM*, 137). He avoids the detached, objectivist stance of the critical scholar, constantly using metaphors that flow from his personal stance in the world. "The many variant uses of the word 'personal' throughout [*PK*] are therefore governed by the logic of his always personally centered and recursive reflection" (*PM*, 137). When Polanyi analyzes the knowing process, he finds that there is always an active agent integrating the tacit clues of a given setting in order to discover their explicit meaning. Knowing is always, therefore, an action, a process, guided by an intelligent agent, the human person. Such personal acts underlie all our knowings, from the most routine to the most abstract and complex.
- b. As his aim is the justification of scientific knowledge, Polanyi naturally takes up the question of the import of our personal claims: "[There is a] personal participation of the knower in all acts of understanding. But this does not make our understanding subjective. Comprehension is neither an arbitrary act nor a *passive experience*, but a *responsible act* claiming *universal validity*" (*PM*, 138).³ To talk in this way is to make a novel epistemological affirmation, namely that knowing always involves making a personal claim: it is active,

not passive, and it is reflexive, referring back to the person who makes it, not objective as if written in an eternal and timeless text. “Finally,” Poteat notes, “responsible acts—indeed *any* acts—are *convivial*: their context is an interpersonal world of others...to whom we are responsive as to other persons and to whom we are therefore responsible. Knowing then, is *obedient* and *responsible*” (*PM*, 138-139). Here Polanyi is beginning to ground, to justify, the results of scientific knowledge not in some objective calculus of logic or verification, but in the personal acts of the scientist—a most extraordinary claim, according to the critical tradition.

- c. The term *fiduciary* “plays a central role in Polanyi’s exposition,” and rather than use the more common trust or faith as translations, Poteat renders it “to rely upon;” thus, “as an existent, tonic mindbody I acritically rely upon the fact of the pre-reflective and unreflected givenness of my being as the ground of reflection....” (*PM*, 139). There are two elements of the fiduciary that I want to highlight: first, the kind of natural, unconscious reliance on the states and powers of our bodies that goes on constantly, as right now: you are relying on your heart pumping, your lungs breathing, your bones and muscles holding you upright, your eyes surveying the scene before you, your ears taking in the sounds of the room, and so on. Polanyi again turns a commonplace into an epistemological claim: because such reliance is a necessary pre-condition for all knowing, and the richness and complexity of these forms of reliance cannot be fully specified, our knowing is necessarily built upon trust, upon faith. Second, when we consider not the unconscious constituents of knowing but the articulate claims of reason, another element of reliance can be seen, namely its intentionally circular character. Polanyi begins chapter 10 of *PK* with

*‘I believe that in spite of the hazards involved, I am called upon to search for the truth and state my findings’... This sentence, summarizing my fiduciary programme, conveys an ultimate belief which I find myself holding.... [I]n uttering this sentence I both say that I must commit myself by thought and speech, and do so at the same time. Any enquiry into our ultimate beliefs can be consistent only if it presupposes its own conclusions (*PK*, 299).*

Thus our explicit, articulated knowings rely upon our tacit knowings—the latter is the ground, and the former the consequent. Here is an understanding of logic that places reliance or trust at the heart of human knowledge. Poteat goes further to argue that “It is not then merely our knowing...which...has a

fiduciary structure; our very being in the world is fiduciary in structure” (*PM*, 140). At every moment I rely on some antecedent moment, and some logically antecedent level, in order to simply live. (The book jacket of *PM* uses the image of M.C. Escher’s “Drawing Hands” as an exact reminder of this very point.)

- d. “Of all the biblical images,” Poteat claims, “to be found in Polanyi’s account of our ways of knowing and being, none is more unambiguously or centrally present than that of ‘calling’” (*PM* 140). To claim knowledge is to have an intellectual commitment to make a responsible decision to search for the truth, and to state one’s findings. Important here is the fact that the situation in which I make such a commitment, such a decision, is not some generalizable, universal situation, but one peculiar to me and my specific history. There is thus a givenness to our situation which frames our decisions: “Believing as I do [Polanyi writes] in the justification of deliberate intellectual commitments, I accept these accidents of my personal existence...as the concrete opportunities for exercising our personal responsibility. This acceptance is the sense of my calling.” And as one can only be “called to” in a convivial setting, Polanyi can say further, “Our believing is conditioned at its source by our belonging” (*PK*, 322).
- e. Finally, in Poteat’s catalogue of “central motifs” in Polanyi’s thought, we come to his radical re-definition of the real as that which is absolutely contingent, which cannot be comprehended, even in principle; as that which will continue to reveal itself in surprising, indeterminate future manifestations; reality is, in fact, inexhaustible (as God is inexhaustible, for Poteat). If one takes an instrumentalist view of science, as positivists like Ernst Mach did, then scientific claims are merely convenient calculating devices, summaries of experience which are economical and useful, like a telephone directory. The persuasive power of scientific theory, its ability to discern some new coherence, to disclose some new reality, is denied out of a desire to maintain the *certainty* of those same theories. The meaningfulness of knowledge to speak of what is true and real is sacrificed to a misplaced obsession with an absolutely certain, explicit, clear *method* of verifying the real.

I have only touched on a few elements of the rich legacy of Michael Polanyi, but perhaps it is enough to sense the web of connections between the work of Polanyi and that of Bill Poteat.

Endnotes

¹These biographical details are fully discussed in Scott and Moleski 2005. A brief summary can be found in Mitchell 2006.

²Polanyi, quoted in Hall 1968, 24.

³Poteat is here quoting Polanyi in *PK*, vii-viii; the italics are Poteat's.

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WILLIAM H. POTEAT AND MICHAEL POLANYI: TOWARD A HISTORY OF THEIR RELATIONSHIP FROM 1952 THROUGH 1976



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Keywords: William H. Poteat, Michael Polanyi

Abstract

This essay provides a timeline charting contact between Michael Polanyi and William H. Poteat. We trace the contours of the intimate, multifaceted, and mutually influential friendship of Polanyi and Poteat which developed over more than twenty years.

This historical record of contacts between Michael Polanyi and William H. Poteat portrays their close, multifaceted, and mutually influential relationship. There were more contacts and a deeper relationship between Poteat and Polanyi than we had recognized prior to undertaking this study. Much more can be learned about their mutual influences. The new Poteat archival collection of letters, drafts, and unpublished manuscripts in the Yale Divinity School Library (YDS) will make further exploration possible.¹

Below we suggest that the nature of Polanyi's influence on Poteat began to change in 1968. Poteat's subsequent inquiry and quest take him in directions he believed moved far beyond and beneath the "grand program" of Polanyi with which he was closely associated earlier. We welcome reactions, corrections, and additions to the narrative which we have here pieced together.²

1952: Poteat discovers early philosophical writings of Polanyi

The discovery, in 1952, I think of early ‘philosophical’ writings of Michael Polanyi—the first I remember, was “The Stability of Beliefs” in the *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*, later to be incorporated, as a section, into *Personal Knowledge*—accredited and greatly enriched the context within which initially to obey my own intimations (*PM*, 6).

Poteat’s incorporation of Polanyi’s discussion of an exchange between an Azande witch doctor and a scientific agronomist in the Duke Divinity School class “Christianity and Culture 16,” some 15 years after 1952, showed Polanyi’s influence on Poteat’s teaching. Breytspraak vividly recalls several class sessions spent unsuccessfully trying to convince Poteat, role playing the Azande, of the truth of the scientific approach contra his obviously erroneous Azande view of how the world works. Whether there were any references to Polanyi in this vigorous exchange is a detail now unclear, but the illumination of the stability of beliefs made a profound and lasting impression.

1954: Poteat publishes “The Open Society and Its Ambivalent Friends”

The first published evidence of Polanyi’s influence on Poteat appears in Poteat’s 1954 review article “The Open Society and Its Ambivalent Friends” in *The Christian Scholar* (included in *PP*). The essay sharply criticizes Popper’s ideas as presented in the new revised and expanded second edition of *The Open Society and Its Enemies*.

In a short reference to Polanyi without citation, Poteat approvingly notes Polanyi’s notion of “fiduciary foundations.” This phrase is not in “The Stability of Beliefs” but “fiduciary foundations” does appear twice in *LL*, once in a reference to the end of “the critical enterprise” and the new emerging intellectual period, “the post-critical age” (109). Popper’s critical rationalist ideas about an Open Society suggest he does not recognize the importance of fiduciary foundations.

Poteat’s reference to Polanyi without citation seems to assume his readers are familiar with Polanyi and suggests that he has already incorporated some Polanyian ideas into his own perspective. Other sections and themes in Poteat’s essay on Popper seem compatible with and may be influenced by Polanyi, but Poteat’s own critique of “Cartesian anthropology,” “deracinate, critical reason,” and absolute distinctions between facts and norms is also made from the standpoint of “Incarnation faith.”

1955: Poteat visits Polanyi and is given a typescript of the Gifford Lectures

After a 1955 visit with Polanyi in Manchester, full of excitement for us both, I took the train to Sheffield for an international conference, a typescript of the Gifford Lectures, later to become *Personal Knowledge*, under my arm. There were no seats to be had on board, so I stood in the aisle. There I propped the typescript on a stainless steel bar extending across the window at which I stood and read with mounting excitement the section on ‘connoisseurship,’ as the flooded English midlands rushed past, beyond the page from which I read. ‘Connoisseurship’ was rich nourishment for my post-critical instincts (*PM* 6-7).³

The Polanyi biography’s account, based on Scott’s 1978 interview with Poteat, has a little different flavor and a couple of inaccurate details:

During his years in Manchester, Polanyi had made many friends in the university; however, few took him seriously as a philosopher. In 1955, he made such a friend in Bill Poteat, a philosopher of religion who had come upon Polanyi’s essay on the Azande (“The Stability of Beliefs”) while writing his dissertation. Poteat had recently been appointed to an assistant professorship and was grateful for Polanyi’s interest in him. He felt very young and insignificant when he attended a soiree at Michael and Magda’s apartment. There he met a most impressive collection of people from all walks of life. To Poteat’s surprise, Polanyi’s friends and associates seemed unaware of his work in philosophy. In spite of his cordial relationships with them, Polanyi was something of an outsider among them (*M/S* 226).⁴

Scott’s longer, unpublished manuscript of the biography contains this passage:

As Poteat was leaving to catch the train back to Oxford Polanyi forced on him three or four chapters of what was later to become part of *Personal Knowledge* (*PK*). Poteat remembers being terrified of losing the manuscript since he hadn’t had the presence of mind to ask whether his were unique copies. However, he started reading while standing in the outside aisle on the train, his excitement rising all the

while (1978 Scott interview with Poteat). Poteat's delighted response must have been a great encouragement to Polanyi. The friendship thus begun was to continue for many years and give [sic] opportunity for serious exchange on Polanyi's philosophy (text provided by Marty Moleski, S.J.).

December 1958: Polanyi retires from Manchester and begins to travel extensively in the US and elsewhere, making a visit to Poteat in Austin, Texas

. . . and finally to Austin, Texas, where William Poteat was teaching at the Episcopal Seminary. Polanyi arrived unannounced. Dismissing his taxi at 6:30 A.M., he found Poteat's office still locked. Eventually he located a janitor, who let him in. At about 8:00 A.M., Poteat opened his office door to find Polanyi sound asleep, with his head propped on the handle of an umbrella braced between his knees (*M/S*, 235).

Polanyi's inclusion of this visit in his extensive travel—which included stops in Chicago to visit Hayek and perhaps Shils, Palo Alto to visit Stanford's Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, Princeton to visit Hugh Taylor, and other significant contacts and family members—perhaps suggests something about the warm personal relationship that was developing. Or did Polanyi think that this bright and (relatively) young philosopher would be helpful in promoting his ideas? Poteat's institutional position at a small denominational seminary likely did not impress Polanyi.⁵ A lecture, "The Outlook of Science: Its Sickness and Cure," was delivered in Texas on this trip and may help explain the visit, in addition to the developing personal relationship that led Polanyi to feel comfortable napping in Poteat's office. The lecture was never published, but lecture notes that survive contain one of the relatively few discussions by Polanyi of his meaning of "post critical."⁶

1962: Poteat goes to Oxford from January to June as Visiting Research Fellow at Merton College

Polanyi was, in June 1959, elected Senior Research Fellow at Merton College, Oxford (*M/S*, 239); his fellowship continued until he was forced to retire because of his age in July 1961 (*M/S*, 247). He moved to Oxford and continued to live there in the sixties and seventies and had some continuing unofficial connections with Oxford colleges. Poteat came to Oxford from January to June of 1962 as a Visiting Research

Fellow at Merton College. References to their discussions at this time are found in the unpublished notes on Scott's 1978 interview with Poteat. But it is unclear how much Polanyi was around Oxford in this period, so the extent of contact between Polanyi and Poteat this term is unknown. Poteat was pursuing his interests in ordinary language philosophy along with whatever contact he had with Polanyi. In this term, Polanyi went to California for the McEnerney Lectures (February, 1962), met with Charles McCoy's graduate seminar at Pacific School of Religion, and there met Richard Gelwick (*M/S*, 247-248).

In the notes, which were taken by Monika Tobin (Scott's assistant) from tapes of Scott's interviews with Poteat, Poteat also gives some background on how he arranged the Duke Lectures when he returned from this term at Oxford. Moleski suggests there may be even more information on the Scott tapes, available in the Regenstein Library. Because it was right after this period that Poteat arranged to bring Polanyi to Duke, whatever contact they had was significant, even if of short duration.

1964: Polanyi spends the spring semester at Duke University as the James B. Duke Distinguished Professor

The Polanyi biography documents Poteat's extensive involvement with personal arrangements and professional relationships for Polanyi's Spring, 1964 Duke residency (*M/S*, 254-256). Polanyi's increasing "otherworldliness" required increased attention and care by Poteat as he filled in for Magda in helping with Polanyi's everyday needs. There were also wide-ranging contacts arranged for and by Polanyi during this period (e.g., Polanyi visited Sewell at Tougaloo College, Gelwick came to Durham, Polanyi went to the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, the University of North Carolina, Greensboro, and MIT).

Karl Polanyi died in April and Michael went to Toronto for the funeral. He prepared for presentations in Jerusalem and at Bowdoin College. No wonder that, as Scott and Moleski write, "In many ways, Polanyi felt that this semester at Duke marked the high point of his career as a philosopher" (*M/S* 256).

We believe this residency at Duke was a crucial period for the mutual influence and deep friendship between Poteat and Polanyi. Polanyi's writing of "The Logic of Tacit Inference" and his efforts to make connections with the thought of other important thinkers would have been fertile ground for exchange about topics and thinkers Poteat knew well, as Polanyi worked on those topics and the "mind-body problem" (*M/S* 255).

Newspaper clippings and articles on Polanyi's lectures at Duke are in the Yale collection.⁷ In Monica Tobin's transcription of Scott's interview of Poteat, there are interesting exchanges not included in detail in the Polanyi biography:

Poteat: Have you read the whole series of those [Duke] lectures?

Scott: I probably did once.

Poteat: . . . I felt very strongly that this was very good stuff and in fact it's not so cryptic as the spin off—namely the TD. Do you know that whole story about how that happened? The format was that he'd give a lecture on a Monday night and then on the Tuesday afternoon there'd be a university-wide seminar, which is to say anyone could come ... Arts and Sciences and all the rest, from 4-6 and he would deal with whatever questions were raised by people in the light of the lecture given the previous night. After the first lecture, we distributed on a given Monday night the mimeographed typescript of the lecture of the preceding week. So . . . everybody had an accumulation of previous lectures. So there was this . . . kind of intellectual ethos around his thought which was unique in his experience. He had never had a kind of continuing conversation with a more or less intact group of people who had [notes] to look at from the lecture of the preceding week.

Scott: Audience?

Poteat: The audience would run from about 75 to 150...frequently there was standing room only in the hall which was perfect acoustically and for preserving the intimacy between the speaker and members of the audience but it began to overflow when you got up over 100. Michael always had the feeling that Duke was for him one of the most important experiences of his whole life as a philosopher because he felt he had gotten a hearing there such as he had not gotten anywhere else (transcript provided by Marty Moleski, S.J.).

The interview continues with comments about the attempt to get the Duke Lectures published. In his interview with Scott, this is a matter about which Poteat did not mince words.⁸ Poteat recalled a young editor at Doubleday who

snapped it up and said we want to do this and we thought it was all settled and he was going to take time to go over the lectures and fill them in and tidy them up and then the Yale University Press got on its high horse and their legal department got in touch with Doubleday's and they made the absurd claim that the Duke Lectures were in fact the Terry Lectures (transcript provided by Marty Moleski, S.J.).

August 1965 and 1966: Polanyi participates in Study Group on Foundations of Cultural Unity (SGFCU) at Bowdoin College and subsequent Study Group on the Unity of Knowledge (SGUK) beginning in 1967

The Polanyi biography provides information (*M/S* 258 ff.) on the SGFCU, which Polanyi chaired, with Marjorie Grene and Edward Pols serving as fellow members of the organizing committee.⁹ Poteat is listed as a participant in both the August 1965 and August 1966 Bowdoin conferences put together by SGFCU; he is an active discussant in Grene's monograph (Grene 1969) which includes portions of the 1965 conference discussion. Poteat's interactions with Polanyi and the other important intellectuals linked to SGFCU (Sigmund Koch who had recently moved from Duke to the Ford Foundation, Pols, Grene, Hans Jonas, Iris Murdoch, Charles Taylor, John Silber, Eugene Wigner, William T. Scott, Donald Weismann, Elizabeth Sewell, and many others) must have been important in Poteat's development. The Bowdoin conferences, which were covered appreciatively in the *New York Times* (*M/S* 260), are a fascinating episode in mid-twentieth century Western intellectual history and should be explored further for their general influence beyond that on Poteat and Polanyi.

But Poteat is not listed as a participant in any of the ten meetings of the SGUK (which succeeded the SGFCU) that occurred from October 1967 through March 1970 (Grene 1971, vii-xvi).¹⁰ An interview with George Gale (5/27/14), who served as executive secretary for the SGUK, confirmed that Poteat would have been invited to later sessions. Why does Poteat not participate in these later conferences that included many of the same figures as well as other leading thinkers such as Jacob Bronowski, Noam Chomsky, John Searle, Alasdair MacIntyre, Hubert Dreyfus, Jean Piaget, and others? We believe this is strong indication of the change in Poteat's priorities and direction, beginning in 1967-68. This contrasts with his intense collaboration with Polanyi, particularly from the time of the 1964 Duke lectures through Poteat's editing of *Intellect and Hope*.

Fall 1965: Polanyi stays with Poteat, who works on Terry Lectures

Polanyi, exhausted after ending his scheduled Wesleyan Lectures early, goes to Chapel Hill late in the fall to stay with Poteat and his wife Marian to recover. This is reported in Scott's longer, unpublished draft but not in the published biography.¹¹

Another significant involvement of Poteat in Polanyi's projects in this period is his participation in the controversy over the revision and publication of the Terry Lectures as *Tacit Dimension* in 1966. Polanyi finished preparing materials for publication in January 1966 (*M/S*, 261). Poteat's account, reported in the transcription of his

interview with Scott (made much later), claims both he and Grene urged Polanyi *not* to publish the Terry Lectures as delivered.¹²

1964 – 1968: Poteat works on *Intellect and Hope* and Polanyi's Grand Program

In these years, Poteat and Thomas Langford edit *Intellect and Hope (IH)*, a major collection of essays, including many by participants in the SGFCU as well European scholars, funded by the Lilly Endowment (after earlier proposals went to the Danforth Foundation and others).¹³ Poteat's editing and his work on his own contributions are major episodes in the history of the influence of Polanyi on Poteat's thought and Poteat's influence in the spread of Polanyi's ideas.¹⁴ Poteat's contributions to this volume appear to be his first major publications related to Polanyi.

Early work on the *IH* project apparently began in 1964 as a Spring 1964 Poteat letter refers to discussions of the project with Provost Cole.¹⁵ Work continued until the publication of the book in 1967, according to some correspondence, or 1968.¹⁶ The Danforth and Lilly proposals, the projected contributors, and correspondence with President Knight and others about the project are fascinating and show that there were discussions of potential conferences around the volume. In one note, President Knight mentions possibilities of appointing Polanyi to a new senior research position at Duke in 1967.

The letter from Poteat to Provost Cole quoted below mentions his heavy editorial involvement, including weekly correspondence with some authors. Indications from comments to former students reported to us, as well as Poteat's later comments in *PM*, are that Poteat did most of the editing of this volume, which was published as jointly edited by Poteat and Langford. The proposal to Lilly has the clear tone and style of Poteat and provides a striking view of his enthusiasm and commitment to Polanyi's philosophy as a fundamental critique of and alternative to modern thought, across a range of disciplines. Comments in Poteat's letters to President Knight and Provost Cole are examples of his self-described "delusions of grandeur" (12/12/66 letter to President Knight) about the project and its impact.

If I may be forgiven for saying so, it (*Intellect and Hope*) is the most comprehensive and integral assault upon behaviorism or reductionism of which I know—save only that of Polanyi's work itself; and it has the additional advantage of coming from prestigious hands in many different fields. Authors from the fields of religion, philosophy, political science, biology, physics, law, sociology, art, literary criticism, psychology and representing Northern Ireland, England,

Belgium, France, German[y,] Poland, and the United States are included (Poteat's letter to Provost Cole, 12/12/66).

Poteat's later letter to Scott in May 1967 also shows the depth of his involvement in Polanyi's thought in this period. Scott had apparently been somewhat critical of a draft of Poteat's introduction to *IH* and Poteat explained how his experiences in teaching Polanyi led him to write the unusual introduction. This letter also gives an inventory of Poteat's teaching of Polanyi as of this date:

I have gone through P.K. with three undergraduate seminars, two graduate seminars with participants from religion, philosophy, political science, and psychology; I directed the five open seminars which followed each of Michael's Duke Lectures; and into the bargain I re-read all reviews of P.K. before beginning the Introduction (Poteat to Scott, 5/3/67).

Poteat's letter to Knight (12/12/66) states "the name of Polanyi and his work is coming to be associated with Duke as Husserl with Louvain" and his letter to Cole (12/12/66) indicates that Polanyi's personal papers will be donated to the Duke Library.

All of this makes clear that Poteat was fully committed to what we are describing as Polanyi's "grand program" in these years. But almost immediately, we see changes in Poteat's orientation that parallel his apparent decision not to continue participating in the Study Group conferences that began in October 1967.

January 1968: Poteat writes Grene to back out of co-editing *Knowing and Being*

On January 8, 1968, Poteat wrote Marjorie Grene to tell her he would be unable to fulfill his previous commitment to her and Polanyi to serve as the co-editor of what became *KB*.¹⁷ The letter is classic Poteat in style, rhetorical flourishing, and commitment to his students.

But what does it say about his own sense of the alignment of his lifework with Polanyi's project? If he had seen his major contribution as the spreading of Polanyi's ideas, he surely would have found a way to stay involved in this publication. The letter seems to show he knows his calling is elsewhere and that he is willing to let others be the leaders in promoting Polanyi.

Did Poteat continue to influence *KB*, making further suggestions about selections or the introduction? Did he read the manuscript, and talk or correspond with Grene about it? The letter shows him responding to her plan and refers to other

correspondence. This letter also mentions earlier contact with Polanyi in Washington (“When Michael asked me in Washington to be your collaborator . . .”) a meeting of which we have found no other record.

Poteat’s letter to Scott (5/3/67) makes clear that Poteat sent drafts of sections of *Intellect and Hope* to Grene, so she may have reciprocated while continuing to work on *KB*.

June 1968 to Fall 1969: Poteat takes sabbatical in Greece and experiences his “Orphic Dismemberment”

We believe this experience, mentioned briefly in several of Poteat’s essays and discussed in greater detail in letters to students in the Yale Collection, marks a major turn in Poteat’s life. It also marks the change in his understanding of his calling in relation to Polanyi’s project. He already seems to be pulling back, that is, not participating in the follow-up SGUK conferences, pulling out of *KB*, and focusing his 1968 sabbatical plans on art history and Greek culture. On some levels, this was no radical break—see below our discussion of his continued personal support of Polanyi and recognition of Polanyi’s influence on him.

The Prologue to *PM* (7) recalls his “Orphic Dismemberment” (“the intellectual categories upon which I had relied no longer fit”) and outlines his new orientation. The book, written beginning in 1976, probes this orientation in deep phenomenological detail. It is “an attempt to think *out of myself*, under the influence of deeply interiorized Polanyian motifs, about matters nowhere dealt with as such in *Personal Knowledge*” (*PM* 8). He writes, “My debt to Polanyi is profound and conspicuous. But, for good or for ill, what follows is my attempt, subject to a long and exigent apprenticeship to him, to think some unthinkable thought of my own” (*PM* 8).

March-April 1971: Poteat teaches six-week “Seminar in Meaning,” at University of Texas, Austin

After the (80th) birthday celebration, Magda returned to England and Michael continued on to Austin. He felt very alone without her. It fell to Bill Poteat and his wife to care for him. For the first time in his years of friendship with Poteat, Polanyi talked intimately about his family, reminiscing about his brothers and sisters . . . At the same time, Polanyi was aware that his ability to marshal details in a coherent argument was fading. Poteat found conversations increasingly exhausting, since he was expected to supply what Polanyi was unable to remember (*M/S*, 278).

Poteat had leave from Duke and was at Texas this term, teaching a course on “Music, Eroticism, and Madness,” an arrangement that seems to have supported Polanyi after Magda returned to England. John Silber, known to Poteat and Polanyi from the SGFCU, may have arranged for Polanyi and Poteat to be in residence simultaneously before he was fired at UT Austin in 1970.

Breyspraak recalls Poteat’s comments after that period about the frustrating and exhausting experience of having to serve as Polanyi’s memory when he was still trying to function with increasingly deteriorating cognitive abilities. Poteat also commented about Texas university politics as something out of the old Wild West, with Silber being best understood as a Texas gunslinger.

1972: Poteat distances himself from the Consortium for Higher Education Religious Studies (CHERS) and other programs

As Polanyi’s influence led to other conferences and the creation of the organization that eventually becomes the Polanyi Society, Poteat kept his distance from such activity.¹⁸ Was Poteat involved in any of the planning for the Polanyi programs offered by CHERS, including the May 1972 Dayton conference, Polanyi’s “last public scholarly presentation” (*M/S* 280)? Was this another opportunity Poteat declined? Poteat’s sole involvement in activities sponsored by the Polanyi Society, we believe, was his appearance at the 1993 Washington meetings which focused on his work.

1972: Polanyi seeks Poteat’s help on the final *Meaning* project

Polanyi was by then very aware that his mind was failing. As he observed his own fading powers, he was haunted by the fear that he would not be able to complete his philosophical system. He knew that he would need help from his disciples to round out the work he had done in the preceding four years. In his frustration over delays, Polanyi asked Bill Poteat to help him outline the volume before Prosch’s arrival. Polanyi even suggested that he might spend six weeks at Duke, although he was happy with Poteat’s alternative proposal of coming to Oxford in late December. In the end, however, Poteat could not come. Feeling old and desperate, Polanyi was forced to wait until February 1973 for Prosch to join him (*M/S* 282).

From this account, the notes, and correspondence, it appears that Poteat saw some notes or an outline of one of the versions of the *Meaning* project.¹⁹ He seems to have had plans to participate, but, for whatever reasons, he did not.

1974: Poteat seeks a home for Polanyi Papers

Poteat's involvement in the placement of Polanyi's papers is referenced in a March, 7, 1974 letter from Geoffrey Payzant of the University of Toronto to Scott (copy provide by Marty Moleski, S.J.), which includes the following:

I can report that Michael Polanyi has written to say that he is willing that his books, papers, etc. should be deposited in the University of Toronto Library. Bill Poteat and I have been working together on this, and both of us will probably make a trip to Oxford in the summer to get the whole thing properly underway . . .

Next week I go to Boston for a meeting with some of the Explorers Poteat thinks I ought not yet to announce to them that Toronto will get the Polanyi papers, but that I could discuss it in confidence with Prosch. I think Poteat may be right about this, but will wait and see how it looks when I get there. Will keep you informed.

There are additional references to Poteat in other letters about the Polanyi's papers, including one in which Magda Polanyi expresses confidence that Poteat can best represent the Polanyis.²⁰

A May 18, 1974 letter to Gelwick from Magda Polanyi shows the depth of the relationship between Poteat and Polanyi from her perspective: "I find him [Michael] increasingly difficult to follow and rapidly deteriorating. He has written a letter to Bill Poteat to express his pleasure and appreciation, but the letter is such that it cannot be sent, not even to Bill. It is heartbreaking for me to talk about this, but [I] shall have to explain to Bill why M. has become silent."²¹

Conclusion

This outline confirms the close relationship between Poteat and Polanyi in the years between 1955 when they first met, through Polanyi's final illness. In the early sixties, Poteat became Polanyi's ally, promoter, agent, possibly his intended literary executor for a period. Particularly between 1964-67, Poteat was an eager supporter of what might be called Polanyi's "grand program." But it appears that Poteat developed a

different focus beginning about 1968, although he remained a close friend, supporter, and, in Polanyi's view, a potential major contributor to Polanyi's intellectual reforms. With his "Orphic dismemberment" in 1968, Poteat realized that he and Polanyi had been insufficiently radical in addressing the dead ends of the Enlightenment, and he increasingly focused on "recovering the ground" with phenomenological explorations of mindbodily being-in-the-world. Rather than building a grand program based on Polanyi's explicit philosophy, Poteat began to draw from Polanyi's deeper and often tacit "logic"—a cluster of breakthroughs that he regarded as even deeper than Polanyi's explicit thought and any movement based on it. (see *PM*, the prologue and *passim*).

Many sections of *Polanyian Meditations* explore this ground, and one wonders what Polanyi might have made of this book. By 1997, Poteat would write in a letter to Walter Mead:

As for Polanyi's analysis of ontological hierarchy, it performs no philosophical function for me at all. First, fundamentally, it is an exercise wrought with second order concepts almost entirely which, as you know, has no attraction for me . . . It could have been formulated by any philosopher working in the traditional idiom (Poteat to Mead, May, 1997, Yale Archives).

One must contrast this assessment with Poteat's enthusiastic endorsement of Polanyi's grand program ("the most comprehensive attack on behaviorism and reductionism of which I know") in his December 6, 1966 letters quoted above and his extensive involvements on many fronts in promoting Polanyi's ideas prior to 1968.

Poteat's close personal friendship with Polanyi continued until Polanyi's death. Poteat drew from Polanyi where it helped his inquiry, but in his view he needed to dig far beneath and beyond Polanyi's grand program.²² This began at least by 1967-68. It was perhaps not initiated by but was dramatically inspired by that October evening in Athens when he rounded the corner at dusk and saw Moustakas's equestrian statue when the light was turned on "providentially" inside the Diogenes International Gallery (*PM2*).

Endnotes

¹A full exposition of the mutual influences of these two revolutionary intellectuals of the last century would include many dimensions we have left largely unaddressed: (1) Poteat's influence on the spread of Polanyi's contributions through his doctoral students' dissertations and teaching; (2) Poteat's role in introducing Polanyi to other students (undergraduates, Divinity School students, graduate students from other departments, especially Political Science); (3) subsequent publications of Poteat's students in articles and books substantially influenced by Polanyi; (4) Poteat's use of and disagreements with Polanyi in his own writings, including his four books; (5) Poteat's dissent from Polanyi's perspective as discussed by Cannon, Mead, Rutledge, Yeager and others; (6) earlier

articles in *Tradition & Discovery* that discuss aspects of Poteat's thought, including essays by Poteat students and about Poteat that have also appeared in *Appraisal*; (7) correspondence between Poteat and Polanyi in the YDS Poteat archive and the Michael Polanyi Papers (MPP) in the University of Chicago Library; (8) discussion of Polanyi and Polanyian themes at the Washington, 1993, meeting of the Polanyi Society devoted to Poteat's work (a meeting which Poteat attended and participated in actively; a fuzzy tape of that conference is in the Yale collection, awaiting transcription); and (10) other papers presented at the Yale Conference in 2014 found at www.whpoteat.org.

²When possible, citations are in the text using the following abbreviations: *PP* = *The Primacy of Persons and the Language of Culture* (Poteat, 1993). *PM* = *Polanyian Mediations: In Search of a Post-Critical Logic* (Poteat, 1985). *M/S* = *Michael Polanyi: Scientist and Philosopher* (Scott and Moleski, 2005). Thanks go to Marty Moleski, S.J., the surviving Polanyi biographer, who provided many helpful things (e.g., relevant text from the unpublished Scott manuscript). Many cited documents are included with the longer version of this essay that can be found under "conference papers" at the Poteat website: www.whpoteat.org. Breyspraak or Mullins will be happy to help others access documents.

³The "section on 'connoisseurship'" is likely based on Polanyi's Series II, Lecture 6, "Skills and Connoisseurship" which is available at www.polanyisociety.org.

⁴If Poteat's recollection of his 1952 discovery is accurate, he would have completed his dissertation before reading any of Polanyi's writings. Poteat's dissertation on Pascal was defended and signed November 15, 1950. According to Dale Cannon's research, UNC hired Poteat as a full-time Instructor in Philosophy in 1947. Cannon reports that he had risen to the rank of Associate Professor by 1955, a year in which he won the university's outstanding teacher award (Biography on www.whpoteat.org).

⁵Poteat taught at the Episcopal Theological Seminary of the Southwest in Austin for three years beginning in 1957. As footnote 4 reports, Poteat had risen to the rank of Associate Professor at UNC by 1955, when he won the university's outstanding teacher award. Why he left UNC for Austin is unclear, but this may have been connected to the (unsuccessful) student movement at Chapel Hill to have Poteat named Chancellor in 1957 (described in personal correspondence from Ed Yoder [4/23/2014], who was student editor of the *Daily Tar Heel* at that time). In his unpublished note on "Religion and Culture as I See It" (written sometime after 1967 and provided by Dale Cannon) Poteat says the offer from Austin came "just as I was about to abandon my career."

⁶Where Polanyi gave the lecture is unknown. A 21-page typescript of the lecture (some of which may be notes rather than polished text) has written, in Polanyi's hand, at the top of the first page "Austin 30 Nov 1958." The lecture is available as part of the Gelwick microfilm collection (filename: Glwk84-Outlook-of-Sc-Sickness&Cure-Lecture-1958) of Polanyi materials available at www.polanyisociety.org.

⁷The Duke Lectures themselves are now available at www.polanyisociety.org.

⁸See also Mullins (2010, 64-65) for a review of archival letters outlining the copyright controversy that sidelined efforts to publish the Duke Lectures.

⁹The 1965 and 1966 conferences sponsored by SGFCU and the subsequent series of smaller conferences sponsored by SGUK were supported by the Ford Foundation. Documents we have

recently obtained from the Ford Foundation give additional insights into Polanyi's role in these exciting conferences as part of his "grand program" for reforming Western thought.

¹⁰There apparently was a least one and perhaps two SGUK meetings after the publication of Grene's collection (Grene, 1971), which included selected materials from papers in the first ten conferences.

¹¹The biography's discussion of this period is *M/S*, 261-264. See also the introduction to the Wesleyan Lectures posted with the lectures at www.polanyisociety.org.

¹²See Mullins, 2010, 63-64 for some excerpts from Grene letters over several years about the Terry Lectures and their revision. Polanyi's Introduction in *TD* (1966, x; 2009, xviii) suggests only the third chapter differs substantially from the Terry Lectures.

¹³Poteat mentions visiting 11 foundations in his 12/12/66 letter to Provost Cole.

¹⁴Poteat's own contributions include his essay, "Myths, Stories, History, Eschatology and Action: Some Polanyian Meditations," his introduction, "Upon First Sitting Down to Read *Personal Knowledge*," and the appendix. What may have been an earlier version of Poteat's essay titled "Myths, Stories, History and Action" was prepared for the 1966 Bowdoin conference.

¹⁵Documents referenced in this section come from Duke University Archives from files of President Knight and Provost Cole. We appreciate the assistance of the Duke archival staff in locating material. Most can be viewed in the longer version of this paper posted at www.whpoteat.org under conference papers.

¹⁶1968 is the date in *IH* copies the authors have seen, although May 1967 is the date on Acknowledgement (*IH*, vi) and perhaps 1967 was the anticipated date of publication when some correspondence was written.

¹⁷This letter (Box 16, Folder 2, MPP) was included in Mullins (2010, 40-42).

¹⁸See *M/S*, 280-281. Activities related to Polanyi's thought are also noted in early issues (1972-74) of *The Society for Explorers Quarterly Bulletin* and *The Polanyi Society Newsletter* available at www.polanyisociety.org.

¹⁹See Moleski and Mullins (2006) for discussion of Prosch's involvement in late Polanyi projects, including *Meaning*, both before and after this 1972 discussion with Poteat. They also discuss letters reflecting the increasingly fragile Polanyi's simultaneous work with Gelwick.

²⁰As part of his 1970 Duke dissertation directed by Poteat, Gerald L. Smith prepared a 1969 microfilm of the copy of Polanyi's Gifford Lectures which Majorie Grene gave to the Duke University Library at some point in the late sixties (Smith 1970, 298). Smith's Introduction to the microfilm (Michael Polanyi, #222-1-2) indicates Grene gave the typescript "to Duke University Library for inclusion in the Polanyi archives." Until at least the late sixties, apparently Duke was the intended recipient for the Polanyi papers and Poteat likely had much to do with this designation. Payzant's 1974 letter indicates the papers will go to Toronto but in the end they went to the University of Chicago. There are references to letters and notes about negotiations with libraries in the unpublished Scott draft of the biography.

²¹This letter, cited in Moleski and Mullins (2006, 14) is one Gelwick gave to Scott.

²²The pattern here, Poteat's early enthusiasm for Polanyi's ideas and his later criticism of Polanyi, as he found his own calling, complemented by a continuing close personal relationship all over a period of 24 years, is the same pattern found in Marjorie Grene's engagement with Polanyi over 26 years.

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POTEAT'S USE OF POLANYI: AS FERTILE GROUND AND POINT OF DEPARTURE



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Keywords: irony, faith/reliance, heuristic passion, personal agency, reductionism, confession, W. Mead, R. Hall, K. Cashell, D. Yeager, D. Cannon, humanism, the tragic and knowledge, dialectical, reduplication, new method of philosophizing, mindbody, speech, orality

Abstract

William Poteat acknowledges a profound debt to Michael Polanyi, yet claimed not to be doing Polanyian scholarship. So what was the relationship of the former to the latter? Polanyian motifs important to Poteat include the fiduciary, creativity of knowledge, personal agency, critique of reductionism, and the confessional mode. In addition, Poteat goes beyond Polanyi in his rich humanistic background, his sense of the tragic, the need for a new language and method for philosophy commensurate with the dialectical nature of truth, the concept of “mindbody,” the centrality of speech/orality to human being.

I begin with a paradigm of cognitive dissonance: in 1874, at the Paris studio of the photographer Nadar, a group of French painters ostracized by the art establishment exhibited paintings revealing a new approach to seeing the world. Louis LeRoy, the art critic for the weekly paper *Le Charivari* expressed the view of most of society by describing the show and its shared technique of “Impressionnisme” as “outrageous”—his judgment of works by the artists Manet, Pissarro, Degas, Renoir, Monet, and Cezanne.¹ I suspect many people who read William Poteat’s work for the first time can sympathize with Louis LeRoy—the language, the syntax, the allusions and references

are so far removed from their normal readings in contemporary philosophy that they find themselves thinking, if not saying, “Outrageous!”

Those who know Poteat’s work have been sensitized to this problem by Poteat himself and the thinkers he studied. We see it in Kierkegaard’s “indirect method,” Wittgenstein’s acknowledgement of the strangeness of his work, Poteat’s own analysis of the residual Cartesianism of Popper, Freud, Steiner, and Percy, and in his repeated warnings that he is not doing philosophy in the usual way—and should not be read that way; indeed, he says at one point, “...dropping out is the most radical philosophical feat” and Poteat certainly “dropped out” of the professional guild of philosophy in many ways.² So I begin by suggesting that one of the themes most to be engaged in understanding Poteat, one of the central emblems of his work, concerns how to read him: permeating everything Poteat writes about Michael Polanyi—and other topics as well—is irony, indirection, a double vision. As Poteat himself put it in a strange biographical note he wrote for Duke Divinity School in 1964: “The fact that I have said that all of this about myself is so, makes all of it to be somewhat less than so” (Poteat 1964, 51).

Out of sympathy for a “first reader” of Poteat, however, let me introduce my essay in a more conventional way. As part of the focus on Poteat’s relation to Michael Polanyi, this article first surveys quite briefly those “places where Poteat chose to develop his own position in Polanyian language and structures,” in Diane Yeager’s words. It then turns to Poteat’s contributions to philosophy beyond Polanyi that are due to weaknesses in Polanyi’s approach, the radical implications of Polanyi’s thought which remained hidden for most readers, but which Poteat sought to excavate, and finally Poteat’s distinctive motifs which cannot be found in Polanyi’s work *per se* (Yeager 2008, 31-38).

Fertile Ground

Poteat himself stated it clearly: “My debt to Polanyi is profound and conspicuous” (Poteat 1985, 8; hereafter *PM*), and his relation to Polanyi was perceptively probed by eight papers in an issue of *Tradition & Discovery* devoted to “The Philosophies of William Poteat and Michael Polanyi.” So my best advice on this topic is to re-read the Prologue to *Polanyian Meditations*, and to review carefully that issue of *Tradition & Discovery* (35, no. 2 2008). Let me lift out a few of the items that caught my eye in that symposium, particularly in Diane Yeager’s and Dale Cannon’s articles. From Polanyi’s “deeply interiorized motifs,” Poteat stresses the following:

- a. Knowledge and action are grounded in faith, in the tacit commitments and subsidiary clues upon which the knower must rely in order to make any claim about the world. Here Polanyi provided a well-argued response to the

assumption of modern philosophy that only absolutely certain conclusions, arrived at through radical skepticism, could be called “knowledge.” Poteat speaks in one place of the “cloud” under which A.J. Ayer’s *Language, Truth, and Logic* put the humanities, and clearly he saw Polanyi’s work as a life-line to those struggling to preserve the sensibleness of non-scientific language.³ Though Polanyi himself connected the “faith” of knowing with religious faith (*PK*, 280-286), he only occasionally alludes to this connection, though it was a move congenial to Poteat, (Nickell and Stines 1993, 118ff.).

- b. A second Polanyian contribution to Poteat’s program was his insistence on the dynamic character of knowing, a process best exemplified in discovery, creativity, and action rather than in the purely ideational products of concepts and theories. Knowing is an intellectual passion, a heuristic enterprise by which the seeker gropes toward “a revelatory unfolding of the only now known.” Yeager perceptively notes that Polanyi’s term “heuristic passion” “also gave [Poteat] a name for his own driving, striving, searching, restless journey,” which seems an apt description of Poteat’s manner of being (Yeager 2008, 33).
- c. A third, related way in which Polanyi helped Poteat was in providing greater resources for the recovery of personal agency in philosophical discourse. Poteat’s interest in the later Wittgenstein and ordinary language philosophy had already alerted him to the importance of restoring the first person pronoun to the center of epistemology, but Polanyi’s discussion of “emergence” helped Poteat see “the possibility of recasting the reflexive, reflective “I” as the composite, thoroughly temporal mindbody that dominates [his] late books.” Indeed, Yeager argues that “this attempt to give some sort of philosophical account...of agency and therefore freedom constitutes Poteat’s most distinctive and most significant contribution” (Yeager 2008, 34).
- d. I want to suggest also that in Polanyi’s work Poteat gains an important ally in his opposition to positivistic science. Though Poteat himself rarely discusses the actual workings of science, he does refer at important points to the “reductionistic ethos of modernity,” to “reductionism,” and describes Polanyi’s work in one place as “the most comprehensive and integral assault upon behaviorism or reductionism of which I know.”⁴ Poteat’s use of B.F. Skinner, Karl Marx, and Charles Darwin in some classes, his criticisms of Karl Popper and A.J. Ayer, and his approval of Sigmund Koch’s critique of Skinnerian behaviorism show that he is aware of the weight of modern science in distorting society’s understanding of knowledge.⁵ Poteat himself had little interest in the details of the science-humanities debate, perhaps in part because Polanyi had handled that challenge so well, certainly beyond Poteat’s ability to do so.

- e. Finally, Poteat is struck by the confessional mode which Polanyi employs in *Personal Knowledge*, and that is precisely the mode he himself employs in his late books. Roughly one-third of his essay “Upon First Sitting Down to Read *Personal Knowledge*” is devoted to a discussion of the rhetorical device of confession and its implications (Langford and Poteat 1968, 13-18). The use of the first person singular pronoun is a solecism for critical intellectual discourse, announcing as it does that one has not placed private, personal intuitions under the judgment of universal, objective standards, and so the persistent use of “I” in Poteat’s late books confirms Polanyi’s claims about personal knowledge, displays Poteat’s owning of responsibility for what he has written, and signals to the reader that a different form of knowing and being is present here.

We could, of course, greatly extend this list of Polanyian contributions to Poteat. Wally Mead states that “...the real genius of Poteat, to my thinking, is this determined effort to *eliminate the stark dichotomy* of the ‘inner-self’ and the ‘outer-world,’ and therefore the split between mind and body...” that Polanyi sometimes, but not always overcame (Mead 2008, 12).

Ron Hall has pointed out that Poteat’s reservations about the universal application of Wittgenstein’s model of language games probably comes from Polanyi’s steadfast emphasis on the person as speaker as the center of language, and (though Poteat does not take this step) one might conclude with Rush Rhees that *conversation* is therefore the better model for language than games (Hall 2008, 21-22).

Kieran Cashell sees Polanyi’s presence in Poteat’s writings as “ubiquitous; it informs everything at an infrastructural level.” Using Polanyi’s terminology, Cashell labels the relationship of Poteat to Polanyi as an *apprenticeship*, suggesting that *PM* is a “written report” on the embodied epistemology that Poteat saw in Polanyi. He goes so far as to say that “Poteat’s authorship is mediated Polanyi” (2008, 48-50).

Such brief comments do not do justice, of course, to these various treatments of Polanyi and Poteat, but perhaps they can serve to indicate the rich and varied resonances that have been heard between the two men, resonances that will not yield, we might say, an exact score of either man’s compositions, but will still allow us to enjoy their two-part harmony. The second of my aims was to sketch “Poteat’s contributions to philosophy beyond Polanyi,” and to that I now turn.

Point of Departure

(1) Poteat’s dis-ease with critical philosophy began a few years before he read Polanyi, in his dissertation on Pascal and Descartes, an emblem of the first difference

between the two men—namely, the depth and reach of Poteat’s cultural background in the humanities, perhaps parallel in some ways to Polanyi’s competence in science. As Gus Breytspraak put it, “there is a much broader and deeper agenda being set” in Poteat’s early work than he found in Polanyi, an agenda that incorporates philosophy, literature, art, and theology, as well as a good bit of Freud, and enabled him to develop “personal knowledge” beyond Polanyi (Breytspraak 2008, 18). As one small example, consider Poteat’s identification of the problem of critical philosophy as “gnosticism” in the “Prolegomenon” to *Recovering the Ground*:

I gaze Northeastward across the Atlantic...and I wonder: can we survive our millennial addiction to gnostic apocalypticism...? Gnosticism, older than the Western world, an ever present religion deep in the western soul, ... is the belief that men and women are pure spirits, now held captive in the prison of this world created by an evil demiurge from which alone esoteric gnosis can set them free (1994, xi).

Gnosticism is not a Polanyian term, but to anyone in the humanities, particularly in religion or philosophy, it is rich in connotations, allusions, reverberations that quite easily extend the discussion of critical philosophy into new directions. Poteat’s humanism both *enables* his reaction to critical philosophy and also *enhances* that reaction beyond what could be accomplished by the scientist or philosopher alone, as his acute reading of texts shows so well (see Nickell and Stines 1993, Pt. Three).

(2) Second, I recall a comment made in seminar by Poteat, probably in the fall of 1971, that Polanyi had little sense of the tragic. Poteat’s reference, as I remember it, was to Polanyi’s time in Austin, Texas, the previous spring, where he gave what would be his last series of lectures. Polanyi had just celebrated his 80th birthday, and according to Scott and Moleski in the biography, “Polanyi was aware that his ability to marshall details in a coherent argument was fading. Poteat found conversations increasingly exhausting, since he was expected to supply what Polanyi was unable to remember” (Scott and Moleski 2005, 278). Poteat’s reference in class to this experience was to Polanyi’s having invested his entire life in intellectual activity and now that his mind was going, not knowing what to do. He had few resources, personal or professional, to cope with such an eventuality and was increasingly depressed about it. My memory is that Poteat was referring to the absence of a religious faith in Polanyi adequate to this time in life, and also to the essentially Enlightenment confidence in reason that had sustained Polanyi for so long, but which now was betraying him.

It is difficult, of course, to assess a person's thinking at this time of life, since none of us has lived through a similar situation, but I think there is at least some truth in Poteat's observation. I have looked at the boxes in the Polanyi archive at Chicago that deal with the period of World War II and just afterward, and found no sustained attention by Polanyi to the Holocaust, despite the fact that many of his own family members died in the camps and almost all of them suffered radical disruptions in their lives, many ending as exiles. Polanyi tried to help some of his relatives find shelter and work in England or America, but while the war caused him to write energetically about the political and economic challenges caused by fascist and communist governments, there is silence about one of the greatest tragedies of that bloody century, namely the destruction of the European Jews.⁶ *PK*, published thirteen years after the end of the war, contains numerous references to "dictatorship" and "totalitarianism," but very few to the moral or spiritual destructiveness of these regimes. Though Polanyi was not a practicing Jew, he was forced to leave Germany in 1933 because he was Jewish by the Nazi definition. This is not to say that Michael Polanyi did not feel this tragedy deeply, but that he did not include this darkness in his reflections on the modern age. Perhaps a certain optimism is necessary in order to do great science.

In contrast, the "shadow side of life" was a continuing concern for William Poteat, as can be seen particularly in the early essays "Tragedy and Freedom" (1956), "The Absence of God" (1956), and "Anxiety, Courage, and Truth" (1966), as well as in later essays like "Persons and Places" (1974) and "The Banality of Evil: The Darkness at the Center" (1988). He writes:

For us knowledge tends to be associated with heroism and unqualified beatitude.... Yet—it has not always been held, nor is it true. A deeper human sensibility has shown that truth is not only won at a price, but painful when won; that knowledge is always an ambiguous good, concealing a threat; that catastrophe is associated with the loss of innocence.⁷

He then points to the myths of Oedipus, Adam, and Faust in order to show the relevance to human knowing of the various forms of darkness. And while this is not a concern of the last three books, I do not believe it is entirely absent from any of his writings, which is not true of Polanyi.

(3) A third way in which I see a distinctive difference between Polanyi and Poteat is in the latter's awareness of the degree to which all of western thought has been warped, truncated, or distorted by the critical temperament, such that a new language is necessary to oppose it. Poteat had suggested in "Upon First Sitting Down to Read

Personal Knowledge” that Polanyi’s difficulty for new readers was precisely his use of terms according to a post-critical sensibility, but in his own work this feature is raised, or deepened, to the level of a central motif (Poteat 1968, 3). This is the feature of irony, of suspicion referred to as I began this essay, and it has been well explored by Dale Cannon, who identifies it with Kierkegaard’s double-reflection:

Largely from Kierkegaard, I believe, Poteat early on learned that the human condition is (and fundamental concepts about it are accordingly) through and through “dialectical”—which is to say ambiguous: Nothing is simply what it seems to be on the surface, particularly not what it appears to be to detached, “objective” reflection.... What is needed is a sensitivity to the ironic possibilities in existence.... Unless a person becomes aware of and sensitive to this, she or he is liable to misunderstand and mistake what Poteat was all about and what he found in Polanyi (Cannon 2008, 25).

As Poteat makes clear in the Prolegomenon to *Recovering the Ground*, the style of his later works was intentional and the tone, I might say, aggressive. Here is a characteristic example:

...the present essay is not about anything. In its style – awkward syntax, non-linear progression, reflexivity, dialectical reduplication, an unfamiliar and often deliberately “atonal” diction congested with what will appear to be pretentious or merely clever coinages that, together, allow my radical insight lucidly to oppose itself to the conceptual landscape from which it has been elicited and to impede yet another bemused lapse into our familiar dualisms—I have obeyed the demand upon me of this primitive reality to educe and then body forth the logos that endows my mindbody with sentience, motility, and orientation, both before I have yet spoken and after I do, as itself the condition of speech (Poteat 1994, xiv).

This is not a sentence that tries to woo its reader, to lead her gently into a colloquy with Poteat. He continues the explanation by comparing his reader to a “beholder of Cezanne’s paintings,” and claims his “text is like a fully developed Cubist painting.” His aim, therefore, is “to place the reader in an agonistic relation to the text. The rhetoric seeks by reduplication to embody dynamically in its own tension the actual intentional structure of our feats of knowing...” (Poteat 1994, xv). Cannon helpfully comments

on this “reduplication:” its point is to get us (Poteat’s readers or audience) to focus on the content of reflection (“the what”), but also to become aware of our own state of mind and life as we relate existentially to that content (“the how”). When practicing such double-reflection, we should gradually become aware of the cultural means—the pictures, metaphors, assumptions—with which we rely in our reflection on “the what,” and how they distort our understanding. “They skew our take upon the world and abstract us from ourselves” (Cannon 2008, 25).

As my first quote from Cannon indicated, this double-reflection extends deep into the human condition. “All truth as truth, considered existentially, is inherently and essentially dialectical”—that is, truth’s disclosure of itself is directly dependent on the knower’s relationship to that truth, on her authenticity and passion. To say that “truth is subjectivity” is to point to this feature that makes it impossible to “objectively,” distantly, coolly, dispassionately, detachedly understand truth. To do so would be to focus on “the what,” while ignoring “the how.” This was fundamental to Poteat; “sometimes *Polanyi* was aware of and sensitive to this, at other times he was not. And that is, in large measure,” Cannon concludes, “where the difference between them lies” (Cannon 2008, 25).

That Poteat was sensitive to the “how” of doing philosophy is easily seen in his last three books, where he adopts a distinctively new style of philosophical reflection. In the introduction to *A Philosophical Daybook*, Poteat describes his method:

What I began to do in 1987...was to sit down in my study every morning and, in a leather-bound book of blank pages, write down my reflections upon whatever philosophical perplexity was made to surface as I tried to learn what my way of thinking had become.... For myself ... [these pages] are an attempt to represent a certain new style of dwelling in one’s mindbody in the world. I have therefore avoided editorial tampering with what was written in the longhand draft, hoping thereby to keep you as close as I found I had to keep myself to the concrete agonistic, fully mindbodily activity of putting words upon the page in my own fair hand, which is, after all, one of the things that thinking is (Poteat 1990, 3).

Not only have Poteat’s ideas about philosophy changed, but also his understanding of how one should do philosophy: it should be done consistent with one’s mindbodily being. Everything must serve “*real life*, that is, life that is potent with the unacknowledged configurations of meaning, coherence, order, and value....” The writing longhand, the dating of each entry, the continuing to write only so long as a train of thought continues, the refusal to edit the text “for the sake of some Cartesian conceit,”

in the awkward language described above—all of these were strategems for avoiding a relapse into Cartesianism. The result is that “It will be immediately obvious that this is no work of scholarship.... What I aspire to for you is the same thing I have sought for myself: growing consolidation in a post-critical mode of mindbodily being...” (Poteat 1990, 3-5).

One last innovation of language should be mentioned, namely the crucial term “mindbody.” The stimulus and conversation partner in this particular move is probably not Polanyi, but Merleau-Ponty in his exploration of the irreducible coherency of body, mind, and perception in the *Phenomenology of Perception*. Through his own phenomenological examination of his bodily being in thinking, writing, bike-riding, and playing tennis, Poteat reveals the insidious tendency of the critical tradition to make us think of our body as a thing like other things, when in fact it is, for us, radically unlike anything else in the universe. These phenomenological analyses—a good example is Poteat’s analysis of his act of reading a paragraph in the *Meditations* (Poteat 1985, 182-187)—are original contributions to a re-visioning of philosophy, and help demonstrate what “mindbody” looks like in ordinary experience. Poteat’s description of “incarnate knowing,” characterized by the temporal, the embodied, and the oral imagination, tends to assume greater and greater importance for him as time goes on: “Our mindbodies, among whose existential modalities are form, order, meaning, and beauty, are the paradigms of the real” (Poteat 1985, 232). The mindbody is the center from which all our stretching forth toward the world commences.⁸

(4) Beyond noting the language used in Poteat’s writings, we must also remember that a major way in which he extends Polanyian thought is in his placing speech at the center of our mindbodily being. I want to remind readers of several facets of this theme:

First, Poteat’s early writings show a keen awareness of the need to insist that a speaker is an agent whose existence cannot be reduced or assimilated to its behavior, since the “I” of human speech is “systematically elusive” and logically unique. Surely Pascal and Kierkegaard have predisposed Poteat to this defense of the self against those who, like Gilbert Ryle, would efface all interiority (Yeager 2008, 34-35).

Second, one of the real strengths of *Polanyian Meditations* is the way that Poteat uses contemporary research in orality by linguists and anthropologists—Jack Goody, Walter Ong, Joseph Church, Colwyn Trevarthen, and William Condon—to extend and deepen his claim that it is in the oral/aural world of speech that language has its primitive home, rather than in the world of written texts (Poteat 1985, 153-197). He contrasts this at every point with the picture of language bequeathed us by the visual model of language that underlies the critical tradition, in which the world is rendered in a dead slice of visual space that systematically eliminates the temporal, dynamic

place in which persons have their natural home (see Poteat 1985, 50-92 as well as Nickell and Stines 1993, 23-42).

And finally, I think that for Poteat, the quality of language, particularly human speech, that makes it such a powerful constituent of our humanity is its metaphorical richness. In the etymological excursions in the *Meditations* he is signaling the many layers of intention, orientation, and implication contained in our speech, that bind our mindbody together with that of others and so makes both knowing and communication possible. It is not clarity, as Cartesianism claimed, that denotes knowledge, but richness of meaning, and revealing and celebrating this is the burden and the glory of the humanities.

I have gone on too long, and yet not said nearly enough. But this will have to do for now, and I will simply close these comments on Poteat with the advice: *Read his books.*

Endnotes

¹“Impressionisme.” *The Oxford Companion to French Literature*, ed. P. Harvey and J.E. Heseltine (Oxford University Press, 1959).

²The phrase “dropping out” is from “Reflections on Walker Percy’s Theory of Language,” in Nickell and Stines (1993, 233). Poteat comments on the necessity of his awkward style and quotes Wittgenstein in a note (Poteat 1985, 7).

³See Poteat’s comments on Ayer in Langford and Poteat (1968, 205-206).

⁴These references are from Poteat’s letters to Duke President Doug Knight and Provost Taylor Cole about the project of *Intellect and Hope*, described in Breyspraak and Mullins’ paper in this issue of *Tradition & Discovery*.

⁵On Popper, see Nickell and Stines 1993, 201ff.; on his use of the writings of Skinner, Marx, and Darwin in classes, see Breyspraak 2008, 15. Koch taught at Duke and was also a member of the Study Group on Foundations of Cultural Unity (SGFCU) in which Poteat participated.

⁶The biography confirms this, as there are no indices for “Jews” or “Holocaust,” and the pages on the war and postwar years are primarily on his work on economic and political issues. See Scott and Moleski 2005, 152-54, 162-63, and 171-172. But also see p. 128.

⁷“Anxiety, Courage, and Truth,” in Nickell and Stines 1993, 280. In “The Banality of Evil,” Poteat refers to the Holocaust explicitly (Nickell and Stines 1993, 3-6).

⁸Some of the language in my account here is taken from my article “William Poteat: The Primacy of the Person,” in *Appraisal*, vol. 7, no. 2 (Oct. 2008): 31-37. This was reprinted in *Tradition & Discovery*, 40/2 (2013-2014): 36-45.

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A Review Essay

VOLITION, COGNITION, AND ACTION: THOMAS PFAU ON KNOWING AND BEING



Andrew Grosso

Pfau, Thomas. *Minding the Modern: Human Agency, Intellectual Traditions, and Responsible Knowledge*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013. Pp. 728 (hb), 688 (paper). ISBN 978-0268038403 (hb), 978-0268038441 (paper). \$75 (hb), \$30 (paper).

Keywords: volition, tradition, person, modernity, nominalism, Coleridge, Ockham

Abstract

Thomas Pfau's Minding the Modern simultaneously (1) elucidates the correspondence between various philosophical issues, (2) identifies how these issues were disaggregated during the modern period and how this led to the collapse of humanistic studies, and (3) outlines a strategy for reintegrating these issues and thereby restoring confidence in forms of philosophical, historical, and moral reasoning. Pfau engages many of the problems Michael Polanyi sought to address, but approaches them from a rather different perspective.

Thomas Pfau's *Minding the Modern* (2013) seems destined to find a spot on the same shelf as the works of Alasdair MacIntyre, Charles Taylor, Pierre Manent, and others who have sought to account for the perceived shortcomings of contemporary intellectual culture by way of a close reading of the history of modernity. Pfau's efforts are simultaneously historical, philosophical, and programmatic: he (1) expounds the long-term ramifications of nominalism, (2) elucidates the ineluctable correspondence between subject and object, cognition and action, freedom and responsibility, and other comparable distinctions that during the modern period devolved into false

dichotomies, and (3) commends efforts aimed at restoring our appreciation of the essentially personal character of all knowing and being. What follows is an extended review of his arguments in *Minding the Modern*, to which I append some cursory observations about the relative correspondence of his efforts to those of Michael Polanyi.

Pfau describes his overarching purpose in a variety of ways. His primary concern has to do with the “twofold enigma” of humanistic inquiry and the “distinctive dialectical process” whereby such inquiry is “received, rethought, and transmitted to future generations” (4). His desire to “retrieve” the kinds of “interpretive concepts and frameworks” necessary for humanistic reflection leads him to an extended consideration of the relationship between “theoretical inquiry and practical reason” (4), which he suggests requires careful thinking about volition, awareness, apperception, and cognition. His concern in all this has to do with his judgment that “absent a sustained, comprehensive, and evolving critical engagement with the history of key concepts of human agency (will, person, judgment, teleology), humanistic inquiry will not only find itself increasingly marginalized ... but will eventually discover itself to have been the principal agent of its own undoing” (75).

The first three chapters of the book anticipate in summary form the more detailed arguments of later sections. Pfau devotes considerable attention to tracking the various intellectual developments that have led to the current crisis in humanistic studies. The advent of modernity, he contends, was less a “momentous rupture within a single vector of historical progress” and rather more a shift that involved the “eclipse of one worldview by an incommensurable worldview” (24). He traces the origins of this eclipse to the “Franciscan critique of Aquinas by Bonaventure, Duns Scotus, and, especially ... Ockham’s startling proposition that reason is a function, indeed a projection of power, rather than the criterion for its responsible exercise” (18). The path marked by Ockham was followed by Bacon, Hobbes, Locke, Hume and others, and eventually led to a place at which “questions of human flourishing and of interpersonal obligation and responsibility” were “effectively quarantined and ... gradually forgotten” (20). The modern obsession with “accumulative, inter-subjectively demonstrable, and systematic” ways of knowing resulted in a “far more restrictive understanding” of action, thought, and articulation than was previously the case (18-19).

Further exacerbating this tendency was an increasingly stringent resistance to all forms of authority, tradition, and “normativity” (32). As modern thought continued to unfold, the narrative character of humanistic inquiry shifted “from the mnemonic to the emancipatory, from the genre of epic to that of utopia,” and from participation in tradition to the “methodical cultivation” of critical detachment, all motivated by a “deep-seated fear of error” (35). Similarly, modern thought introduced a different understanding of time, one beholden to “chronometric” measurement and “value-neutral accountancy” rather than the more value-laden “*persistence of time in consciousness*”

(37). This shift in temporal perspective elides our ability to appreciate how concepts are received and transmitted, and thereby privileges utilitarian forms of “political, social, and economic reasoning” (41). Thomas Paine’s insistence that it “is the living, and not the dead, that are to be accommodated” (372) yields an understanding of volition and responsibility in which “action morphs into process” and the responsible agent is “sublated into the impersonal authority of what Hegel calls *System*” (48).

Although there is from the fifteenth century on a clear tendency towards increasingly individualistic and abstract forms of reasoning, Pfau suggests the features of modern thought are by no means unique to the modern period. Instead, he identifies a historical trajectory that runs “from Protagoras through Leucippus, Democritus, Epicurus, Lucretius, next resurfacing in the extreme voluntarism and irrationalism of the late nominalists (Gabriel Biel, Nicholas of Autrecourt), and taken to their logical conclusion in the mechanistic and determinist theories of mind spawned by Hobbes, Locke, Hume, Hartley, Priestley, and Schopenhauer” and continuing through the work of Frege, Ayer, Ryle, and others (72-73). The identification of this trajectory helps make the point that the transmission of knowledge and values involves the “dialectical and agonistic” contest of ideas. In other words, what Pfau intends to recover is a “*debate*” and not a presumably “self-contained, homogenous, and monolithic tradition” (69). That we have lost sight of the extent to which the ideas and practices that sustain humanistic inquiry are necessarily transmitted in this manner is itself an indicator of how thoroughly “trans-generational, inter-subjective, and materially concrete” ways of knowing have been displaced by “private, ritualized meditation” *à la* Descartes (57). So strong is our commitment to formalized, syllogistic accounts of knowing that we are unable even “to register the *fact* of [our] conceptual amnesia,” let alone “articulate its *significance*” (68).

Having outlined the parameters of his argument, Pfau next turns to a detailed analysis of how a number of developments came together during the late medieval and early modern periods in ways that ultimately eviscerated humanistic inquiry. The first development he examines has to do with modern accounts of volition, and in particular with how the will came to be increasingly thought of as “inscrutable and non-cognitive” (80). Broadly speaking, Western thought inherited from classical Hellenistic culture three accounts of the will: a Platonic one, a Stoic one, and an Aristotelian one. The first tended to regard the exercise of reason as both “necessary and sufficient for movement, judgment, and action” (89). The second likewise placed a premium on “rationality and accountability, the cognitive and the discursive” (101), and further characterized the act of judgment as one that ideally avoids all social entanglements (97). From this perspective, knowing is seen as a “quest for cognitive *autonomy* and moral *self-legitimation*” (104). The third, however, moved in a rather different direction: Aristotle’s account of *prohairesis* (first) affirmed the essential connection between reason and emotion and

(second) recognized habit, community, and narrative as indispensable for the cultivation of both astute reasoning and appropriate desire (89-90).

Despite its more robust analysis of knowing and being, the Aristotelian account of volition “came under increasing pressure in late Scholasticism and was rejected outright by the emerging discourse of ‘rights’ in the seventeenth century” (98). A more Stoic account of volition resurfaces in the eighteenth century, including the tendency to associate irrationality with “passion” and to treat human action “descriptively rather than normatively” (104). Modernity’s commitment to this account of volition has left us increasingly incapable of accounting for the nature of judgment (both moral and rational) and thus unable to adjudicate differences between opposing judgments (99). The result is “disorientation,” angst, and irony (100).

Aristotelian accounts of cognition and volition were initially complicated by their reception in “classical Latin and early Christian” cultures (108-109). Pfau highlights Augustine of Hippo’s analysis of the often divided and inconstant nature of human volition as a paradigmatic example of this development (Pfau limits his review of Augustine to *Confessions* and *The Trinity*). Augustine’s account of freedom as the exercise of the will in the recognition of and desire for the good along with his emphasis on the priority of love over reason (and of divine grace over both) presented new challenges. More specifically, his efforts led to an understanding of the individual that associated self-awareness, not with self-possession or self-mastery, but rather with cognizance of our “defective moral vision” (121). In other words, the problem for Augustine is neither the absence of reason nor the surfeit of passion, but sin (an argument Augustine employed in his critique of the Pelagian tendency to exaggerate the capacity of the will [114]). Thus, whereas for the Greeks self-awareness was thought to be coterminous with the unification of the self, for Augustine it “almost always amounts to awareness of indelible conflict” (117).

Thomas Aquinas developed the “consummate articulation” of the “fusion” of Aristotelian and Augustinian accounts of the will (133). Like Aristotle, Thomas believed all contingent being involves the “realization of a substantial form” ordered toward a “superior end” (134). Like Augustine, he proposed neither cognition nor volition precede the other; rather, they mutually determine one another, and their interdependence is strengthened by action oriented towards the true, the good, and the beautiful (cf. 139, 146, 148). He also affirmed Augustine’s analysis of the consequences of sin. Hence, Thomas recognized the need for both “operative and cooperative” grace in practical and formal reasoning; “rational and sustained exchange about pretty much anything at all” (133) requires the participation of human cognition, volition, and action in the wisdom, sovereignty, and grace of God. The “*prima philosophia*” of metaphysics opens to the “*sacra doctrina*” of theological reflection, which itself opens to the “*visio beatifica*” of mystical union (140-141).

Thomas's account of knowing and being is closely aligned with his analysis of language: our concepts and terminology do not merely refer to entities but rather help ground "our relation to, engagement with, and participation in the reality" of the entities we thereby encounter (156). "Every problem...presents itself as such *to* us as something unconditionally, if enigmatically 'given'" and thereby signifies "rational thought's dependency on the sheer givenness or, rather, 'giftedness' of the underlying phenomenon." This obviates the possibility of wholly independent, autonomous cognition or volition and requires a commitment to "a specific outlook on the nature, scope, and ambition of knowledge itself" (158-159).

It seems Thomas recognized the consequences that would follow if the metaphysical framework wherein he situated his accounts of cognition and volition were ever rejected: the intelligibility of contingent entities, the relation between subject and object, the exercise of moral reasoning, and the very possibility of "rational personhood" itself would all collapse (146-147). Oddly enough, it was a theological conviction rather than the secular rejection of medieval piety that paved the way for the eventual rejection of the metaphysical framework of Thomistic thought: William of Ockham's insistence on the absolute sovereignty and freedom of God both prioritized volition over cognition and opened up a divide between God and the creation (161). The distinction between the "*potentia absoluta*" and the "*potentia ordinata*" hardened into a difference, the former existing at an infinite remove from the latter (169). God *institutes* reason, meaning, and purpose rather than *affirms* them (173).

Ockham was by no means the first to head in this direction: Roscellinus of Compiègne, Peter Abelard, and others were making similar moves many years prior to Ockham. Nor was Ockham alone in his own time in promulgating nominalist tendencies: Étienne Tempier prioritized the being of God above all other divine attributes, and Nicholas of Autrecourt argued the meaning of concepts lies exclusively in their "predictive probability" rather than their capacity to signify a metaphysical framework (163-165). At the same time, the emphasis placed by Francis of Assisi, Bonaventure, and others on the singular identity and character of Christ carried "along with it an implicit challenge to the authority of the church" (171).

All of these developments were harbingers of a new worldview, one committed to hitherto unprecedented levels of "explicitness, transparency, certainty, and verifiability" (160), to the priority of "efficient and material causes" over presumptive formal and final ones (168), to autonomous self-determination on the part of the world and individual agents (175), and to the appearance of the secular "both in theory and in practice" (quoting Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*) as a mediating horizon between the necessary and the contingent, God and the world (178). These developments also gave birth to a new theological problem, namely, that of theodicy: suffering, privation, and

even contingency itself were no longer taken for granted but seen as conditional and thus open to amelioration, both philosophical and practical (181-182).

The third section of *Minding the Modern* explores the consequences of the disaggregation of cognition and volition brought about by nominalism: here Pfau's critique of modernity shifts into high gear. The first representative artifact Pfau examines is Hobbes's voluntarist ode to statism, *Leviathan*. Later social and political thinkers (e.g., Locke, Montesquieu, Kant, Adam Smith, J.S. Mill, et al) would all try to moderate the position Hobbes develops, but they all work within the framework he established (186-187). Hobbes attempted to recover classical Greek and Latin accounts of identity and action, but intentionally ignored accounts of personhood developed in the Christian tradition (200). He maintained the will is both "the indisputable source of the self's inner reality" and at the same time "terminally opaque and incommensurable with all propositional and discursive knowledge" (190). Reasoned action does not so much follow from the exercise of volition as much as it involves a *post hoc* attempt at justification (202). Thus, individual will, bereft as it is of "all temporal continuity and historical awareness" (192), is incapable of being coordinated with other "disjointed" individual wills into any kind of meaningful purpose apart from the organizing power of the sovereign (189); in short, Hobbes transposed Ockham's insistence on the absolute sovereignty of God to the king.

Hobbes's account of the will is commensurate with contemporaneous accounts of physics and natural law developed by Pierre Gassendi, Hugo Grotius, and Samuel von Pufendorf, all of whom attempted to apply the "impersonal methods of Baconian science" to philosophical and political questions (191-197). The most "conspicuous casualty" of this approach is "the idea of the individual as centered on a rich, unique, and dynamic spectrum of intellectual and affective dispositions and states" (199-200) and reduced instead to "an aggregate of inherently value-neutral forces" (187) all "begging containment by a stronger counterforce" (192).

Hobbes's "uncompromising assault on teleological and Christian-Platonic models of human agency" left those who followed him very little to work with in their efforts to identify reliable grounds for "moral and spiritual flourishing" (215). Francis Hutcheson (and others) sought to "contain the apparent irrationality of the Hobbesian will" by articulating a social, political, and economic vision of human experience in which all is governed by the individual exercise of "self-disciplined interest" (217). This further inclined Western thought towards instrumentalist forms of thinking. It also marks a shift away from reasoning on the basis of first principles and toward reasoning from (phenomenal) effects back to presumed (noumenal) causes (216-217). Reason is no longer a "plausible *foundation* for the commonwealth," but rather reveals a pattern of cost-benefit transactions "within an *already* established community" (242). Accounts of volition and agency were reconfigured along the lines of "an empiricist and

notably hedonistic theory of human action” (219). At the same time, the emergence of the notion of individual rights, understood especially in terms of upward social and economic mobility, included “a vocal and often inspired critique of establishment religion as ... prejudicial to these very rights” (251).

John Locke consummated the “downward transposition of the will from an active and dynamic metaphysical source to the epistemological zero-degree of literally mindless passions.” Locke’s proposals rendered “mental and physical processes as wholly convertible” (220), and even though he sought to retain “some rudimentary mental function” he found himself forced to do so in a way that accounts for agency only by way of an “infinite regress of explanatory concepts” each characterized by a “diminished level of awareness” (222). Thus, desire no longer strives for anything (let alone a transcendent good), but is merely a deterministic passion. One unfortunate ramification of this account is that it undermines “all temporal perspective” (223) and turns the self into “an epistemological vagrant of sorts” (224) with neither a past nor a future, cut off from community of every kind.

Contemporaneous efforts (such as those of Shaftesbury) to restore the “temporal continuity” of knowing and acting failed to break free of the gravitational pull of nominalism because they continued to depend on reductionistic accounts of agency (237-240). Such accounts could not help but shade every act of knowing with the tint of irony since they could offer nothing better than a “hermeneutic of suspicion” that encouraged the search for truth, goodness, and beauty even as it ruled out the possibility of finding them (247).

Like Locke, Bernard Mandeville is a “transitional figure” between early modern critiques of virtue ethics and the more thoroughgoing critiques that emerge during the nineteenth century and are “identified above all with Nietzsche” (256). Mandeville’s “unflinchingly empirical account of how cognition unfolds” (258) reopens a problem identified by Boethius and resolved by Thomas, namely, the relationship between “human fate” and “divine providence” (260-263). Mandeville’s insistence on the “absolute primacy of passion” led him to reject the more “integrative” framework developed by Thomas (264). As Schopenhauer would later acknowledge, to prioritize passion “means to reinvest a seemingly empirical phenomenon with a noumenal and metaphysical dimension all of its own and, in so doing, to expose the Enlightenment’s own mythical underpinnings” (266). Mandeville is sometimes seen “as a prescient and well-intentioned version of modern, liberal, and pluralist society,” but in fact he leaves individuals and society without any means for managing difference (265).

As Shaftesbury did with Locke, Francis Hutcheson attempted to respond to Mandeville and “recover a model of free and responsible human agency” (270). He insisted our moral awareness is intelligible only if it is understood as a cultivated virtue rather than as either a “mysterious, metaphysical power” or a primordial, irrational

impulse (275). However, his tendency to make “endless distinctions and subdivisions of the affections” along with his inability to identify an alternative to “the prevailing, diametrically opposed languages of rationalism and empiricism” makes Mandeville’s account of moral agency “a rather muddled affair” and thus ultimately unsatisfactory (280-281).

By the time we get to David Hume, the nominalism introduced by Ockham and others has so worked its way into accounts of cognition, action, and moral awareness that the possibility of responsible agency has been “lost in the fog of physiological, non-cognitive processes” (284). Although he hoped his naturalism would enable him “to recover from the implications of his epistemological skepticism” (292), Hume’s analysis of “mind, reason, judgment, and will” ended up rendering these phenomena so “ephemeral” as to make them “altogether fictitious” (300). He insisted “anything not susceptible of being described in terms of efficient causation constitutes a ‘belief’ and, as such, must be anathematized.” Thus, he does not so much “elucidate as dissolve” our experience of awareness and judgment (306). His approach “reflects less a compelling solution to persistent epistemological questions than the sheer refusal even to embark on the quest for genuine answers” (315). Hume’s efforts thus demonstrate the extent to which reductionistic naturalism “explains, literally, nothing” because it cannot account even for itself (286). Ironically, Hume’s proposals also have the effect of undermining any possibility of real freedom. The identification of liberty with “indeterminacy and autonomy” leaves us without any means of reliably appraising action and rules out the possibility of a coherent or meaningful narrative account of our experience (296-297). Similarly, his “suggestion that social exchange pivots on the vicarious manipulation of collective passions spells doom for the Enlightenment project of a rationally deliberative public sphere” (302). Hume himself recognized the way the seemingly intractable philosophical problems raised by his skepticism “seem to vanish, like the phantoms of the night on the appearance of the morning,” when we “leave our closet, and engage in the common affairs of life” (326, quoting Hume’s *Treatise on Human Nature*). He nonetheless considerably extended a trajectory in Western thought that continued to evolve “from Nietzsche to Frege, Wittgenstein, Ryle, Derrida, Lyotard, Daniel Dennett, and David Chalmers” (287).

Following in the footsteps of Francis Hutcheson, Adam Smith attempted “to recover a model of practical rationality” capable of enduring the acid bath of Hume’s skepticism (326) and was at once “post-metaphysical” but also moved “beyond the rationalist, emotivist, and skeptical critiques of metaphysics” (327) regnant at the time. The challenge Smith faced was to find a way of transforming the essentially irrational behavior of individual agents into actions that yield “rational, systematic effects” in society as a whole (328). Smith’s efforts thus mark a shift towards what Charles Taylor has identified as the “rise of the disciplinary society,” from the “*auratic*” (i.e., the

distinctive or authentic) to the “*technocratic*” and from the “*personal*” to the “*systematic*” (332). The possibility of action has thus been transformed first into mere “reactions” and thence to impersonal “transactions” (371).

Smith’s efforts depended on a “rather peculiar and selective” reading of Stoic thought (335). The Stoics held that passion signifies a failure to recognize the propositional nature of truth, and hence succumbing to passion involves a “disorder of judgment,” but such disorders could be overcome through “methodological and sustained introspection.” Smith, however, objected to “the very supposition that vice and virtue could ever be established by an inner sense operating independent of any contextual awareness” (344) and thereby ruled out the possibility of there ever being a “critical or counterintuitive perspective” on socialized sentiments (345). Instead, he characterized moral awareness as a “mimetic alignment” of individual passion with those of others (336-337). This results in a view of society in which humans are “anonymous, hermetic, and substantially unrelated individuals” and the bond between them “strictly virtual” (339), one that results in “the narcissistic dramaturgy of sentiments displayed and approved” (342). Not surprisingly, the primary metaphors Smith employs to describe socialized sentiments tend to be “theatrical” or “optical,” both of which are thought to yield “supposedly seamless, transparent, and effortless” forms of knowing (348-349). Overall, his account renders “moral cognition and judgment” a “mere reflex gesture,” one that results in “mimetic affirmation” but rules out the “creative potential of thought” (349). Unlike the novelty encouraged by classic accounts of virtuous habit, Smith’s account of behavior involves only “*repetition without difference*” (368) in the “extrapolated, virtual domain” of the social horizon (370). Pfau identifies the current “rise of cognitive-science models” of agency and action as the “most obvious heir” to the line of inquiry codified by Smith (359).

The last chapter of this section of Pfau’s book summarizes the various ambiguities and tensions that continue to characterize late modern liberal thought and practice. The language of “rights” that forms the “centerpiece of modern liberal polity” (380) affords unique opportunities for pursuing freedom and dignity, but the “incommunicable person of the Augustinian and Thomist tradition has morphed into a free-floating particular begging to be sublated into a philosophical, sociological, or statistical calculus” (376). The possibilities for self-actualization have increased dramatically as a result of the “cascade of micro-distinctions” individuals utilize to pursue ever-more idiosyncratic ways of identifying themselves (380), but the absence of any “coherent, let alone normative vision of justice and goodness” (389) makes it difficult to identify a basis for socio-political stability and cultural flourishing without direct recourse to “state-administered force” (378). The proliferation of expectations and demands for the amelioration of all forms of privation and the expansion of opportunity likewise evokes a tendency to pursue the betterment of society as much through violent revolution as through gradual reform (401). The emancipation and prosperity of the bourgeoisie

are offset by “the essential pettiness” and “trivial socioeconomic aspirations” of the “founding vision” of modern libertarianism (412). The unbridled objectivity championed by modern science leads to remarkable levels of technological achievement even as it contributes to the fragmentation of knowledge “into so many discrete institutional and disciplinary sub-specializations,” eventually eroding any sense of the “human and spiritual significance of the knowledge so obtained” (421; cf. 417-436). In short, the tendencies manifest in early nominalism culminate in a culture unsure of its own foundations and unable to justify its own continued existence.

In the fourth and final section of *Minding the Modern*, Pfau adopts a more (re)constructive perspective and identifies the ways the thought of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, John Henry Newman, and others can contribute to the recovery of humanistic inquiry and cultural flourishing. Coleridge’s work “marks the beginning of a turn, in both philosophy and poetics, away from instrumental and pragmatic models of rationality and toward the (mostly negative) knowledge of history as one all-pervading miscarriage” (437), i.e., toward an acknowledgement of the consequences wrought by the perpetual forgetting characteristic of the modern project (438). Further, Coleridge anticipates Hans Blumenberg’s later assessment of “modernity as a renewed confrontation with the unresolved legacy of Gnosticism” (438), i.e., with a worldview characterized by the “estrangement of nature and matter” (439), by an unbridgeable divide between God and the world, and by a tendency to associate salvation with privileged knowledge. The rejection of Thomistic accounts of the relationship between nature and grace, human freedom and divine sovereignty, in favor of the more exaggerated accounts typical of the Reformation leaves us with precious few resources for engaging the philosophical challenges of their times (447).

The epistemological vantage point Coleridge takes up acknowledges our indebtedness to tradition and the historical development of the concepts we employ in our interpretive efforts (457-459). Over and against both the (Kantian) tendency to delimit our experience of reality to what can be justified through rationalistic demonstration and the (Hegelian) tendency to perpetuate the “original transgression” of modern incredulity through an unending process of “self-perfecting skepticism” (464-465), Coleridge holds out the possibility of recovering the spiritual dimension of human experience and thereby restoring confidence in our ability to exercise responsible action.

Having begun his examination of the problems he believes are endemic to contemporary culture with an analysis of the will, it’s no surprise to see Pfau first take up this same question in his engagement with Coleridge. Appreciating Coleridge’s understanding of the will requires attending to the distinction he made between different ways of knowing. He insisted, for example, on the difference between (on the one hand) a “framework of inquiry” wherein specific ideas are tested and verified and (on the other) the necessary conditions for any such framework; he referred to the former as a

“hypothesis” and the latter as a “postulate” (469). Volition is an example of a postulate, a necessary condition for many if not all forms of “rational discourse.” The exercise of the will involves neither “inference nor deduction,” but is rather “an act of assent to an incontrovertible inner certitude” that is less a proposition and more “a phenomenological *datum*” (470). It is thus the exercise of will that gives human experience its “reflexive or meta-discursive perspective” (477). Coleridge thus “reinvests human agency with an intellectual cum spiritual dimension of which the will had been stripped since the advent of Franciscan, voluntarist theology in the early fourteenth century” (478).

The will is one of the principal dynamics at work in the actualization of “Personëity,” i.e., the distinct and unique identity of the individual realized over time within the context of the individual’s relations with others and the world. Coleridge does not, however, absolutize the will *à la* Schopenhauer. “Phenomenality and ontology remain ... absolutely distinct” (480). The will thus “points to a radical and profoundly unsettling freedom,” one that resists both explanatory conceptualization and “deontological framing” (492). Like the true, the good, and the beautiful, volition “is not some notion or idea but is bound up with its realization” (498). Similarly, personhood “*is not a concept*, certainly not of the ordinary kind, not a quality to be predicatively applied to some set of objects or even a particular species; neither is it a transcendental (Kantian) category. Rather ... its reality is that of a (normative) idea,” an “unconditional good” (516).

With the connection between volition and personhood in place, Pfau next embarks on a survey of various accounts of personhood in the Western tradition (see esp. 517-555). He notes in particular Coleridge’s appreciative exposition of patristic conciliar theology and its identification of ipseity, alterity, and community as the defining characteristics of persons, both divine and human (506; cf. 510, 520). Even in those instances in which our experience of alterity is destructive rather than constructive (e.g., when our will elects to do something other than what our reason inclines us to do), the exercise of will is an essential clue (albeit in such instances only a negative one) to the incommunicable character of our identity and our orientation to and dependence on a transcendent horizon (532-533). Pfau also devotes significant attention to the work of Boethius and Richard of St. Victor, both of whom contributed to a theologically and philosophically robust understanding of the person (535-550); the latter in particular anticipated Coleridge’s insistence on the singular and incommunicable nature of persons (cf. 560-561). The extent to which Coleridge emphasized the importance of the incommunicability of persons is evident even in his analysis of language: we cannot, he suggested, signify persons in the same way we signify those things for which we can use predicative concepts (551). Pfau also acknowledges the similarities between Coleridge’s efforts and those of Buber, Levinas, and Lacan (519),

and draws on the work of Philip Rolnick, Norris Clarke, Jean-Luc Marion, and others to round out his overview.

His purpose throughout this survey is to demonstrate the difference between traditional accounts of personhood and the late modern tendency to opt instead for abstract, chiefly juridical ones (511). These, he suggests, evince a “laissez-faire ideal of pluralism and freedom that renders individuals and communities increasingly disinclined to give any reasons whatsoever for their practices, values, and commitments” (513). Within the context of a society marked by “proliferating subdivisions, interest-groups, and strictly preference-based notions of value and meaning, the instantaneity of mimetic (and inherently non-cognitive) impulses” displaces all narrative accounts of knowing and being, all reference to the transcendent, and all notions of relation other than “volitional and elective” ones, i.e., those modeled on efficient causality (514). Thus, “action is supplanted by mimetic reflexes, and...the cultivation of practical reason is short-circuited by the unthinking emulation of and compliance with prevailing customs, manners, and fashions” (515). In short, he sees the recovery of a more adequate understanding of personhood as necessary in order to sustain the vitality of common life.

The last two chapters of *Minding the Modern* are devoted to outlining an epistemology grounded in and responsive to the insights of the preceding sections. This involves highlighting the extent to which “love” rather than “correctness” is at the heart of all human knowing (515). Over and against the “seemingly deiform human intellect” to which his contemporaries aspired, Coleridge proffered an account of knowing that moves along both a “horizontal” and a “vertical” axis (563). Likewise, he rejected the passivity of the disembodied mind awaiting sensory impressions and insisted instead on the importance of action and thereby the significance of the body (564). He acknowledged, too, the difference between “primary” and “secondary” imagination, i.e., between the more fundamental, constructive dynamic of the mind “as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation” of God and our own critical, reconstructive efforts aimed at understanding the world (573). Taken together, these all signify the difference between an orientation to our experience that sees the world as “a cosmos rather than a universe” and is thus able to apprehend the world as a gift rather than as a meaningless agglomeration of quanta acting on one another in an extrinsic manner (571). We cannot, insists Coleridge, “confuse the value-saturated incommunicability of *person* with the generic and abstract species-concept of *human being* contingently realized as so many ‘individuals’” (586). Reductionistic and materialistic accounts of personhood ultimately fail to grasp the qualitative distinction between “the material ‘event’ of consciousness and its infinitely complex, layered, and richly evaluative internalizations” (587).

Apprehension of the personal character of human experience involves recognizing the extent to which “the empirical, inter-subjective realm is saturated with normative values or ideas” (592). Following Levinas, Pfau suggests this means acts of knowing require the exercise of justice, itself understood as “access to the Other outside of rhetoric, which is ruse, empire, and exploitation” (quoting Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*). The goal of understanding is not “unilateral acquisition or harvesting of information,” but rather transformation through participation in relationship (597). In other words, the cultivation of virtue is fundamental to the exercise of knowing. This is consistent with Coleridge’s emphasis on “fidelity to the conscience” as the *sine qua non* of understanding (603). This fidelity is grounded in our experience of alterity (manifest in both our awareness of ourselves and our awareness of others) and our effort to sustain the personal character of our identity and relationships. Any philosophy “solely based on rational, self-conscious, and abstract agency” and contained “within a ‘prudential’ calculus of interests to be negotiated” is impossible (609); rather, any debate in the realm of formal ethics presupposes a more primordial commitment to our recognition as responsible agents those with whom we disagree (610).

Despite his best efforts, Coleridge was ultimately unable to realize the ambitions of his philosophical project: as John Henry Newman observed, Coleridge’s “obsessive attempt at reclaiming and interweaving various strands of humanistic and theological thinking” was constantly at risk of “collapsing under the sheer weight of the machinery reassembled for the purpose.” Too much of the tradition has been displaced, and (even more to the point) this loss is no longer felt as such to the degree that would be necessary for its “recovery” to be possible (615). This, along with other overt “criticisms and more tacit misgivings,” encouraged those who came after him not to pursue the course Coleridge charted (616). Instead, those who like him were dissatisfied with the Enlightenment but who could not follow where he led “proceeded to rethink the human in emphatically objective terms, by embarking on a rehabilitation of the image” (618). But this, Pfau indicates, is a “matter for another book” (*ibid.*).

As noted at the outset, Pfau’s efforts overlap at points with those of Polanyi, even though they begin in rather different places and proceed by way of different forms of argumentation. Pfau’s analysis of nominalism lines up in helpful ways with Polanyi’s account of moral inversion, and suggests the ameliorating perfectionism and unbridled objectivity of moral inversion may grow from a common root. Both Pfau and Polanyi provide thick or textured descriptions of acts of knowing, i.e., ones that emphasize the continuity between informal and formal awareness, the correspondence between truth, goodness, and beauty, and the importance of embodiment, relationality, and tradition. Similarly, both recognize the need for some account of the transcendent character of the opportunities and responsibilities that ground and shape human experience. All of these features contribute to the articulation of a distinctly personalistic outlook in

both Pfau's and Polanyi's work. Finally, both highlight the challenges involved in maintaining vibrant and pluralistic cultural, social, and political orders and recognize the inability of late modern forms of reasoning to provide a secure foundation for such efforts. There is thus much to be learned from reading Pfau and Polanyi alongside one another.



REVIEWS

Cuneo, Terrence, *Speech and Morality: On the Metaethical Implications of Speaking*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. Pp. 224. ISBN-13: 978-0198712725 (hb). \$55.00.

In his second book, Cuneo argues that reflection on the nature of speech can reveal the truth of moral realism. While there are no completely uncontentious definitions of moral realism, it can be safely glossed as the idea that some moral statements, like “Genocide is wrong,” are true in virtue of moral facts. These facts, moreover, are in no way contingent upon human beliefs, desires, or attitudes.

Although to the best of my knowledge Michael Polanyi did not use the term “moral realism,” he seems to have been sympathetic to the idea. In “The Message of the Hungarian Revolution,” Polanyi describes the plight of the Budapest intellectuals who revolted against the Soviet Union in 1956 on the grounds that the value of truth and justice could not be disestablished by party decree. No explanation of this revolt can be complete, Polanyi thought, if it leaves out the moral truths that animated the rebels.

With regard to the various schools of thought within moral realism, Cuneo tries to be ecumenical. In this respect, *Speech and Morality* is a less ambitious project

than his previous book, *The Normative Web* (OUP 2010), where Cuneo argues for specifically non-naturalist moral realism; in other words, he rejects the idea that moral facts are wholly reducible to facts of the kind discoverable by the natural sciences. Presumably, Cuneo still holds this position, but in *Speech and Morality* he endeavors to develop an argument—his Speech Act Argument—that moral realists of all stripes can get behind.

Cuneo begins by drawing our attention to a dispute between Thomas Hobbes and Samuel Clarke. In *Leviathan*, Hobbes imagines primitive, stateless human beings who have prudential reasons to ensure their own survival but lack moral obligations to others. Only when they contract with one another to transfer power to an all-powerful sovereign to protect their interests do moral reasons emerge.

Clarke objected that in order for that agreement to be binding, it would have to have already been the case that “compacts ought to be faithfully performed.” Were this not true, no promise would have the normative force to make subsequent promises binding. Cuneo calls this “Clarke’s Insight,” and the book can be

seen as an extended effort to draw out its metaethical implications (2).

What Clarke thinks is true of promising, Cuneo thinks applies to assertions, commands and adjournments, and all other speech acts. When a speaker performs one of these acts, she changes her “normative standing” with respect to her audience. When one makes an assertion, for example, one takes responsibility—*moral* responsibility—for the truth of what one has asserted.

In developing and presenting his normative theory of speech, Cuneo borrows heavily from the work of J.L. Austin and John Searle. It is a pity that he never cites Polanyi, who seems to have been a kindred spirit. For instance, Polanyi writes, “[N]o sincere assertion of fact is essentially unaccompanied by feelings of intellectual satisfaction...and a sense of personal responsibility” (*PK*27).

But, it must be emphasized, a mere feeling of responsibility isn’t enough to make one a speaker, any more than merely believing that one has taken the oath of office is enough to make one president of the United States. To be president, one must *actually* take the oath of office, and to be a speaker, one must *actually* be responsible for one’s assertions. Because the existence of this kind of responsibility entails that there are some moral facts, we are justified in concluding that moral facts exist. This, in a nutshell, is Cuneo’s Speech Act Argument.

One might object that the obligations of speakers need not be explained by recourse to the kind of mind-independent

moral facts that moral realists postulate. Perhaps the obligations of speakers are on a par with “practice-based” obligations, like those associated with being an umpire in the game of baseball. Many anti-realists seem to believe that the normativity internal to established human practices is ontologically innocent.

Cuneo is keen to convince his readers that both categorical normativity and what he calls “practice-based normativity” stand or fall together. He contends that the arguments marshalled against facts about categorical normativity inadvertently undermine facts about practice-based normativity that both realists and anti-realists generally accept.

For example, Crispin Wright claims that we have reason to believe in moral facts only if we have a reason to believe that such facts explain a wide variety of non-moral phenomena. Because moral facts are not explanatory in this way, we should reject them. If Wright’s argument is sound, then a parallel argument would show that legal facts and norms should also be rejected, Cuneo alleges.

When a plaintiff makes an angry outburst at a judge, the legal facts explain not only why the angry outburst counts as an act of disrespect toward the judge, but also why the plaintiff is anxious about being punished. Legal norms explain the goings-on in the world through our beliefs and attitudes about them.

If this kind of explanation is sufficient for facts about legal normativity to be explanatorily useful, then perhaps facts about moral normativity could be

explanatorily useful in a similar way. If, on the other hand, this kind of explanation doesn't suffice, then we should accept neither legal nor moral normativity. Similar conclusions are drawn about a number of other attempts to reject categorical normativity while retaining practice-based normativity.

After making this argument, Cuneo presents his case against three kinds of anti-realism: error theory, expressivism, and constructivism. Here I will focus on his case against error theory, the view that moral statements attempt to describe the world, but that all of them fail to do so because there are no moral facts. Cuneo summarizes his argument against error theory as follows: "If an error-theoretic view of morality were true, however, then there would be no moral features and, so, no moral facts. And thus we could not speak. But we do speak, and so error theoretic views are false." (164)

In asserting that "we could not speak" were error theory true, Cuneo does not mean that we would remain silent but that we could not perform normative speech acts. I find it unclear why the error theorist would not simply embrace that conclusion, just as an atheist would embrace the conclusion that there are no true baptisms on the assumption that a baptism places one in a relationship with God.

It is one thing to reject baptism, and another to reject all ordinary speech acts, an idea Cuneo calls "deeply unattractive." Error theory, however, is *on its face* a deeply unattractive position. The error

theorist who is willing to say "it isn't true that the trans-Atlantic slave trade was morally wrong" is unlikely to shrink from saying counter-intuitive things about speech acts if that is what his metaethical theory commits him to saying.

So it's unclear whether Cuneo's response to the error theorist confers any dialectical advantage upon the realist. His response is further undermined by his earlier statements about the communication of animals and small children. Having the rights and obligations of a speaker requires a level of rationality that most animals and very young children have not attained. When they communicate, they engage only in what Cuneo calls "proto-speech acts," which are speech acts only in an "honorific" sense (69-75).

Honorific degrees are bestowed by institutions that normally bestow regular, non-honorific degrees; do genuine speakers somehow bestow the honorific speaker status on non-speakers? Apparently so: "[O]ne can properly ascribe...the status of having performed a speech act (or something close thereto) in virtue of the fact that one is being treated as a participant in the social practice of speaking" (71, emphasis mine).

Plausibly, though, a monkey incapable of speech has a reason to shriek to warn of an approaching snake, and makes an error, although not a *moral* error, when it shrieks at a snake-shaped stick. The monkey's communication can be evaluated as appropriate or inappropriate even if there were no genuine speakers on earth

to grant it honorary membership in the speaking club.

Cuneo would do best to dispense with the idea of “honorific” speech acts and accept that all communication involves normativity, though not necessarily *moral* normativity. Otherwise, Cuneo must concede that all the proto-speech acts whose utterers have not been granted “honorific” status are instances of non-normative communication. Once the category of “non-normative communication” is acknowledged, the door is open for the error-theorist to claim that it encompasses *all* speech and thereby de-fang Cuneo’s case for realism.

In the final chapter, Cuneo shows that his normative theory of speech can help answer an epistemic problem for realists that has been forcefully advanced by Sharon Street. Given that our moral sensibilities have been so thoroughly influenced by evolutionary pressures, how can realists explain our ability to detect the mind-independent moral facts without postulating a miracle or a cosmic coincidence?

Cuneo suggests an elegant solution to this so-called “Darwinian dilemma.” The ability to speak clearly has survival value and, if Cuneo is on point, presupposes awareness of some moral facts. So when evolutionary forces favored the development of speech, they also inadvertently favored rudimentary moral awareness. Once evolution creates beings capable of understanding some moral truths, they can reason their way to other moral truths.

Cuneo’s *Speech and Morality* comes highly recommended to those interested in moral realism. Students of Polanyi’s philosophy will find much to appreciate in the way Cuneo connects speech act theory to contemporary debates in meta-ethics. If the book is unlikely to convince moral skeptics, expressivists, and error theorists, it at least succeeds in bringing to light some hidden costs of their positions.

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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 James van Pelt (james.vanpelt@yale.edu) and someone will see that you are added to the list.

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