

THINKING WITH MICHAEL POLANYI'S INSIGHTS: AN INTERVIEW OF RICHARD MOODEY

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ABSTRACT

In this interview, Phil Mullins questions Dick Moodey about his more than sixty years of thinking strongly influenced by Michael Polanyi and Moodey's efforts as a social scientist to link Polanyi-influenced thinking with other important thinkers.



You have had a long and complicated academic career, and Michael Polanyi's thought seems to have been an important resource for you for decades. When did you discover Polanyi, and why did you find him important in your early career?

I discovered Polanyi in 1958, when *Personal Knowledge* appeared on the new bookshelf of the Jesuit seminary where I was studying Thomistic philosophy. West Baden College was located in southern Indiana but was affiliated with Loyola University of Chicago, where I was also working towards an MA in sociology. A Jesuit sociologist taught some courses at West Baden, and I attended summer school classes in Chicago. Polanyi appealed to me because I needed a philosophy of social science that would guide my study and practice of sociology. I had been attracted to the study of sociology by the writings of the Russian American sociologist Pitirim Sorokin. He rejected positivism and Marxism, but I wasn't satisfied with his philosophy of social science. When I discovered *Personal Knowledge*, I had already been studying the 1957 publication of *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (1992 [1957]) by the Jesuit theologian and philosopher Bernard Lonergan. Lonergan was attempting to update Thomistic philosophy to make it more consistent with the findings of modern science. I started reading *Personal Knowledge* (1958) in the hope that it would help me to understand *Insight*.

What I have just said is true, as far as it goes, but my goal wasn't just to discover or create a philosophy of social science, or just to use *Personal Knowledge* to help me to understand *Insight*, or, as it turned out to be the case, to use *Insight* to help me to understand *Personal Knowledge*. In his introduction to *Insight*, Lonergan wrote, "the aim is not to set forth a list of the abstract properties of human knowledge but to assist the reader in effecting a personal appropriation of the concrete, dynamic structure immanent and recurrently operative in his own cognitional activities" (1992: 11 [1957: xvii]). I was trying to achieve that kind of personal self-appropriation. My cosmology professor, Fr. Joseph Wulfange, SJ, helped me with my struggles with Lonergan's long and difficult book. He had worked with Lonergan in the writing of *Insight* and reminded

me repeatedly that Lonergan had told him that to lose sight of the goal of personal self-appropriation would be to miss the whole point of *Insight*.

One of my criticisms of Lonergan was that his core message was personal, but his idiom was, most of the time, the impersonal language of scholastic philosophy and theology. I hoped that Polanyi's more personal idiom would help me not simply to understand *Insight* but to achieve personal appropriation. Lonergan divided *Insight* into two parts: "Insight as Activity" and "Insight as Knowledge." In the first part, he sought to help readers answer his epistemological question: What am I doing when I am knowing? In the second, he sought to help readers answer the metaphysical or ontological question: What am I knowing when I am doing those things?

My first readings of Polanyi provided me with some conceptual tools or clues that were useful for understanding ideas in *Insight*. I learned to use Polanyi's modification of the findings of Gestalt psychology as a tool for understanding what I was doing when I was knowing. Each time I have an insight, I integrate an indeterminate host of tacit subsidiaries to create a focal object. This is an important aspect of what I am doing when I am knowing. Polanyi's analogies between acts of perceiving, understanding, judging, and deciding are based on his modification of the findings of Gestalt psychology—he put more emphasis on the intentional striving of the knower. Lonergan didn't refer to Gestalt psychology in his explanations of what he thought he was doing when he was knowing, but because of my reading of Polanyi I can't think, write, or talk about insights without my understanding of Gestalt entering into what I think and say. This became an important aspect of the philosophy of social science I was attempting to develop. What I was doing—integrating tacit subsidiaries in all my acts of knowing and doing—was also what all the people I studied were doing. I strongly agreed with Polanyi's criticism of Laplace's ideal mind (*PK* 139–142) and thought that it was especially relevant to a philosophy of social science: a *realistic* social scientist must attribute to the people he or she studies the same kinds of intellectual and moral powers he or she uses to study them. This is one of Polanyi's main points in *The Study of Man*, which I was able to read soon after its publication in 1959. Social scientists' failure to acknowledge the mental powers of others has been a major consequence of their embracing the "ideal of scientific detachment" that had "exercised a destructive influence in biology, psychology and sociology" (*PK*, vii). A social scientist must not imagine himself or herself to be "looking down" on the behavior of others in the manner of Laplace's demon.

As I got deeper into *Personal Knowledge*, I gradually began to realize that Polanyi was advocating something very similar to Lonergan's advocacy of "self-appropriation." This became especially clear in the section titled "The Fiduciary Programme," which is the final section of "The Logic of Affirmation." In the first chapter in Part Three, "The Justification of Personal Knowledge," Polanyi wrote, "I have insisted on this before on diverse occasions: pointing out that we must accredit our own judgment as the paramount arbiter of all our intellectual performances, and claiming that we are competent to pursue intellectual excellence as a token of a hidden reality" (*PK*, 265). The meanings I created and attributed to what Polanyi wrote about self-accreditation were almost identical to the meanings I created and attributed to what Lonergan wrote about self-appropriation. *Personal Knowledge* became important in helping me to achieve what I call "self-appropriation/accreditation." There's the *act* of self-appropriation/accreditation, and there's the subsequent *state*. One of Polanyi's several statements of purpose for writing *Personal Knowledge* was, "The principal purpose of this book is to achieve a frame of mind in which I may hold firmly to what I believe to be true, even though I know that it might conceivably be false" (*PK*, 214). I interpret that as a description of the state subsequent to his acts of self-appropriation/accreditation.

“Responsible” points to another aspect of the state resulting from self-appropriation/accreditation. The meaning I create and attribute to that term includes both embracing the ideal of performative consistency—consistency between what I believe, what I say, and what I do—and responding to others in a fitting or appropriate way. That language comes from H. Richard Niebuhr’s *The Responsible Self* (1963), which I could not have read until later, but my years of meditating on the Gospels had resulted in my embracing the ideal of the “Great Commandment,” even though I knew that I often failed to follow it. For me to believe that I am a morally responsible social scientist, I have to believe that I am trying to love my neighbors as I love myself. The people I study as a social scientist are my neighbors. Loving myself and my neighbors more authentically depends upon self-appropriation/accreditation.

You did a Polanyi Society paper many years ago on Lonergan and Polanyi. In the early years of the Polanyi Society, there were in fact a number of people interested in Polanyi who also were interested in Lonergan. What is the connection, and why do you think today there seem to be fewer scholars who put these figures together?

The first paper I presented at a meeting of the Polanyi Society was “Judgment in Polanyi’s Post-Critical Thought and Lonergan’s Critical Realism” (Moodey 2001). The following year, I presented “Moral Passion and Moral Judgment: Polanyi and Lonergan on Ethics” (2002). I later submitted a synthesis of the two papers to *Tradition & Discovery*, but one of the readers asked for some substantial revisions. I didn’t attempt to submit a revised version, not so much because I was discouraged by the requests for revision as because I experienced a shift in my sense of calling. It was *from* trying to “sell” Lonergan to Polanyians and Polanyi to Lonerganians, but I can’t describe, either concisely or precisely, what it was *to*. To some extent, it was *to* the kind of thinking and writing William Poteat described in his introduction to *Polanyian Meditations: In Search of a Post-Critical Logic*. He said that the book began where his earlier essay, “Myths, Stories, History, Eschatology and Action: Some Polanyian Meditations” (1968), ended. Neither the essay nor the book was intended to be a “contribution to Polanyian scholarship and interpretation.” In the following passage, he wrote first about the earlier essay:

It was rather 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*. While there is much closer attention to Polanyi’s text in this longer sequel than in the earlier essay, the text is mainly a point of departure for moving toward a wide range of other things. (1985, 8; Poteat’s italics)

I think that a major reason why the reader of my submission to *Tradition & Discovery* wanted me to revise it was that it included a lot of that kind of thinking *out of myself*, rather than either Polanyian or Lonerganian scholarship and interpretation. He or she did admit that there might be a place for that kind of writing in *Tradition & Discovery* but seemed to be uncomfortable with it.

Another way of describing that shift was that I renewed and deepened my conviction that the most important similarity between Lonergan and Polanyi is their advocacy of self-appropriation/accreditation. That’s also their most important contribution to the philosophy of social science. The essential foundation of social scientific knowing and learning is the personal self-appropriation/accreditation of the social scientist. This includes the realization that most learning occurs in the context of meaningful social interactions,

that participants take turns at sense-giving and sense-reading, and that these acts always involve the *creation* of the meanings the participants attribute to the spoken or written words.

I think that one reason why fewer people today than in the early years of the Polanyi Society try to connect Polanyi and Lonergan is the huge increase in the number of materials to be mastered. More writings *by* each man are now more readily available. The *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan* now contains twenty-five volumes. Those include just the primary sources, although most of these volumes are annotated by the editors. Bibliographies of works by and about both men are long and intimidating. They intimidate me. I realized that many Polanyians had read much more by and about Polanyi than I and that many Lonerganians had read much more by and about Lonergan than I. I didn't start reading the secondary sources on Polanyi and Lonergan until my retirement from Allegheny College in 1998, when I was sixty-five.

Over the years, my *explicit* religious beliefs have become less like Lonergan's and more like Polanyi's. The meaning I create and attribute to "God" isn't consistent with the meanings I create and attribute to many statements of Christian doctrines. Like Polanyi, I judge many of those statements to be untrue. The meaning I attribute to "God" is probably closer to what Paul Tillich *might* have meant by "the ground of being." However, I know that the meaning I create and attribute to that term can't be identical to what Tillich meant. The tacit subsidiaries I integrate to create that meaning are different from the tacit subsidiaries he integrated to create the meanings he attributed to "the ground of being." But just as I don't think Polanyi was an atheist or agnostic, I don't think I am either. An aspect of my Christian background to which I remain committed is the ideal of the Great Commandment. I *try* to love the ground of being and to love my neighbor as I love myself. By "love" I include the hope that both my neighbors and I can become more "responsible selves" by striving to achieve an ideal state of self-appropriation/accreditation. I believe that a good conversation is one of the best ways to achieve self-appropriation/accreditation. One of the reasons I love The Polanyi Society is that our discussions, by and large, are convivial conversations among people who are committed to searching for the truth.

Could you say more about the importance to you of Polanyi's "Sense-Giving and Sense-Reading" and your repetition of the phrase "the meanings I create and attribute to words"?

In the first paragraph of "Sense-Giving and Sense-Reading," Polanyi stated the thesis he would develop in the rest of the essay:

I shall show that, notwithstanding their informal character, these acts possess a characteristic pattern, a pattern that I shall call the *structure of tacit knowing*; I shall show that to form such a structure is to *create meaning*. Both the way we endow our own utterances with meaning and our attribution of meaning to the utterances of others are acts of tacit knowing. (*KB*, 181; Polanyi's italics)

When I read your questions, the meanings I create and attribute to them are not identical to the meanings you created and attributed to them when you wrote them. When you read my responses, the meanings you create and attribute to them are not identical to the meanings I created and attributed to them when I wrote them. Our communication is, however, fairly successful because the meanings each of us attributes to the written words are similar enough for the interaction to continue without one or both of us deciding to quit the conversation because of judging the words and sentences of the other to be totally incomprehensible.

The meaning I create and attribute to “conventional meaning” is *not* that the *identical* meaning is in the minds of both parties in an interaction. It is, rather, that the meanings the sense-reader creates and attributes to words and sentences are similar enough to the meanings the sense-giver created and attributed to those same words and sentences that both are comfortable with letting the conversation go on. It’s likely that even in the best of conversations, there will be times when the sense-reader will call a temporary halt to ask the sense-giver what he or she meant by a word, phrase, or sentence. When that happens, there’s a slight departure from conventional meanings. A big departure from conventional meanings can, as I said, result in one or both of the persons deciding to quit the conversation.

The residues of my repeated study of “Sense-Giving and Sense-Reading” are now prominent among the tacit subsidiaries I integrate to create the meanings I now attribute to texts Polanyi had written earlier. “Articulation” was a chapter of *Personal Knowledge* that became important to me very early in my study of Polanyi. Because the dispositions I have acquired from studying “Sense-Giving and Sense-Reading” are tacit subsidiaries for my present interpretation of passages in “Articulation,” I don’t think I now can recreate the meanings I attributed to those passages back in the late 1950s and early 1960s. My memories of my past are always interpreted in a present in which the *from* side of the *from-to* structure of remembering is inhabited by dispositions more recently acquired. What I now think and say about “The Re-Interpretation of Language” (*PK*, 104–117) is the result of integrating tacit subsidiaries that weren’t part of my background then. Polanyi began that section by saying that an “educated mind relies for most of its knowledge on verbal clues” and that its conceptual framework “will be developed mostly by listening or speaking.” This supports my more sociologically formulated assertion that most of a person’s learning occurs in the context of meaningful social interactions—listening and speaking or reading and writing. Polanyi added that the educated person’s “conceptual decisions will usually entail also a decision to understand or use words in a novel way” (*PK*, 104). After pointing to some specific ways in which persons reinterpret language, he expresses his agreement with Piaget that learning involves two interrelated processes, assimilation and accommodation, although he preferred to name the second process “adaptation.” He then says that “to modify our idiom is to modify the frame of reference within which we shall henceforth interpret our experience; it is to modify ourselves” (*PK*, 105).

I modify Polanyi’s idiom as follows: to modify *my* idiom is to modify the frame of reference within which *I* shall henceforth interpret *my* experience, and to modify *your* idiom is to modify the frame of reference within which *you* shall henceforth interpret *your* experience. Polanyi’s statement is indeed more concise than mine, but for me to affirm his statement would be to modify my frame of reference in a way that contradicts what I believe to be true. I deny that “we” have what I mean by a “frame of reference.” Each of us has a *unique* frame of reference consisting of the residues of our *unique* set of life experiences.

The meanings I create and attribute to “Sense-Giving and Sense-Reading” are especially important to the meanings I now create and attribute to “The Personal Mode of Meaning” (*PK*, 252–253). Polanyi focused on the way his conceptual framework had been shaped and reshaped by the *idioms* of the times and places he had lived. In this section he used “matrix” to point to what I believe he meant, in other texts, by “conceptual framework” or “frame of reference.” I relate this to “The Re-Interpretation of Language.” It was during his meaningful social interactions in those earlier times and places that Polanyi modified his matrix and thereby modified himself. Although he described that matrix as a system of beliefs, he emphasized his inability to say precisely what those beliefs were. Because the meaning I usually create and attribute to “belief” includes the ability of the believer to *say* what he or she believes, I prefer to say that the matrix is a

complex network of acquired dispositions, residues of past experiences, as Donald Campbell defined them in his now classic “Attitudes and Other Acquired Behavioral Dispositions” (1963).

I affirm, with the Polanyi of “Sense-Giving and Sense-Reading,” that *each time* a person performs an act of sense-giving or sense-reading, he or she forms the structure of tacit knowing and thereby *creates* a meaning by integrating tacit subsidiaries to form a focal object. Each act of creating meaning results in a modification of *that person’s* tacit background, the *from* side of the *from-to* structure of all knowing and doing. Other Polanyian terms that point to each individual person’s tacit background are “frame of mind,” “frame of reference,” “conceptual framework,” and “matrix” within which Polanyi said, “I was to find my problem and seek the terms for its solution” (PK, 252).

I keep repeating the awkward phrase “the meaning I create and attribute to words” as a way to remind myself and my readers that “the conduit metaphor of communication” misrepresents what’s actually going on in the sending and receiving of verbal messages and contradicts Polanyi’s core argument in “Sense-giving and Sense-Reading.” I learned about the conduit metaphor from George Lakoff and Mark Johnson’s *Metaphors We Live By* (1980: 10–11), and they were reporting on the findings of Michael Reddy (1979: 294–310). Reddy found that about 70 percent of our commonsense discourse about language implies an acceptance of the conduit metaphor. Examples are “It’s difficult to *put* my ideas *into* words” and “The meaning is right there *in* the words.” Using Lakoff and Johnson’s way of naming metaphors, the metaphors contained in the complex conduit metaphor are

IDEAS (OR MEANINGS) ARE OBJECTS.
LINGUISTIC EXPRESSIONS ARE CONTAINERS.
COMMUNICATION IS SENDING.

By repeatedly emphasizing that meanings are *created* by sense-givers and sense-readers, I’m trying to replace the false picture of verbal communication that commonsense discourse suggests to me as well as to others with one that I judge is more likely to be true.

You were a sociology graduate student at the University of Chicago working with Edward Shils and others in the sixties, in the period Michael Polanyi regularly lectured at the University of Chicago. I believe that you once told me you met with Polanyi and heard the 1968 version of the Meaning Lectures. Please comment on your Chicago experience and its importance for your vocation.

I think what you mean by my “Chicago experience” was my experience as a graduate student at the University of Chicago, but I think of my “Chicago experience” as having begun in 1953 when I joined the Chicago Province of the Society of Jesus. I didn’t enter the concrete city until the summer of 1957, when I first started taking summer school classes in sociology at Loyola. I got my MA in sociology from Loyola in 1961, after I had already left for my two years of teaching in Nepal. In the spring of 1963, I left both Nepal and the Jesuits. In the fall of 1963, I got a job teaching sociology back at Loyola and began to look around for a place to get a PhD. My experience in Nepal and my past study of Hindi helped me to get a National Defense Foreign Language and Area Studies fellowship to work with the Committee on South Asian Studies at the University of Chicago. The University of Chicago was my second choice because I had hoped to work with Francis L. K. Hsu, the chair of anthropology at Northwestern. He edited *Psychological Anthropology: Approaches to Culture and Personality* (1961) and authored *Clan, Caste, and Club* (1963). I went to the University of Chicago because that’s where I was able to get financial support.

I was still able to work with Hsu. He served as an examiner for the special field I created, “Cognitive Development in South Asia,” and was on my dissertation committee. He was collaborating with Fred Strodbeck, the head of Chicago’s social psychology program. I followed Hsu’s suggestion that I work with Strodbeck, who became my graduate advisor and chair of my dissertation committee. Strodbeck presented “Sex-Role Identity and Dominant Kinship Relationships” in August 1966 at a conference sponsored by the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research. The conference focused on the hypothesis Hsu had developed in *Clan, Caste, and Club*. Revised versions of the conference papers were published in *Kinship and Culture* (Hsu, ed. 1971). I spent the summer of 1966 engaged in research designed to support Strodbeck’s hypotheses about connections between his work on sex-role identity and Hsu’s kinship and culture hypothesis. My dissertation, *Masculinity and Femininity in India and the United States* (1971), was accepted as completing the requirements for my doctorate in sociology.

I was involved with Loyola of Chicago for more years than with the University of Chicago. I got my MA from Loyola while I was still in the Jesuits, taught there full-time for two years after leaving the Jesuits, and returned to another year of full-time teaching there after two years as a full-time student at Chicago. While at Chicago, I attended Edward Shils’s seminar on the Indian intellectual, but I didn’t really work with him in the way that I did with other members of the Committee on South Asian Studies or the faculty members in social psychology. I respected Shils, and my respect for him has grown since my time at the University of Chicago. But I also disagreed with him about a number of things. I remember arguing with him a lot while attending his seminar. Among other things, I judged him, perhaps unfairly, to be too Eurocentric and too conservative. I liked the work of C. Wright Mills, and Shils had written what is widely regarded as a nasty review of Mills’s *The Sociological Imagination* (1959) titled “Imaginary Sociology” (1960). I also liked the work of Sorokin. Sorokin and Parsons clashed at Harvard, and I regarded Shils as a collaborator with Parsons and thus a possible enemy of Sorokin. Only later did I realize that his collaboration with Parsons was relatively brief.

I did appreciate, however, that Shils brought Polanyi to Chicago to present the 1968 version of the “Meaning Lectures” and arranged for Polanyi to meet with graduate students. One other student came to our two-hour session but just listened to the conversation I had with Polanyi. We talked about Lonergan, and he said he regretted that he had not been able to find the time to read *Insight*. We talked more about Piaget, whom Polanyi knew personally. Piaget’s work contributed a lot to the meaning I created and attributed to “cognitive development.” I believe that South Asians, as well as Swiss and Americans, learn by the interrelated acts of assimilation and accommodation, and I understand these in terms of Polanyi’s *from-to* model. Polanyi and I disagreed about what Piaget meant by “reversibility” but agreed about the usefulness of thinking of individual intellectual development in terms of “assimilation” and “accommodation.” Polanyi seemed to me to be fully involved in our conversation and not at all offended by a mere student’s disagreeing with some of the things he said. I came away from our talk profoundly impressed by being treated so respectfully by a great man.

An important aspect of my University of Chicago experience was that is where I decided that I wanted to teach in a liberal arts college rather than in a research university. I observed young assistant professors there spending too much time, from my perspective, writing grants for research money and then, if successful, being administrators of the money and staff. I believed that I would have a better chance of helping students to achieve self-appropriation/accreditation in a liberal arts college than in a research university. In the fall of 1968, I accepted a full-time position at Allegheny College in Meadville, Pennsylvania. I continued

to work on my dissertation. In the spring of 1971, Chicago granted me a PhD, and Allegheny granted me tenure and promotion to associate professor.

I also met my first wife in Chicago, and my two oldest children were born there. That played a big part in my decision to move from Loyola to Allegheny. I couldn't afford to live in suburbia and didn't want to raise my children in a big city. I was born in a small town, and my family moved to a rural area when I was in the fifth grade.

You are a broadly visioned, philosophical sociologist. You have digested the classics, but you have taken a serious interest in some contemporary figures who have digested Polanyi or who worked on similar problems, figures like Stephen Turner, Mark Johnson, and George Lakoff. Tell us a bit about who you align with Polanyi and how this set of figures outlines a perspective from which you think about things.

The way I align Turner, Lakoff, Johnson, and others with Polanyi is similar to the way I align Lonergan with Polanyi. The meanings I created and attributed to some of their texts are *almost* identical to the meanings I have created and attributed to some of Polanyi's texts. But what is more important to me is that Turner, Johnson, and Lakoff have helped me towards better self-appropriation/accreditation. They have been most useful in helping me towards more complete answers to the epistemological question: What am I doing when I am knowing? Turner (e.g., 1994; 1998–1999; 2014; 2018) has helped me mostly by providing me with better arguments and evidence against believing in the existence of group minds and shared mental stuff. Johnson (1987) has gone much deeper than Polanyi or Lonergan in spelling out all the implications of embodied knowing. In this, his writings complement the work of William Poteat's emphasis on "I" as "mindbody." Lakoff also emphasized embodied knowing. In *Philosophy in the Flesh* (1999), he and Johnson call their philosophy "embodied realism." I think an argument could be made that this could be a name for the realism of both Polanyi and Poteat. Lakoff has also summarized and developed further the category theory of modern cognitive linguistics. The title of his *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind* (1987) comes from the contents of a distinctive category of Dyirbal, an Australian language. I have used Lakoff's *Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think* (2002) extensively in the sections of my sociology courses dealing with family and kinship. I connect it with Hsu's kinship and culture hypothesis, which figured prominently in my dissertation. In *Moral Politics*, Lakoff uses conceptual tools from cognitive linguistics—radial category, prototype theory, conceptual metaphors—to explain differences in the ways "liberals" and "conservatives," as commonly defined in the US at the turn of the century, think about political issues.

It's true that I'm a "philosophical sociologist," but I think all social scientists ought to be philosophical because we study *persons*, their actions, interactions, and the products of their actions and interactions. I know what others are doing by knowing what I am doing and affirming what I know myself to be doing with "universal intent." A way of saying this that is more often used in the social science literature is affirming the "psychic unity" of the human species. The self-knowledge and self-love that results from self-appropriation/accreditation is the model *from* which I attend *to* what others are doing. In *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology* (1970), Alvin Gouldner advocated what he called "reflexive sociology." I have always thought that the kind of reflection he called for is really philosophical. Commenting on the notion of believing in order to know, Polanyi offered his interpretation of St. Augustine's assertion, "*nisi credideritis non intelligitis*": "It says, as I understand it, that the process of examining any topic is both an exploration of the topic, and an

exegesis of our fundamental beliefs in the light of which we approach it; a dialectical combination of exploration and exegesis” (*PK*, 267).

The meaning I create and attribute to this text is that it is a statement of Polanyi’s *ideal* process of examining a topic, rather than an attempt to describe how *everyone* examines a topic. I also think that this process is more important in examining social things than in examining the non-social things studied by natural scientists. Objectivists of all varieties are likely to refuse to engage in an exegesis of their fundamental beliefs. I say that this ideal *ought* to hold for social scientists’ examination of all kinds of social things, from the poison oracle of the Azande to the workings of economic markets and the recurrence of wars and revolutions.

Another of the contemporary writers I align with Polanyi is Douglas Hofstadter. His *Gödel, Escher, Bach: an Eternal Golden Braid* (1979) and *I Am a Strange Loop* (2007) have been very useful to me in my efforts to know what I am doing when I am knowing. Hofstadter never quotes either Polanyi or Poteat but focuses intensely on the aspect of personal knowing that was also a recurrent object of focal attention for Poteat: the semantic strangeness of “I.” A term used by some social scientists, especially those in the school of thought called “ethnomethodology,” is that “I” is an “indexical word.” There is a strange sense in which each person who uses it means something different from what every other person means by it. “Strange loop” is the name of the complex conceptual tool that I use a lot in my thinking, talking, and writing about social things. About the meaning I create and attribute to that term, I truly know more than I can say. An image helps. Hofstadter uses M. C. Escher’s “Drawing Hands” to illustrate, in part, what he means by a “strange loop.” In the print, each hand is pictured as drawing the other. That same print is the illustration on the dust cover of my copy of Poteat’s *Polanyian Meditations* (1985). I believe that something analogous to this image is one of the reasons for the strangeness of the first paragraph of chapter 10, “Commitment,” of *Personal Knowledge*. The first sentence is italicized: “*I believe that in spite of the hazards involved, I am called upon to search for the truth and state my findings*” (*PK*, 299). In the rest of the paragraph, Polanyi reflected on what he was doing by asserting that sentence about himself: (1) he was summarizing his fiduciary program—the strange name that, for a while, was his name for his entire *Personal Knowledge* “project”; (2) he was *asserting* as true something about himself and simultaneously *authorizing* that assertion; (3) he was deliberately articulating an argument that he said was, necessarily, “intentionally circular.” The following sentence illustrates why I say that the paragraph contains a strange loop: “For in uttering this sentence I both say that I must commit myself by thought and speech, and do so at the same time.” Polanyi’s declaration of his calling and his reflections on it were the result of his personal self-appropriation/accreditation.

Phil, in more than one place you have characterized Polanyi’s philosophy as a weaving together of critical philosophizing, constructive philosophizing, and a *Lebensphilosophie*. I am suggesting that this interweaving creates a strange loop. I think that readers can feel as if they *understand* Polanyi’s critical and constructive philosophizing because they can create and attribute meanings to his sentences and longer texts that are consistent with one another. But I think that to *affirm* the truth of those sentences and longer passages, a reader must embrace a philosophy of life that includes a calling similar to Polanyi’s, a calling at least to search for the truth, if not necessarily to state one’s findings. This isn’t just an “intentionally circular” process; it’s a strange loop.

Polanyi at times seems to point to sociology and the social sciences as the bane of modernity. I think Edward Shils once said in a letter to Polanyi that he tended to blame the relatively new social science

disciplines for far too many of the problems of modernity. Can you comment on Polanyi's take on the social sciences?

I agree with Shils, but I think there's a lot more to say about Polanyi and the social sciences. In his early essay, "The New Skepticism" (*SEP*, 29–32), Polanyi expressed his dislike of politics and his hope for the *right kind* of sociology. Almost four decades later, he expressed a similar hope in a section of *Personal Knowledge* titled "Neurology and Psychology" (*PK*, 262–64). It's significant that this is section 10 of "The Logic of Affirmation." Section 11 is "On Being Critical" (*PK*, 264), and section 12 is "The Fiduciary Programme" (*PK*, 264–68). After criticizing reductionist and mechanical models of the nervous system and psyche, Polanyi said something that I regard as a basic principle of the right kind of sociology and, by extension, the right kind of social science: "By contrast, to acknowledge someone as a sane person is to establish a reciprocal relation to him" (*PK*, 263). He concluded "Neurology and Psychology" by reflecting further on the right kind of sociology:

Objectivism requires a specifiably functioning mindless knower. To accept the indeterminacy of knowledge requires, on the contrary, that we accredit a person entitled to shape his knowing according to his own judgment, unspecifiably. This notion—applied to man—implies in its turn a sociology in which the growth of thought is acknowledged as an independent force. And such a sociology is a declaration of loyalty to a society in which truth is respected and human thought is cultivated for its own sake. (*PK*, 264)

That's the kind of sociology I have always tried to practice. That quotation supports my contention that self-appropriation/accreditation is not a solitary act; I must accredit each person with whom I interact, including those whom I study as a social scientist, as a person entitled to, and *able to*, shape his or her knowing.

The meanings I create and attribute to Polanyi's economic writings differ significantly from those attributed to the same texts by other Polanyians. I believe that after the publication of *Full Employment and Free Trade* in 1945, Polanyi lost interest in promoting Keynesian economic theory as a way of getting out of the Great Depression. WWII did much more to end the Depression than any application of Keynesian theory. I think he also stopped thinking, talking, and writing about the economies of societies as closed systems. The meanings I create and attribute to his treatment of the economic domain in "Conviviality" are very different from those I create and attribute to *Full Employment and Free Trade*. Two things about *Personal Knowledge* strike me as significant. (1) He said that the objectivist ideal of knowing had harmed biology, psychology, and sociology but said nothing about it having harmed economics. (2) He admitted in *Full Employment and Free Trade* that he sought to popularize Keynes's economic theory, but in *Personal Knowledge*, thirteen years later, he never once mentioned that economic theory. The only references to Keynes are in connection with his ideas about probability. I believe that if Polanyi had continued to believe in the importance of Keynesian economics, he would have mentioned it in *Personal Knowledge*, *The Study of Man*, *The Tacit Dimension*, or *Meaning*. I am not, however, so strongly committed to that belief that Polanyians who continue to explore Polanyi's economic writings will be unable to persuade me that I'm wrong.

I have intentionally stressed the incompatibility of the meanings I create and attribute to *Full Employment and Free Trade* with those I create and attribute to the texts I focus on as Polanyi's development of the semantic aspect of his *from-to* model. Another Polanyian might disagree with me to the extent that there are important differences between the meanings he or she creates and attributes to one or both of these aspects

of Polanyi's writings and the meanings I attribute to them. Disagreements among Polanyians are inevitable because of differences in the tacit subsidiaries each person integrates to create the meanings he or she attributes to a text. These disagreements can't be resolved by quoting a text written by Polanyi. But I believe that I can approach a better understanding of what another says by getting a better knowledge of the tacit subsidiaries he or she has integrated to create a meaning that is inconsistent with, perhaps even contradictory to, the meaning I have created and attributed to the same text. There's a limit to this, however, for none of us can make all of those tacit subsidiaries explicit—each of us always knows more than he or she can say.

This bears on the sociology of economic life. Models in mainstream economics, including Polanyi's interpretation of Keynes's model, are primarily about interactions as *exchanges* of commodities that can be valued in terms of measurable amounts of money. Behavioral economics is, to some extent, an attempt to think outside of that box. The monetary *value* of a commodity is, in mainstream models, its *meaning*. That's a very abstract and impersonal kind of meaning, and it leads to a very abstract model of economic actors—"economic men." This model of interaction as the exchange of commodities is profoundly different from the model of meaningful interaction that I create and attribute to "Sense-Giving and Sense-Reading." Taking turns as sense-giver and sense-reader clearly isn't an exchange of commodities, but it's also not an "exchange" of meanings, as is implied by the conduit metaphor.

In examining the topic of economic markets and depression, Polanyi failed to follow what he later prescribed as the right way to examine any topic. In *Full Employment and Free Trade*, he did not engage in a dialectic between exploring the topic and an exegesis in the light of the fundamental beliefs with which he approached that topic. Did he believe that the "laws of the market" were natural laws, analogous to the laws of gravity and inertia? Did he believe that money and commodities—including human labor as a commodity—were fluids that "flow"? Did he believe that it's morally responsible to think, talk, write about persons as if they were "calculators" seeking to maximize—or satisfy—profits and minimize losses? I think that he bracketed some of his fundamental beliefs in his attempt to popularize Keynes. I think that, for a while, he did believe that depressions could be fixed by getting more money into the hands of consumers.

"Sense-Giving and Sense-Reading" is for me the clearest exposition of what I call Polanyi's "pure" sociology, even though he doesn't connect his argument explicitly to sociology. It is an explanation of what's going on when persons interact. In *Society, Culture, and Personality*, Sorokin wrote something that has guided all my sociological work: "The most generic model of any sociocultural phenomenon is the meaningful interaction of two or more human individuals" (1947, 40). But Sorokin misrepresented what is going on when two or more people communicate by using the metaphors contained within the conduit metaphor. He described meanings as if they were preexisting objects that the sender of a message would "put into" a symbol and that the receiver of the message would "take out of" that symbol. He called symbols, including words, "vehicles of meaning." "Sense-Giving and Sense-Reading" corrects this misrepresentation of what is going on during an episode of meaningful interaction. I call this part of Polanyi's pure sociology because it's not ideological in the sense of arguing for or promoting a practical agenda.

However, there's an aspect of what I like to call Polanyi's "applied" sociology with which I must disagree. Harry Prosch made this aspect of Polanyi's applied sociology the organizing principle of *Michael Polanyi: A Critical Exposition*. Prosch wrote, "Our study will show that Polanyi, in his role as a physician-philosopher, was mainly concerned with trying to cure the modern mind of what ails it" (1986, 7). The book's four parts are "Diagnosis," "Prescription," "Treatment," and "Evaluation." In "Confronting the Minotaur: Moral Inversion and Polanyi's Moral Philosophy," Diane Yeager said something similar: "The exposure and

critique of moral inversion is a project to which Polanyi reverts repeatedly between 1946 and 1975, and it can fairly be said that diagnosing this pathology, analyzing its causes, and devising a remedy constitute the social objective to which his philosophical work is ordered” (*TAD* 29(1): 23). Had I realized, back in 1958, how important this was to Polanyi, I might not have become a Polanyian. I had applied to be a missionary because I still believed that Jesus was the savior of humankind and I wanted to participate in the process of converting the world to Catholic Christianity. I judged philosophers and social theorists who saw themselves, or their systems of thought, as saviors of humanity to be foolish. I realized that Auguste Comte, Karl Marx, and Polanyi’s contemporary George Lundberg were too smart to be written off, but I judged them to be naïve insofar as they believed that they themselves, or their theories, could save the world. I might have put Polanyi in the same category if I had realized that Polanyi believed that he had been called to cure the modern mind of moral inversion. I consider this aspect of Polanyi’s sociology to be ideological, again, in the sense of arguing for or promoting a practical agenda. I recognize that I am using “ideology” in a way that Polanyi did not.

Prosch reported that, towards the end of his life, Polanyi saw himself as a failure in his role as a physician-philosopher—“on the whole the modern mind seemed to him to be no better off than when he had found it” (1986, 203). In spite of this, Prosch later said (p. 278) that he believed that Polanyi “was sound in assuming that as a philosopher his role was to be a physician.” I disagree. I think, rather, that Polanyi was sound when, in the exposition of his fiduciary program, he wrote,

I believe that the function of philosophic reflection consists in bringing to light, and affirming as my own, the beliefs implied in such of my thoughts and practices as I believe to be valid; that I must aim at discovering what I truly believe in and at formulating the convictions which I find myself holding; that I must conquer my self-doubt, so as to retain a firm hold on this programme of self-identification. (*PK*, 267)

Isn’t it possible that the “sickness to health” metaphor is bound up with or basically reliant on accepting Polanyi’s account of philosophical reflection—“bringing to light and affirming as my own, the beliefs implied in such of my thoughts and practices as I believe to be valid”?

Yes, I think that’s highly probable. On the very next page (*PK*, 268), the concluding page of “The Fiduciary Programme,” Polanyi connected his statement about the function of philosophic reflection to two other images that point in the same direction as the sickness to health metaphor. The first image is the “second apple,” pointing to a second loss of paradise. In “‘Balance of Mind’: Polanyi’s Response to the Second Apple and the Modern Predicament,” Jon Fennell (*TAD* 44(2): 47–63) never mentions moral inversion. The second prominent image in the same paragraph is “the scientific Minotaur is born.” In “Confronting the Minotaur: Moral Inversion and Polanyi’s Moral Philosophy” (*TAD* 29(1): 22–48), Diane Yeager never mentions the second apple or balance of mind. I think both essays are excellent expositions of aspects of Polanyi’s philosophy, but my point here is that they illustrate the complexity of his thinking. The same text can lead two scholars to go in quite different directions.

Another passage from “Articulation” can help me explain what I mean by saying that I disagree with this aspect of Polanyi’s applied sociology. It’s on the final page of the section titled “Thought and Speech. I. Text and Meaning.” Polanyi asked how we should distinguish between two kinds of “verbal speculation”:

the kind that “may reveal an inexhaustible fund of true knowledge and new substantial problems” and the kind that produces “pieces of mere sophistry”:

Three things will have to be borne in mind: the *text*, the *conception* suggested by it, and the *experience* on which this may bear. Our judgment operates by trying to adjust these three to each other. The outcome cannot be predicted from the previous use of language, for it may involve a decision to correct, or otherwise to modify, the use of language. (*PK*, 95; Polanyi’s italics)

By “our judgment” I understand Polanyi to mean “each individual *person’s* judgment.” Rather than treating “judgment” as a faculty that performs operations, I prefer to say that “I”—mindbody—“judge” the relations between text, conceptions—the meanings I create and attribute to the text—and *my* experience. I italicize “my” because I don’t experience any other person’s experience. When I judge texts written by Polanyi in which he described himself as having been called to cure the modern mind of moral inversion, the personal experiences I bring to bear on this are my repeated judgments of persons who claim to be saviors. They are *foolish* in that claim, even though other things they have written might be very wise. When George Lundberg answered “yes” to the question in his title, *Can Science Save Us?* (1947), I judged his answer to be foolish. To the extent that Polanyi answered “yes” to the question, “can my fiduciary program save us?” I judge his answer to be foolish. In so many ways, Polanyi was a wise philosophical realist, but to the extent that he believed that his fiduciary program could save us, his understanding of himself and his relationship to human societies was unrealistic.

Prosch himself said a number of things that I judge to be inconsistent with his claim that Polanyi had been “sound in assuming that as a philosopher his role was to be a physician.” I have already mentioned his reporting that Polanyi considered himself to have been a failure in performing that role. Prosch expressed agreement with Eric Hoffer that “one of the diseases of the intellectual is that we think we are more respected and influential in our societies than in fact we are,” and Prosch suggested that Polanyi might have suffered from this “disease” (1986, 279). He said that “Polanyi overemphasized the extent to which the workings of a free society depend upon concepts in the minds of the bulk of its citizens” (283). Prosch said that “Polanyi may have misjudged our present political and economic situation: he did not see that the very existence of great masses of people in our modern societies may preclude the operation of simple democratic participation in political issues in a considered, intelligent manner” (288). Prosch admitted that there is just an analogy between a philosopher and a physician and that, like all analogies, this analogy has its limits (289).

Prosch said that Polanyi sought to explain why so many intellectuals have supported totalitarian movements—especially Marxism—that denied the freedom of intellectuals to control their own inquiries: “He did not give us an historical account of other non-ideational factors which were leading intellectuals to support such movements. This omission may be viewed by historians and sociologists as a serious defect in Polanyi’s account” (1986, 278). I am one of those sociologists who judge this as a serious defect, not just in his explanation of the support of intellectuals for Marxism, Nazism, and Fascism, but in his belief that his fiduciary program in philosophy could cure the modern mind of all that ailed it. As a sociologist, one of my biggest disagreements with Polanyi’s account is that he so often wrote as if he truly believed that “the modern mind” pointed to a *real organism* that *really* could suffer from a disease that a correct philosophy *really* could cure.

Polanyi's belief that the right kind of philosophy could solve the problems of modern societies seems to me to put him a category of thinkers Benjamin Barber criticized in *The Conquest of Politics* (1988): Bertrand Russell, John Rawls, Robert Nozick, Bruce Ackerman, Alasdair MacIntyre, and—to a lesser extent—Michael Oakeshott. Barber criticizes these thinkers for attempting to replace the *political* processes by which collectivities decide what to do when they have to do something but face uncertainties and internal disagreements. They either say explicitly or strongly imply that the right kind of philosophical reasoning can replace such things as voting, electing representatives, petitioning, demonstrating, etc.

On the concluding page of “The Fiduciary Programme,” after presenting images of the second apple and the birth of the scientific Minotaur, Polanyi said, “The alternative to this, which I am seeking to establish here, is to restore to us once more the power for the deliberate holding of unproven beliefs” (*PK*, 268). This connects Polanyi's “prescription” for moral inversion to his description, on the previous page, of the function of philosophic reflection. I don't disagree with the claim that *Polanyi* made this connection. What I disagree with is Polanyi's *belief* that he was called to “cure” the modern mind of the “disease” of moral inversion.

There are some misleading conceptual metaphors involved in the formulation of what I am saying was a foolish belief:

THE MODERN MIND IS AN ORGANISM.

MORAL INVERSION IS A DISEASE.

THE FIDUCIARY PROGRAM IS A CURE FOR THE DISEASE.

At the core of my disagreement is my denial that “the modern mind” points to the kind of social thing that can perform mental acts or be in a mental state. It does point to an idea, concept, or meaning. In “On the Modern Mind,” Polanyi attributed mental acts and states to the modern mind: “the modern mind distrusts intangible things and looks behind them for tangible matters on which it relies for understanding the world” (1965, 12). I say that only *persons* can perform acts of distrusting, looking behind, and understanding. A concept is not a person.

When you say that a concept isn't a *person* capable of performing mental acts, you seem to be making an ontological or metaphysical statement. Can you say some more about how you relate epistemology and ontology?

I think it's necessary to begin with something I have always believed and continue to believe. As far as I can remember, I have never doubted that I was real, that my parents were real, that either one of my two wives have been real, or that my children are real. Both Polanyi and Lonergan rejected the Cartesian program of universal doubt, and I had rejected it in practice even before I had ever heard of it. When, back in the late 1950s and early '60s, I was trying to formulate a philosophy of science for social science, I wasn't at all interested in whether I was a *real* person or in whether or not my partners in face-to-face meaningful interactions were *real* persons. What my two intellectual heroes wrote about self-appropriation and self-accreditation were, more than anything else, ways of saying some things I already believed.

I began to be interested in philosophy when I was a junior in high school and read my uncle's book, *Philosophy in Literature* (Ross 1949). After reading it, I told him my definition of philosophy: “the rationalization of prior convictions.” He thought that was a good way of thinking about philosophy. The experiential residue of that interaction has been one of the tacit subsidiaries I integrate whenever I create the meanings I attribute to philosophical statements, whether I utter them as a *sense-giver* or as a *sense-reader* of utterances

by others. This predisposed me to agree later with Polanyi's characterization of the function of philosophical reflection: "bringing to light, and affirming as my own, the beliefs implied in such of my thoughts and practices as I believe to be valid."

One of those beliefs, however, is that a statement about reality doesn't become true just because I believe it. It helps if a person I trust says that it's true, but an aspect of self-appropriation/accreditation is that I have to take personal responsibility for my actions, including acts of asserting a sentence to be true. By judging, I commit myself to *asserting* some statements and *denying* others. By deciding, I commit myself to *action*. In his introduction to *The Tacit Dimension*, Polanyi said that by working out the *from-to* structure of knowing and doing he had reduced his emphasis on commitment. I say that he had reduced his emphasis on *deliberate decisions*, because each time he integrated a host of tacit subsidiaries to create a focal object, the act of integration itself implied a commitment to the truth of those subsidiaries, even those so deep in the background that he could not become consciously aware of them. It's possible to question the truth of a tacit subsidiary only when it is made the object of focal awareness, but doing so requires the integration of tacit subsidiaries to which he had to be committed.

To assert statements about what I'm doing when I'm knowing is not just epistemology. It's also ontology because it's asserting the *reality* of the *process* of knowing. A key aspect of the ontology of both Polanyi and Lonergan is their assertion of isomorphism between the structure of knowing and the structure of the known. The meaning I create and attribute to "isomorphism" is *analogy*, with an emphasis on the *similarities*, rather than the *differences*, between the analogues. I think that this emphasis on similarity is unfortunate because it has led some Polanyians to reject what I consider to be essential to connecting his epistemology to his ontology: the analogy—*isomorphism*—between the structure of the knowing and the structure of the known. I also judge this analogy to be essential to connecting Lonergan's epistemology to his ontology. The *similarity* is important, and—for Polanyi goes back to his modification of the Gestalt model—he insisted on the intentional striving of the person who creates the Gestalt. Just as acts of knowing are integrations of subsidiaries into a focal object, so also are objects of knowing integrations of subordinate elements. The *difference* is equally important: the parts of a known object are radically different from the tacit subsidiaries a person integrates to understand that object.

The essays in the special issue of *Tradition & Discovery* devoted to Polanyi's realism have been important to my thinking about the isomorphism between his epistemology and his ontology. Stefania Jha called this Polanyi's "ontological equation" and judged it to result in an ontology that is "fragile, unscientific, and philosophically unstable" (*TAD* 26(3): 20). I have read and taken notes on Jha's essay several times, over an extended period of time, and still believe that Polanyi's ontology is excellent. But, unlike Jha, I don't insist on "labels from mainstream philosophy" (p. 21).

The meaning I create and attribute to the "critical problem" is that it's a game that most children play from time to time when they are growing up and that some adult philosophers play at it in earnest. Any philosopher who tries to *persuade* one or more others that they are nothing more than characters in his, her, or their dream is violating the ideal of performative consistency—acting as if those others were real persons while at the same time denying their independent reality. As a social scientist, I have specialized in trying to know meaningful social interactions. I know that when I interact with another person, I judge that person to be real and that my partner judges me to be real. This is the context in which Esther Meek's (*TAD* 26(3): 72–83; 2017) "indeterminate future manifestations" (IFM) effect operates as a criterion for reciprocal judgments of the reality of the other. I know, and my partner knows, that during our interaction what we have

said and done in the past moments of that episode of interaction does not fully determine what either of us will say or do in the future moments of that episode. An important reason that interacting persons judge one another to be real is that both know that the other is unpredictable.

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