

# **The Eclipse of the Personal? Affirmations, Proposals, and Questions**

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## §1. Introduction

Martin E. Turkis II has written an engaging, erudite, and illuminating study of Michael Polanyi. I suspect it will prove in time to be an important work, a reference point for future scholarship. He properly urges us to take philosophers and the traditions in which they are rooted seriously in the manner articulated by Stephen R. L. Clark: “taking a philosophical tradition seriously requires that we move beyond textual criticism of the canonical works themselves and explore and develop the implications of such a tradition of thought for those of us here and now” (Turkis 2024, 224). Doing so, in Clark’s own words, “can still inspire us in ways that Plato [or Polanyi] himself did not write down, nor even (perhaps) imagine” (2015, 250).

This is just right. Everything of course depends on *how* this exploration is carried out. The exigency to identify and explore these implications prompts me to see his project as “primarily an intervention in Polanyi studies” (2024, 221). In Turkis’s judgment, the failure of so many of Polanyi’s admirers to appreciate (1) the metaphysical character of his post-critical undertaking (his contribution extends beyond epistemology) and (2) the implied<sup>1</sup> Platonic character of this metaphysics itself makes this intervention necessary.<sup>2</sup> He is for the most part trying to reconstruct a metaphysical Polanyi squarely in the Platonic tradition *but*, in several places, endeavoring to go beyond this by laying out his own position.<sup>3</sup>

One of the chapters<sup>4</sup> (“Polanyi’s Copernican Realism: Content, Reception, and Relation to Three Contemporary Realisms”) is devoted to a detailed, in-depth engagement with Ontic Structural Realism (OSR), Objected-Oriented Ontology (OOO), and Neo-Aristotelianism.

1 It might be possible to distinguish between an *implicit* and an *implied* metaphysics. Given certain claims explicitly made, a project is allegedly intelligible or defensible only on terms seemingly quite foreign or, at least, underdetermined by the words on the page.

2 The compressed history of universals given by Polanyi in *Meaning*, beginning with Plato, is waved away by Turkis, who says we should not allow what Polanyi wrote to “unintentionally distract us from the Form’s incorporeality” (215).

3 Both the author and the eventual editor of this Forum have asserted I was being unfair when I simply raised the question of whether Turkis is *using* Polanyi for his (Turkis’s) purpose. I do not think so. My judgment is a qualified and tentative one: there were times when I read and indeed reread this book when I could not help but ask, is there an alien agenda (one distant from Polanyi’s project)? I have no doubt that the author was *consciously* trying to be true to the spirit of Polanyi’s project and, eventually, made clear he was advancing positions not attributable to Polanyi. I nonetheless still have some doubts regarding murkier matters. Possibly erring too far in the direction of charity and conviviality, I have excised these doubts from the body of the essay. Refusing to compromise candor, however, I mention them here as an aside.

4 The chapters are curiously unnumbered (this is an inexplicable policy enforced by the publisher on the author). Also, each chapter contains its own list of references. Numbered chapters and a comprehensive list of references in a single place would have been, in my judgment, preferable. This is not a criticism of the author but simply the expression of annoyance at Palgrave.

Turkis's exposition of these rival approaches is informed and charitable but ultimately critical. In this chapter (pp. 51ff.), the author's goal is to show how Polanyi's Copernican realism<sup>5</sup> is, on balance, a more tenable form of realism than these three contemporary forms. This chapter concludes by stressing, "Polanyi's epistemological project is deeply intertwined with his particular brand of metaphysical realism—a realism which affirms our ability to make contact with and grasp real reality, if only partially, by means of both philosophical reflection on first principles and empirical observation"<sup>6</sup> (107). The critical task undertaken in the second substantive chapter inaugurates in the following chapters a series of reconstructive and indeed constructive tasks in which one of the principal objectives is to show Polanyi's relevance to metaphysics but also the incompleteness of what can be gleaned from his writings. While Polanyi's notion of emergence is pushed to the periphery, his concept of field is central to the reconstruction of Polanyi as a full-blown Platonist.<sup>7</sup>

*To be* is, Turkis asserts near the outset of this study, *to mean*.<sup>8</sup> He returns to this pivotal point several times later. "We meet here," Polanyi in 1963 wrote for a revised edition of *Science, Faith, and Society*, "a new definition of reality" (quoted by Turkis, 53).<sup>9</sup> The real

is that which is expected to reveal itself indeterminately on the future. Hence an explicit statement can bear on reality only by virtue of the tacit coefficient associated with it. This conception of reality and of the tacit knowing of

5 The author claims there is warrant in Polanyi's writings for using this expression, which is true. This however does not make it especially apt. A more straightforward expression with far deeper roots in Polanyi's post-critical project (say, *fiduciary* realism) seems both more descriptive and immediately intelligible.

6 This way of putting it seems to be too Cartesian, implying possibly both an ontological and epistemological distance between human beings and the world "outside" of their consciousness. We are always already in contact with a world transcending, to an incalculable degree, our consciousness and control; and our direct experience of an "external" world inculcates a sense of reality as other than but comprehensible to us. Please note that experience can be direct, yet mediated: in Peirce's language, the secondness of experience does not preclude its thirdness. See Bernstein 2010, chapter 6 ("Experience After the Linguistic Turn"). I hope this is not a quibble, but getting the starting point right seems crucial. Any suggestion that humans are initially beings standing apart from the world, and thus tasked with making contact with an utterly alien order of being, seems to be at odds with both Polanyi and the disclosures of our experience, properly acknowledged and understood.

7 Why Platonism seemingly precludes emergentism eludes me. Perhaps it does not for Turkis; perhaps his marginalization of the latter has nothing to do with his embrace of the former. What takes form in the *Chora* in part by virtue of the Forms might include what today we call phenomena of emergence, might it not?

8 Some (I immediately think of Walt Gulick here) would object that this involves a conflation. Others are more disposed to granting the possibility that the meaning of reality is separable from the reality of meaning.

9 In fact, Josiah Royce in *The World and the Individual* (based on the author's 1900 Gifford Lectures) proposed an explication of being in terms of meaning. Also, see C. S. Peirce's critique of this version of Royce's metaphysics (CP 8.100-131). See also Peirce's review of *The Religious Aspects of Philosophy* (CP 8.39-554; also, in EP 1, 229-41). It is relevant to recall here that Peirce referred to Royce as "an American Plato" (EP 1, 229).

reality underlies all by writing.<sup>10</sup> (Polanyi 1964, 6; quoted in Turkis, 53; cf. Rescher)

Near the conclusion of the last substantive chapter (“Aristotle, Plato, and Polanyi on Access to Forms” [pp. 201ff.], Turkis at a climactic moment asserts that Polanyi’s “potential fields of potentiality...serve as the anchor for intelligibility and hence [for] meaning” (217).<sup>11</sup> They, Turkis proposes, are “best understood as the net of Forms along with the shaping power they exert over the unfolding of actualized entities (in other words, their functioning as constitutive causes)” (217-18).

*To be is to mean*, and, in turn, meaning is ultimately a function of the Forms (on this account, a purely objective reality, not irreducibly *personal* acts, commitments, and practices, ultimately secures intelligibility and meaning).

Turkis offers a strong statement of his Platonic stance: while “the actualization of our explicit awareness of the universal is logically subsequent to our contact with an appropriate sensible particular,” the instantiation of the Form itself “is made possible by the relevant Forms, which exist actually with or without actualized instantiations” (Turkis 2014, 239).<sup>12</sup> Of course, Turkis is aware that some will “object that the universal is merely epistemological and does not deserve ontological status.” His reply to such an objection is immediate and unequivocal: “to exist is to mean” and “to exist at all is to be a comprehensive entity. This is all that is necessary for a place in our ontology” (239). These explications of “*to be is to mean*” are suggestive and unquestionably helpful, but the claim invites a fuller explication than it receives. I suspect meaning here means intelligibility (or cognizability<sup>13</sup>).

In a later chapter, moreover, Turkis helpfully reminds his readers that Polanyi was influenced by Dorothy Emmett’s *The Nature of Metaphysical Thinking* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1945). I wonder if we ought to use an analogical understanding of meaning to illuminate an analogical understanding of being. In explicating the claim that “*to be is to mean*,” this might be helpful, especially in our endeavors to interpret a thinker such as Polanyi, that is, one keenly attuned to critical differentiations of integrated meanings.

None of my praise should be taken to signal unqualified agreement with all of Turkis’s fundamental claims or all of his main arguments. While explicit in stating his aims and painstaking in making his case (and, on both scores, there is hardly anything to fault), there remain crucial questions regarding the basic nature of Turkis’s hermeneutic project. One way to make this clear is to use an expression from parliamentary procedure. Is the author of *The Metaphysics of Michael Polanyi* offering a “friendly amendment” to the author of, above all, *Personal Knowledge*, one he can reasonably expect would be accepted by Polanyi were he alive today? Even if we could resurrect Polanyi and pose this question to him, and if he

10 If this formulation were slightly modified (the real is that which *would* reveal itself in the course of history or at the end of time), Polanyi’s understanding of reality would be indistinguishable from Peirce’s. Cf. Nicholas Rescher’s “The Roots of Objectivity.”

11 To *anchor* meaning is one thing; to be at bottom identical with meaning seems to be another.

12 I am disposed to think that Peirce’s distinction between existence (or actuality) and reality might be helpful here. The Forms are real but not existent, insofar as existence tends to be a degree of determinacy not necessarily characteristic of some forms of reality.

13 In the context of rejecting Kant’s notion of the *Ding-an-sich*, C. S. Peirce claims reality is synonymous with cognizability (*EP* 1, 25). Meaning in the sense of something grasped or realized is however not the same as something being inherently graspable or realizable. “*To be is to mean*” might mean the grasp, however partial and perspectival, of some aspect of reality, or it might mean simply intelligibility.

rejected this amendment as friendly, that does not decide the issue. Many would no doubt quickly conclude: So much the worse for the interpretation defended by Turkis in *The Metaphysics of Michael Polanyi* and elsewhere. But it would not be unreasonable to say: So much the worse for Polanyi for failing to see how a lacuna mars his project.

## §2. Forms and Emergence

It is obvious that Turkis holds that Polanyi needs Plato and, specifically, needs an ontology of more than purely immanent Forms. Aristotle's doctrine of forms as it is ordinarily understood is, in Turkis's judgment, insufficient; only Plato's doctrine will do. That is, Polanyi's epistemology needs Plato's ontology, but, Turkis assures us, this would not commit Polanyi to a two-world theory (see, e.g., 2024, 192). How would Polanyi greet such a claim, as a friendly amendment or otherwise? What *in* his writings would provide interpreters with evidence to take Turkis's proposal as fulfilling Polanyi's deepest, if possibly unavowed or unexpressed, intentions and aspirations?

What tends to get lost in Turkis's account of Polanyi's project is, from my perspective, the personal and, inseparably tied to this, the ethical. That is, there is the danger that the transcendent and immaterial tend to eclipse the personal and the ethical. Both terms with which I am concerned are indeed formally acknowledged, but neither informs and animates Turkis's interpretation as much as other concerns. What also tends to get lost is Polanyi's explicit and repeated espousal of a concept of emergence, about which Turkis has misgivings (or simply a low regard for what others find innovative and illuminating). In any event, there is something "scholastic" about his book, both in an admirable and possibly a disparaging sense. Peirce, a great admirer of the medieval schoolmen, stressed that there is a thoroughness and attention to detail, and also a disposition to put theses to the text, which is characteristic of the scholastics (*CP*, 132). There is, alas, also the tendency bemoaned by William James: "In a subject like philosophy it is really fatal to lose connection with the open air of human nature, and to think in terms of shop tradition only" (13). Thus, it becomes imperative to avoid merely playing "the professorial game"—for philosophers "to think and write from each other and for each other and at each other exclusively." To some extent, this is of course unavoidable and indeed justifiable. Turkis is however principally responding to other interpreters (e.g., Walter Gulick, Phil Mullins, and Esther Meek) and to other authors more generally (e.g., James Ladyman [OSR], Graham Harman [OOO], and William Simpson [Contemporary Hylomorphism]), with not a great deal of attention paid to the range of phenomena ultimately relevant to the assessment of these rival heuristic frameworks. In general, regarding Polanyi himself, Turkis clearly gets this. For example, he in his biographical account at the outset of the book notes that Polanyi's "rejection of positivism and pure empiricism along with sustained attention to the beliefs, values, methods [also traditions of connoisseurship?], and phenomenological experiences of real scientists at work in the scientific community would ultimately drive Polanyi toward his development of a post-critical philosophy" (2024, 12). Later, he insightfully—brilliantly—notes that "Polanyi's heuristics of discovery [was] developed in the phenomenological light of his own experience in physical chemistry" (2024, 44). But Turkis does not follow Polanyi's example: his

engagement is, to too great an extent, simply with the words of others, not with phenomena themselves.<sup>14</sup>

Take a single example: the formation and demise and, let us hope, regeneration of coral reefs. How are we to explain these phenomena? The *emergence* of living beings from inanimate matter and the prodigious forms of terrestrial life, including these sites of incredible biodiversity, are precisely the kind of phenomena to which Polanyi's own attention was drawn time and again. In the second half of the nineteenth century and throughout the next century, into the twenty-first, what we witness is a dramatic shift from an understanding of nature controlled by Newtonian physics to one animated by an appreciation of life, as an emergent yet irreducible phenomenon. Part of Polanyi's historical significance is that he makes a powerful contribution to this dramatic shift. To read him in abstraction from this history, to approach him principally in terms of intersecting debates among contemporary philosophers, with little or no regard for important debates in present-day science, seems to be deeply at odds with his character, temperament, and aspirations. Moreover, a full defense of Turkis's ambitious project ultimately requires a detailed, in-depth engagement with the obvious alternative to a top-down Platonism—one or another of the more tenable forms of emergentism, holding out the promise of showing how self-assembling systems or networks are explicable without appealing to transcendent forms. Such a defense might however fall outside the scope of his initial effort to establish the plausibility of his present undertaking. Even so, to make the case in a completely persuasive manner for his Platonic stance without squarely confronting the strongest forms of emergent naturalism falls somewhat short of the immanent demands of philosophical dialectic (demands nowhere more dramatically exhibited than in Plato's *Dialogues*!). And one must meet these demands in the teeth of the phenomena themselves.<sup>15</sup>

To some, my calling attention to the natural phenomenon of coral reefs will seem beside the point. To others, it will be a welcome reminder of the human and trans-human stakes in even the most seemingly abstruse philosophical debates (Midgley 2017, 43-49).<sup>16</sup> Are we to fiddle while the Earth burns, or are we to do metaphysics with the smell of the conflagration in our nostrils, with our eyes itching from particulate matter emanating from thousands of

14 The author has loudly complained to me that this was unfair: I was not taking his book on *his* terms. I was asked to write a response, not a review. Moreover, nothing—including justice or charity—compels me to accept these terms. I will allow the readers of this review to judge whether I have made an honest preliminary effort to judge his book on his terms, while *ultimately* voicing concerns and questions about the wisdom of certain choices.

15 Writing to his brother Henry, William James confessed about the task of composing his *Principles of Psychology*, “I have had to forge every sentence in the teeth of irreducible and stubborn fact” (*Letters of William James*, vol. 1, 225). Cf. Whitehead 1967, 2-3.

16 Freedom (intellectual, political, persona, and in other senses) was at the heart of Polanyi's project, and Martin Turkis is explicitly, if perhaps insufficiently, attentive to this. An “ontology of the person,” in accord with this project, would make this clear; insofar as an ontology of the person is not part of an interpretation of Polanyi's metaphysics, some might wonder about the presuppositions of that interpretation. That intelligibility is partly a function of the creative exercise of human rationality can possibly be ignored for attention to an allegedly neglected feature of Polanyi's considered approach.

miles away?<sup>17</sup> The children of Vico, Nietzsche, James, Dewey, Collingwood,<sup>18</sup> Ortega, and indeed Polanyi will incline in one direction, the progeny of (on a certain reading) Parmenides, Pythagoras, and Plato in the opposite.<sup>19</sup>

“Philosophical articulation is,” as John E. Smith notes,

inescapably dialectical in the precise sense that it requires a critical arena of discussion within which it is possible to determine how much a proposed categorial scheme can actually interpret in comparison with alternative schemes of the same logical type of articulation. Unfortunately, as happens too frequently, the discussion does not advance to the level where comparison between actual philosophical proposals is possible because all the effort is going into determining the entrance requirement. (1971, 609-10)

Critical philosophy involves the indefinite postponing of a direct confrontation of rival frameworks because all the effort is expending on securing the *possibility* for such a confrontation. In contrast, post-critical philosophy elaborates in detail the comparative merits of rival heuristic frameworks. Phenomena of life, history, and rationality are explained in one manner by non-reductivist naturalists and in a very different manner by Platonists. The devil (or divine) is in the detail. What are the comparative strengths and weaknesses in these rival heuristic frameworks? Making the case for a framework, on high, without comparing it to rivals stands in marked contrast to making the case, on the ground of the phenomena themselves, in a formally comparative manner. This is one of the virtues of *The Metaphysics of Michael Polanyi*: the author is taking pains to compare it to rival theories, and to some extent he is doing so in reference to phenomena (not least of all the phenomena most directly pertaining to the discovering of reality and, at least by implication, the apprehension of meaning in its diverse forms).

Turkis is, without question, a better-informed commentator on Polanyi than I am, knowing more intimately and widely the secondary literature. And he takes care to situate his interpretation vis-à-vis the approaches of others. He is quick to note, “Polanyi explicitly develops a version of emergence theory” (112, note #1). (Is it significant that the acknowledgment of such a central aspect of Polanyi’s implicit metaphysics is to be found in a footnote?) “It is,” he adds, “unsurprising that some interpreters of Polanyi’s work, such as

17 This is in fact the case as I write this: the fires in California, where Martin Turkis lives, and the air quality in Rhode Island, to the point of itching eyes, are phenomena not to be slighted or ignored. To *do* metaphysics at present with little or no trace of an ecological consciousness, let alone a feminist consciousness, seems, to me at least, an indefensible perpetuation of a tragically flawed approach. When I bring up such considerations, Martin cries “Foul!” He and I apparently grew up on different playgrounds, with different rules about what counts as a foul in a rough-and-tumble pick-up game. The divergence comes down to “This is how the game *ought* to be played.” No argument can secure the superiority of either approach. They are in themselves forms of life and also parts of such forms. Choose your team.

18 “The chief business of twentieth-century philosophy is,” Collingwood asserted in his *Autobiography*, “to reckon with twentieth-century history” (1939 [1978], 79). Whether or not it is the chief business of twenty-first century philosophy, certainly part of the business of contemporary philosophy ought to be reckoning with the opening decades of this century.

19 On my reading, *metanoia* is central to this tradition, but surprisingly Turkis pays little attention to this central theme. See Findlay’s Gifford Lectures, especially *The Transcendence of the Cave*.

Lowney and Gulick, emphasize emergence as of central importance, while others...do not.” Turkis immediately adds, “I myself am of the camp that does not find Polanyi’s work on emergence to be among his most important contributions.” As a result, especially since “debates over emergence can be highly technical and involved,” he elects “not to engage with emergence theory in a sustained way, though it will be touched on from time to time” (112, #1). There is an ambiguity here. It is one thing for a doctrine to be of central importance to the thinker who espoused that doctrine and another thing for that doctrine to be, in the judgment of an interpreter, one of that thinker’s “most important contributions.” Turkis is aware that his decision to push emergence to the margins “will frustrate some readers and elate others.” Or it might simply perplex yet another set of readers. However you or I happen to assess the value of this contribution, how did Polanyi himself understand its importance? Can we make sense out of *PK* by focusing to such an extent as Turkis does on fields and paying so little regard to emergence?

Part of the value of this study is that Turkis puts Polanyi in dialogue with contemporary theories such as ontic structural realism (OSR) and object-oriented ontology (OOO). My hope is that his and earlier examples of this are taken up by other students of Polanyi, with alternative casts of characters.

### §3. Polanyi and Plato

Indeed, Michael Polanyi invites us to put him into dialogue with other thinkers, including those who have appeared on the scene after he disappeared. Martin Turkis has done Polanyi and the community of his readers a tremendous service by conducting a critical dialogue between Polanyi’s Copernican realism on the one side and three contemporary versions of metaphysical realism (*ad seriatim*) on the other. We encounter in Polanyi’s writings a self-consciously historicist, because self-avowedly “traditionalist,” conception of rationality. Rationality is itself an emergent function, entangled in overlapping fields and thus in evolved hierarchies.<sup>20</sup> Such a conception of rationality is not at the center of this study. But, then, Turkis has other fish to fry.

As already noted, Martin E. Turkis II intends this study to be an intervention in Polanyi studies (221). He is far from naïve: with his claims regarding Polanyi’s Platonism fare, he knows he is lying in the teeth of many of the most influential and informed interpreters of Polanyi’s project. He defends his position with passion and ingenuity, though perhaps not with a sufficient measure of wisdom. Whenever competent and informed inquirers disagree, especially profoundly and vehemently disagree, there is indubitable ground for genuine doubt (not the paper or make-believe doubt of “critical” philosophers but the substantial doubt taken with the utmost seriousness by “post-critical” theorists) (cf. Peirce). Insofar as the situation is genuinely dialogical, not merely polemical, not only do the doubts of one’s opponents need to be specifically addressed but also the alternative laid out by them needs to be squarely confronted. I imagine Turkis takes himself to have in effect specifically addressed their doubts and objections by mounting his constructive case for post-critical Platonism. Yet

<sup>20</sup> Here is another place where the field of Polanyi’s thought itself overlaps with those of James and arguably other pragmatists. John J. McDermott expressed regret that James did not develop “the metaphor of field in order to account descriptively for the primal activity of the process of experience” (1977, xlv). In *Self, God, and Immortality: A Jamesian Investigation*, however, Eugene Fontinell develops the Jamesian notion of field. For James’s own suggestive engagement with this important notion, see Perry 1935, 365ff. (these pages contain extensive quotations from James’s notes for a seminar given in 1895–1896).

I also imagine that I will not be alone among the readers of his book who still have their doubts about Polanyi's Platonism.

In a book published in 1972, Stephen Toulmin, a thinker in intellectual kinship with Polanyi wrote,

Two hundred years of historical research have had their effect. Whether we turn to social or intellectual history, evolutionary zoology, historical geology or astronomy—whether we consider explanatory theories of star-clusters, societies, or cultures, languages or disciplines, organic species of the Earth itself—the verdict is not Parmenidean but Heraclitean. As we now understand it, nothing in the empirical world possesses the permanent unchanging identity (356)

The cumulative effect of these mutually supportive developments is nothing less than a paradigm shift:

Confronted with the question, 'How do *permanent* entities preserve their identity through all their *apparent* changes?' we must simply deny the validity of the question. In its place we must substitute the question, 'How do *historical* entities maintain their coherence and continuity, despite all the *real* changes they undergo?' (356; cf. Darwin 2009 [1859], 295-96)

Turkis will no doubt suppose that nothing here touches his position, for he can readily grant that nothing in the merely (!) empirical world possesses a "permanent unchanging identity," though insofar as this world is a truly intelligible world, nothing less than immaterial principles of unbounded intelligibility suffice. But please note: historically understood, Eleatic thinkers were pre-Socratic, and, moreover, Eleatic principles are timeless principles (cf. Midgley 2017, chapter 5). The phenomena of life and indeed of the earth itself as a place where life emerged and evolved called for the discovery of time and history in a way marking a dramatic shift from an Eleatic outlook to a Heraclitean appreciation of temporal and historical flux. On my reading, Michael Polanyi's post-critical project was one of the places where this shift was registered. To call him (as MacIntyre does) "the Burke of the philosophy of science" (MacIntyre 2006, 16) is to do him an injustice. The historically emergent forms of post-critical rationality both exhibited by Polanyi himself and illuminated by his descriptions, narrations, and theories suggest to me at least someone quite different than the figure portrayed by MacIntyre as a Burkean traditionalist (i.e., an uncritical or at best insufficiently critical traditionalist) but also quite different from the figure portrayed by Turkis as a Platonist. Perhaps Polanyi was a Platonist in the sense he was unquestionably a thinker embodying the most admirable qualities of the restless, probing, self-critical author of the *Dialogues*,<sup>21</sup> who at every turn was concerned to show dramatically the human stakes (especially the political stakes) in even the most abstruse philosophical disagreement. The

21 "Nothing could be more helpful," John Dewey wrote in an autobiographical essay, "to present philosophizing than a 'Back to Plato' movement; but it would have to be back to the dramatic, restless, co-operative inquiring Plato of the *Dialogues*, trying one mode of attack after another to see what it might yield; back to the Plato whose highest metaphysical flight of metaphysics always terminated with a social and practical turn, and not to the artificial Plato constructed by the unimaginative commentators who treat him like the original university professor" (*LW* 1, 155). There is, I should stress, nothing artificial about Turkis's Plato and certainly nothing unimaginative in his exposition of Plato—or of Polanyi.



human *agon* of passionate argument, incomprehensible apart from the specific manner in which individual interlocutors were shaped by their cultural traditions, is alone the site in which the human animal catches glimpses of the truth and, tied to this, the context in which we begin to appreciate the fateful shifts from one heuristic framework to another (e.g., the shift from the Homeric to the Socratic ideal of heroism and the implications this shift entailed for moral and political deliberation). The dialectic of dwelling in and breaking out of such frameworks is the stuff on which history—and dreams—are made (Scott 2019).

Until the eighteenth century, a top-down emanation of the cosmos from transcendent Forms has been in Western culture the dominant picture. The defenders of a bottom-up emergence and evolution of the cosmos have mounted a serious challenge to this regnant tradition.<sup>22</sup> The author might reasonably object that he is not espousing a top-down theory of transcendent forms. He touches so lightly on the cosmological as distinct from the ontological, and he permits himself to attribute an implied Platonism to Polanyi, that it does not seem untoward to suggest this, however hesitantly.

At this moment, nature, history, and rationality invite to be rethought beyond anything any Greek philosopher imagined or likely could have imagined. Hierarchy, field, *and* emergence are central to this task. This explicit metaphysics ought to be explored in much greater depth, in conjunction with any number of theorists, including Prigogine, Wimsatt, and Cahoon.<sup>23</sup> Is this metaphysics implicit in Polanyi's actual position, or is it derived as the result of a series of implications by a thinker standing at some distance from Polanyi's express positions? (Given these putative commitments, above all, to realism and intelligibility, he must, so the argument goes, espouse this or that doctrine, though there is no

22 It might be helpful to distinguish ontology (or fundamental ontology), cosmology, and regional ontologies, such as "an ontology of the mind" (*PK*, 264), and, hence, "an ontology of commitment" (279). I would argue Polanyi made contributions to all three.

23 Given their experimental sensibility, I suspect Polanyi himself would be more interested in the accounts offered by such theorists than those highly speculative ventures of Ladyman, Harman, and even the neo-Aristotelians. The author's aim is admirable: "to put Polanyi's work into conversation with a range of realisms that continue to serve as cruxes of contemporary metaphysical debates, both continental and analytic" (93). For this reason alone, even if one judges the range of realisms to be too narrowly construed, there are strong reasons for staging a dialogue between Polanyi and the latter group of contemporary theorists, especially when done with such painstaking attention to detail and deep commitment to fairness as Turkis displays in his book. When I come to the point where he acknowledges that the "epistemological and metaphysical pride of place given the person in Polanyi's work *may well be* objectionable to the OOO theorist" (91, emphasis added), and defends this by properly noting that theorist offers "*a metaphysical theory generated by people reflecting on the world*" (92), I am nonplussed. What one camp cannot in principle acknowledge (their metaphysics precludes this), the other makes central to its account of being and knowing. Such unbridgeable differences on such fundamental issues dispose me to imagine the benefit of staging other dialogues, especially with thinkers more deeply concerned with the phenomenology of human practice and the discoveries of contemporary science. Imagine a review of a contemporary book on Hegel that ignored Charles Taylor, Terry Pinkard, Robert Pippin, and other first-rank interpreters, focusing rather on what in the judgment of the respondent's mind were not first-rank interpreters or philosophers. Is a reviewer or respondent unjustified in pointing this out? Authors have a right to make their choices, and reviewers have a right to criticize those choices. Reviewers and respondents unquestionably might be wrong in their assessments of who would make more valuable interlocutors, but let the readers of the review or response decide.

textual or historical evidence that he would have been disposed to embrace the doctrine.) Going beyond textual criticism by identifying and exploring the implications of a historical text or tradition is one thing, but going against the manifest meaning and dominant interpretive tradition without incredibly strong arguments is quite another. I can only imagine that Turkis takes himself to have such arguments. I would be surprised if the majority of his readers judge his arguments for Polanyi's Platonism in such a meritorious light. But the efforts of Charles Lowney, Martin Turkis, and others are certainly not to be dismissed out of hand: they merit judicious and fair consideration. *The Metaphysics of Michael Polanyi* establishes at least this much.

#### §4. Conclusion

At bottom, my worry is that the approach defended in *The Metaphysics of Michael Polanyi* eclipses the irreducibly *personal* dimension of human knowledge. This would be roughly analogous to an account of Freud discounting the unconscious, one of Marx slighting the significance of revolution, or one of Dewey involving jettisoning his notion of experience.<sup>24</sup> It feels like *a deus ex machina* to stress at the conclusion that Polanyi's "motivations were always fundamentally metaphysical *and* ethical"<sup>25</sup> (252; emphasis added). Impersonal, immutable, immaterial Forms ultimately do all the work of securing intelligibility,<sup>26</sup> not the embodied, passionate, personal, and historical acts of human agents. All the references to Eros and to allied topics aside, the ethics of human inquiry is eclipsed by the "divinity" (i.e., timelessness) of the *Eide*.

So much of traditional philosophy and religion has been a call to humans, Mary Midgley observes,

to leave the transience of nature and move away towards the stillness [and stasis] of eternity. In this way, after death they would enjoy a pure communion with the timeless entities [cf. Turkis, 201-18] to which they were profoundly akin. At this point, however, there is surely something of a problem. How is it that human souls, which are essentially mobile creatures, responding constantly to changes in the world, are akin to these dignified, rock-like, unchanging ideals [or *Eide*]? What have these two kinds of being in common? How could they communicate? Plato did notice this problem in his late work, but he never resolved it.<sup>27</sup> (Midgley 2014, 43-44)

<sup>24</sup> This is actually what Richard Rorty endeavors to do in his creative appropriation ("strong misreading") of Deweyan pragmatism. Is Rorty truer to the deepest impulses of Dewey's project or is, say, Richard J. Bernstein, who insists on retaining the notion of experience? Analogously, is vis-à-vis emergence Turkis truer to the spirit of Polanyi's project or, say, Gulick? Though I incline toward Gulick's position, I want above all for this to be heard as a question.

<sup>25</sup> The word *ethical* is used only four times in this study, though "moral" is used more generously. It does not appear in the index. To *show* in detail how Polanyi's metaphysics accords with his ethics and heuristic of inquiry is a task yet awaiting us, though many scholars have shed light on this topic.

<sup>26</sup> His ideal of intelligibility is an extremely abstract and indeed ethereal one. Turkis contends that the evolved and evolving forms of becoming (including becoming discovered) are insufficient to secure the kind of intelligibility we need. Others are almost certainly going to judge this hankering as an itch better not scratched.

There might thus be more than an eclipse of the personal but also the eclipse of temporality, historicity, and nature itself.

As I see it, at this moment, then, Polanyi was not a Burkean traditionalist and also not a traditional Platonist. Trying to fit such an innovative and original philosopher into traditional categories, however finely adjusted and ingeniously nuanced, does an injustice to both this philosopher and those categories. Even so, Martin Turkis's own innovative portrayal of an alleged "post-critical Platonist" illuminates *much* about Polanyi's project, even if its main argument does not (in my judgment) go through. Most of his subsidiary arguments do go through, as most of his principal claims are either inherently uncontroversial or firmly established by rigorous argumentation.

Peirce alleged that none of the very great philosophers understand themselves: rather, they tend to see far deeper into the nature of reality than into that of their own projects (*EP* 2, 38).<sup>28</sup> This might also be true of Michael Polanyi. But did he specifically fail to grasp either his own implicit (or, better, implied) Platonism or his need to incorporate a full-blown theory of uninstantiated Forms into his metaphysics to realize itself? Was he mistaken to this extent about what he was doing? Debating this question is going to assist us in understanding better both the nature of Polanyi's metaphysics (implied and express) and the nature of reality itself. For his role in carrying on the work of others who are also disposed to see Polanyi in this light and, more generally, for engaging with Polanyi as a contributor to metaphysics (not only an innovator in epistemology<sup>29</sup>), we owe Martin E. Turkis II great gratitude.<sup>30</sup>

27 This is what most scholars mean by the unresolved two-world theory plaguing Platonic metaphysics. Turkis is convinced such an attribution to Plato is untenable and unfair (161, including notes #161, 181). At least in Plato's later thought, the Forms are "separate and austere transcendent" (225) but inseparable from transient, perceptible things. Such things are unintelligible apart from the Forms, but the Forms themselves need not be instantiated (they are intelligible in themselves—though likely in relationship to one another). The author assures us repeatedly that there is no two-world problem. I suspect that Midgley would say to Martin what she said to Plato: the problem of the relationship between εἶδη and φύσις has not yet been resolved, if it is indeed resolvable.

28 In this instance, Peirce is specifically remarking about Plato.

29 Most mainstream epistemologists have ignored Polanyi's work because he seemingly ignored the problem of skepticism, at least, as that problem is "responsibly" addressed by them. Insofar as "epistemology" (a word which Peirce loathed), is predicated on the problem of skepticism—insofar as the entrance exam is addressing in a certain fashion *the* problem of skepticism (the very possibility of knowledge)—Polanyi was an epistemologist. He was rather (like Peirce) devoted to articulating and defending a heuristic of discovery (a more apt expression than the logic of discovery, since this lends itself to immediate and persistent misunderstanding).

30 In my endeavor to be fair to the author, I have revised this response at least six times. I am certain he judges me to have failed. I was aided by Robert Innis, Walter Gulick, Phil Mullins, Stan Scott, and Martin Turkis, but especially Prof. Gulick, who displayed heroic patience and offered sage advice. An irony is not lost on me. If I were charged with *using* the invitation to respond to *The Metaphysics of Michael Polanyi* as an occasion to advance my own interpretation of Polanyi and approach to metaphysics, I would say, in a heartbeat, "Of course" (that's not only what we do but for the most part what we cannot avoid doing). Any interpretive endeavor entails selective emphasis, and, in turn, any specific instance of "selective emphasis...is inevitable whenever reflection occurs [or interpretations unfold]. This is not an evil. Deception comes only when the presence and operation of choice [or selective attention] is concealed, disguised, denied" (Dewey *LW* 1, 34). Martin has been

explicitly candid in his choices and emphases. I have also tried to be. Our hermeneutic, philosophical, and specifically metaphysical differences are deep and multiple. I have tried to get him right, while not betraying my understanding of Polanyi's project and approach to philosophy. One profound difference is that in his judgment I slight detailed argumentation, and in mine he overvalues it. "The chronic humbug of philosophy [is]," James complained in hyperbolic fashion, "to prove everything" (Perry, 484; cf. C. I. Lewis) (e.g., the existence of the external world, the reality of other minds, or the very possibility of human knowledge). Hence my appeals to phenomenology and his irritation with my not playing certain "professorial games." His commitment to the metaphysics of a *must-be* logic and mine to that of a *might-be* logic only further complicates and likely muddies matters. He supposes he has knock-down arguments in support of his conclusions, while I remain content with arguments to the best explanation, mindful that other explanations often carry tremendous weight and force. The strictly logical evaluation of allegedly isolatable arguments is a game I actually enjoy, but here and elsewhere I have *reasons* for painting in broad, bold strokes (see in the body of this paper the quotation from Smith's "Being, Immediacy, and Articulation").

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