



A POLANYIAN-PARTICIPATORY APPROACH TO COMPARATIVE STUDY OF RELIGION: *THE QUESTIONS OF KING MILINDA* AND ANSELM'S *PROSLOGION* AS TWO TRADITIONS OF RELIGIOUS PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT

*This essay sets out an interreligious noncommittal and ontologically neutral framework or model for comparative study of religion that draws deeply on the participatory and personal understanding of knowing found in the published works of Michael Polanyi, especially his account of indwelling and empathetic knowing. Along the way, the essay presents a variety of innovations relevant to comparative study that open up novel and heuristic avenues for fruitful research and interreligious dialogue. This is a phenomenological approach but does not make appeal to or use of essentialized categories, as in classical phenomenology of religion. It focuses on traditioned, somatic practices in the contexts where they occur and flourish. In this kind of study, empathy becomes a disciplined art; theological and ontological judgments are suspended but not foreclosed; religious 'realities' are not rejected; and religious commonsense generic patterns and structures are noticed and described. The study provides a context for exploring differences and similarities without prejudice. It makes use of the post-critical conception of objectivity developed by Michael Polanyi. A comparison of phenomena from different religious traditions calls for setting them within the same ongoing generic way (generic traditioned practice) of being religious. As its title indicates, my book recognizes six generic ways of being religious, and I share those briefly here. The essay concludes with a case study comparison of *The Questions of King Milinda* and the *Proslogion* of Anselm.*



Introduction

This paper and the response by Jacob Sherman continue a conversation that began in 2010 at the Polanyi Society Meeting. At that meeting, Sherman, one of the two co-editors of *The Participatory Turn*, brought to light the convergence between Polanyi's thought and the recent movement among many scholars

in the comparative study of religion represented in that book. This current paper and Sherman's response come to the same convergence but from the other side: what an approach to the comparative study of religion shaped by Polanyi's thought looks like—specifically one comparing expressions of Buddhism and of Christianity—and how this case study appears in relation to studies representing the participatory turn.

My paper draws in large measure from my 1996 book, *Six Ways of Being Religious: A Framework for Comparative Studies of Religion* (Wadsworth/Thompson/Cengage).² That book was profoundly shaped by Polanyi's thought, even more than I realized at the time of writing it, though I did not intend to set out a *Polanyian* approach to the comparative study of religion. I certainly do not regard it to be the only approach to the study of religion that might be informed by Polanyi's ideas, and it does not claim to be the last or even the best word on the subject. I regard it as the best I am currently able to do while being responsible both to Polanyi's insights and to a career of getting to know and teaching the history and comparison of religion in human life and culture.

In what follows, much of what I say that characterizes a Polanyian approach to the comparative study of religion may be recognizable as good and appropriate independently of its relationship to Polanyi's thought or what his ideas imply about how to approach comparative study of religion. I believe that is in part because Polanyi affirms, draws from, and justifies our reliance on commonsense ways of knowing and understanding.

Part I: Key Polanyian Insights Relevant to the Comparative Study of Religion

I will begin by setting out a number of central Polanyian insights that are particularly relevant to the comparative study of religion.³

1. First, *in all of our knowing, understanding, and experiencing, we know more than we can say* (and more than we can learn from another or communicate to another via fully explicit modes of communication). What we know but cannot say Polanyi calls *tacitly known* or *tacit knowledge*.⁴ All knowing and experiencing—including specifically religious knowledge and experience—transcends what can be said or summarized explicitly and analytically (i.e., in some respects it will border on being, or be in some measure, ineffable).

It is not just contemplative modes of religious knowing and experiencing that involve knowing more than we can say. All modes of knowing involve tacit aspects. The fact that all knowledge transcends the explicit doesn't by itself make such knowledge mystical, though some have thought so. This assumption (that transcendence implies mysticism) has been a source of much confusion, it seems to me. (I am speaking here of what I would like to call *authentic* religious knowing and experiencing, judged as such from within, which leaves room for various cases of inauthentic and degenerative, less than optimal religious knowing and experiencing.) Thus even reflective and discursive 'theological' expressions of a religious tradition that involve articulating what that tradition takes to be ultimate reality will have tacit, and in certain respects ineffable, aspects. Some of these aspects will be more ineffable than others and may possibly be combined or fused with properly mystical and contemplative expressions. Nonetheless, this does not make such expressions mystical—at least not in the vocabulary I am using here and in my book.⁵

In consequence, *all* religious experience and practice, while almost always involving some tacit, ineffable aspects, is not thereby necessarily connected with contemplative practice and contemplative modes of knowing.⁶ In other words, other religious practices and modes of knowing that involve tacit aspects need to be considered over and above contemplative modes of knowing.

2. *Genuine religious knowing* (whether contemplative or not) *is for the most part practice based and mentor/apprenticeship led.* Polanyi has shown that the transmission of all types of knowledge, including scientific knowledge, is based in significant part on indirect teaching and guidance—even when it may appear to be explicitly or directly guided. How so? Knowledge transmission relies on the tacit initiative and indwelling participation of the learner to carry her beyond focal, explicit levels, both of a teacher’s words and of the symbolism being indwelt, to come to know for herself by acquaintance and understanding (which is for the most part tacit) what it is really all about. In any case, *it is an ongoing practice of skill mastery passed on from master to apprentice.* Consequently, it presupposes a context of tradition and community to support and sustain it.

3. So also, *all religious practice/knowing involves a from-to vectorial tacit structure that is somatically based,* and which *involves attending from a system of religious symbols* that is subsidiarily assimilated to the knower’s body in concert with other members of the community to which she belongs.

The participant-knower will, of course, also be attending primarily from her own body, which is the basis and ground of her attentional activity in the world. Her body, as Polanyi points out, is primarily known to her subsidiarily. She is able to know other things beyond her body principally in virtue of attending from the clues lying within her body that point to them and indicate their meaning. (The implications of this from-to structure will become clearer in what follows.)

All religious practice and knowing involves this *from-to* orientation (or *from-via-to* orientation, to use Walter Gulick’s helpful phrase,⁷ with the “via” here alluding to the difference made by the symbol system being indwelt), which is an essentially tacit and indispensable dimension to religious life and practice. It is here that the interpretive context of religious symbolism and practice taken for granted by insiders is to be found, and this context is ignored at peril of complete misunderstanding or worse by outsiders who would otherwise like to understand.

When these particulars are attended from subsidiarily, they are tacit and the meaning that they thereby come to have will have subtly shifted from what it may appear to be when they are attended to focally; in some important respects, that shift of meaning is unspecifiable except in terms of the meaning of the religious “realities”⁸ toward which they point. However, some aspects of that to which the participant’s attention is carried by them may be no less tacit and unspecifiable in varying respects. To attempt to render these tacit and unspecifiable aspects fully explicit may be destructive of the religious experience in question, no less in the one case (aspects of what is attended to focally) as in the other (aspects of what is attended from subsidiarily). This is not to imply that much cannot appropriately be said, but what is appropriately said will invariably involve indirect language, metaphor, and a requisite sensitivity to clues or hints for the hearer/reader to follow up and apprehend for herself (or possibly miss despite good intentions to the contrary).

4. *The meaning of religious symbols is primarily disclosed as they are indwelt and attended from subsidiarily.* Polanyi calls our attention to a change in the phenomenal appearance of words, whether spoken or written, as we switch our attention from looking *at* the words (to attend to them directly) to looking *from* them subsidiarily toward their meaning (to focus on the meaning). I.e., the surface appearance or sound of the words changes; for the fluent speaker/reader, they become transparent to their meaning.

Substantially, the same is true of religious symbols and the system of symbols that is their home when indwelt and attended from in order to apprehend and get in touch with their meanings, with that to which they point. Their surface appearance and sound, their touch and taste, their smell and movement become transparent to the meanings and realities that they purport to be about.

This is so for insiders but not for outsiders *who are not attending from them and indwelling them but only to them or at them*; outsiders see only, or at best slightly more than, their surface appearance, unless they happen to be actively empathizing.

5. *As one attends from the symbols and integrates them in an effort to move one's understanding forward to comprehend what at first is not comprehended—there is a sense in which the participant crosses a threshold—the particulars from which one is attending (including, but not limited to, the religious symbols one is indwelling) change not only in their appearance but also in their meaning*, in how these particulars contribute to and figure into the meaning that emerges. That is part of the tacit, unspecifiable aspect of their meaning.

One may apprehend these changes subsidiarily by considering how variations in the subsidiary particulars and how we happen to be attending from them influence the focal meaning we are attending to from relying subsidiarily on them.

Like a tool or a probe extends one's reach into regions otherwise not accessible, religious symbols, rituals, scriptures, and teachings extend one's reach into meanings and realities otherwise not accessible. They put a participant in touch with these things; they usher her into their presence.

There is a sense in which this involves a change in the participant as well, a transformation that enables her to grasp and be in touch with things that she could not grasp or be in touch with before, but also to see and regard once familiar things in quite different ways. They may bestow on her a different sense of identity and a different set of relationships than she would otherwise possess.

Not all symbols within the system will change in the same way or to the same extent as others. Within a system of religious symbols, usually a few have a central, encompassing, and integrative significance—central in the sense that they serve as principal points of access to whatever is taken to be the ultimate reality. Such symbols for insiders who indwell them are not merely transparent in conveying their meaning. They enable their meaning, the “reality” to which they are understood to refer, to become symbolically present to the participant. They enable participants to encounter and participate in that “reality.” Such symbols might appropriately be called not just sacred but “sacramental.”

6. *Indwelling and attending from a religious symbol system in concert with others* (especially others who are doing so from long experience who serve as mentors of one's own indwelling) *opens up vistas of experiential, acquaintanceship-type knowing inaccessible to outsiders*.

It opens one up to what Santayana called “another world to live in,”⁹ or, rather, it opens one up to this ordinary world but seen in an entirely new light and from an entirely different perspective than the ordinary, everyday world that insiders share with outsiders: filled with spiritual mysteries, presences, dimensions, and “realities” to which outsiders are oblivious. It is this indwelling and attending from investment of oneself (in varying degree and depth) via a religious symbol system that makes an insider an insider and is the key to access its mysteries.

7. *We come to know other persons truly only through empathy and shared indwelling*. As Polanyi has pointed out, we know another person, and know her mind and feelings, by attending from and dwelling in features of her body—her facial features, her words, her gestures and posture, her movement and activity, her language; the cultural context of her situation (which could be, for example, something as secular as a scientific laboratory); and whatever her intentions and purposes are therein revealed to be. We indwell those things, many of which are the very things she is indwelling and attending from, in order for us to come to know what she is about. Our knowing must come alongside and share and participate, as it were, to whatever extent is possible, in her knowing. Accordingly, we come to know and understand another person's religious knowing

and experience, mediated through a system of religious symbols and a tradition of religious practice, in essentially the same way.

For outsiders to begin to get to know and understand the insider's religious experiential knowledge and understanding, they must to some degree become acquainted with that person's "other world to live in" by indwelling and attending from the same symbol system as the insiders, more or less in the way that they do—ideally, alongside and mentored and/or coached by knowledgeable insiders. The criterion for understanding, of course, is for the outsider doing the empathizing to have his developing understanding be heard, understood, and accredited by the knowledgeable insiders as agreeing with theirs. For outsiders to access religious-based knowing and practice, then, requires participative empathy and indwelling (attending from basically the same particulars that an insider attends from in order to apprehend and be in touch with what those particulars, functioning subsidiarily, point them toward).

It is well known that Polanyi directly challenged the notion of objectivism which dominated the epistemology of science and epistemology more generally—i.e., the notion that we can only truly know (that is, *know objectively*) what we approach in a purely detached, distancing, and skeptical manner. It is not so well known that he sought to bring about a radical revision of this notion of objectivity, changing it to a much more commonsense notion. A truly *objective* grasp of a subject, Polanyi contends, is not one that distances us from the object of our inquiry but rather one that gets us beyond the distorting proclivities of subjectivity and draws us near to, and puts us in touch with, the thing around which our several respective and partial perspectives are ranged. This happens where we encounter it in its transcendence beyond our partial grasp (beyond the partiality of our grasp), where we receive a glimpse of how it may manifest itself to other perspectives than our own. Our grasp will always be partial, but what makes it objective is its connection with how the subject will likely reveal itself differently (but connectedly) to other relevant perspectives, the promise of still other manifestations of the same subject (as the same subject) to other views.¹⁰

This (revised) notion of objectivity is precisely relevant and fitted for use in the comparative study of religion.¹¹ It calls directly for a methodology of empathy to give access to an objective knowledge of persons and, among other things, the human enterprise of religion. Indeed, it can be rightfully called *an empathetic objectivity*. It is an objectivity that is not antithetical to human subjectivity but is precisely what is called for in the study of human subjectivity.

8. Consequently, *a disciplined approach of indwelling empathy, or empathetic indwelling, sensitive to the matters heretofore mentioned is called for in all academic study of religion and has a certain primacy*. Objectivity (in the sense just described) requires it.

However, I need to make clear here that I regard the primacy of *indwelling empathy* in religious studies not to be the last or the only word. Many other disciplinary perspectives may fruitfully be brought to bear on the study and understanding of religious phenomena, including those that are primarily of an outsider and critical nature and even the perspectives of other religious traditions. But a complete understanding of any religious phenomenon requires that a certain primacy be given to an insider's perspective and therewith to the indwelling empathy needed to understand it. Though it may be difficult to integrate all that can be learned from the many perspectives, the goal is a rounded integration of what can be learned from each perspective relevant to understanding the phenomenon in question.

What I have just sketched as an approach of empathetic indwelling is what I have for many years understood a *phenomenological approach to the study of religion* to be all about. This is contrary to some of the classical advocates of "phenomenology of religion" who misleadingly construed and sought to practice it as

the development of a catalogue of religious universal terms and categories, giving little if any attention to how their meaning depends on the specific context in which they are used.

An empathetic approach, whenever possible, gives deference to the insider's experienced perspective in their specific tradition and practice on the possible convergences and divergences between it and what is experienced in other traditions. The interpretive judgment of the student/scholar of multiple traditions (coming initially from the outside) remains dependent on insight that comes from long experiential practice and indwelling and is not available to those less experienced. A superficial empathetic acquaintance from within multiple traditions of what appears to be the same phenomenon does not trump this kind of insight. Observed similarity between religious phenomena, even profound similarities across traditions, does not constitute identity, particularly if contextual differences such as the respective symbol systems and specific traditions of lived practices are not taken into account. What initially appears to the comparativist to be similar or even identical may turn out, on closer examination, to be different, and what initially appears to be different or even opposed may turn out, on closer examination, to be quite similar if not the same.

This approach is central to what I take "The Participatory Turn" in contemporary religious studies to mean—namely, (a) how it empathetically takes up differences of context, pathway, and indwelling experience more seriously than do other approaches and (b) the way it defers whenever possible to experienced and knowledgeable participant-insiders' perspective(s) as a check on all presumed understandings of religious phenomena.¹²

Consequently, I find problematic any easy reduction of examples of what appears to be a similar pattern of religious symbol, experience, or practice across disparate religious traditions to a single type—as, for example, sacrifice, devotion, mystical experience, spiritual enlightenment, or shamanic ecstasy. This doesn't mean that typology has no place. It means, rather, that any worthy typology should be developed inductively (or, perhaps better, *abductively* in C. S. Peirce's sense, distinct from both induction and deduction) with care, tentativeness, and humility and never be allowed to cause us to lose sight of distinctive differences in the instances we use it to conceptualize or classify.

9. *A disciplined approach of indwelling empathy opens up a field of **religious common sense***, where communication between perspectives and possibilities of mutual recognition are made possible. This is a space of interreligious coming together, a forum of common sense making for and between religious insiders, particularly within (or relative to) the same generic way of being religious.¹³

This is the domain for what Polanyi called the "universal intent" of our claims but specifically for religious judgments and judgments about religious "realities"—the realm where judgments concerning religious truth make sense. In effect, they aim at evoking mutual recognition from all who are insiders (competent and authentic insiders) within the symbol system in which these "realities" are alleged to be encountered.

Polanyi introduces the concept of universal intent in a discussion of the pursuit of discovery in science:

By his own command, which bound him to the quest of reality [as being transcendent to his subjectivity], he [the working scientist] will claim that his results are universally valid [to those similarly bound to the quest of reality and who are thus insiders to this quest]. Such is the universal intent of a scientific discovery. I speak not of an *established* universality, but of a universal *intent*, for the scientist cannot know whether his claims will be accepted.... To claim *validity* for a statement merely declares that it *ought* to be accepted by all [who are insiders to this quest]. The affirmation of scientific truth has an obligatory character which

it shares with other valuations, declared universal by our own respect for them. (Polanyi 1966, 78)¹⁴

There is a sense here in which such religious judgments are relative and a sense in which they are not. They need, of course, to be understood in the context of the symbol system within which they are uttered; that is where they make sense. But the point I am making is that their truth value is in an important sense relative to this realm of religious common sense, for they are essentially incapable of being recognized, made sense of, or adjudicated (as to their truth status) except by persons who are insiders seeking to ascertain and come in contact with that which they are about, or persons who are at least empathizing with them.

To be sure, there arise differing and conflicting claims about religious realities by participants of the same tradition, and even more so by participants of different traditions. Nevertheless, there are lots of *penultimate matters* about which they may and do often come to general agreement. I want to refer to these as matters of religious common sense. And it is with these matters, or matters that can begin to be accessed from this context, that phenomenology of religion properly speaking is concerned.

By “common sense” here, I do not mean commonplace ideas or truisms that a given group of religious people happen to hold about religion and religious practice. Rather by the term I refer to aspects of the common human condition with regard to religious belief and practice that are fairly readily discoverable by almost anyone in any tradition who has a modicum of thoughtful sensitivity, curiosity, open-mindedness, and empathy. I refer primarily to *generic* features of religious life and practice, commonsense considerations that have a certain independence from the specifics of any given religious tradition and independence from what are there regarded as “ultimate matters.” Outsiders may notice aspects of them, but they won’t really begin to understand them without serious disciplined empathy. These features pertain to forms of religious life and practice that recur from one religious tradition to the next and only infrequently outside those traditions.

10. *A Polanyian-informed, disciplined, empathetic approach to the comparative study of religion leads to the discovery and recognition of a broad range of matters of religious common sense—generic features religious practitioners as such more or less share in common: specifically, different sorts or types of religious practice, generic patterns of religious life, that I choose to call “different ways of being religious.”*¹⁵

What is “a way of being religious” (generically considered)? It is one generic manner and pattern among others of drawing near to and coming into what participants deem to be a right or appropriate relationship with what they take to be ultimate reality. Differently put, it is one way among others of entering and indwelling a religion’s “other world”—in the light of which the mundane world is believed to be put into proper perspective—and of participating in its central mysteries.

Among the possible different ways of being religious that might be found, I identify six: sacred rite, right action, devotion, shamanic mediation, mystical quest, and reasoned inquiry. The name indicates the sort of practice participants utilize to draw near and come appropriately into relationship to the ultimate reality (however conceived). There could be more but most likely by way of differentiating two or more within one of these six. Within any one religious tradition, they can often be combined or fused. They are not as such exclusive, although occasionally particular examples of single ways or fusions of ways may be exclusive. In principle, however, any and all of the six may find expression in any one major religious tradition, unless something in the tradition’s symbol system discourages or suppresses its expression.

Being a generic type, “a way of being religious” is not an actual, specific practice found anywhere. It does not itself fully characterize any actual particular religious phenomenon or practice, though many exemplify its features. Like the generic category “mammal,” it does not name a particular animal; it names a type whose exemplifications all more or less bear the features identified in the type. It is an abstraction; its description/definition should never be taken to be more real or more concrete than the actual practices that it abstractly names and tries to typify in a religious commonsensical way. The words I use to articulate it are tentative and revisable, the best I am able for the present to come up with.

What is the point? What is it for? The point and purpose of this framework of six ways of being religious is primarily to facilitate the comparative study of religion and interreligious dialogue. In particular, it encourages and facilitates the identification, juxtaposition, and comparative study in depth of distinct expressions of the same generic way of being religious in quite distinct and different religious traditions. The framework facilitates this kind of comparison while holding open the question of agreement or disagreement concerning the nature of whatever the compared traditions say about ultimate realities (e.g., whether they are convergent or divergent) and then deferring such questions to serious and sustained interreligious inquiry and dialogue. In that respect, the framework distinguishes and separates differences due to different ways of being religious (a generic, phenomenological matter) from differences due to the specifics of the symbol systems in play (a “theological” matter).

For persons who are interested in learning more about the set of six ways of being religious, how they relate to each other, and how they are most appropriately applied in the comparative study of religion, I refer you to my book (1996), *Six Ways of Being Religious: A Framework for Comparative Study of Religion* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thompson/Cengage).

Part II: Reasoned Inquiry as a Way of Being Religious

One of these six generic sorts of religious practice centers on the pursuit of truth and understanding regarding ultimate matters (matters pertaining to the ultimate reality, whatever it is taken to be) through *reasoned inquiry*.

The way of reasoned inquiry “consists in the rational, dialectical struggle to transcend conventional patterns of thinking in the effort to attain understanding of, and consciousness transforming insight into, *the ultimate what, how, and why of things*—that is, to bring together and unite, so far as possible, mind with *the ultimate Mind* [however understood within the tradition in question] and thereby acquire a portion of *divine wisdom*. It typically involves systematic study of a tradition’s scripture and previous attempts to articulate *what is ultimately the case*” (*Six Ways*, 68). It is important to understand the way of reasoned inquiry primarily in terms of being a *religious* practice in community, a peculiar way of carrying on religious life (rarely standing on its own apart from other sorts of practice). Specifically, it is a way of drawing near to whatever is conceived to be ultimate reality through intellectual inquiry.

It is easy for us modern Western intellectuals (so habituated to print culture) to identify reasoned inquiry with its explicit products or as if the creation of these explicit products were the main thing (whether they be statements, discourses, books, commentaries, written compendia, or something else), whereas the main thing about it is participation in the struggle to transcend secondhand representations and, as it were, directly apprehend or awaken to ultimate reality itself.

Consequently, explicit products of the way of reasoned inquiry are important for this way of being religious and have the meaning that they have for it only when interpreted in the context of the ongoing tacit

practice where they have their home. I.e., how does such a product serve the underlying religious intentions of the author, the hearer, the reader, the person (or the community) who is using it as a vehicle for her own inquiry and for developing understanding?

The way of reasoned inquiry is typically practiced collaboratively, persons inquiring together with others who seek to hold each other's reasoning responsible—not just responsible to those others who happen to be present but to the best and wisest interpreters of the tradition to be found (these are the mentors or masters of the practice), whether in the present, in years past, or, in anticipation, those yet to come. Ready access to scriptural texts and the best possible commentaries, of course, is requisite.

Just as is the case for the other five generic ways of being religious, the way of reasoned inquiry addresses a specific (though generic) existential need or needs—above all, the need to understand aspects of ultimate reality for oneself and get beyond the secondhand answers with which others rest content. Accordingly, it brings to the reading and interpretation of the tradition's scriptures its own (generic) hermeneutical orientation or “bias” as it were: it looks for clues that promise the insight and understanding for which it longs.

So also, just as with the other five generic ways, the way of reasoned inquiry succeeds and/or fails to realize its intentions. There are generic virtues that specifically pertain to the way of reasoned inquiry (e.g., knowledge, intellectual mastery, wisdom, intellectual patience) as there are generic vices (e.g., intellectualizing, pretentiousness, nitpicking, dishonesty)—virtues and vices that are commonsensically recognizable across the boundaries of one tradition to the next. Although these virtues and vices will rarely be differentiated from the virtues and vices specific to a particular religious tradition, they nevertheless are readily recognizable by persons only superficially acquainted with the tradition through careful empathetic comparison and through interreligious dialogue.¹⁶

*Reasoned Inquiry within Buddhism and Christianity*¹⁷

Considering Buddhism as a whole and Christianity as a whole, the way of reasoned inquiry has long held a revered place, as well as the other five ways of being religious. (For a much fuller account of each of the six ways in Buddhism and in Christianity and their sub-traditions, see *Six Ways*, chapters 7 and 8.)

Clearly, in Buddhism the way of reasoned inquiry has been held in high regard simply because, in a kind of balanced synthesis with right action and mystical quest, it was given emphasis as a result of the early formulation of the Buddha's Eightfold Path to enlightenment (consisting of two parts *paññā* or wisdom, three parts *sīla* or ethical virtue, and three parts *sāmadhi* or mental concentration) and the expectations placed on those who undertook monastic life. There are, however, some forms of Buddhism, notably in Mahayana lineages, that gave reasoned inquiry higher emphasis (though never exclusive emphasis) and others that gave it little or no emphasis at all.

The goal of Buddhism (at least of monastic Buddhism) is a mystical realization for oneself of enlightenment, attained through a systematic uprooting of egoistic desire, egoistic aversion, and confused or ignorant states of mind that fuel the condition of suffering that is the transmigrating “ego,” in order to attain the condition of unconditioned existence known as *nibbāna/nirvāṇa*. Mere quieting of the mind in concentrative absorption is insufficient by itself to attain it; there must also be insight into, and reasoned understanding of, the impermanence, insubstantiality, and turmoil that characterize all things in mundane existence. As much as any other factor, it is lack of insight into and misunderstanding of these matters that is believed to keep a person trapped in an unenlightened state. That is what reasoned inquiry is for in Buddhism and why its speculative tendencies are for the most part kept under two pragmatic restraints: (a) it must contribute

directly to attaining the goal of enlightenment, and (b) it must not feed the delusive craving of the ego for autonomous existence by postulating metaphysical entities that might serve to rationalize that craving.

In Christianity, the way of reasoned inquiry never received the kind of early emphasis and direction that it did in Buddhism for two reasons (somewhat similar to the restraints on reasoned inquiry in Buddhism): (a) fear that too great a latitude given to rational inquiry might lead to heterodox understanding of the truth of Revelation (i.e., what was believed to have been revealed of God in Jesus Christ on which salvation was understood to hinge) and (b) concern that the autonomy, pride, and pretentiousness naturally engendered in rational inquiry might conflict with the attitude of humble and simple faith requisite for receiving the essential saving content of Revelation. Despite these restraints, due to a strong precedent set by early Christian thinkers such as Justin Martyr, Origen, and Augustine (including the Apostle Paul, for that matter) through giving reasoned articulations of the content of the Christian Revelation vis-à-vis competing philosophical and religious ideas of the time, the way of reasoned inquiry came to be given a significant place, especially in Western Christianity.

For early Christians the Revelation of God in Christ was an inexhaustible mystery evoking wonder and a desire to comprehend it for oneself and for others. In their understanding, Christ was the universal *Logos*, the cosmic Reason of God, linking Christians with reason and truth wherever it might be found. Consequently, reasoned inquiry was not just a way of studying and interpreting what had been made explicit of the Christian Revelation; it was a way of entering more deeply into the mystery of that Revelation and developing new and more profound understandings. It became a way of being Christian.

Because the way of reasoned Inquiry is so pervasive in Buddhism, it would be foolhardy to attempt anything more than a few brief comments about its many different varieties. The Theravada (“Way of the Elders”) lineage that predominates today in South Asian countries has kept mostly intact the tight pragmatic synthesis of reasoned inquiry, right action, and mystical quest that was achieved in the early centuries of Buddhism in India.

Mahayana (“Great Vehicle” conceived in opposition to Hinayana or the “Lesser Vehicle,” with which it caricatured Theravada lineages and teaching) lineages granted more freedom and encouragement to reasoned inquiry and accordingly developed several impressive philosophical systems in India, Tibet, China, and Japan. In some lineages, notably Gelukpa in Tibet and Tendai in Japan, a serious systematic study of Buddhist philosophy became a major requisite of communal monastic life. To pursue the Buddha’s path in these traditions is to have one’s understanding of basic Buddhist teaching developed and refined through intense and rigorous debate as well as through renewed encounter with the great Buddhist philosophers of the past by way of their writings and through courses of study with master teachers in the present.

Within Christianity by late Medieval times, there had developed two quite different patterns of reasoned inquiry that have come down to the present in a variety of forms in Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant traditions. In late Medieval times, they were known as monastic theology and scholastic theology.¹⁸

With the rediscovery of classical learning (and the writings of Aristotle, above all, with his systematic methodology known as *scientia* toward all intellectual topics) and the consequent rise of the medieval universities in twelfth-century Europe, a distinctive form of theological study known as scholasticism emerged. The result was an establishment of the basic parameters for most subsequent theological reflection in Western Christianity, especially for Roman Catholic theology but also for much of Protestant thought. It was developed through intensive study of church doctrine, of the writings of respected earlier Christian

thinkers, and of sacred scripture (especially as these bore upon issues of disagreement and controversy); honed through rigorous debate; and elaborated in a systematic form that sought to account for and answer all major theological questions. Theology in this approach aspired to be a kind of rational science. For most priests, ministers, and persons involved in Roman Catholic and mainstream Protestant institutional religious vocations, theological study in this sense has been one of the principal ways of being Christian.

Long preceding the rise of scholasticism and continuing as a counterpoint to scholastic theology into current times, there has been a less systematic and more mystically oriented sort of inquiry in which reasoned inquiry itself is simultaneously a personal religious quest (fusing aspects of the way of mystical quest with the way of reasoned inquiry). This alternative pattern of inquiry was early given a strong precedent by Augustine (354–430), especially in his early works, and became characteristic of theological reflection pursued in a monastic context. It came to be known as “monastic theology” and distinguished itself from scholastic theology once the latter had fully emerged by the thirteenth century. Found in both Eastern and Western Christianity, it is illustrated clearly in Augustine’s *Confessions*. Intellectual inquiry in this approach involves, or rather is, a kind of dialogue with God in Christ and specifically with the divine *Logos* that is believed to illuminate the mind and be the source of creative insight. To inquire *theologically*, accordingly, is *personally* to draw near to God in hope of ultimate union. After Augustine, another major figure in the West who clearly exemplifies this orientation is Anselm (1033–1109)—monk, prior, and abbot of a Benedictine monastery at Bec and later Bishop of Canterbury.

The Questions of King Melinda and the Proslogion of Anselm

To exemplify a Polanyian-Participatory approach to the comparative study of religion after the manner I have laid out in this paper, it is necessary to select particular expressions of the *same* way of being religious from the religious traditions in question, else the observable differences between the two expressions will confuse differences in the generic ways of being religious involved with differences as a result of particular features of the religious traditions. These are different sorts of differences, and the framework of the six generic ways helps to keep those differences separate.

There are literally thousands of examples of reasoned inquiry that might be selected from Buddhism and from Christianity. Which to choose? One factor, of course, is the availability of careful, nuanced, and trustworthy descriptions and translations of the examples to be juxtaposed and compared. The kind of comparison I am undertaking relies and builds on participatory groundwork done by the recent generations of scholars in religious studies.

To minimize the likelihood of confusing generic with particular religious differences and maximally to bring to the fore the differences between Buddhism and Christianity, expressions of the way of reasoned inquiry in Buddhism and in Christianity will be selected, preferably from what at first consideration appear to be somewhat similar patterns of reasoned inquiry within similar contexts of practice.

I have chosen, somewhat arbitrarily, examples that presuppose a well-established monastic context where monks are seriously engaged in reasoned pursuit of religious truth for themselves and not in an academic way. Also, both examples presuppose a context of monastic spirituality established by the vowed, committed life of monastics seriously in pursuit of at-onement¹⁹ with what they take to be ultimate reality in which their own reasoned inquiry is understood to play a significant role. Neither presupposes a highly developed sophisticated and systematic framework of scholastic philosophy/theology. On the contrary, the

setting portrayed in the two writings that I have chosen is relatively informal and conversational, and the quests for understanding that are represented are personally motivated.

Both of the writings that I have chosen to illustrate expressions of the way of reasoned inquiry in Buddhism and Christianity are well polished. Both are classics in their respective traditions. Their importance as an illustration of religious practice has more to do with how they are/were utilized to teach and guide and model the practice of the way of reasoned inquiry in their respective religious traditions than with the somewhat idealized practice given in the texts themselves. Explaining this would require much more ethnographic work than I can at present provide or undertake.

In any case, my reading and interpretation of these two works of religious literature will seek to place and read them in the context of religious practice—both the practice exemplified in the work itself and what can be imagined of the practice in which the work would be utilized to model, teach, and guide pursuit of the way of reasoned inquiry within their respective traditions.

The first example is from a recent translation of a classic work in Theravada Buddhist philosophy, *The Questions of King Milinda (Milindapañha)*, which was probably composed in the first century BCE.²⁰ It portrays a dialogue between King Milinda, a Greek king (Menander) who ruled the Northeast of India (Bactria) in the latter part of the second century BCE, and a learned monk called Nagasena. Milinda is portrayed as bright, knowledgeable about Buddhism, inquisitive, philosophic-minded, skilled in debate, but skeptical—raising a host of serious questions and puzzlements about Buddhism that, according to the story, most monks at the time were incapable of answering. Only the formidable Nagasena—miraculously born for this very purpose, according to the story—was equal to the task. In the dialogue itself, Nagasena plays a part akin to the Platonic Socrates, overcoming one by one each of King Milinda’s misgivings by rational argument and apt simile. In the end King Milinda is converted to Buddhism, establishes a great monastic center, and ultimately attains enlightenment. The selections I choose to focus on concern the “nonexistence” of the soul and the completely non-mundane nature of *nibbana* (*nirvana* in Sanskrit), or, differently put, they seek to demonstrate the systematically misleading character of ordinary language in attempting to speak of these ultimate realities. For Buddhism, there is no individual soul or self as a linguistically identifiable, enduring metaphysical entity, nor can mundane categories of understanding capture the nature of *nibbana*—although for both, analogy with familiar, paradoxical things may provide intimations. The difficulty in saying just what a person ultimately is or what *nibbana* is should not, however, be taken to imply that they do not exist. The point is not to rest content with the limited intimations that a mundane understanding might grasp but to allow such intimations to provoke a breakthrough of insight to a higher level of intuitive comprehension that will itself be a realization of enlightenment.

The second example is a little book of prayerful meditations by Anselm, titled *Proslogion* and subtitled *Fides quaerens intellectum* (“faith seeking understanding”),²¹ composed in the late eleventh century, most likely at a monastery of which Anselm was abbot in Bec in what is now France. Its explicit intention is “to seek to understand what is believed” and thereby raise Anselm’s mind from “faith in God” (with which it begins) to “the contemplation of God”—a contemplative, mystical knowing that transcends explicit representation. It is written in the form of a kind of dialogue with God and with himself. After a reflective, meditational prayer of longing and seeking after God in the first chapter to set the context and tone, there occurs Anselm’s famous “ontological argument” in the second and third chapters. The argument is designed to shift the reader’s attention from the *idea* of God that faith has—specifically, “that than which nothing greater can be thought,” that is, nothing greater in the sense of goodness and perfection—to a contemplation

of the *reality* of God so conceived as being beyond the limit of what can be conceived: in other words, from *thinking about God* to realizing *that one stands mentally in the very presence of God* in all of God's greatness. At this point or juncture, the mind is not closed in on itself with its many representations but is opened out on and encounters an infinitude that transcends itself.

Comparing the Milindapañha and the Proslogion

For my comparison, I shall not simply leave these two writings representing two practices of the way of reasoned inquiry juxtaposed. I shall also attempt to consider the one in light of the other and begin to imagine implicitly in my thinking a Nagasena-taught Buddhist monk and an Anselm-taught Christian monk in dialogue. As I earlier said, I am committed to deferring a full understanding of each writing and each practice to master practitioners of that practice, but I want also to imagine as well as I can how such master practitioners might begin to understand and probe the other practice.

Each would approach the other, of course, as a believer in his own tradition. However, in the way of reasoned inquiry, authentically understood and practiced, such fundamental or ultimate beliefs, whatever else they are, are a heuristic or a means of creatively penetrating more deeply into whatever matters are in question. Anselm speaks for all who follow the way of reasoned inquiry, not just Christians, when he states, "Unless I do believe I shall not understand"—i.e., beliefs here are understood to be a means toward understanding. Here, belief is not an end of inquiry (nor does it end inquiry) but is a beginning of inquiry, a means of inquiry, a way forward. It is a seeking to experience and know, or know more fully, the truth toward which the explicit belief points. The explicit belief is never fully identifiable with the reality it is understood to represent (at least not for practitioners of the way of reasoned inquiry).

Note that in both, the seeker seeks (or is being drawn to apprehend) something beyond the ordinary reach of intellectual understanding, beyond ordinary articulation, and beyond the realm of mundane, conditioned existence. Both use discursive reasoning to take the reader to the limits of discursive reasoning in order to apprehend something that lies beyond. Both regard that reality to be non-finite.

- "Like space, it [*nibbāna*] is not born, does not decay or perish, it does not pass away here and arise elsewhere, it is invincible, thieves cannot steal it, it is not attached to anything, it is the sphere of *aryans* who are like birds in space, it is unobstructed and it is infinite." (*Milindapañha*)
- "We believe that you [God] are that than which nothing greater can be thought." "Surely you dwell in light inaccessible—where is it? And how can I have access to light which is inaccessible? Who will lead me and take me into it so that I may see you there? By what signs, under what forms, shall I seek you?" (*Proslogion*)

Nevertheless, attributes of the transcendent reality being sought can be glimpsed by way of analogy and simile. In the *Milindapañha*, Nagasena says, "As a lotus is unwetted by water, *nibbāna* is unsullied by the defilements. Like water, it cools the fever of defilements and quenches the thirst of craving." Nagasena uses many more similes to draw out and develop Milinda's understanding.

Anselm uses far fewer similes or analogies, but he does make generous use of biblical metaphors such as light, face, image, seeking and finding, and the obscuring smoke of sin. At one significant juncture of the argument, Anselm appeals to a painter and his painting: "It is like a painter who, when he thinks out beforehand what he is going to create, has it in his understanding, but he does not yet understand it as actually

existing because he has not yet painted it. But when he has painted it, he both has it in his understanding and actually has it, because he has created it.”

It is significant that both writings utilize and exemplify reasoning but explicitly chasten it as inadequate unto itself and supplement it, insisting that reasoning by itself is not sufficient to reach the goal intended. Something more is needed—wisdom, insight, light from beyond, illumination from God, that which severs defilements (and not what just understands and grasps them)—to reach an understanding of what is beyond reason’s reach (left to itself).

King Milinda asks, “What, Nagasena, is the characteristic mark of reasoning; and what the mark of wisdom [in the process of escaping from rebirth]?” Nagasena replies, “Taking hold is the mark of reasoning, cutting off is the mark of wisdom. . . .the recluse [Buddhist monk] takes hold of his mind with reasoning and cuts off the defilements with wisdom.” (Along with wisdom, “confidence, virtue, mindfulness, energy and concentration” are mentioned.)

In asking for a deepened encounter with God, Anselm prays, “Lord, I am not trying to make my way to your height, for my understanding [my capacity of reasoning] is in no way equal to that, but I do desire to understand a little of your truth which my heart already believes and loves.”

Each grants some limited recognition of the rationality and respectability of the principal counter-position against which it argues but ventures to refute it and show that it leads to absurdity. Each employs a version of the *reductio ad absurdum* argument (Nagasena to Milinda’s charge of nonsense [my wording] concerning Nagasena’s argument that there is no enduring individual named by Nagasena, by turning the tables and proving by the same assumption that the king’s chariot does not exist; Anselm pointing out the contradiction implicit in the “fool” saying in his heart that there is no God once he has understood what God is).

Despite each having a counter-position, neither Nagasena nor Anselm are antagonistic toward them—at least not significantly antagonistic; their exchanges do not exhibit the radical challenge and counter challenge of serious (confrontational) debate, scholastic or otherwise. All exchanges appear to be convivial.

The obstacles to an understanding of ultimate reality have some interesting similarities. In the *Milindapañha* there are two sorts of obstacles. For the King, he faces, at least at first, the obstacle of not understanding the point, purpose, and promise of the Buddha’s path. For the person seeking to follow that path (which eventually includes the King), there is the obstacle of continuously arising mental formations, graspings, and cravings—all manifestations of a deluded self, thinking it is some sort of enduring substantial entity. In the *Proslogion*, the fool who says in his heart that there is no God faces the obstacle of not truly comprehending his own understanding, its relation to what is ultimately real, and, with that, the paradoxical limits of his own understanding. For the aspiring monk who would follow Anselm’s leading, there is the obstacle of supposing that the mind that understands is enclosed upon itself instead of realizing that his mind is directly open out onto (and illuminated by) a real transcendent greatness beyond his mind’s grasp.

In other words, for both writings, a primary obstacle (perhaps the primary obstacle) to illumination or enlightenment is misunderstanding the true nature of the self (or the nature of the true self) that is radically different than it is supposed to be: for Nagasena, the Buddha-self who shines forth once defilements are removed; for Anselm, the true self who shines forth as the image of God once it is renewed and refashioned by God and is no longer darkened by sin. A key condition of illumination seems to be a matter of gaining penetrating insight into the true self that one actually is while simultaneously being dispossessed of mistaken

notions of the self (including mistaken notions of one's own mind and understanding) and turning away from, letting go of, and leaving behind this false self-conception.

Also, for both writings a primary obstacle to illumination or enlightenment is false or misleading understandings of the true nature of ultimate reality itself (*nibbāna*, God), not realizing how radically distinct it is from mundane realities and that it is not to be confused with the empirical, phenomenal order of things. Strictly speaking, it is empirically undetectable. In addition, implicitly it is evident that there needs to be a dispossession of mistaken notions concerning the power and competence of discursive thought to understand the self and the nature of ultimate reality.

For Nagasena, the self that is finally free of defilements and thus realizes *nibbāna* and *nibbāna* itself seem, by implication, to be indistinguishable. In a way markedly similar, though not identical, the self freed from sin and turned wholly to God (the self in whom God's image is cleansed and fully restored) seems to be for Anselm in some sense at-one with God in God's inconceivable greatness (though it appears to be not indistinguishably so, for it appears to be in intimate personal rapport with God).

Though more prominent in the *Proslogion*, both writings work implicitly to clear up misunderstandings about the (criteriological) nature of what is infinitely good and perfect, the measure of all goodness and perfection: that than which nothing greater can be thought. Implicitly, *nibbāna* seems to be characterizable by the same idea or something very close. Note that it is not on the scale of what is more or less great, such that there would always be an imaginable higher point on the scale. Rather it is off the end of the scale; it is beyond discursive capture or definition (which makes a thing finitely definite). Both *nibbāna* and God are not "the greatest" on the scale, which would simply be the topmost point on the scale. Rather the scale points to infinite greatness, infinite goodness, infinite perfection. Yet for both, this ultimate criterion makes a consequential difference in our world, for

- "It [*nibbāna*] gives the beauty of virtue"—i.e., it is what gives beauty to genuine virtue in all of its forms. (*Milindapañha*)
- "All the good I have [and find in the world around me] comes from you [God]," says Anselm in his prayer. (*Proslogion*)

Here in both writings, reasoned inquiry fuses with intuitive insight, and discursive argument (by a kind of grace?) is made to culminate in mystical awareness.

In each, the shift that is being occasioned takes us from the familiar to what seems wholly unfamiliar, from the finite to the infinite, from conditioned reality to unconditioned reality, from a world suffused by ego attachments to a world free of egoistic attachment, from exile to homeland. In both, there is a preliminary labor of preparation, dispossession, and breaking free, but once past the promised illumination or enlightenment is pure joy, pure bliss.

Some Differences

The *Proslogion* sets a definite context of prayer central to which is a passionate, personal longing for and seeking after God, a striving somehow to see God face to face. God here is definitely identified as personal—indeed, as "a being"—and as entering into personal relationship with the aspiring monk, something altogether absent in the *Milindapañha*. A Buddhist would likely be inclined to identify this longing and seeking as an egoistic craving. But would that be an appropriate characterization, especially since the Benedictine monastic path of seeking God seeks to transcend the self-centered ego?

In contrast, the *Milindapañha* seems remarkably dispassionate, calm, and focused on laying foundations and bringing to light practical, pragmatic considerations that will most directly lead to *nibbāna*. There seems to be no striving, no devotional prayer to a person-like ultimate reality, as there is in the *Proslogion*, nor any expectation that such a devotional petition would meet with an answer. (Also, Nagasena appears to me slightly more confident and self-assured of his answers than does Anselm.)

Summing Up

I conceive this sketch not to be a set of finished conclusions—far from it—but an ongoing heuristic research program. To draw on Polanyi again, if reality has been engaged, that will prove itself by manifesting itself inexhaustibly in new and surprising ways.

Here are some questions that I think are worth pursuing:

- I have suggested above that it could be applied, but is there anything that would prevent Anselm's ontological argument being applied to *nibbāna*?
- Although there is nothing in the text to indicate it, could an element of what Anselm would recognize as "grace" come into play in Theravada Buddhist practice that complements the effort of reasoning in the aspiring Christian monk?
- Could the self that is freed from defilements according to the *Milindapañha* possibly be convergent with, if not indistinct from, the self in whom God's image is cleansed and fully restored according to the *Proslogion*? (Here is where the long-term deliberate process of monastic spiritual formation, and the context within which that is understood, may make a significant difference to the aspiring monk.)
- For all they have in common, could *nibbāna* and God possibly somehow be the same? What might an extended dialogue between masters of each of these practices of reasoned inquiry bring up? If disagreement, to what would the respective masters appeal to justify the disagreement? If it is concluded that they are distinct realities, would they, strictly speaking, contradict one another?

Conclusion: The Promise of a Polanyian-Participatory Approach

I have sought in this paper to set out what a Polanyian-Participatory approach to the comparative study of religion would look like in general, then more specifically to a generic pattern of religious life that I venture to call the way of reasoned inquiry, and still more specifically to a comparison of examples of this generic pattern drawn from Buddhism and Christianity. I have tried to show that a Polanyian approach leads to selections of phenomena for comparison in terms of what they are most likely to have in common in terms of religious common sense.

I hope I have demonstrated the power of this approach for comparison in depth as well as its power for facilitating dialogue between representatives of the traditions under comparison—both at the level of what I have called religious common sense and at the level of ultimate beliefs or convictions. I do not think that what I have given is the only way to carry out a Polanyian-Participatory approach, but right now I do not have much of an imagination for an alternative.

For anyone who is interested in looking at what such an approach might look like for other generic patterns of religious practice than reasoned inquiry, I refer to my book, *Six Ways of Being Religious*, where I juxtapose and compare examples from Buddhism and from Christianity for each of the six ways. I also use the framework for comparing Buddhism and Christianity as whole or as entire traditions.

ENDNOTES

¹Jose Ferrer and Jacob Sherman, eds. (2009), *The Participatory Turn: Spirituality, Mysticism, and Religious Studies* (SUNY Press).

²Since 2014, the book is available for download in digital form as a pdf file online at <https://open.umn.edu/opentextbooks/textbooks/542#Reviews>.

³I devised this list of Polanyian insights over many years drawing on my study of Polanyi, my participation in meetings, conferences, and publications of the Polanyi Society (see the website polanysisociety.org), and my teaching and thinking about the theoretical background of the comparative study of religion. My immediate source is the second chapter of *Six Ways*, “Thinking Generically about Religion,” 17–45. I need to make clear, however, that, as formulated here, this list is not straight from what Polanyi has written but comes from my adaptation of his insights.

⁴Polanyi writes about the nature and structure of “tacit knowing” in many places. See especially Polanyi (1958, 1964), *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press); Polanyi (1966) *The Tacit Dimension* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press); and Marjorie Grene, ed. (1969), *Knowing and Being: Essays of Michael Polanyi* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press), part three: “Tacit Knowing.”

⁵In my book (*Six Ways*, 63–65, 382), I restrict “mystical” to the employment of ascetic and meditative disciplines in a deliberate quest to interrupt, slow down, or otherwise break through and become free of the obstructing limitations and distracting compulsions of ordinary life in order to attain a direct awareness of *ultimate reality* (whatever that is conceived to be), come to be wholly at one with it, and have life and one’s relations with all things become transparently grounded in it (which is what I identify as the generic way of mystical quest to be found in multiple and distinct religious traditions). My usage of “mystical” is thus more restrictive than common usage, which is sometimes narrower and sometimes broader than this definition.

⁶See endnote 5. I would include contemplative practice and contemplative modes of knowing among what I refer to there as “meditative disciplines.”

⁷Walter Gulick first introduced his “from-via-to” elaboration of Polanyi’s “from-to” conception of the structure of tacit knowing at a Polanyi Society Meeting in 1984. It was later published and considerably refined in Walter Gulick (1992–1993), “Polanyi’s Theory of Meaning: Exposition, Elaboration, and Reconstruction,” *Polanyiana* 2(4) and 3(1): 7–42; and still later in Walter Gulick (2012–2013), “Polanyian Biosemiotics and the From-Via-To Dimensions of Meaning,” *Tradition and Discovery: The Polanyi Society Periodical* 39(1): 18–33. My appeal to and use of the *via* is principally to “locate” the mediating place of religious symbols in the from-to structure of tacit religious knowing.

⁸The “realities” here referred to are taken to be real by fully participating insiders; to outsiders they are, as it were, virtual realities, referred to not directly but indirectly by being marked off here by scare quotes. Such “realities” become accessible and something to which reference can coherently be made only by virtue of appropriate crossing of the threshold and indwelling of the system of symbols in question. Polanyi speaks of such when he writes,

I can speak of facts, knowledge, proof, reality, etc., within my commitment situation, for it is constituted by my search for facts, knowledge, proof, reality, etc., as binding on me. These are proper designations for commitment targets which apply so long as I am committed to them; but they cannot be referred to non-committally. You cannot speak without contradiction of knowledge you do not believe, or of a reality which does not exist. I may deny validity to some particular knowledge, or some particular facts, but then to me these are only allegations of knowledge or of facts, and should be denoted as ‘knowledge’ and as ‘facts’, to which I am not committed. Commitment is in this sense the only path for approaching the universally valid. (Polanyi 1964, 303)

Some writers call this conception of realism “enactive realism” (cf. Ferrer and Sherman 2009; and Sherman, “Polanyi and the Participatory Turn: Reimagining Religious Studies,” in this volume of *Tradition and Discovery*). What Polanyi has to say

about the criterion of an empirical statement's being true is relevant as well to statements regarding "religious realities": "An empirical statement is true to the extent to which it reveals an aspect of reality, a reality largely hidden to us, and *existing therefore independently of our knowing it*. By trying to say something that is true about a reality believed to be existing independently of our knowing it, all assertions of fact necessarily carry *universal intent*. *Our claim to speak of reality serves thus as the external anchoring of our commitment in making a factual statement*" (Polanyi 1964, 311).

⁹Quoted by Clifford Geertz (1973), "Religion as a Cultural System" in his *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books), 87. Original quote is in George Santayana (1982/1905), *Reason in Religion: The Life of Reason*, vol. 3 (New York: Dover Publications), 5-6.

¹⁰A good deal of Polanyi's argument in his principal philosophical work, *Personal Knowledge: Toward a Post-Critical Philosophy* (1958/1964), consists in challenging the philosophy of objectivism (in its various guises) as in any sense adequately representative of the natural sciences, even the most rigorous, and offering in its place a truer conception of objectivity:

the discovery of objective truth in science consists in the apprehension of a rationality which commands our respect and arouses our contemplative admiration; ...such discovery, while using the experience of our senses as clues, transcends this experience by embracing the vision of a reality beyond the impressions of our senses, a vision which speaks for itself in guiding us to an ever deeper understanding of reality. (5-6)

¹¹In *Six Ways* I offer the following definition of objectivity, which I attempt to follow in the methodology of the book: A striving to draw near to the object of investigation at the point where all relevant perspectives on it intersect, thus to comprehend it in its transcendence beyond any one perspective in a way that ideally commands the recognition of those who dwell within them and know them well. It is fundamentally a matter of doing justice to the object itself, the object in the round. (This meaning of objectivity is to be distinguished from that often associated with modern natural science, namely, a comprehensive methodology of distancing: of separating the investigating self from the object of investigation.) (1996, 382; see also 17-18, 129)

¹²Ferrer and Sherman (2009), *The Participatory Turn*.

¹³In *Six Ways* I offer the following definition of religious common sense:

Considerations of practical wisdom having to do with common aspects of being human involved in religious practice that are (in principle) mutually recognizable by thoughtful, reflective, and knowledgeable people of different religious traditions—i.e., generic practices, concerns, and values they share in common despite their many differences. Although they may not be common sense for all ways of being religious (though some considerations are), they constitute common sense among persons at home with any one [generic] way of being religious, though they be involved with that way in entirely different traditions. (1996, 390; see also 41-42, 120-12)

¹⁴Also see Polanyi 1964, 302: "But the universal intention of a radical innovation [in the pursuit of discovery of some new aspect of reality] can also be represented as a sense of its pre-existence"—which is to say, its transcendence from the subjectivity of the innovator and of those who competently recognize it.

¹⁵In *Six Ways* I explain six generic ways of being religious in chapter 3 and give multiple examples of each in chapter 4.

¹⁶Identification of generic virtues and vices for each of the six generic ways of being religious is given and discussed in chapter 5 of *Six Ways*.

¹⁷In chapter 10 of *Six Ways*, I set out a case study comparing an example of reasoned inquiry in Buddhism and in Christianity. The remainder of this article is drawn from that case study.

¹⁸See Jean LeClerq (1982), *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study Monastic Culture*.

¹⁹In *Six Ways* I make use of the concept "at-onement" as meaning

The state of being at-one with whatever a religious tradition [or adherents thereof] takes to be "ultimate reality." It encompasses in its range of meaning "reconciled with," "in right or appropriate relation with," "in rapport with," "in agreement with," "in harmony with," "in conformity to," and "in union with"—with the understanding that the precise characterization of the state of at-onement will differ from one tradition to another. (1996, 25, see also 379)

²⁰Bhikkhu Pesala (1991), *The Debate of King Milinda: An Abridgment of the Milinda Panha* (Buddhist Traditions, vol XIV; Delhi, India: Motilal Banarsidass), 3-6, 19, and 83-86.

²¹Benedicta Ward (1973), translator, *The Prayers and Meditations of Saint Anselm* (New York, Penguin Books), 239–246. In *Six Ways* I also quote and make use of Benedicta Ward (1973/1990), “Anselm of Canterbury: A Monastic Scholar,” Fairacres Publication 62 (Oxford, England: SLG Press); reprinted in Benedicta Ward (1992), *Signs and Wonders: Saints, Miracles and Prayers for the 4th Century to the 14th* (Brookfield, VT: Variorum/Ashgate), 8–12.

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