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Submissions: All manuscripts should be submitted as a Microsoft Word file attached to an email message. Articles should be no more than 6000 words in length (inclusive of keywords, abstract, notes, and references) and sent to Paul Lewis at lewis_pa@mercer.edu. All submissions will be sent out for blind peer review. Book reviews should be no more than 1000 words in length and sent to Martin Turkis at mturkis@yahoo.com.

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

Citations:

- Our preference is for Chicago's parenthetical/reference style in which citations are given in the text as (last name of author year, page number), combined with full bibliographical information at the end of the article. One exception is that Polanyi's major works may be cited parenthetically using the following abbreviations (with abbreviations italicized):

CF *Contempt of Freedom*

KB *Knowing and Being*

LL *Logic of Liberty*

M *Meaning*

PK *Personal Knowledge*

SEP *Society, Economics, and Philosophy*

SFS *Science, Faith, and Society*

SM *Study of Man*

STSR *Scientific Thought and Social Reality*

TD *Tacit Dimension*

For example: Polanyi argues that (*TD*, 56). Full bibliographical information should still be supplied in the references section since many of us may work with different editions of his works.

- Endnotes should be used sparingly and be placed before the reference section.
- We do recognize that Polanyi's work connects with scholars who work in diverse disciplines that use different style guides. To the extent that our software allows, we will accept other styles (e.g., APA or MLA) so long as the author is consistent and careful in following it. The main point, of course, is to give the reader enough information to locate and engage your sources. Manuscripts that are not careful and consistent in style will be returned so that the author can make corrections, which may delay publication.

For more information see <http://polanysociety.org/Aims-and-Scope-9-12-18.htm> and <http://polanysociety.org/TAD-Submissions&Review-9-12-18.htm>

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PREFACE

In This Issue

The first three articles connect Polanyi to contemporary economic and political theory. Martin Turkis opens the issue by suggesting ways that Polanyians needs to address more directly the ways that today's economy differs from that of Polanyi's day. In the following two articles, Charles Lowney and Gábor István Bíró debate how compatible Polanyi's thought is with the influential theory of John Rawls.

The final article, by Eduardo Beira, draws from archival material to trace how Polanyi develops his ideas in conversation with Heidegger.

Looking Ahead

Buddhism teaches that all of life is change and we often make life hard on ourselves by grasping, i.e., trying to hold on to a world that is changing. Next year marks Vol. 50 of *TAD* and the Editorial Board is contemplating changes to the frequency and format of the journal, in part in anticipation of a redesigned website (which we hope is live before you read this). As of this writing, I cannot say whether the changes will be large or small, or when they will take effect. But change should not worry Polanyians, for we know that we dwell in traditions only to break out as we discover new ways of knowing, being, and doing.

Final Thoughts

As always, keep up with the latest news about Zoom discussions, conferences, etc., at www.polanyisociety.org and the discussion list.

Last, but not least, remember that the Polanyi Society (and *Tradition and Discovery*) need your support through dues and/or donations. You can donate to the Society at www.polanyisociety.org

Paul Lewis
Managing Editor

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BLASTING THE POST-CRITICAL OUT OF THE CONTINUUM OF COLD WAR POLITICAL ECONOMY: REPOSITIONING POLANYI'S POLITICS IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Martin Turkis

Keywords: Michael Polanyi, Karl Polanyi, Political Economy, Politics, Economics, Central Planning, Markets, Labor, Capital, Post-critical, Marxism, Anarchism, Liberalism, Post-liberalism, Fascism, Socialism, Leftism, Conservatism, Centrism, Civil Economy, Antonio Genovesi

ABSTRACT

This article aims to complicate the economic and political terrain on which debates within Polanyi Studies take place, arguing that imprecise terminology and an ossified set of Cold War concepts erect dubious and simplistic dichotomies (e.g., liberal/conservative, markets/planning, freedom/totalitarianism, etc.) that are not up to the task of appropriately navigating contemporary political economy. The essay accomplishes this task by offering counterexamples to status quo assumptions in Polanyi Studies as well as by suggesting more nuanced avenues for future Polanyian exploration.



Michael Polanyi's political and economic liberalism is a crucial part of his intellectual legacy that tends to provide a more or less centrist backdrop to most sociopolitical analysis carried out within the sphere of Polanyi Studies. My principal objective in this essay is to complicate and thicken the account of liberalism and related social questions that sets the historical and political context for most Polanyian forays into political economy. In what follows, then, I will attempt to point out some ways we might accomplish such a thickening, primarily by giving examples of social thought that in my view disrupt the assumptions about liberalism and competing systems often taken for granted in Polanyi Studies.

Polanyi's analysis of modernity focuses on the critical turn in philosophy. His epistemology works to open up a post-critical space in order to confront the critical challenge directly. One question that needs to be asked, and that Polanyi did not look at to my knowledge, is the question of the extent to which liberalism itself stands or falls with the critical project. Is a post-critical approach necessarily humanely post-liberal?¹ Or, to put it differently, does a post-critical orientation drive us to transcend liberalism or to radically

reenvision its contours to such an extent that it becomes nearly unrecognizable to many who would describe themselves as liberals? This overarching set of questions can be approached from a number of directions.

It is an open question whether the moderate liberalism that is often ascribed to Polanyi could possibly take us beyond the political and civilizational impasses we currently face. I suspect that it cannot, since this type of centrist liberalism is nothing new. It is, in essence, indistinguishable from the combination of generally neoliberal economics with a limited dose of Keynesianism (accepted on the liberal right and left) and certain forms of social evolution—e.g., access to abortion, rights and recognition for the LGBTQ+ community, etc. (supported most vocally by the liberal left). These dispositions, more or less, have characterized the governing trends from the end of the Reagan and Thatcher era on. In the US, this consensus has been embraced by party elites on both sides of the aisle until quite recently. If, as has been alleged, current problems have arisen from the ills of this governing consensus, which has only been on the friz in relatively recent times, then it seems that a return to such centrist liberalism is only likely to kick the can down the road.

If this is so, then the question becomes how to reimagine social structures so that the very humane firmament of values that Polanyi rightly sees as the proper telos of human society can best be sustained. To that end, I suggest that those of us working with Polanyi's legacy extend our social theorizing in some or all of the following directions.

In my view, too much discussion of Polanyi's economic and social thought falls back into the orthodoxies and interpretive categories of the Cold War era—central planning vs. markets, totalitarianism vs. freedom—and this despite the fact that Polanyi himself, at his best, eschewed such simple dichotomies and saw himself as forging, with Keynes and others, a humane middle path between such extremes, even going so far as to characterize the “conflict between Socialism and Capitalism...as a continuous process of mutual instruction crowned by fundamental reconciliation” (1946, 341).

Many thinkers in the Polanyian tradition seem to take “capitalism” to be roughly equivalent to “markets without central planning.” More technically, and more helpfully in my view, capitalism might be seen as a market system sans central planning in which *capital is systematically favored over labor insofar as labor is generally alienated from both means of production and the outcome of production, whether in terms of goods or profits.*²

This systematic favoritism is most obvious with respect to labor's general lack of ownership and control over the means of production, though it also manifests itself in their alienation from the goods and profits produced thereby. It is generally the case that there are institutional barriers that work to prevent labor from gaining access to such ownership, or, if some access is granted (say, through an employee-owned-shares program), then methods are commonly employed to prevent labor from exercising full, proportional control through that formal ownership (by, for example, granting ownership in the form of non-voting shares).

Consider as well the fact that injecting capital into an enterprise by purchasing a tradeable share ensures the share-owner of access to a potentially infinite revenue stream via dividends and share price growth, while injecting, say, an hour's worth of labor into the same enterprise will generally only entitle the worker to a finite, capped, hourly wage. If we imagine the original share price to be the same as the hypothetical worker's hourly wage, then the favoritism is stark, indeed.

By way of contrast, consider Principles # 3 and # 4 of the Mondragón Corporation, a network of cooperative enterprises encompassing “Finance, Industry, Retail and Knowledge [and] currently consist[ing] of

95 separate, self-governing cooperatives, around 80,000 people and 14 R&D centers, occupying first place in the Basque business ranking and tenth in Spain”:

3. Sovereignty of Labour. Profit is allocated on the basis of the work contributed by each member in order to achieve this profit.
4. Instrumental and subordinated nature of capital. The capital factor is a necessary resource, but it does not confer the right to vote and its stake in the profit is limited and subordinated to labour. (Mondragón Website)

Insofar as Mondragón is organized to confer voting rights and more open-ended profit allocation to the active contribution of labor while restricting these privileges for passive capital contributions, it represents a viable institution that operates on market principles but *systematically favors labor over capital* and is therefore *not* a capitalist firm on the definition stipulated earlier and which I reiterate here: Capitalism is not simply a system that uses market mechanisms, but is rather a market system that programmatically extends favorable, open-ended opportunities for accumulation to capital, while depriving labor of such opportunities.

If we were to take this formulation to be the defining trait of capitalism, how might this change the ways in which we envision the organization of a society of explorers? To get a sense of what sorts of changes might flow from such a conceptual shift, we can look to an array of existing scholarship that might be profitably combined with Polanyi’s insights. To begin with, a capitalist society might be seen as, in Karl Polanyi’s terms, a *market society* in which markets (e.g., the profit motive) dictate the social realities rather than a *society with markets* that embeds market mechanisms within societal structures in order to harness their usefulness while circumscribing the malign influence of the profit motive, thus preventing markets from defining social aims. Additional possibilities (many of which amount to possible ways of organizing production in a *society with markets*) include Proudhonian mutualism in the anarchist tradition, guild socialism, Pescian economics or distributism (within the tradition of Catholic Social Thinking), R. H. Tawney’s Christian socialism, Nordic social democracy, and various models of worker-ownership or control (as embodied by Mondragón above or, alternatively, as seen in the cooperative economy of the [Emilia-Romagna](#) region of Italy).

The above are all important historical resources, yet there is much that is currently fermenting that might be of use, too. Post-Keynesian tendencies like Modern Monetary Theory, which has certain affinities with Polanyi’s own call for full employment (as Nicholas Gruen has noted), should be explored.³ Gruen’s original work on humanely conceived, non-ideological policy hacks along with the contributions of Greek economist Yanis Varoufakis are extremely relevant as well, as is, I think, Shoshana Zuboff’s analysis of surveillance capitalism. The proposals for a “participatory socialism” laid out by Thomas Picketty (2019, 966 and Chapter 17) are likewise germane.

In his recent work on Polanyi’s liberalism, Charles Lowney cites two thinkers close to my own heart—Matthew Crawford and Iris Murdoch—on the importance of work (2022, 168). It is worth noting that some of the heterodox currents I have just mentioned were of great interest to Murdoch and, I suspect, are also of interest to Crawford, who is, at any rate, often read within and alongside such sub-traditions. Much work flowing out of this family of approaches leads toward the conclusion that the capitalist system as defined above is, on balance, an alienating force that relentlessly destroys tradition as well as any appreciable connection between work and non-utilitarian value, even as it engages in the arbitrary misappropriation of much of the utilitarian production value of economic activity for the vast majority of people.

The upshot is that questions of the virtues of the free market vs. central planning and the assumption that free markets naturally cohere in some sense with other social freedoms may well be dangerous red herrings for our current situation. As E. F. Schumacher (1973, 303) pointed out, even assuming dubiously simplistic black-and-white dichotomies of Freedom vs. Totalitarianism, Market Economies vs. Planning, and Private Ownership of means of production vs. Collectivized Ownership, we have to deal with the fact that there are eight possible cases with respect to these three categories:

1. Freedom, Market Economy, and Private Ownership
2. Freedom, Planning, and Private Ownership
3. Freedom, Market Economy, and Collectivized Ownership
4. Freedom, Planning, and Collectivized Ownership
5. Totalitarianism, Market Economy, and Private Ownership
6. Totalitarianism, Planning, and Private Ownership
7. Totalitarianism, Market Economy, and Collectivized Ownership
8. Totalitarianism, Planning, and Collectivized Ownership

“It is absurd,” Schumacher rightly notes, “to assert that the only ‘possible’ cases are 1 and 8: these are merely the *simplest* cases from the point of view of concept-ridden propagandists” (ibid., emphasis original). Polanyi would agree.

Furthermore, we ought to remember that the policy proposals (Medicare for All, student loan forgiveness, free college tuition, etc.) of the live political movement farthest to the left in the context of recent US politics—the presidential campaign of Bernie Sanders—do not imply central planning at all but rather depend on certain restrictions on market mechanisms that have a fairly long record of success in European social democracies (especially in the case of medicine) and that are increasingly advocated for by resurgent populist currents on the right as well as the left. Furthermore, consider the fact that centrally planned, collectivist economies are not even an agreed-on goal for avowedly Marxist thinkers on the contemporary left. Thus, Vivek Chibber argues that

We have to start with the observation that the idea of a centrally planned economy entirely replacing the market has no empirical foundation. We can want centralized planning to work, but we have no evidence that it can. Every attempt to put it in place for more than short durations has met with failure. (2022, 150)

And also,

...We have to reject wholesale the political model generated by the Bolsheviks of a one-party dictatorship and abrogation of basic liberties. It was a calamitous mistake to denigrate liberal rights as “bourgeois,” which many Marxists of the early twentieth century did, implying that those rights were illusory or fraudulent in some way. This rhetorical ploy made it far easier for those rights to be extinguished by Stalin and, before him, by Lenin himself. Liberal rights were all fought for and won by working-class movements, not by liberal capitalists. From the English Revolution of 1640, through the French Revolution, to the labor movement in the nineteenth century, all the way through the anti-colonial struggles of the twentieth century, democratic gains were all fought for, and won, by laboring classes, not

elites. It was in fact over the resistance of elites that democratic rights were established at all. Any Left worth its salt has to protect and deepen those rights, not throw them aside. (2022, 149)

I quote Chibber at length as an antidote to caricature of the Left, which, in my view, is all too common in Polanyi Studies. Yet it must be noted that it was not entirely absent in Polanyi's own work either. His analysis of moral inversion is to my mind compelling and correct; however, his characterization of Marxism and Marxists as monolithically prone to moral inversion is typically too flat to be of much use in understanding the actual range of views at play both in his own day *and* on the contemporary left. His focus on what amounted to Marxism-Leninism leading to Stalinism is understandable given the Cold War context of the 1950s (when he was working on *Personal Knowledge*), but even then it amounted to a flattening of the intra-Marxist debates—for example, the rejection of the Bolshevik/party vanguard model by Austro-Marxism (a significant influence on Karl Polanyi)—as well as the debates between the Marxist and non-Marxist left that characterized the period leading up to the Bolshevik Revolution and continued apace throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first.

When considering the legacy of the dichotomy of central planning vs. free markets as they figure in the quest for a society of explorers, we must also keep firmly in mind that the most powerful form of capitalist expression since the widespread institution of neoliberal Hayekian approaches by Thatcher and Reagan—the multinational corporation—functions internally as a totalitarian enterprise (see [Richard Wolff](#) on the paradox of the American obsession with liberal democracy, which is comfortably paired with a near total lack of workplace democracy and which even goes so far as to see political democracy and workplace democracy as inimical to one another). Meanwhile this Hayekian turn has notably done nothing to diffuse the centralized power of the state, which has continued to augment itself apace.⁴ The irony is thick and multivalent. And if this analysis holds to any degree, then it is very relevant to Polanyi's concerns, since a society of explorers is difficult to foster when the majority of the "explorers" spend most waking hours in workplaces defined by a sort of top-down, quasi-Stalinism at the mercy of the new Five-Year Plan dictated by CEO, board, and shareholder.

Another common thread in much analysis found within these currents of thought is the argument that the core of liberalism is an inexorably individualist logic predicated upon a faulty anthropology that can only fully countenance a negative conception of liberty. This core, so runs the tale, manifests itself on the liberal right as a fierce economic libertarianism and on the liberal left as a strident social libertarianism, philosophically united in their prostration before the altar of the unfettered individual will. Yet again, if this diagnosis is correct to any extent, then liberalism (or its excesses) is to that same extent constitutively in conflict with the Aristotelian balance between negative and positive liberties that Polanyi consistently advocates. This is why, as both Nicholas Gruen (2022) and Gábor Bóro (2021) have noted, Polanyi's liberalism is incompatible with the dominant strain of Hayekian/Friedmanian neoliberalism that came to dominate the Mont Pèlerin Society and to exercise great influence in the governance of economic affairs.

In light of all this, I would love to see the panoply of political options and economic arrangements considered, both historical and potential, amplified within the realm of Polanyi Studies. I worry that such flattening of the terrain interferes with making the best use of Polanyi's insights.

For instance, the distinction between the non-liberal left and left-liberalism is critical, as is the distinction between right-liberalism and the Schmittian, non-liberal right tending towards fascism. The common

liberal/conservative dichotomy, which in the US context camouflages the fact that both the Democratic and Republican parties have traditionally been ideologically liberal, is profoundly unhelpful. More precise terminology can help clarify on this front. In many political discussions, egregious straw men are erected by conflating the liberal and non-liberal left. More precise terminology also allows for a more granular analysis of the current trend of a populist fusion of the liberal right with elements of the Schmittian, non-liberal right.

Allow me to give a few examples of such flattening. When considering, for instance, the Federalist Society, many left-liberals flatten the political terrain by assuming a sort of near-universal concord (within the Federalist Society) on all planks of the Republican Party platform, yet as Sohrab Ahmari, Patrick Deneen, and Chad Pecknold point out, disagreement among members of the society on cultural issues (abortion, for example) is explored and tolerated. The society enforces unity, however,

in the realm of political economy. In the same decades of progressive ascendancy on cultural issues, society-certified judges on the federal bench pushed through a raft of decisions aimed at thwarting collective action by workers and government action against monopolies. ...the North Star of all is rule by large corporate and financial power, and support for militarism and cultural aggression abroad. (2022)

Consider as well the type of identity politics often described as “woke” (though that term is more and more passé). Such positions are frequently described by those uncomfortable with them as being characteristic of the “radical” or “revolutionary left.” In fact, however, such identity politics are primarily the province of left-liberals and come in for harsh critique from many thinkers on the non-liberal left, whether reformist or revolutionary. By way of example, consider Adolph Reed and Walter Benn Michaels’s claims regarding what sort of societal disparities should be the primary targets of socialist policy:

...not only will a focus on the effort to eliminate racial disparities not take us in the direction of a more equal society, it isn’t even the best way of eliminating racial disparities themselves. If the objective is to eliminate black poverty rather than simply to benefit the upper classes [of the African American community], we believe the diagnosis of racism is wrong, and the cure of antiracism won’t work. Racism is real and antiracism is both admirable and necessary, but extant racism isn’t what principally produces our inequality and antiracism won’t eliminate it. And because racism is not the principal source of inequality today, *antiracism functions more as a misdirection that justifies inequality than a strategy for eliminating it.* (2020, emphasis added)

In their analysis, the root cause of material inequality in society is a political economy that systematically alienates the vast majority of productive workers from their economic output. Yet this systemic status quo is accepted quite happily not only by right-liberals such as Mitch McConnell but also by left-liberals like the Clintons, Obama, or Joe Biden. Reed puts it more bluntly in a *New Yorker* interview: a focus on race divorced from an explicit analysis of class and political economy has led left-liberals to believe that “more Oscars for Ava DuVernay is...a victory for the civil-rights movement, and not just for Ava DuVernay and her agent” (Wallace-Wells 2022). Figures like Reed and Benn Michaels on the reformist wing of the non-liberal, socialist left thus reject identity politics (and the culture wars more generally) as a distraction from substantive questions of political economy that might effect real social change.

Commenting on the Trump/Clinton race, Slavoj Žižek, the Slovenian Marxist philosopher associated (at least rhetorically) with the revolutionary left, explained the left-liberal use of identitarianism as a distraction in order to defend the economic status quo thus:

And here comes the trick: the Leftist call for justice [in the sphere of political economy] tends to be combined with struggles for women's and gay rights, for multiculturalism and against discrimination including racism. The strategic [left-liberal] aim of the Clinton consensus is to dissociate all these [cultural] struggles from the Leftist call for [economic] justice, which is why the living symbol of this consensus is Tim Cook, the CEO of Apple who proudly signed [a public] pro-LGBT letter and who can now easily forget about hundreds of thousands of Foxconn workers in China assembling Apple products in slave conditions—he made his big gesture of solidarity with the underprivileged, [by] demanding the abolition of gender segregation. (2016)

My point here is not to take positions on the foregoing topics but rather to show by way of example how the mainstream vocabulary commonly deployed within Polanyi Studies—liberal vs. conservative, with its attendant assumptions about particular correlations between positions on cultural and political economic issues—is not up to the task of navigating our current milieu.

Awareness of the internal debates and varying tendencies within different political camps is therefore keenly important. Within the tradition of the revolutionary left, for instance, one thinks of Bakunin's prediction of the tendency toward authoritarianism in facets of Marx's work that led to a schism between anarchists and communists within the First International and that continues to provoke debate today, as seen in exchanges between Slavoj Žižek and anarchist philosopher Simon Critchley.⁵ Historically, in places like Spain before its civil war, one can see that when libertarian socialist (i.e., anarchist) principles were put into practice, temporary alliances between liberals and communists were formed to crush such nascent social possibilities. The upshot here is that even the revolutionary flank of the non-liberal left is *not* totalitarian (nor even authoritarian) through and through.

There is interesting work being done on the origins and limits of liberalism as well as possible post-liberalisms that I think could be helpfully engaged with, since Polanyi's goal was not to go back to a golden age of classical liberalism but rather to reform and perhaps to transcend it, without rejecting its real achievements. The term "post-liberal" is currently contested, with some who self-describe as post-liberal supporting the right-wing authoritarian tendencies embodied to varying degrees in the current political regimes of Viktor Orbán in Hungary or the Law and Justice Government in Poland, as well as in the revival of interest in reactionary Catholic integralism in the work of figures like Adrian Vermeule.

I am not much interested in mounting a defense or rehabilitation of the term "post-liberal," yet it does have a certain obvious semantic utility in describing attempts to go beyond the current liberal settlement. Thus when I refer here to post-liberal possibilities, I want to be clear that I am not allying myself with such reactionary, authoritarian tendencies but rather hew closer to Adrian Pabst's understanding of a post-liberal politics:⁶

Such a politics is anti-authoritarian but not anti-liberal. On the contrary, liberty and fundamental rights are precious gifts that should not be curtailed. Yet they can only be sustained by the practice of fraternity and mutual obligations. Genuine post-liberalism draws on

the best liberal traditions but corrects liberal errors and excesses such as individualism, untrammelled capitalism or identity politics. Its organizing principles are community, mutual markets, ethical enterprise and the common purposes around which people associate. (2022, location 318)

He goes on to say,

But in recent years [post-liberalism] has too often become associated with a politics that is anti-liberal and anti-modern, animated by a reactionary desire to roll back the new rights of minorities and to return to social and political exclusion along the axes of race, sex or class. A true post-liberal approach eschews crude forms of solidarity built on ethnic or religious homogeneity and instead embraces the pluralist heritage of ethical traditions forged in the nineteenth and the twentieth century.... [It] is emphatically not anti-liberal. (2022, location 399)

I take Pabst's summation here to be broadly compatible with the spirit of Polanyi's vision of a society of explorers rooted in a firmament of values giving rise to a social order that would also be consonant with Karl Polanyi's four vistas of a humanist socialism: (1) pluralist democracy or freedom within society; (2) national independence or freedom from imperialist domination; (3) industrial culture or acceptance of modern technology as a fact; (4) an international order that respects the coexistence of different cultures and national sovereignty (Polanyi-Levitt 2012, 14).

I think it fair to say that Michael Polanyi would be on board with all of these four vistas, though he and his brother Karl would surely differ on significant details regarding how to achieve them. Nonetheless, I think a post-Cold War historical perspective can help to bridge some of their political disagreements.

It is clear, to me at least, that Michael Polanyi's philosophy is much more radical, nuanced, insightful, and original than his Keynesian economics are. I do not wish to denigrate his economic contributions in any way, but it is fair, in my view, to point out that they were far more derivative of Keynes's theory and less original than his philosophical contributions have turned out to be. I would thus argue that more effort needs to be put into applying his philosophy—particularly the sum total of what Dale Cannon calls the post-critical ethos—to political economy in light of the historical events that unfolded after his time (the demise of the USSR, the end of the Cold War, the triumph of Hayekian neoliberalism, etc.) as well as the development and evolution of various schools of thought within the realm of political economy that have transpired since the time of his passing. I think that if the post-critical ethos is thus applied, we wind up with something close in spirit to the vision of Karl Polanyi, who never claimed that markets should be abandoned wholesale but rather, in J. Bradford DeLong's aphoristic rendering of his (Karl Polanyi's) legacy, that “the market was made for man, not man for the market” (DeLong 2022, 7).

DeLong argues that the highest, most utopic achievement of political economy realized to date is that of European-style social democracy, constituted, in his view, by the “shotgun marriage of Hayek and [Karl] Polanyi, blessed by Keynes” (ibid., 6). My own instinct is to jettison Hayek and replace his market authoritarianism with Michael Polanyi's richer, more humane understanding of markets, polycentricity, and public, as opposed to merely private, liberty. This will, I think, result in a happier partnership, since I agree with Walt Gulick that the two brothers “ended up, whether they explicitly acknowledged it or not, in rough agreement” (2008, 43, n. 64).

Michael Polanyi's acceptance of markets is, in my view, safer than Hayek's as it is embedded in his (Polanyi's) philosophical project, which is oriented toward a firmament of values that operates irreducibly over and above the purely material and economic. Even so, Polanyi's understanding as conceived within economic traditions running back to Adam Smith can be further refined by tapping into the Italian theoretical tradition of civil economy that springs from the work of Antonio Genovesi, Adam Smith's contemporary, whose legacy continues in the current work of Luigino Bruni and Stefano Zamagni, among others. Bruni and Sugden sum up the distinction between Smith's and Genovesi's understandings of the market thus:

In place of Smith's...assumption of a peculiarly human propensity "to truck, barter and exchange one thing for another," Genovesi grounds his analysis of markets on an assumed human inclination towards mutual assistance...allow[ing] market transactions to be understood as fraternal relationships of mutual assistance without denying the essential role of private incentives in the workings of an efficient market. (2008, 46–48)

This alternative strand of political economy might be a rich source of insights that could be put into productive post-critical conversation with Michael Polanyi's understanding of public liberty as well as Karl Polanyi's notion of humanely and socially embedded markets.

My primary aim in this piece has been to complicate the economic and political terrain on which debates within Polanyi Studies take place. We are not currently faced with a world stage on which a set of sociopolitical dominos fall either toward Marxist-Leninist Central Planning Committees on the one hand (Bad!) or Freedom on the other (Good!). The historical situation was of course always much more complex and nuanced, and it continues to be. Indeed, we currently find ourselves within a milieu containing a declining hegemon (the US) and a resurgence of a wider variety of live political and economic options than what characterized most of the post-war period, at least in the developed world. I have attempted to bring some semblance of attention to a few of these options in the interest of enriching the discussion. We might think of these additional layers and details as some of the IFMs emanating from the complex and tangled reality we approach when we do political economy, the surplus that Dale Cannon frequently reminds us manifests the transcendence of reality as understood within post-critical thought.

In closing, my own inclination is to see Michael Polanyi as less willing to constructively paint outside the lines on questions of social and economic organization than he was in the area of philosophy. If this is the case, and if the liberal project is indeed bound up cheek by jowl with the critical philosophical project that defines modernity, then the search for a properly post-critical political economy becomes the question of how to blast Polanyi's epistemological insight and metaphysical orientation toward a firmament of transcendental values out of the continuum of liberal thought so that it might rest more securely within a newly emerging, humane political and economic settlement in which neither markets nor humans may exercise authoritarian control over others and in which human needs—material, cultural, and spiritual—are met in a sustainable way.

ENDNOTES

¹“Post-liberalism” is a contested term that has become associated by some in recent years with support for right-wing authoritarianism. My use of the term in no way implies support for such political tendencies, as I hope will be made clear.

²Karl Polanyi explains the alienation of labor thus:

Why does ‘capital’ exist? The machine, which in a human sense represents nothing other than past labour, is able to confront living labour, the workers, as a power independent of him or her, as capital, only because past labour, the product of labour—machines or tools—was alienated from present labour by becoming the property of others. Without this alienation of past labour—that is, without private ownership of the means of production, which deprives the present worker of his control of his own past labour—present labour would be a simple continuation of past labour. That it is otherwise in capitalism is a consequence of the fact that here the interrelationship of the economic actors is not the cooperative relation of the joint workers who use the joint product of their past labour, the means of production, as tools for their current labour but is the capital relation between the workers—whose past labour (the means of production) has been alienated from them—and those who are in possession of that past labour, that is, the capitalists. (2018, 16)

³Gruen claims that

Polanyi’s neoliberal Keynesianism would have restored full employment via ‘people’s quantitative easing’ or ‘helicopter money’. His schema for doing so offers one way to operationalise some of the questions being raised in discussions ranging from Keynesians to modern monetary theorists about the respective roles of money printing and bond-financed fiscal stimulus.

Similar liberal principles led Polanyi to propose a minimum basic income nearly two decades before Milton Friedman proposed it for similar ‘neoliberal’ reasons, though they were both pipped at the post by Thomas Paine in the 18th-century. (2022, 8)

⁴Perhaps the continued growth of the state under the aegis of neoliberal policy should be less than surprising. Philip Mirowski points out that

While it is undeniable that neoliberals routinely disparage the state...it does not follow that they are politically libertarian or, as David Harvey would have it, that they are implacably opposed to state interventions in the economy and society. Harvey’s error is distressing, since even Antonio Gramsci understood this: “Moreover, laissez-faire liberalism, too, must be introduced by law, through the intervention of political power: it is an act of will, not the spontaneous, automatic expression of economic facts.” From the 1940s onward, the distinguishing characteristic of neoliberal doctrines and practice is that they embrace this prospect of repurposing the strong state to impose their vision of a society properly open to the dominance of the market as they conceive it. (2018)

⁵As Critchley notes on his “political disagreement with Žižek,”

This is not a question of the narcissism of petty personal differences, but of a clear political cleavage that recalls Bakunin’s critique of Marx and the anarchist critique of Leninism. I argue that the only choice in politics is not, as it is for Lenin and Žižek, between state power or no power. Rather, politics consists in the creation of interstitial distance within the state and the cultivation of forms of cooperation and mutuality most powerfully expressed in *the anarchist vision of federalism*. (2012, 17; emphasis mine)

Anarchist visions of federalism, it ought to be noted, are far less centrally controlled than is the federalism of the US, for example. Yet anarchists are all too often lumped in under the general caricature of totalitarian collectivism even though most forms of anarchism explicitly endorse decentralized worker control of means of production and social organs.

⁶ Though I would not identify as a post-liberal on Pabst’s lines either. I prefer to situate myself in the tradition of reformist democratic socialism.

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RAWLS'S POLITICAL LIBERALISM FROM AN EMERGENTIST PERSPECTIVE¹

Charles Lowney

Keywords: John Rawls, political liberalism, political rationality, Michael Polanyi, public liberty, dual control, emergence, veil of ignorance, pluralism, social justice, political justice

ABSTRACT

*John Rawls's political liberalism is supported and better understood via Michael Polanyi's tacit and emergent structures. Rawls claims the political is "freestanding" and "neutral" relative to comprehensive moral doctrines and metaphysical assumptions. Polanyian critics of Rawls emphasize the personal nature of our political commitments and Polanyi's metaphysical realism. They also claim tacit knowing makes Rawls's "veil of ignorance" impossible. However, as an emergent social order, political liberalism is a joint comprehension of a plurality of competing traditions that operates as an upper-level control in a dual control system; it supports yet constrains individuals in traditions so they may mutually flourish under its umbrella. Emergent levels have their own rules of organization and hence possess a rationality that can function independently and neutrally relative to its subsidiaries and so is freestanding, as Rawls claims. Still, since this level is constituted by overlapping consensus and is not a *modus vivendi*, there is indeed personal commitment to political values, as Polanyi affirms. This continuity makes it difficult to disambiguate one's comprehensive ethical understanding from one's political understanding. But, as with counterfactual hypotheses in science, Polanyi could endorse the artifice of the veil. By occluding politically irrelevant facts we better access this shared level, and tacit convictions about political justice become explicit.*



Michael Polanyi applied his conceptions of tacit knowing and emergence not only to the study of nature but also to the development of social, economic, and political systems. Although at first glance their views can seem incompatible, John Rawls's political liberalism is consistent with, and better understood via, Polanyi's tacit and emergent structures.

Rawls talks about the *political domain* as "freestanding" and "neutral" (Rawls 1993, 10 and 191; hereafter *PL*) relative to moral doctrines and metaphysical beliefs. This seems to violate Polanyi's emphasis on the inescapability of the tacit and the personal in favor of some disengaged and "objective" point of view.

Gábor Bíró goes to the root of this concern when he argues that Polanyi's conception of tacit knowledge is "antithetical" to Rawls's approach because it makes it impossible for us to draw down the "veil of ignorance" and come to the "original position" from which Rawls formulates his principles of justice (Bíró 2023). Also, as Eric Howard notes, Polanyi's political values are deeply embedded in moral traditions and metaphysical beliefs, while Rawls claims that the rationality and values that should support our public life are distinctly *political* and do not rely on appeals to our "comprehensive moral doctrines" (*PL*, 13) and their metaphysics (Howard 2022).

When we look at Polanyi's and Rawls's views flatly, they can certainly seem incommensurable, but when we look closer, we start to see the similarities. In Polanyi's philosophy, we find the evolution of interdependent levels, e.g., from individual freedom to social freedom to public liberty, and we also find a structure in which diverse traditions, or dynamic orders, and the individuals that comprise them collect and thrive under the umbrella of an emergent overarching political tradition. Looking closer at Polanyi, we thus see prospects for how a higher-level, relatively "freestanding," political rationality—above private freedom and its reasoning but below public liberty and its responsibility—can successfully advance freedom and mutual cooperation.

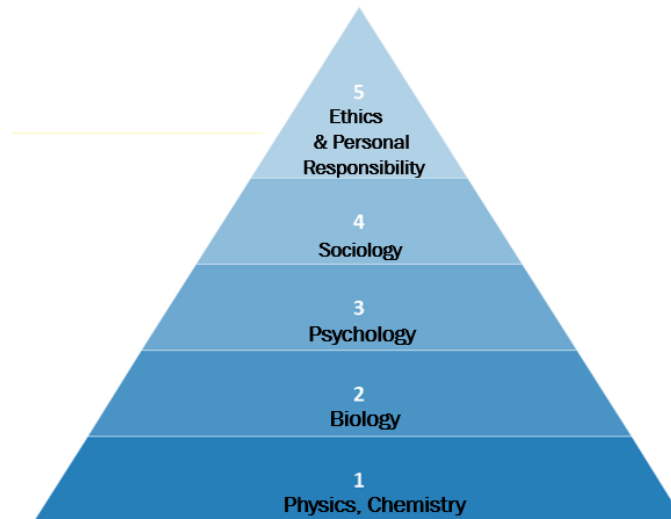
Looking closer at Rawls, we also see that the domain of the political is formed by an emergent "overlapping consensus" that is not strictly "neutral" but relies on the commitments and values of individuals within their traditions, i.e., their consensus cannot be a mere *modus vivendi* (*PL*, 147). We thus see a personal commitment to an overarching liberal political structure that can promote social cohesion. Bíró and Howard are right, however, in that it is difficult for an individual to disambiguate personal and metaphysical commitments from this level of political commitments. By looking at how Polanyi allows for counterfactual considerations in science, e.g., when considering alternative hypotheses, we see how the artifice of a veil of ignorance helps us *think from* this higher level of understanding and value and thereby helps bring into explicit focus tacit intuitions that we do hold about *political* freedom, equality, and justice.

An Emergentist Approach to Nature, Society, and Morality

Polanyi develops a conception of emergence in which there is a "dual control" shared by a base level and an emergent level (*KB*, 154–155). Lower-level constituents have their own rules of operation and causal powers, but when they are part of a higher-order comprehensive system, this system, at its own level of interaction, exercises its own controls that can in turn influence or organize the actions of the lower-level parts. Levels can build on levels. We see dual control operative in the way a body (here, a higher level) organizes physical and chemical processes (lower level) to self-sustain and to do work in its environment; and in how the mind, as a further emergent structure, relies on the body yet can also constrain the body to act for the benefit of both the body (finding food) and the mind (seeking its own satisfactions) in its environment. The responsible person (seeking to do good) is a further higher-order entity that depends on but can constrain and guide both the body and mind. We see a hierarchy of emergent levels: from simple material processes to an organism, to organisms with minds, and so on up to persons with moral responsibilities.

Polanyi also saw that different sciences examine different emergent levels in nature and can discover rules of how they each behave. While physical and chemical laws govern the lowest level, each higher level has its own set of laws that can't be fully comprehended from the perspective of the lower level, e.g., in the way the operating principles of a machine are meaningless from the perspective of physics and its laws (*KB*, 153, 154). The higher-level organization does not violate the lower-level laws, but it constrains and shapes

the activity of constituents by acting on boundary conditions left open at the lower level. For instance, biology and its laws rely on but are irreducible to physical processes; mind and its laws rely on but are irreducible to biological processes. The laws, or *rationality*, of each emergent level are different because the systems being described have emergent and novel features. Though dependent on the lower level, the higher can act and interact in ways unimaginable from the lower-level perspective.



Although emergent relations are complex and interconnections abound, in studying emergence it is helpful to organize phenomena into levels that can be studied on their own, as well as understood in terms of how they each both depend on and shape the level below and are both constitutive of and constrained by the level above. Polanyi identified levels generally in terms of fields of investigation, from physics and chemistry at the bottom, rising up to biology, then psychology, then sociology, and then to morality, with responsible personhood at the top.²

In Polanyi's view, we thus see an emergence from the physical and biological and their investigations to the social and the moral and their investigations. What is real, according to Polanyi, is not merely what is earliest and smallest, nor is it always physically tangible (*TD*, 33). Mind is real, and moral principles can be just as real as scientific laws. Polanyi's view of reality can thus lead to an emergentist account of ethics that can sustain the reality of values (Lowney 2010).

We observe and study emergent systems in nature, but we are ourselves emergent beings in emergent traditions in an emergent society, and we understand in terms of the language and culture that these higher levels provide. According to Polanyi, emergent levels with dual control exist not only in physical systems but also in conceptual structures, like those that govern language production (*KB*, 154). Emergent structure, in which subordinate parts (lower-level)—which are not all merely material—integrate into a comprehensive entity (emergent level), is mirrored in tacit knowing structures in which subsidiary clues integrate into a focal joint comprehension of meaning (*TD*, 35, 36). In both, a new logical level emerges because the rules of operation and new properties cannot be reduced to the lower-level meanings. The ontic and epistemic come together in the emergence of real systems that form novel relations and meanings that have real effects in human experience. While some features of emergent systems might shift as we move from physical relations to behaviors and social relations (e.g., their stability, duration, likelihood to manifest under various

conditions, degree to which bottom-up causes are limited by top-down constraints, etc.), dual control is common to both. Hence, even though there are many important differences between physical systems in nature and human social and moral systems, they can both be analyzed in terms of emergent layers with the structure and function of dual control, i.e., lower-order parts in a higher-order system with levels of dependency and constraint, and as such systems within systems.³

Just as discoveries are made in science through experience and inquiry, better ways of being and better ways of being together can manifest and be discovered in response to existential problems. A solution to an enduring human problem can be a new moral principle or a new form of organization that guides actions. In science or morality, such solutions can be a logical leap because they reorganize our prior understanding of the facts of nature, or values, in a new “interpretive framework” (*PK*, 93, 138). Emergence and discovery, in nature and society, can thus effect a jump to a different logical level with a different rationality and a new conception of what is morally, or politically, right.

Political Liberalism as an Emergent Higher-Order Level in a Dual Control System

In an emergentist scheme, a political liberalism can be seen as a form of government that emerged to allow for a variety of cultural and religious traditions to thrive peacefully within it. First, we have the rule of law, in and from practices surrounding Common Law, and then the emergence of a constitutional democracy, in and from the institutions that support it.⁴ We can see that liberal political orders function as a joint comprehension and supersession of the diverse and competing individual traditions in Western society. We can call them “traditions” or “dynamic orders” as Polanyi does, or call them “comprehensive moral doctrines” as Rawls does, since different practices give them at least slightly different conceptions of what it means to live the good life.

While the evolution and history are much more complex, generally, the competing free interests of people in various social and political contingents produced a democratic form of government by which these various ways of life with their various interests and moral goals could coexist peacefully and prosper individually in a system of fair cooperation. Together these traditions brought about and supported higher-level political values that we share, such as political freedom, equality, and justice, which constrain people within their parochial traditions but also issue in social goals that can freely elicit personal commitments, providing more opportunities for the exercise of public liberty.

Polanyi’s free society can be seen as a form of political liberalism that acts as an emergent structure. The free society, like a higher-order entity, can be said to have an emergent general will (Lowney 2022, 148–152). Rousseau says the primary common interest of the individuals in a society best constitutes the general will (Rousseau 1987, 158).⁵ As the primary common interest, a peaceful coexistence and mutual cooperation of individuals in diverse traditions, which also protects and advances their common values, appears to be the essence of general will in a free society. This notion of fair cooperation is also central to Rawls’s understanding of constitutional democracies (*PL*, 15–22).

Polanyi models a free or liberal society on the social organization of science, which he sometimes calls the “republic of science,” and its cooperative organization and mutual authority (Polanyi 2000; henceforth *RS*). Here we see dual control at work. Such a society is oppressive if it is governed by a “corporate” or controlling authority that imposes its values and projects too rigidly from the top-down, and it is not only free but more effective when governed by a “supervisory” authority that allows scientists, and different scientific traditions, to use their own internal standards and judgment in a bottom-up control (see Jacobs 2023).

This self-governing, free association of scientists exercising mutual control remains both free and effective as long as the members in their plural traditions share some transcending values, which are also constitutive of a general will and which also manifest in some common constitution (*LL*, 26), e.g., in a commitment to discovery of truth that follows recognized procedures in science or the commitment to justice via due process in the courts in a free society.

Political Liberalism as “Neutral” toward Traditions, with a “Freestanding” Rationality

Conceived as an emergent overarching structure, political liberalism’s conception of political justice acts like an upper-level constraint in a dual control system, and part of its job is to allow for the peaceful cooperation and mutual flourishing of people in a variety of different traditions that support it but that are now also constrained and guided by common higher-level political values. This allows traditions their independence but also provides social cohesion, as it protects pluralism by preventing one tradition from competing for dominance in a way that destroys or exogenously appropriates the others.

Rawls’s political liberalism posits a political rationality that operates independently from the particular traditions and so is independent from the various comprehensive moral doctrines of the people that comprise that liberal society. As such, the political is “neutral” relative to the plural traditions, and its rationality is described as “freestanding.” We can now see truth to this from a Polanyian perspective. As an *emergent* joint comprehension and discovery, political liberalism has features that are not simply reducible to the various traditions with diverse comprehensive moral doctrines that support it. Just as a “higher” level in scientific study (e.g., in biology) has its own laws that are not reducible to the laws of subsidiary levels (e.g., physics), the political domain would have a different sort of rationality than its subsidiaries, and different rules of justice would be operative at this “higher level” of organization.

Polanyi, of course, would recognize that no political beliefs were truly neutral, just as no scientific facts could truly be impersonally objective. All beliefs are personal commitments. But in analogy with the republic of science and, more generally, the independence of dynamic orders in society, we can see that the particular beliefs we espouse that constitute the liberal political society are “neutral” with respect to the plurality of particular traditions that can safely fit beneath its umbrella. This neutrality allows traditions to freely operate according to their own standards, as long as they meet the supervisory constraints of the overarching system that allow them to mutually thrive.

We can thus also agree with Rawls that reasons provided in support of particular policies in the public forum should aim to be “freestanding” in a way that does not rely solely on dwelling in the practices and values of any one particular tradition, since at the level of political governance we must appeal to other citizens in various traditions via the shared emergent values that we hold together. This appeal, in Polanyi’s analogy, is similar to the way scientists from different fields appeal to the overarching rationality of their common heritage in advancing reasons for accepting or rejecting new proposals for research and in validating or dismissing purported discoveries (*LL*, 26, 27). In this way, scientists and citizens also appeal to a common constitution, and its evolving interpretation, as something that manifests our general will.

“Overlapping Consensus” Constitutes the Higher-Order Political Rationality

Like Polanyi, Rawls recognizes that this liberal domain of the political and its rationality is not quite truly neutral because it relies on the “overlapping consensus” of its constituents (*PL*, 14, 15). An overlapping

consensus of people with a variety of different comprehensive doctrines supports a free society, i.e., a constitutional democracy. This overlap constitutes the personally endorsed beliefs specific to the overarching political structure and its values. It is in their “overlap” that they form the higher-level *political* joint comprehension of meaning that has its own rules and rationality. These are partially independent (as emergent) from the subsidiary traditions (hence freestanding), but the rules are also fully expressive of an individual’s beliefs and so come to be part of the individual’s particular comprehensive moral doctrine as it envisions a reasonable political order.

While this emergent political solution to how we should live together arose in the West and out of the conflicts between its various competing comprehensive doctrines, the umbrella of political liberalism contains political values that can come to be genuinely supported by people with a wider variety of doctrines. This emergent rationality with its political values can therefore be “multiply realized,” as an emergentist would say, and the class of comprehensive doctrines that can support political liberalism is what Rawls calls “reasonable” (*PL*, 59). Just as many different evolutionary strategies might allow for the same higher-order capability (e.g., dragonflies, bees, and birds evolved the ability to *fly*), many different moral comprehensive doctrines might come to support an emergent political liberalism and genuinely value its political conceptions of freedom, equality, and justice—for them its rationality is *reasonable*. As Rawls says, the reasonable overlap “leads to a form of tolerance and supports the idea of public reason” (*PL*, 59).

Rawls acknowledges that not all comprehensive moral doctrines are reasonable in the sense described, and so not all can participate in the overlapping consensus and be swayed by public reason. Liberal political values are thus not themselves neutral: the beliefs in liberty, equality, and justice that we endorse are not endorsed as political truths in very different sociopolitical cultures. Similarly, Polanyi recognizes that “‘freedom’ and ‘servitude’ can carry their true connotations only when uttered in a free country” (1955, 203). Our higher-level political rationality is thus constituted by an overlapping consensus within the broader society, amongst individuals with their commitments to particular traditions intact. For Rawls, like Polanyi, “All those who affirm the political conception start from within their own comprehensive view and draw on the religious, philosophical and moral grounds it provides” (*PL*, 147).

Just as there is an overlapping consensus of reasonable traditions for Rawls, there is an overlapping of all the fields of science that help it constitute an overarching coherent tradition for Polanyi; the fields form “*chains of overlapping neighborhoods* extending over the entire range of science” (*TD*, 72). Rawls warns that there must be enough overlapping consensus in comprehensive doctrines to provide the acceptance and legitimation of the political system. Similarly, Polanyi also warns that liberalism requires having a strong common tradition, and there is a real danger in becoming too divided (*LL*, 42).

Rawls is clear in *Political Liberalism* that “an overlapping consensus is not a mere *modus vivendi*” (*PL*, 147); “reasonable pluralism” for Rawls is not just a *de facto* pluralism (*PL*, 24 n. 27). It is not an agreement we enter into that is counter to our own pursuit of the good; it is not a contract that merely balances ours with another’s pursuit of the good.⁶ Rawls’s overlapping consensus works and provides social cohesion because the plural traditions under its umbrella (or enough politically active citizens within them) actually do share a similar overarching conception of justice that would still be upheld even if one party gained advantage over the other (*PL*, 148).

So Rawls’s political liberalism does not pretend to be neutral in itself but has its own personally affirmed commitments. Diverse “reasonable” contingents have come to share our overarching political culture and

its rationality, though they may justify it in different ways from within their own comprehensive moral doctrine or tradition.

Setting a Comprehensive Metaphysics Aside

Rawls shies away from metaphysical claims and sees the commitment to this shared political culture as the source of cohesion. Polanyi sees a metaphysics at work in the “overlap,” or “joint comprehension” into a political order. Free societies are endorsed by universal transcendent ideals that we not only hold but we are naturally drawn toward. They are thus all “rooted in the same transcendent ground” (*LL*, 46).

Polanyi sees a wider realist metaphysics in the evolution of liberalism that he believes to be consistent with his conception of emergence. In nature, there are “ordering principles” that chart tendencies, or gradients of potentiality. These, like dynamic attractors, help to form and sustain emergent systems. As with multiply realizable systems, these formal organizations can have different constituent components, as constituents are drawn into the emergent shape charted by the organizing principle. There is thus an evolution of sorts, and reality can call us forward in a process of “anthropogenesis” to richer ways of being (*PK*, 386).

Polanyi, like Rawls, recognizes that people from many different sociopolitical traditions might come to support the same higher-order political values, but for Polanyi this comes from accessing more universal human truths and transcendent values. Here, on this issue of metaphysical commitment, is where Howard sees a sharp difference between Polanyi and Rawls. Rawls will not allow the justice of a political liberalism to be determined by comprehensive doctrines and their moral and metaphysical conceptions. Howard quotes Rawls: “The essential point is this: as a practical matter no general moral conception can provide a publicly recognized basis for a conception of justice in a modern democratic state.’ Any ‘workable conception of political justice,’ according to Rawls, ‘must allow for a diversity of doctrines and the plurality of conflicting, and indeed incommensurable, conceptions of the good’” (Rawls 1985, 225; Howard 2022, 111).

There is a range of metaphysical beliefs that may be incommensurable with each other (e.g., whether materialist or spiritualist), but they connect and intersect in the domain of political belief, and they are reasonable enough to share in the political rationality that can support pluralism. Just as the emergent political rationality can be considered freestanding and neutral towards the goods of various moral comprehensive doctrines that reasonably support it, political liberalism can be considered independently from various metaphysical conceptions that may support it as well. Rawls says, “a political conception need not be comprehensive” (*PL*, 154); it requires no richer metaphysics. Though Polanyi brings his wider “comprehensive doctrine” to bear, he could also acknowledge that, as emergent, the political and its rationality can be approached as its own level. Also as emergent, it can be considered independently of how it is justified by any one metaphysical system held by a particular tradition—including his own—that might endogenously explain what gave rise to it or why its values hold. As Rawls says, if we start from our “general moral conceptions” and advance reasons specific to them, as a “practical matter,” we will have a difficult time coming to agreement. If we put metaphysics aside and approach formulating reasons from a political rationality that we share, e.g., by arguing for our right to pursue a particular goal within the limits of the public good, we have a better chance of convincing others and reaching agreement.

Polanyi’s post-critical philosophy aims us towards a more robust notion of truth and reality than Rawls is willing to discuss. In a pluralist society, we see how the shared political culture is a source of social cohesion, while an appeal to a particular metaphysical conception might risk further division. But, since we are

seamlessly committed to our moral comprehensive doctrines as well as our political values, a problem arises. We don't always clearly distinguish the levels that we jump between. It becomes difficult to disambiguate the values that are particular to us as individuals in our parochial traditions from these common political values. Here is where Rawls's thought experiment is helpful.

Tacit Knowledge of Political Justice Is Unveiled

As ways of being and behavior go together with systems of thought, we can *think from* the moral values and preferred goals of our particular moral beliefs and conceptions, but we can also *think from* the level of our emergent political beliefs and conceptions. We can think from our position as an individual exercising freedom (e.g., we should be free to drive as fast as we think safe), or we can think from the level of society and its freedom (we should obey the speed limits so everyone can be free to get to their destinations safely) (Lowney 2022, 136). This is where Rawls thought experiment comes in, and he sees it as an improvement on the thought experiments of John Locke and others who also use a consensus or social contract approach to understand political conceptions of justice and rights. The purpose of drawing down the “veil of ignorance” and entering the “original position” is not to abstract us away from all the tacit commitments we hold; it is an effort to provide access to the tacit conception of justice that we share as reasonable members of this emergent liberal political culture.

Social contract theories approach justice by imagining what kind of society we would establish from the—necessarily counterfactual—position of being an individual outside of society and outside of any political arrangements. Before Rawls, as B  r   notes, e.g., with Adam Smith, we were asked to imagine ourselves as an “average person” (B  r   2023, 35). This, at least, retains an embeddedness that B  r   feels to be more consistent with Polanyi's conception of tacit knowledge. But if we approach justice with our individuality and personal interests intact, according to Rawls, we can obscure the higher-order understandings of justice that we share as a society. Even as average, if we imagine ourselves at the level of a particular individual, an approach like Locke's or Smith's “fails to recognize the social nature of human beings” (PL, 286). Rawls says, “Locke's doctrine improperly subjects the social relationships of moral persons to historical contingencies that are external to, and eventually undermine, their freedom and equality. The constraints that Locke imposes on the as-if historical process are not strong enough to characterize a conception of background justice acceptable to free and equal moral persons” (PL, 287). In contrast, Rawls's veil is designed to bring out the conception of justice that should be operative as the “just background conditions against which the actions of individuals and associations take place” (PL, 266).

From Polanyi's perspective, Rawls may be right. On a day-to-day basis, we are habituated to commonly *think from* the position we have as individuals with our own particular moral conceptions and goals. It is difficult to rise up to think at the level of our community and still more difficult to think from the level of political society. Thinking as an average person can emphasize individual freedom in a way that tears at the social cohesion provided by our higher-level political values; it can make consensus seem a mere *modus vivendi*. The veil of ignorance is designed to get us to *think from* values that we *do* genuinely hold, but they are manifest at levels of relation that we are typically inexperienced at thinking from. The notion of a veil and an anonymous representative in the original position is thus an artifice to highlight a background conception of justice that we share.

An Acceptable Artifice?

Bíró objects to Rawls's artifice because tacit knowing does not allow us to think as disembodied agents, abstracted from our lives. Indeed, if we actually were so abstracted, we would not be able to think at all about moral or political issues. But in drawing down the veil of ignorance, we merely occlude some facts to draw attention to others. We can see drawing down the veil *negatively* as being asked to think of ourselves as disembodied rational agents, but we can also see it *positively* as being asked to imaginatively identify with the array of people in our society. To say that from behind the veil you will *not know* your skin color, your sex, your gender, what goals you have in life, whether you will be blessed with wealth, fortune, and ability or will be poor, unlucky, and fraught with disability is also to imagine what would be fair from the perspective of *any one* of the people you might become. It asks us to imagine their lives as ours and their possible conceptions of the good as our own, and that helps us isolate the tacit background we are trying to *think from* when we consider what rules of fair cooperation we should set up for our pluralistic political society.

Rawls does not ask us to be entirely ignorant of all our tacit social and political background conceptions. He *relies on* our tacit background conceptions. Indeed, just as some comprehensive doctrines are not reasonable in the political sense, people who do not have the emergent political values that we tacitly share in our overlapping consensus will not have the same intuitions from behind the veil. For them, this imaginative exercise will elicit a different background conception that we would not recognize as just.

The veil is not a cloak; it is porous. Moreover, this seems a thought experiment that Polanyi could easily endorse. As a scientist, Polanyi recognized that we can think about different possible theories by imaginatively shifting into a different interpretive framework. We gather facts in science under a conception or theory, then, by ignoring or emphasizing different factors, we can consider a new theory that organizes the facts differently. A new theory with promise comes to manifest as scientists match their explicit foreground and tacit background knowledge to the hypothesis put forward. Having relevant background conceptions and tacit appreciation of the facts gives the scientist's hunches more credence than those of people who have only the explicit facts to work with. By engaging in hypothetical thought experiments, a scientist finds a theory that better resonates with her tacit understanding of the facts and will better see the relevant scientific principles. And this is what Rawls asks us to do.

Rawls asks us to remove some of the clues that are morally irrelevant to our shared conception of justice so we can formulate a theory of justice that resonates with our background conceptions. Using Rawls's artifice, we discover and see the intuitive appeal of his two main principles for guiding political organization: the equality principle and the difference principle (*PL*, 281, 282). We can add clues to our conception or take them away when we engage in this imaginative exercise. Rawls's veil is thick relative to Smith's but becomes even thicker when Rawls discusses possible obligations to future generations. Here we (negatively) imagine ourselves ignorant of which generation we would be born into and what resources we might have available (*PL*, 273), which is (positively) equivalent to asking us to imagine being born into a variety of possible future generations.

There is indeed a danger in thought experiments. When we imagine or idealize, we often ignore information that is essential for the operation of a system and neglect pragmatic constraints that are not readily or explicitly apparent. That sort of "ignorance" can distort the experiment and foil our expectations. Enlightenment thinkers, for example, imagined that a democratic government in Ancient Regime France or Imperial Russia would work like those in America or Britain, but they ignored the fact that these countries

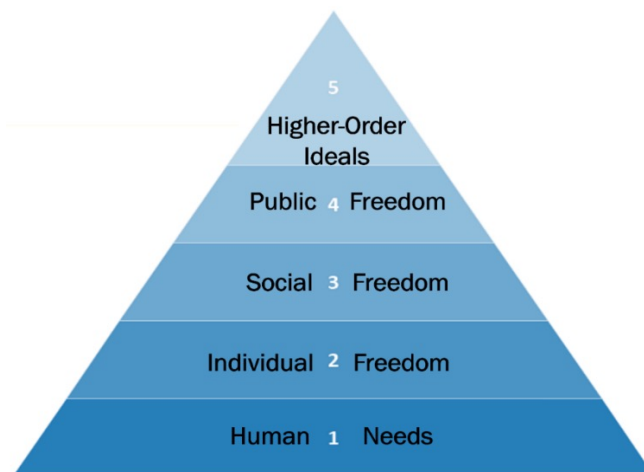
lacked the institutions that could support that form of government. They were then surprised by reigns of terror and the rise of Napoleon or Stalin. We can have similar worries: Are we ignoring important facts about property and its transfer when we think from the level of political justice? Quite possibly. But Rawls is pragmatic enough to recognize that lower-order systems that are efficient and support our higher-order values and goals cannot be ignored, just as we must satisfy our physiological needs (a lower value) in order to engage in relationships (a higher value).⁷ So Rawls can, e.g., acknowledge the need for property and economic inequalities to produce wealth for all but chafe at gross inequalities that do not also benefit the least well off.

Polanyi does not deny our ability to make this sort of imaginative leap, nor should he by the light of tacit knowing. We engage in counterfactual thinking when we consider thought experiments in science and explore new theories. We also use imagination and tacit knowing in a similar way when we attempt to understand the mind of another by dwelling in the clues of his or her behavior (*KB*, 215). We can screen which clues are relevant to understanding who this person is and which clues are peripheral or irrelevant. So B  r   is raising a substantial question: When we lower the veil and enter the “original position,” does the fact that we cannot control how much we unintentionally bring in, or how much we accidentally leave out, negate our ability to use the artifice to access a better conception of political justice?

“Polanyi’s razor” might show the veil is trimmed in places we don’t notice, but it does not eliminate its value. B  r   reminds us that we still carry in, unawares, a lot that we are supposed to leave behind—there is implicit bias that we cannot elude—and I think Rawls would accept that, but by suppressing our individual interests and parochial moral values and goals, the artifice can still help us better access the background conception of justice endorsed by the overlapping consensus of reasonable comprehensive doctrines. It is not perfect, but it assists us in thinking from the higher-order emergent political values that we do hold as our own; it helps us to use our political rationality to assess what we *should* think is politically fair.

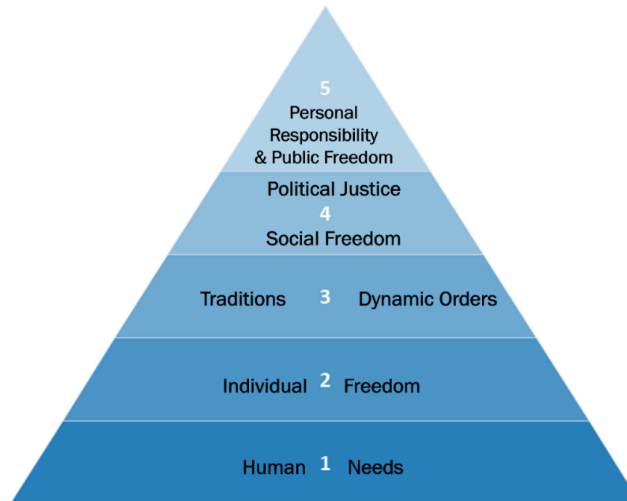
The Political: Above the Social, Below the Personal and Public Liberty

In “Three Freedoms and an Emergentist’s Hope for Social Progress,” I showed a (general) hierarchy in which lower-level *individual freedom* gives way to *social freedom*, which both supports and constrains individual freedom and its needs and values. The resolution of a tension between individual versus social levels of value comes, for Polanyi, with the emergence of *public freedom*. In this higher-order freedom the free



individual again takes the lead. The responsible person is called by conscience to serve a goal that advances society at large but in a way consistent with both that person's tradition/dynamic order and with their highest values.

Human physiological needs set conditions on which higher-order constraints operate. One must be alive, and satisfy physiological needs, in order to be capable of acting freely according to one's moral principles. And one's higher-level values and principles will in turn constrain how one goes about satisfying one's lower-order needs or interests (e.g., one may not freely steal or kill for food). A system in which one's physical needs set the primary values—and its (perhaps Hobbesian) notion of justice and freedom—gives way to a system in which other relations, e.g., friendship and community, become primary values (where liberty is not license). Our higher principles—justice, equality, freedom—are abstract and their meaning shifts at different levels of engagement and understanding. The significance of a lower-order freedom will thus shift as we become aware of and attempt to live out of higher-order relations and their values. A three-tiered hierarchy of freedoms—individual, social, and public—stretched between human needs and our highest ideals simplifies much. It illuminates important dependencies and constraints, but it can also obscure complex interrelations. While it is difficult to order Rawls's notion of the political in terms of this analysis, the following loose schema might be useful:



To the extent common social values can be said to constitute political rationality, we can see Rawls's justice and political autonomy as an order of *social freedom* and responsibility. This social freedom supports and yet constrains or channels *individual freedom* and the moral autonomy to act and aim via the values engendered by traditions. *Public freedom* is a yet higher level that enhances yet constrains or channels social and political freedom via an individual's personal commitments and values.

Whereas individualism and diverse traditions can tear against social cohesion, Rawls and Polanyi look for an overlap of values that are at a higher level (the political) than the various particular comprehensive doctrines (the moral) that we find within a pluralistic society. Political rationality reflects this higher-order organization in a layered dual control system, but the values of the "lower" order of subsidiary traditions are not thereby less important. Indeed, the higher-order system evolved so that these "lower" orders and their valuable goals can mutually flourish in a reasonable pluralism, and Rawls holds that—even while it constrains them to fair cooperation—the political should be "non-skeptical" towards the ethical values of traditions (*PL*, 172) so as not to undermine them but to allow for their mutual flourishing. The ethical

values and goals of a comprehensive doctrine can be higher and more rigorous than political values. Polanyi's notion of public liberty and the reemergence of personal values at the highest level bear this out. Public liberty can represent a more concrete expression of our political autonomy as we honor and advance our personal values in public life.

Conclusion: Can We Agree to Disagree and Still Politically Cohere?

Rawls's conception of a freestanding political rationality can be seen as an emergent feature of a political society that acts as an umbrella over a variety of different social, cultural, and institutional traditions. It holds them together in a mutually beneficial political structure that manifests compatible political values. This higher-order level of meaning is "freestanding" relative to the traditions and particular moral conceptions that gave rise to it, but is also something that we can *think from* to devise reasons that support political action.

Rawls's political liberalism fits well with Polanyi's notion of dual control and the emergence of levels in nature and in human society, in which higher-order rules of rationality are different than those of a lower order. While Polanyi recognizes a deeper metaphysics and development at work, and is committed to a wider, more valuable comprehensive doctrine, he, like Rawls, affirms a political structure—a free society—that allows for the existence of alternative doctrines and dissent, i.e., his "comprehensive doctrine" is reasonable and allows the political to be "neutral" with respect to dynamic orders and traditions and to exercise a supervisory authority (i.e., constraint). Polanyi's structure of tacit knowing also allows for thought experiments such as Rawls's veil of ignorance, which help us identify higher-order tacit commitments and develop new theories. Rawls's theory of justice is just such an analysis at the political level.

From this emergentist perspective, however, we can again ask with Bíró if, when we inhabit the original position behind a veil of (selective) ignorance, we can successfully abstract from features of our own comprehensive doctrine and particular lived situation well enough to recognize what is fair from our higher-level, liberal, political, personal commitments. And we can ask again with Howard whether our metaphysical notions can be bracketed out well enough to consider the political independently from other moral and metaphysical beliefs. If the conceptions and values endemic to particular ways of life inevitably color our understanding, if particular moral conceptions of the good slip in unawares, can we still exercise our common overlapping political rationality effectively enough? Is it possible to find mutual agreement at the political level when we might not truly understand each other at the moral level? There are real dangers here. Political liberalism itself emerged from a liberal tradition, and—as a competing comprehensive doctrine rather than a neutral overarching political structure—it can tend to undermine or illegitimately appropriate other traditions.⁸ So the line between *political liberalism* and a non-neutral, often skeptical *liberal tradition* must constantly be adjudicated. Let us hope that that our commitment to the shared values of political liberalism provides the stability we need to work out our differences peacefully within its framework, even when we agree to disagree.

ENDNOTES

¹This paper was motivated by a panel on Rawls and Polanyi's Political Philosophy held by the Polanyi Society in September of 2021. I thank Gábor Bíró, Eric Howard, and the virtual audience. Some content here is also developed from "Three Freedoms and an Emergentist's Hope for Social Progress" (Lowney 2022); see especially sections on prospects for and dangers of political liberalism (152–158).

²Although the sociological is harder to place, given its mutual interdependence with the psychological, passages in Polanyi's work that support the following schematization of an ontic/epistemic emergent hierarchy can be found in *KB*, 133–135, and also 155 and 220.

³Walter Gulick distinguishes between weak, strong, and moderate emergence in "Forms of Emergence" (2020). Strong emergence occurs in physical nature with the rise of life and autopoietic systems. In moderate emergence, according to Gulick, living beings impose a "purpose" on boundary conditions (57). Gulick places machines together, with social systems, in the "moderate" category and emphasizes the role of agency and invention here, rather than organic emergence and its subsequent discovery, which he links to "strong" emergence. An insistence on an agent's purpose, however, would make social and political emergent layers somewhat difficult to place. Emphasizing the inventions and decisions of agents can also obscure the emergent higher-order relations (like focusing on the trees can cause one to miss organizational features of the forest). Certainly, both invention and discovery are involved in the development of social and political systems. If we abstract from who or what is doing the inventing or controlling and focus on the structure and functional relations, we can see there is continuity between the bottom-up and top-down forms of control in natural systems, and lower-level and higher-level controls in artifactual machines, and in social and human systems. "Moderate emergence" could then cover dynamic systems more broadly and can include human agents, with their behaviors and decisions, among their parts. There are indeed differences, but as long as we recognize that a machine is a system, and there are natural and artifactual systems, we can focus on similarities. Gulick's schema can thus be helpful if not imposed too rigidly, and we can see the emergence of political liberalism as neither a case of weak nor strong emergence but of moderate emergence that is both a creation and discovery.

⁴Rawls, *PL*, 11, provides the definition of "constitutional democracy" at the heart of his political liberalism.

⁵Rousseau also had a conception of public liberty that bears resemblance to Polanyi's (Lowney 2022, 148, 149).

⁶Rawls uses the example of Protestants and Catholics in the sixteenth century (*PL*, 148). At that time, political peace would have been a mere *modus vivendi*. But currently, both Catholic and Protestant citizens in Western societies have developed a shared political consensus regarding tolerance for reasonable differences.

⁷See Lowney 2022, 143–145, where Abraham Maslow's "Hierarchy of Needs" is given as an example of ordering emergent values.

⁸Polanyi sees dangers when he recognizes that liberalism is itself an emergent tradition with values that are not quite neutral but have worked to undermine the authority of traditions, and Alasdair MacIntyre (e.g., in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*) also sees dangers when he recognizes how liberalism can commandeer and distort the values of particular traditions rather than simply secure them beneath its protective umbrella. Rawls would share Polanyi and MacIntyre's worries in that the political should be "non-skeptical" regarding the ethical values of traditions and thus should not undermine them (*PL*, 172). Political liberalism originally emerged from the liberal tradition itself and cannot always be cleanly divided from the notions of that comprehensive moral doctrine. For more, see Lowney 2022, 155–158, where I look at dangers in political liberalism.

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POLANYI'S RAZOR: THE TACIT ANTITHESIS OF THE VEIL OF IGNORANCE

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Keywords: post-critical philosophy, Michael Polanyi, John Rawls, veil of ignorance, tacit knowing

ABSTRACT

Veil of ignorance theories suggest that an appraiser can be (i) completely (focally) aware of and (ii) completely ignorant about the appraisal she is making. This paper argues that Michael Polanyi rejected both of these premises and that he was developing an antithesis to the veil of ignorance model in his concept of tacit knowing. Rather counterintuitively, the latter concept did not refer to one but three kinds of appraisal: making a knowledge claim, making an aesthetic evaluation, and making a moral judgement. This paper shows how the Polanyian concept of tacit knowing clashes with the veil of ignorance model in the case of this third kind of appraisal, making a moral judgement. The first part of the paper portrays how Polanyi's Budapest years might have influenced his discovery of the tacit. The second part explores the evolution of the tacit knowing concept and identifies four stages in his relevant thought based on how he approached the tacit. The third part explains how the Polanyian concept of tacit knowing might be interpreted as a philosophical razor that is antithetical to the veil of ignorance model. The paper concludes by going into details about this antithetical relation and, by doing so, sharpening the razor.



Introduction

Commitment to the idea that philosophical inquiries should not ignore the social context of the topics being inquired into was common in the intellectual life of early twentieth century Budapest. While this commitment produced a sociological tradition (Demeter 2008, 2011, 2020) within Hungarian philosophy, it did not launch a philosophical school *per se*. People sharing this commitment were various, developing different philosophies and ideologies. One of the few social spaces that could draw them together was the intellectual salon of Michael Polanyi's mother, Cécile Polanyi. Tante Cécile's salon became an informal marketplace of socially sensitive philosophies, attracting Marxists, socialists, and liberals alike (Vezér 1986, Scott-Moleski 2005, Szapor 2005, Litvan 2006). This colourful milieu of social sentiments inspired the Polanyi siblings to develop socially sensitive philosophies themselves. Michael developed a humane

philosophy, Karl a democratic socialism (Gulick 2010, Dale 2014, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c, Cangiani and Thomasberger 2018), and Laura a feminist philosophy (Szapor 1997, 2005). During their university years, Michael and Karl Polanyi became founding members of the Galileo Circle (1908–1918, 1918–1919), a student organization fostering anti-dogmatism and sociological studies. While identifying the exact influence of these early social endeavours on Michael Polanyi's later ideas about the tacit seems to be an elusive task, the way he approached the idea of the tacit (as I will discuss in the next section) suggests that this background did play a role.

There were several informal gatherings, student organizations, and newspapers connecting with each other and mirroring similar ideas in early twentieth century Budapest. But this web of philosophical and political endeavours was anything but homogeneous. Although it connected people who shared the commitment to the idea that social context is important to philosophical inquiries, they took very different roads in the following years. Communists like Georg Lukács and Mátyás Rákosi, socialists like Karl Mannheim and Karl Polanyi, and liberals like Oszkár Jászi and Michael Polanyi were all affecting and being affected by this multifaceted network (Demeter 2008, 2011, 2020). The Károlyi government that seized power with the Aster Revolution of October 1918 might be seen as the political power representing a considerable part of this spectrum of social sensibilities, excluding radical leftists. The coalition government of social democrats and civic radicals was tied to the sociological tradition of the Hungarian philosophy of the period and, more precisely, to the Polanyi salon by several strings. The President, Count Mihály Károlyi, and the Minister of Nationalities, Oszkár Jászi, were close friends to the Polanyi family (Litvan 2006). Michael Polanyi became a Secretary of the Minister of Health in the short-lived post-World War I liberal government. When Károlyi was dethroned and the First Hungarian Republic was replaced by the communist regime of Béla Kun's Hungarian Soviet Republic, Károlyi and his sympathizers needed to flee from the country to avoid persecution. Michael Polanyi immigrated to Germany (1919) and then to the United Kingdom (1933), where the world-renowned chemist eventually became a professor of social studies (1948) and developed increasingly sophisticated ideas about tacit knowing.

Stages Towards the Tacit Dimension

While the full-blown version of Polanyi's grasp of the *tacit*, no doubt, only emerged with *The Tacit Dimension* (1966), a careful analysis of his early manuscripts and letters suggests that he was developing the concept of the tacit in four stages over more than three decades from the early 1930s. This section describes these stages and offers additional context to understand the increasing importance of the tacit in Polanyi's philosophy. Of course, no stadial history is free from the fuzziness of stages. That is certainly true of this historical account. Polanyi frequently republished selections of his related earlier essays and lectures as components of later books, which makes it particularly hard to identify stages in his thought. This essay nevertheless argues that four stages can be discerned. In the first stage (appearance of the tacit), Polanyi was led to the seeds of what later became the tacit through his critique of Soviet value theory. In the second stage (origins of the tacit), consisting of two thrusts, Polanyi was inquiring into social and epistemic problems and came up with solutions related to tacit knowing. The first thrust (social origins of the tacit) addressed the social origins of knowing and the unspecifiable and incomprehensible aspects of the act of knowing. The second thrust (epistemic origins of the tacit) addressed how spontaneous order creates a spillover effect of tacit knowing, enabling otherwise unsolvable problems to be solved. In the third stage of development (nature of the tacit), tacit knowing became Polanyi's central concern. He began developing narratives about

what tacit knowing is and how it works. In this stage, Polanyi provided narratives from various social realms with examples of tacit knowing. In the fourth and last stage (structure of the tacit), Polanyi developed an anatomy of tacit knowing to find out what parts can be identified and how these parts together constitute tacit knowing.

Polanyi's earliest philosophical inquiries were attempts to detect the core fallacies of the Soviet experiment and to suggest a different solution for Western civilisation based on the lessons learnt from these fallacies. From our point of view, one of the most relevant points of Polanyi's critique was his discussion of an implication of Soviet value theory. In *Collectivist Planning* (1940) included in *The Contempt of Freedom: The Russian Experiment and After*, he argued that "the compilation of statistics on objects consumed, comprising the number of handkerchiefs, spectacles, prayer books, and countless other kinds of merchandise, are as meaningless from this point of view as would be the valuation of the National Gallery by square yards of canvas or pounds of paint" (Polanyi 1940, 20). A summary of the amounts of these things is meaningless because it does not tell anything about the value of these things to individuals (Bíró 2019, 21). A summary of things is different than the things themselves and is different than the relations of things and people. As a value theory should be concerned about the relation of things and people, but the Soviet statistics do not tell anything about the relation of things and people, it is not a real value theory. This missing "relation" meant to Polanyi that qualitative aspects, including tacitly known aspects, are altogether missing from Soviet statistics. He considered this to be a failure that should be avoided if one seeks to develop a real value theory.

The 1940s can be seen as an intermediary stage in terms of how Polanyi approached the tacit. While the first stage (appearance of the tacit) was centred on the recognition that thought contains unspecifiable and incomprehensible elements, the second (origins of the tacit) was dominated by inquiries into the origins of these elements. At the second stage, two main thrusts can be discerned: one (social origins of the tacit) was portrayed in its most mature form in "What to Believe" (1947)² and the other in *The Logic of Liberty* (1951). In "What to Believe," Polanyi argued that knowing has three inherently interrelated aspects: *understanding* (or the *theoretical aspect*), *believing* (or the *confessional aspect*), and *belonging* (or the *social aspect*). These aspects cannot be separated from each other in acts of knowing. This "inseparability" reflects the importance of the tacit as an instance of unspecifiable and incomprehensible elements that affect knowing without the knower being completely aware of them. These elements came from the shared beliefs (confessional aspect) of the community to which the knower belongs (social aspect). And they are not add-ons but inherent aspects of each and every act of knowing. They cannot be veiled or ignored by the knower herself or by the philosopher who seeks to explain knowing. Polanyi emphasized the importance of belonging (or social aspect), as this aspect is the one that "principally determines which knowledge is true, and which is false" (Polanyi 1947, 154). The truth-value of a knowledge claim or of an appraisal, to use a more general term, is mostly determined by the shared beliefs of the community in which the knowledge claim is being evaluated. Veil of ignorance theories are basic models about how moral judgements are being made. They imply that, in order to be able to make a moral judgement, the appraiser needs to ignore partially or entirely her personal attachment to the issue being judged. For veil of ignorance theories, the truth-value of an appraisal is not explicitly affected by the appraiser's belonging to a community. There are, however, differences in this respect between "thin" and "thick" veil of ignorance theories. "Thin" theories, like Hume's *judicious spectator* (Hume 1739–1740/2007, T. 581) and Smith's *impartial spectator* (Smith 1759/1976, 129, 135), offer a permissive reading based on their grasp of objectivity, while "thick" theories, like Rawls's *justice as fairness*

(Rawls 1971), deny all ground for such a contingency based on a concept of universal objectivity (see the next section).

The other thrust (epistemic origins of the tacit) of the second stage was dominated by the *spontaneous order* narrative, reflected in its most advanced form in *The Logic of Liberty* (1951). According to Polanyi, one of the reasons why spontaneous order is a better way of ordering certain affairs than its corporate counterpart is that it provides epistemic synergy to the appraisals of individual agents. Every individual agent develops a personal *synopsis* about the world (Polanyi 1948a, 2). These *synopses*, shaped in human interaction in a community, overlap each other, and through this overlapping the knowing of each individual agent has an ongoing indirect effect on the knowing of others (Polanyi 1948b, 1). Part of this knowing is tacit knowing. And this spillover effect of tacit knowing is what makes epistemic synergy in a spontaneous order. Corporate order does not take advantage of this kind of spillover effect and epistemic synergy. In this system, the tacit knowing of individual agents does not have a role to play in the knowing of others. A single synopsis is made on the top without being aware of other possible synopses and their relations. Whoever is on the top only has access to her own tacit knowing but not that of others. That is why a spontaneous system performs better in adjusting relations than a corporate system of a similar size. Polanyi has arrived at the tacit through discovering an epistemic spillover effect that permeates spontaneous systems but lacks in corporate ones.

The 1950s marked the beginning of the third stage (nature of the tacit) in which the tacit became the central issue for Polanyi. In *Personal Knowledge*, Polanyi argued that while making a knowledge claim, moral judgement, or aesthetic evaluation, one is not *detached* from who she is and what she is doing. On the contrary, during these acts she is affected by the potential consequences of her knowledge claim, moral judgement, or aesthetic evaluation. This is *prima facie* an antithesis of the veil of ignorance theories, which seems to emphasize disengagement and distancing. However, one should not stop here but unfold Polanyi's argument about why and in what sense such "detachment" (Polanyi 1998, iv) is impossible. Polanyi suggested that making knowledge claims, moral judgements, and aesthetic evaluations are skillful acts subordinating particulars to an anticipated whole, to a concept of what is to be comprehended (ibid., 351). The person making a claim, judgement, or evaluation is not neutral about the outcome of these acts. She is affected both intellectually and emotionally. She is affected intellectually because through these acts she is carving out a personal reality from the infinite number of equipotential realities, that is, making the world in which she lives. Her personal reality—continuously refined in social interaction—is getting increasingly similar to (although never the same as) the objective reality. And she is affected emotionally because through these acts she is following her personal commitments leading—in her view—to an objective reality. What is at stake is the reality she believes in. And she feels for this reality.

Polanyi proposed that by building a personal reality, the "personal coefficient" (ibid., 17) present in these three types of appraisal "bridges...the disjunction between subjectivity and objectivity." The person making an appraisal believes that he can "transcend his own subjectivity" (ibid.) and can reach out to the objective reality. This duality, that appraisals are always already subjective and yet they are inherently made by referring to the objective reality, is again incompatible with what veil of ignorance theories suggest. The latter implies that there is no middle ground or trespassing between the subjective and the objective when making a specific type of appraisal, moral judgement. Polanyi implies that there is. For him, all types of appraisals are accompanied and driven by passions (ibid., 27)—passions to feel that one knows something (*intellectual satisfaction*), that one makes others believe in something (*persuasive desire*), and that one achieves something (*personal responsibility*). For Polanyi, these passions cannot be separated from appraisals (ibid.).

When making an appraisal, “a person commits himself to certain beliefs and appreciations, and accepts certain meanings by deliberately merging his awareness of certain particulars into a focal awareness of the whole” (ibid., 59). When focusing on the whole, we are becoming focally aware of a specific whole and “subsidiarily aware of its parts” (ibid.). Comprehension works like vision: fixating on a point helps us to see (comprehend) the details of that point but, at the same time, makes other points less visible (comprehensible). There is no perfect point on which to fixate. A person may (and is expected to) shift her focal awareness, and by doing so she also shifts her subsidiary awareness. Part of this shifting may result in some tacit elements becoming explicit (from subsidiary awareness to focal awareness) and some formerly explicit elements becoming tacit (from focal awareness to subsidiary awareness). Another part of this shifting does not involve trespassing the tacit/non-tacit divide. Tacit knowing can only reside in the field of subsidiary awareness. But for tacit knowing, moving out from subsidiary and entering into focal awareness always means a transformation from tacit knowing to explicit knowing.

Polanyi argued that a person *dwells in* a set of presuppositions, that is, a set of commitments about what focal and subsidiary awareness will follow, as she dwells in her own body (ibid., 62). These commitments cannot be asserted or articulated by the person having them because they are part of who (she thinks) she is. They are assimilated. Subsidiary awarenesses are being constantly fitted into a coherent focal awareness driven by the belief that this specific focal awareness opens a window to the objective reality (ibid., 63). She thinks and feels she has an obligation towards this objective reality. And by fulfilling this obligation, she is making her personal reality. This reality is not objective because she is making it through her commitments. But it is not completely subjective either because it is anchored in a vision of objective reality. Making an appraisal is a subjective striving towards an objective reality.

A person can follow various commitments. But her commitments are not wholly independent from the commitments of the society she lives in. A society supports certain commitments and represses others and, by doing so, supports the affirmation of certain personal realities and represses the making of others. This is, again, incompatible with the implications of the veil of ignorance theories. To an extent, a person can develop a personal reality that is quite dissimilar from those supported by her society. But only to an extent; eventually a hostile intellectual and moral environment would make her either change her commitments or leave her society.³ According to Polanyi, when making an appraisal about particulars, one is necessarily and tacitly entangled in a grasp of the whole. That is, again, incompatible with veil of ignorance theories that suggest that the agent is in control of what to ignore and not ignore when making an appraisal. “We can know more than we can tell” (Polanyi 2009, x). And we are not in control of this untold knowledge that permeates our knowing and being practices. Polanyi argued that “all thought contains components of which we are subsidiarily aware in the focal content of our thinking, and that all thought dwells in its subsidiaries, as if they were parts of our body” (ibid., xviii). Thinking has a “from-to structure” (ibid.). It is not a static state but a dynamic process coming from subsidiaries and going towards focality. Even “when originality breeds new values, it breeds them tacitly, by implication” (ibid., xix). Agents do not choose new values but “submit to them” (ibid.) by adopting them. They are responsible for choosing their beliefs, but they do not choose their beliefs from a *tabula rasa*. Agents submit themselves to a reality, and this submission grounds their beliefs and consequently their thoughts.

In the fourth, most mature stage, mirrored in *The Tacit Dimension* (1966/2009), Polanyi’s emphasis changed from the nature of tacit knowing to its structure (structure of tacit). He called the basic structure the two *terms* of tacit knowing (ibid., 9). The first is the *unspecifiably* or *tacitly* known or *proximal*, the

second is the *specifiably* known or *distal* term. In his view, tacit knowing has four *aspects* or relational *structures* that connect these two terms. The *functional* aspect means that “we know the first term only by relying on our awareness of it for attending to the second” (ibid., 10). We are attending to the second term, and by doing so we necessarily rely on the first. The function of the first is to help in attending to the second. For example, we get to know the moral qualities of the acts of a person by relying on our own awareness of them for judging moral character. The *phenomenal* aspect means that we only get to know the first term in the appearance of the second (ibid., 11). The first emerges as we are getting to know the second. For example, we get to know the moral qualities of the acts of a person by judging her moral character. The *semantic* aspect describes the process through which meaning is distanced from or displaced away from the knower (ibid., 12–13). The emphasis is shifted from the beginning to the end of the process of interpretation. For example, this occurs in getting to know the moral qualities of the acts of a person in terms of judging her moral character. And, finally, the *ontological* aspect describes “what tacit knowing is a knowledge of,” identifying what “comprehensive entity” (ibid., 13) the two terms constitute together through the process of *understanding*. For example, judging the moral character of a person is twofold: judging her moral character in terms of the moral qualities of her acts and judging the moral qualities of her acts in terms of her moral character.

This fourfold structure of tacit knowing presented in *The Tacit Dimension* (1966/2009) is incompatible with veil of ignorance theories that imply that the appraiser can be unaffected by the act of appraisal. The functional aspect of tacit knowing implies that, when making an appraisal, the appraiser relies on the attendance of her subsidiary awareness to her focal awareness. The phenomenal aspect of tacit knowing implies that, when making an appraisal, the appraiser gets to know her subsidiary awareness through her focal awareness. The semantic aspect of tacit knowing implies that, when making an appraisal, the appraiser goes from subsidiary to focal awareness. The ontological aspect of tacit knowing implies that, when making an appraisal, the appraiser relies on the joint attendance of her subsidiary awareness(es) to her focal awareness. None of these aspects are compatible with the veil of ignorance implication that the appraiser is unaffected by the act of appraisal.

Polanyi suggested that the integration of subsidiary awareness(es) creates an *interiorization* or *indwelling* (ibid. 17). We identify ourselves with what is being known by us. He also noted that such tacit indwelling cannot be replaced with an explicit corpus of knowledge. The elimination of the personal aspects would mean the elimination of the knowledge itself. In the third part of *The Tacit Dimension*, this descriptive account of appraisal was turned into a normative account. What had been framed so far as a general claim of human appraisal was starting to be treated as a claim laying down the foundations of what Polanyi called the *society of explorers* (ibid., 83). In such a society, “man is in thought” (ibid.), that is, driven by “imagination seeking discovery” (ibid., 79) and getting increasingly closer to reality. Explorers are controlled by a “mutually imposed authority” (ibid., 83–84) based on “chains of overlapping neighborhoods” (ibid., 72) that mutually impose different parts of the neighbors’ personal realities.

Cutting the Veils of Ignorance

The overlapping of personal realities is contrary to veil of ignorance theories that require decision-makers to abstract themselves from their personal niche, surroundings, and histories. For these theories, it is not true that “man is in thought” (ibid., 83). Man is seen either outside of thought or capable of decentring himself partly or completely from thought. In this respect, all veil of ignorance theories are not the same. David Hume’s *judicious spectator* (Hume 1739–1740/2007, T. 581) and Adam Smith’s *impartial spectator*

(Smith 1759/1976, 129, 135) reasoned that, when making a moral decision, the decision-maker imagines an average person (but not anyone specific) and asks how she would judge the situation. Moral judgements are based on our personal, internal conversations with this imagined average person. The decision-maker has access to some knowledge that is generally considered to be necessary for making the decision in a given society. She also has access to her personal embeddedness that is her motive to be engaged in an internal conversation with an average person. Nevertheless, although the decision-maker strives for objective moral standards, her motive for striving towards these standards is personal. These theories are commonly referred to as “thin” veil of ignorance theories.

“Thick” veil of ignorance theories, including the one presented in John Rawls’s account of *justice as fairness* (Rawls 1971), suggest that, when making a moral decision, the decision-maker asks how a *fair* (and therefore *just*) system would look like in any society. The decision-maker decides accordingly, without being aware of her past, present, or future embeddedness. Moral judgements are based on an “impersonal” grasp of the “objective” principles leading to *the* just society. The decision-maker purportedly has access to all the knowledge that is necessary for making that decision but does not have access to anything personal. She does not have (her own) morals, personal commitments, passions, desires, fears, and hopes. She does not have sentiments. She does not have any kind of personal attachment to the world! Most “thin” veil of ignorance theories can be made compatible with personal elements to a degree by referring either to the personal motives of decision-makers to strive for objectivity or to their circumscribed grasp of objectivity (objectivity understood as objectivity in a given society at a given time). However, “thick” theories, and most notably Rawls’s application of the model of choosing under a veil of ignorance in *A Theory of Justice* (1971), cannot be made compatible with personal elements by definition: personal elements are defined as factors necessarily leading decision-makers not towards but away from objectivity (objectivity understood as a universal objectivity, a so-called God’s eye view).

The relevant thrust in Polanyi’s writings was not explicitly framed as an antithesis of the Rawlsian model of the veil of ignorance. It could not be framed as such. Polanyi’s relevant papers were written up to the late 1960s while Rawls’s *A Theory of Justice* was only published in 1971. But, regardless of how it was framed, Polanyi’s philosophical framework presents a consistent antithesis to the veil of ignorance theories, including Rawls’s *justice as fairness*. How did Polanyi develop, from the thirties to the late sixties, a counternarrative that undercuts veil of ignorance theories?

Polanyi consistently argued against the “growth of mechanism” (Polanyi 1958/1998, 6), by which he meant the increasing popularity of mechanical views. He proposed that these views embrace a separation of reason and experience, and implied a specific model of validation: that theories (representing reason) should be tested by empirical evidence (representing experience). This commitment to empirical testing had produced a critical attitude in philosophy, an attitude overvaluing doubt (ibid., 283). This attitude became so ingrained both in the mind of experts and in public thought that attitudes of belief that could not be empirically validated had no chance against it. While some attitudes of belief were indeed attitudes of dogmatism and zealotry, others were attitudes of sensible and reasonable belief (ibid., 292). In Polanyi’s view, a critical philosophy, based on doubt, prevailed, and this denied the role of non-empirical belief in science and philosophy. His major project was to develop what he called a “post-critical philosophy” to counter critical philosophy and its bias against non-empirical belief. Some would even argue that the anti-Rawlsianism of Polanyi’s ideas was actually anti-Kantianism. And indeed, the Kantian rational being submitting herself to impersonal moral laws is very unlike the Polanyian sentient being submitting herself

to her personal commitments. Why choose Rawls rather than Kant as an antagonist to Polanyi, then? While both Kant and Rawls presumed the universalizability of morals, it was Rawls who traced back this universalizability to a universal capability of ignorance. And this central role of ignorance is what makes Rawls a more fitting antagonist to Polanyi than Kant. According to Polanyi, “man is in thought” (1966/2009, 83); the appraiser dwells in the appraisal as she dwells in her own body. The appraiser has no capability (universal or otherwise) to ignore this attachment. Making the appraisal is making herself. Ignoring (part of) herself would be not *indwelling* but “outdwelling” and not making herself but unmaking herself. The idea that detachment is necessary and possible for making an appraisal comes from an attitude of doubt.

Theories of veil of ignorance reflect this attitude of doubt. When making an appraisal, the appraiser is not supposed to have any kind of belief about what is going to happen, that is, what knowledge she will discover, what moral judgement she will eventually form, or what aesthetic evaluation she will make. The “objective” appraiser has no belief at all about the outcome of the appraisal. Hume’s *judicious spectator* (1739–1740/2007, T. 581) and Smith’s *impartial spectator* (Smith 1759/1976, 129, 135), for example, do not have any kind of belief about the outcome of the internal conversations in which they are involved. The Rawlsian appraiser also has no belief about the outcome of the appraisal (although she does have some belief about how to get to the ideal outcome). Polanyi’s appraiser was different. Polanyi insisted that “only if a claim lies totally outside his range of responsible interests can the scientist [or other appraisers] assume an attitude of completely impartial doubt towards it” (1958/1998, 291). But it never “lies totally outside.” It is always inside his “range of responsible interests” if he makes an appraisal. That is why he makes the appraisal. If it “lies totally outside,” he would not make the appraisal. Why would he? Why would anyone—even an abstract appraiser—engage in anything that he is completely ignorant about? For Polanyi, that makes no sense. His appraiser does not have an “attitude of completely impartial doubt” (*ibid.*) but an attitude of sensible and intelligible belief. But how does this become a philosophical razor? And what does it demarcate?

Polanyi’s razor is as follows. An appraiser can be neither completely (focally) aware of nor completely ignorant about the appraisal she is making. If a *prima facie* appraiser is completely (focally) aware of or completely ignorant about the appraisal she is making, then she is not an actual appraiser. Making an appraisal is a personal act anchored in the tacit dimension. The personal element of attitude cannot be bracketed, either by the appraiser or by some claimed-to-be objective spectator. It is integral to the act of appraisal. Thus, the processes of moral decision-making as mirrored in veil of ignorance theories are not appraisals in the Polanyian sense. They are shaved off by Polanyi’s razor.

Sharpening the Razor: Tacit as Unveilable, Knowing as Anti-Ignorant

Polanyi’s razor thus suggests that the concept of tacit knowing is an antithesis to the veil of ignorance approach. But the razor can be sharpened even further. The tacit element of knowing can be seen countering the “veilability” (the capacity to be “veiled”) of certain knowledge. Tacit knowing implies that parts of knowing cannot be veiled from each other in the course of a purely objective exercise. Tacit elements cannot be explicated. And what cannot be explicated cannot be veiled. Knowing itself can be seen as countering ignorance. For Polanyi, knowing, both tacit and explicit, requires a commitment from the knower towards what is being known. The knower (appraiser) believes that her knowledge (appraisal) is objective. She thinks she has an objective grasp of knowledge (or of morals or aesthetics). This provides the motive for the knower (appraiser) to be engaged in the act of knowing (appraisal). Without this personal belief, there is no knowing (appraisal). The knower (appraiser) cannot be ignored from knowing (appraisal).

This essay argued that Polanyi's concept of tacit knowing can be seen as an antithesis to the veil of ignorance model. The paper started with exploring the possible origins of the Polanyian tacit in the sociological tradition that dominated Hungarian philosophy in the first half of the twentieth century (Demeter 2008, 2011, 2020). It continued with providing a stadial history of Polanyi's engagement with the tacit from his earliest accounts in the thirties and forties to *The Tacit Dimension* (1966/2009) and *Knowing and Being* (1969). The essay then discussed Polanyi's concept of tacit knowing together with various veil of ignorance theories and defined Polanyi's razor as follows. An appraiser can be neither completely (focally) aware of nor completely ignorant about the appraisal she is making. If she is either, then she is not an actual appraiser. In the final section, Polanyi's razor was sharpened by showing that not just the two concepts (tacit knowing, veil of ignorance) but also their elements are antithetical. For Polanyi, tacit implied "unveilability," and knowing implied anti-ignorance. Veil of ignorance theories that implied that certain aspects of the appraiser can be "veiled" from the process of making the appraisal and that an appraiser can be ignorant about making the appraisal were thus antitheses to the Polanyian concept.

ENDNOTES

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²This essay has been published in *Tradition & Discovery* 46 (2): 21–28. For more about "What to Believe," see Mullins 2020 and Bíró 2020 in the same issue.

³Polanyi gave a detailed description of how society affects commitments through various social institutions, but this cannot be expounded here.

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NOTES ON POLANYI'S INTEREST IN HEIDEGGER

Eduardo Beira¹

Keywords: Michael Polanyi, Marjorie Grene, Martin Heidegger; indwelling and being-in-the-world; Polanyi and “existentialism”; Polanyi’s exploration of Heidegger

ABSTRACT

*This essay makes use of a variety of archival materials in the Michael Polanyi Papers to show that Polanyi’s comment linking his account of “indwelling” and Heidegger’s “being-in-the-world” (in his 1964 “Preface to the Torchbook Edition” of *Personal Knowledge*) was a carefully considered, thoughtful philosophical claim. Materials from both before and after the writing of this Torchbook Preface make clear that Polanyi was seriously exploring connections between his emerging epistemic account and ideas developed by Heidegger as well as other modern thinkers who in the sixties often were dubbed “existentialists.”*



Prosch, Polanyi, and Heidegger

Harry Prosch wrote that “Polanyi noted, several times, that he had learned some things from Heidegger, although, as far as I know, he never said what those things were” (1991–1992, 21). Perhaps this is not quite on the mark. In unpublished manuscripts from the sixties, there are repeated references to Heidegger that suggest that Polanyi was more deeply involved with Heidegger’s writings and ideas than is usually recognized. Although Prosch certainly read many Polanyi texts, he dealt chiefly with the 1969, 1970, and 1971 Meaning Lectures, primary sources for the core chapters of *Meaning* (hereafter *M*; see *M*, ix–xi and 227–228). Indeed, in the manuscripts of these lectures there are no references to Heidegger’s thought. But in archival manuscripts particularly from the first half of the sixties, Heidegger (as well as Husserl and Sartre) are frequently referenced. In his Terry Lectures and somewhat later lectures and manuscripts, this is clearly the case, as the discussion below makes clear.

Polanyi’s best-known reference to Heidegger is in his 1964 “Preface to the Torchbook Edition” of *Personal Knowledge* (hereafter cited as *PK* using the 1964 Torchbook edition pagination). Here Polanyi connects “indwelling” with “being-in-the-world,” which is an important paradigm of Heideggerian existential phenomenology:

Things which we can tell, we know by observing them; those that we cannot tell, we know by dwelling in them. All understanding is based on our dwelling in the particulars of that which we comprehend. Such indwelling is a participation of ours in the existence of that which we comprehend; it is Heidegger's *being-in-the-world*. Indwelling is also the instrument by which comprehensive entities are known throughout the world. It is from the logic of indwelling that I have derived in Part IV of this book the conception of a stratified universe and the evolutionary panorama, leading to the rise of man equipped with the logic of comprehension.

...

Indwelling is being-in-the-world. Every act of tacit knowing shifts our existence, re-directing, contracting our participation in the world. Existentialism and phenomenology have studied such processes under other names. We must re-interpret such observations now in terms of the more concrete structure of tacit knowing. (*PK*, x–xi).

This preface, dated June 22, 1964, was written about two years after delivery of the Terry Lectures, but the Terry archival manuscripts contain similar passages (see discussion below). Some of the material from the Terry Lectures was later published by Polanyi in *The Tacit Dimension* (1966, hereafter *TD* using Anchor Books pagination; see *TD*, v, ix–xi). However, in this book the name of Heidegger never appears, nor is there any direct reference to a relationship with his ideas. There is, however, in his introduction a final intriguing comment that suggests that Polanyi's account of subsidiaries as bodily elements implies that all "novel thought" should be "seen to be an existential commitment." He then goes on to say this is a "handy model" reflecting "major existential actions" independent of a treatment of "the great issues of man's fate." Polanyi concludes by pointing out that "originality breeds new values" but it does so tacitly, and human beings do not thus choose new values but "submit to them by the very act of creating or adopting them" (*TD*, xi). This very concise epistemic account of "major existential actions" is in fact Polanyi's carefully digested reflection on Heidegger, Husserl, Sartre, and perhaps other contemporary philosophers. These were all figures that Polanyi (and others in this period) might have dubbed generically "existentialist" thinkers. Polanyi recognized the bearing of the insights of "existential" thinkers on the problem of discovery (i.e., the problem articulated most clearly in Plato's *Meno*) and the problems of knowledge, and *The Tacit Dimension* is his effort to make this clear.

The connection Polanyi made between his ideas and those of Heidegger in his 1964 *PK* Torchbook preface was likely not expected by many Polanyi scholars; it continues to puzzle some. Some perhaps consider this brief reference only a provocative gesture toward a then most influential European philosopher. Some perhaps have surmised that this reference reflected Marjorie Grene's influence, but, as discussion below makes clear, this seems unlikely. The general case outlined in this essay suggests that this 1964 Heidegger reference indicates what was at the center, in the first half of the sixties, of Polanyi's philosophical concerns about the mechanisms and consequences of tacit inference.

Marjorie Grene, Heidegger, and Polanyi

In the acknowledgements to the 1958 edition of *Personal Knowledge* (included in the Torchbook edition), Michael Polanyi clearly highlighted Marjorie Grene's contribution to his book: "This work owes

much to Marjorie Grene.” And he added, “Our discussions have catalyzed its progress of this work at every stage and there is hardly a page that has not benefited from her criticism” (*PK*, xv).

Marjorie Glicksman Grene (1910–2009) met Polanyi in 1950 (when he first lectured at the University of Chicago), and from 1951 she collaborated with him, most intensively during 1957 and 1958, on the final stages of *PK* (Grene 1986, 356; 1995, 5; and 2002, 13). But the relationship of friendship and collaboration remained quite close also in the following years, even after Grene returned to the United States in 1965 to join the Philosophy Department at the University of California, Davis (Mullins 2022). From the mid-sixties until 1972, Grene was the primary figure organizing two experimental Ford Foundation-sponsored projects, the Study Group on the Foundations of Cultural Unity and the Study Group for the Unity of Knowledge; these projects organized a series of interdisciplinary conferences and produced an interesting set of interdisciplinary publications. Polanyi worked closely with Grene on the initial 1965 and 1966 conferences, participated in several later conferences, and was instrumental in securing funding for the two projects (see discussion in Breyspraak and Mullins, 2017 and 2020).

At the age of twenty-one, Grene, a new graduate in zoology, went to study philosophy in Germany, where she attended Heidegger’s classes: “in 1931 I was sent as a German American exchange student to Freiberg, where—with hundreds of others—I sat at the feet of Martin Heidegger, and heard his lectures on the ‘essence of truth’ and on the ‘beginning of Western philosophy’” (Grene 2002, 4–5). Grene then returned to the United States and completed her doctorate in 1935² at Radcliffe College, which was “the nearest a woman could get to Harvard in those days” (2002, 7). She later won a fellowship to study in Denmark and worked on Kierkegaard (2002, 8). In 1937, she went to the University of Chicago and became a teaching assistant in order to participate in Carnap’s research seminar (2002, 9). The following year, Grene (under her maiden name, Glicksman) published, in an American philosophy journal, a scathing article that deconstructs Heidegger’s method (Glickman 1938). This article she later republished in 1976 in a collection of her essays (Grene 1976a, 38–49), along with another 1958 essay, “Heidegger: Philosopher and Prophet,” in which she criticizes Heidegger’s word play (Grene 1976b, 61–70).³

Ten years after her 1938 American journal article, she published one of two books that marked the introduction of Heidegger and existentialism in the United States. *Dreadful Freedom* she classifies in the preface as “an introductory essay,” and here she treats existentialism as a new attempt at a “reevaluation of values” that promotes an interpretation of the individual as for himself in relation to others (Grene 1948, vii). The third and fourth of the seven chapters of this work are dedicated to Sartre and Heidegger together.

Almost a decade later, Grene published *Martin Heidegger* (Grene 1957), which was one of the first books on Heidegger published in the United States; its influence was significant at a time when there was still no English translation of *Being and Time*. As Martin Woessner notes in *Heidegger in America*, young American students of Heidegger who returned to the US were the first to introduce Heidegger’s philosophical perspective to large American audiences.⁴ They were also the first to seriously criticize Heidegger’s approach (Woessner 2011, 8–9), and in this Grene was one who most distinguished herself.

Given her record as a knowledgeable even if sharply critical Heidegger scholar, it is therefore plausible that Grene could have influenced Polanyi on Heidegger as well as other authors regarded as European existentialists. However, it was not easy intellectually to influence an independent and persistent personality like Polanyi, even under his cover of permanent affability, sympathy, and even some shyness, as the correspondence between Grene and Polanyi itself also attests (Mullins 2022).

It seems, in fact, unlikely that it was Grene's influence that suggested Polanyi's words in his 1964 preface linking his ideas and those of Heidegger. The evidence discussed below hints at other sources. Moreover, Grene later contends, in more than one place, that Polanyi's "indwelling" was not equivalent to Heidegger's "being-in-the-world" but rather is akin to Merleau-Ponty's "being-in-the-world," and this is very different than Heidegger's "being-in-the-world." Grene's account is thus strikingly at odds with what was written by Polanyi in his 1964 Torchbook preface.

Grene discovered Merleau-Ponty around 1960, as she recalled in her *A Philosophical Testament*:

In 1960-61, belatedly, I somehow stumbled on the English version of *The Phenomenology of Perception*, originally published in 1945. I had been working through most of the fifties with Michael Polanyi on what was to be *Personal Knowledge* and Merleau-Ponty's book seemed to me to convey the same message, but in the opposite order, and in a language that I could both understand and use (or so it seemed at the time). The basic concept in which Merleau's description of human existence is grounded is that of being-in-the-world. The expression owes its origin to Heidegger, but both in Heidegger's exposition and in Sartre's it seemed, and still seems to me, defective. Merleau-Ponty took what was right in it and placed it in a more appropriate context. As he uses it, it appears to me by far the best concept available for the rethinking of philosophical questions about human beings as responsible agents and in particular as knowers. (Grene 1995, 69)

In an earlier 1986 essay, Grene, in fact, had already made a similar brief comment:

What Polanyi called "indwelling" or Merleau-Ponty "being-in-the-world" (I know the phrase comes from Heidegger, but Heideggerian ontology is still too one-sided and, as Dorothea Frede's argument clearly shows, too ambiguous in its import, to serve for the *arche* I am trying to suggest) is, as I see it, the necessary ground, at this juncture in our intellectual history, for any fruitful reflection on any such theme as this. (Grene 1986, 365)

In a word, Grene clearly distinguishes Heidegger's and Merleau-Ponty's account of being-in-the-world, and she does not regard Heidegger's account as sound. Although these comments date from after the writing of the 1964 preface, they suggest that if Grene (after she discovers Merleau-Ponty in 1960) had influenced Polanyi to link indwelling and "being-in-the-world," she likely would have done so by emphasizing Merleau-Ponty's "being-in-the-world" rather than Heidegger's account⁵ (see Mullins 2022 for a discussion of Grene's push to get Polanyi to study Merleau-Ponty).

Grene's criticism of Heidegger's being-in-the-world is also confirmed by a note in her contribution to *Intellect and Hope*, the 1968 Polanyi festschrift (Langford and Poteat 1968). Grene's essay, "Tacit Knowing and the Pre-Reflective Cogito," was intended to discuss Sartre's projection of the "impasse of modern philosophy" and "to demonstrate how the whole no-exit panorama of the Sartrean world is transformed by the substitution of tacit for explicit knowing, and of bodily indwelling for the *pour-soi/en-soi* dichotomy of Sartrean thought" (Grene 1968, 20). Discussing the mechanism of Polanyi's knowing (from subsidiary clues to a focus), she writes, "the proximal pole, the subsidiaries, are mine, while the distal pole, the focus of my effort, is that aspect of the world toward which I am straining, to which I am giving my attention. This is the most evident direction of our everyday indwelling, of being-in-the-world" (1968, 44). In a footnote to her discussion, she directly questions Polanyi's effort to link indwelling and Heidegger's account:

Polanyi holds that his concept of indwelling is identical with Heidegger's being-in-the-world; see Torchbook edition of P.K., p. viii. I am not sure about this, since in *Sein und Zeit* there is no conception of authentic community and no ground on which to establish a relation of Dasein to nature; but there is certainly a kinship. (Grene 1968, 44, note 46)

The First Half of the Sixties: Polanyi's Lectures

Polanyi's three Terry Lectures at Yale were given October 31–November 3, 1962. However, the Polanyi archival manuscripts of the Terry materials are a rich and somewhat confusing larger set of materials. What Polanyi actually delivered in his 1962 Yale lectures was likely closely akin to the briefer texts that he gave to Richard Gelwick soon after the lectures (see [Gelwick microfilm](#), files for Glwk110). But the more extensive archival Terry material (cited in References as Box 35, Folders 6–12, MPP [Michael Polanyi Papers], according to the University of Chicago Regenstein Library [Cash] [Guide to MPP](#)) includes lengthy drafts. Also, some of the archival Terry manuscripts seem to be revised texts dated after the actual Terry Lectures. Scott and Moleski note that in Polanyi's stay as a Fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Science in Palo Alto in 1962–1963, he continued to develop the texts he had used in his Terry Lectures (Scott and Moleski 2005, 250). Parts of these Terry materials (see, for example, Box 35, Folder 9, 0291-0293), without question, clearly indicate that Polanyi was making connections between his account of knowing and the existential and phenomenological views of Husserl, Sartre, and Heidegger. In one version of the first Terry Lecture, Polanyi summarizes his perspective this way:

The process of growing into our cultural heritage is part of this way of coming into existence by assimilating things outside us. Thus, the simple structure of tacit knowing accounts for a wide range of phenomena uncovered by modern philosophic movements. (Box 35, Folder 8, 0292 [ms. p. 18]).

In 1963 and 1964, Polanyi further explored the relationship between his epistemic perspective and other modern philosophical ideas. He again treated the topic of links between his account of tacit knowing and existential and phenomenological views in his third Duke Lectures, titled "Commitments to Science," delivered February 24, 1964. The Duke Lectures were never published but are online. In "Commitment to Science," Polanyi added additional discussion to what he had earlier developed in the Terry material. That is, parts of his earlier written texts "grew" as he added ideas. One paragraph of importance was on Husserl, and another linked the problems of existentialism with the intriguing question about what is a problem (see especially pp. 9–13). In one section in particular in this third Duke Lecture, Polanyi directly connects tacit knowing, based on indwelling, and Heidegger's ideas about "being-in-the-world":

From the theory of tacit knowing we can derive the being-in-the-world, the Dasein of man, as defined by Heidegger. For every meaningful thought and action of ours interiorises particulars for the purpose of attending to their joint significance, and thus we populate the known world with comprehensive entities the elements of which function logically as parts of ourselves. Our being extends then over the range of our understanding. We have here Heidegger's Field of Being (as William Barrett has called it) and we discover its logical theory: which is that every act of comprehension shapes jointly our existence and our knowledge. (p. 11)⁶

It seems but a short step from this statement in Polanyi's late February 1964 Duke Lecture to the statement in his "Preface to the Torchbook Edition" of *Personal Knowledge* dated June 22, 1964:

Indwelling is being-in-the-world. Every act of tacit knowing shifts our existence, re-directing, contracting our participation in the world. Existentialism and phenomenology have studied such processes under other names. We must re-interpret such observations now in terms of the more concrete structure of tacit knowing. (*PK*, xi)

All of the earlier passages treating the links between Polanyi's developing ideas and existential and phenomenological views apparently were later reproduced in a 1965 Polanyi manuscript that was to be a chapter in a never published book, *Man in Search of Meaning*. Within what is apparently the book chapter "The Logic of Innovation" (Box 38, Folder 6 0424-0452, but 0434-0439 has been inserted), Polanyi consolidates his previous texts. What follows is a lengthy quotation (and parts of it may be familiar since Polanyi used parts in other publications), but it most clearly reflects the several elements (tacit knowing and indwelling; views of Dilthey, Lipps, Husserl, Heidegger and "Existentialism and Phenomenology"; and an account of Plato's *Meno*) that Polanyi was working to pull together in the mid-sixties:

For centuries past the systematic thinking of modern man has been based almost invariably on the assumption that a process of inference must be explicit. But since the last eighty years or so there have been important thinkers, mainly German, who have postulated that indwelling is the proper means of knowing man and the humanities. Dilthey taught that the mind of a person can be understood only by reliving its workings and Lipps represented aesthetic appreciation as an entering into a work of art and thus dwelling in the mind of its creator. Dilthey and Lipps were right in saying that such knowledge can be achieved only by indwelling. But my analysis of tacit knowing shows that Dilthey was mistaken in affirming that this fact sharply distinguishes the humanities from the natural sciences. There is a continuous transition from indwelling in science, to the fuller participation of the knower in the study of art, literature and history.

My conception of indwelling is more deeply affiliated to existentialism and to Husserl's phenomenology. I am ultimately aiming, as Husserl did, at rescuing the reality of an essentially hierarchic universe from being flattened out by a Laplacean analysis of it. But I shall not try to unfold the true structure of phenomena, as Husserl tried, by excluding the question of their reality.

Husserl followed Brentano in describing thought as being intrinsically directed at its own object, whether this existed or not. He believed that such intensionality of thought makes it possible to contemplate lived experience, irrespective of its claims to reality. The analysis of such lived structures should, therefore, be unerring, transcendental. But when, as he confessed, towards the end of his life, "this dream dissolved" (3) such structural analysis was reduced to subjectivity. My theory of knowledge will try, on the contrary, to discipline intensionality by its bearing on reality.

Husserl has proved so far the most influential thinker of the twentieth century. As it became clear that knowledge of lived experience, which he was seeking, was knowledge

possessed by indwelling, it transpired that it was a knowledge of being, and this led on to Heidegger and French existentialism.

From my theory of tacit knowing we can derive the being-in-the-world, the Dasein of man, as defined by Heidegger. As every meaningful thought and action of ours interiorises particulars for the purpose of attending to their joint significance, we populate the known world with comprehensive entities, the elements of which function logically as part of ourselves. Our being extends in this sense over the range of our understanding. We have here Heidegger's Field of Being (as William Barrett has called it) and are given it[s] logical theory[:] every act of comprehension shapes jointly both our existence and our knowledge.⁷

Once interiorisation is accepted as intrinsic to knowing, an analysis of knowledge will keep bringing up aspects of existence, and such observations will confirm the results of existentialist philosophy. But they will go beyond existentialism by revealing the logical structure of the observed existential commitments.

The existential elements of human knowledge have admittedly a different quality from the existential elements of human destiny. Man's life and fate have a more immediate and more moving interest than has man's knowledge of things. This may partly account for the difference of the perspectives into which being is placed by the two enquiries. Heidegger brings out man's being-in-the-world by confronting him with death which cancels his projects. To me, man's striving for truer being and knowing appears justified within the cosmic course of organic evolution, leading up to responsible manhood within a Society of Explorers.

Yet a fundamental problem of existentialism, of which I have spoken, will be with us. On what grounds can we possibly justify a choice of new grounds in place of those on which we stand when making the choice? The question arises sharply when scientific discovery changes our interpretive framework, but it is foreshadowed already before discovery in our choice of a major problem pointing to discovery. So let me ask once more, What is a problem?

A problem is the sight of something hidden. This description conjures up a self contradiction, stated in Plato's *Meno*, from which he concluded that an effort to solve a problem was logically absurd. He said that to search for the solution of a problem was impossible; for either you know what you are looking for, and then there is no problem, or you do not know what you are looking for, and then you are not looking for anything and cannot expect to find anything.

The solution which Plato offered for this paradox was that all discovery is a remembering of past lives. This explanation has hardly ever been accepted, but neither has any other solution been offered for avoiding the contradiction. So we are faced with the fact that for two thousand years and more, humanity has progressed by the efforts of people solving difficult problems, while all the time it could be shown that to do this was either meaningless or impossible. For the *Meno* is essentially right. It points to the fact that so long as we think of knowledge as having a determinate content, the conception of a problem is self contradictory and the achievement of discovery is incomprehensible.

The fact that for two millennia this fundamental difficulty was passed by, shows how the identification of reason with explicit processes of inference has caused philosophy to overlook, or to notice only marginally, the tacit powers in which all explicit thought originates and remains embedded up to the highest levels of its formalization. Existentialism and Phenomenology have sought to remedy this deficiency, but have done so only at the cost of severing the connection of knowledge with science and indeed with reason itself. But once a belief in reality is seen to be a belief in that which may yet inexhaustibly manifest itself in the future, the claims of science and reason are reconciled with the tacit powers of thought. The paradox of the Meno is resolved in principle by acknowledging the kind of anticipatory powers, which bring our knowledge of the external world to bear on a hidden reality. For a problem is but such an anticipation, intensified and narrowed down to aim sharply at a particular direction. And it can be described without self-contradiction, therefore, as pointing the way to unknown things. (Box 38, Folder 6, 0433 [ms. p. 10], 0440-0442 [ms. pp. 11 and 12] of the chapter “Logic of Innovation,” 0424-0452)

Discussion in the following section elaborates a series of Polanyi’s encounters with existential and phenomenological ideas that are mentioned in archival Polanyi materials. These encounters go back to 1962 and perhaps should be viewed as part of the tacit background of the above 1965 text, which includes passages apparently originally written as early as 1962.

Polanyi’s Early Comments on Phenomenology, Husserl, and Heidegger

An account of knowing that addresses the paradox of new knowledge, a paradox originally posed in Plato’s *Meno*, is discussed in the above quotation from Polanyi’s 1965 chapter “The Logic of Innovation.” But questions about discovery interested Polanyi from at least the time of the publication of *Personal Knowledge*, and such questions seem nascent even earlier, perhaps as early as Polanyi’s Riddell Lectures published in 1946 as *Science, Faith and Society*. In a 1960 letter, Polanyi challenged Marjorie Grene to help him understand matters historical concerning his account of two kinds of knowing: “I am getting increasingly clear about the question to which I should like to find an answer with your help. If there are two kinds of knowing (“by reliance on” and “by attending to”) where have they been hidden for 2500 years?” (Polanyi to Grene, 4 September 1960, Box 16, Folder 1, 0011, MPP). Later in his letter, Polanyi identified six types of knowledge recognized by other thinkers, and one of these is “phenomenology which developed a high sensibility to states of affairs not accessible to specification, and a brilliant technique, see e.g. Hannah Arendt for handling them (without acknowledging their distinctive relation to the speaker).” This somewhat confusing 1960 Polanyi reference to phenomenology suggests at least that Polanyi was beginning, after the publication of *PK*, to attempt concretely to link his developing ideas with other philosophical accounts and particularly the modern account of phenomenology.

Two years later, in mid-1962, Polanyi announced to Marjorie Grene:

I have always felt uneasy about the way my work is related to phenomenology, so I bought a copy of the *Cartesian Meditations* by Husserl. One thing is clear that he assumed the existence of ‘simple evidence’, to be “kept free from all interpretations that read into them more than is genuinely seen”. This is monstrously bad as an epistemology of perception, but

highly suggestive towards recognition of complex entities perceived. (Polanyi to Grene, 15 July 1962, Box 16, Folder 1, 0027, MPP)

There follows a long and elaborate commentary on phenomenology and psychology, consciousness and Descartes. This letter commenting on a carefully studied Husserl text shows Polanyi's personal initiative in exploring possible relationships between his ideas and Husserl's phenomenology.

After the Terry Lectures (October 31–November 3, 1962), Polanyi traveled to Guatemala at the end of 1962, where he spent the turn of the year from 1962 to 1963. In the archival notes about this trip (Notes Made on the Journey December 27, 1962 to January 10, 1963 to Guatemala, Box 21, Folder 7, 0273-02799, MPP), which seem to be notes about what Polanyi was thinking or his reading, there are several interesting discussions. Polanyi identifies one section of his notes as concerning “a major new theme: to trace back my philosophy to the corresponding ideas of the existentialist movement” (Box 21, Folder 7, 0273 [p. 1]). There follow several pages with comments on Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, and Sartre with some references to contemporary books treating these figures. Apparently as part of the discussion of Sartre, there is a section of “notes on relation of existentialism to indwelling.” Here there are a variety of comments about the nature of consciousness, and at the end of these notes is a separate reference to Heidegger:

Heidegger's distinction between representative and reminiscent (evocative) language refers to the variable degree of imaginative effort required to understand a proposition. (Box 21, Folder 7, 0279)

Polanyi apparently was interested in some of Heidegger's ideas about language and imagination and in linking these ideas to his own account of the process for discovering meaning. Two years later, in his opening address for the 1965 Bowdoin conference, Polanyi further discussed the important role of imagination in tacit knowing in “The Creative Imagination,” and this essay was one of the gateways into his Meaning Lectures beginning in the late sixties (Breyspraak and Mullins 2017, 55–58).

In mid-July 1963, Polanyi was in Switzerland, staying at the classic Hotel Waldhaus in Sils-Maria, a village near Moritz. He there wrote Grene a letter in which he commented on the relationships he was discovering between Husserl and Heidegger and his own ideas, and, according to his model of discovery, he admits that this may open up a path, as yet undetermined, to new future understandings:

I have been busily thinking of you here for a few days, while reading “Panorama des idées contemporaines”, by Caitan Picon, a huge volume of well arranged extracts presented by an ardent Husserl-Heidegger follower. The date 1956. I am at last convinced and clear that Husserl's vision and its existential extension by Heidegger, Merleau Ponty and Sartre become comprehensible in terms of tacit knowing. Most of what they say is an account of my own panorama as it would appear to a mind coming across its paradoxes without having recognised its mechanism. In certain respects this experience of a scene, familiar to me by light, in terms of how it feels in the dark, is revealing. It certainly stimulates me towards trying to explore some ultimate implications of its structure, which an understanding of this structure tends to cover up, or at least distract from. What pleased me most, was to find that so much of Husserl's struggle, as well as that of his successors, was conducted in trying to break the monopoly of “conceptual” thought. They meant, of course, explicit thought. This explains, at long last, the famous “reduction” obscurely demanded by Husserl. It means

the kind of vision that the “giant blackboard” has illustrated back in my Virginia lectures. I can see now that the close concurrence, up to a point only, of Ryle’s writing with my own views is due to the fact that he demonstrates the absurdity of explicit descriptions in places where I conclude that only tacit knowing is possible—while he, of course, goes off at a tangent and comes down with some lame behaviorism or artificial and false trivialisation of the problem (as in his critique of phenomenism). All this is most exciting—for it is a small fraction of the things that are becoming clear to me at last. It will be wonderful to talk to you about all of it. (Polanyi to Grene, 22 July 1963, Box 16, Folder 1, 0049-0050, MPP)

About two weeks later, in early August 1963, Polanyi wrote two typewritten pages of dense notes on tacit knowledge, consciousness, and the role of imagination in problem solving. The first note clearly relates interiorization (indwelling) with being, understood in Heidegger’s existential phenomenological sense, which later is made even more explicit in the preface to the 1964 Torchbook edition of *PK*:

Husserl, struggling against reductivism, realised that we know much that cannot be conceptually grasped. Accused all previous philosophy of having consciously or less consc.[iously] assumed that knowledge must be conceptual. Here he attacked Kant, in particular. He realised that this non-conceptual knowledge extended into the world as a participation. He saw the interesting structure processed by man’s mental and cultural domain and proposed that it should be analysed but only described, while setting aside the question whether it was real or not ... He thought that, having set this aside, experience and its description would have the absolute certainty that an illusion has qua illusion. Thus came about his transcendent ego with an ubiquitous intentionality, but never an effort or commitment. He tries to develop this view in a metaphysical sense, but this excursion into ultimate depth is unsupported by any substantial image of the secondary strata to which it underly [sic]. There is no structure of conceptual knowledge, let alone tacit inference and no ideas about the structure of the universe which sustains man, his knowledge and the works of human thought. Heidegger, Sarte [sic], Jaspers realise that the knowledge which cannot be cast in conceptual form is that of being, our own being in particular. Since they have no substantial theory of non-conceptual thought, they regard being as either given or decreed. Our personal freedom is exercised by deciding to be i.e. by overcoming our given being. Being, thus decreed, is authentic.

Our main existential knowledge (known by being lived) is our knowledge of being in our body. Many instances of interiorisation and re-exteriorisation are given, but without exploring the wider field to which they belong. Hence no theory of knowledge emerges in this connection. Hence also, no evolutionary perspective is visible. The universe may as well not exist. Once more, the depth of metaphysical analysis seems insufficiently guided by an understanding of that to which it should underlie. (In my own work, it is, on the contrary, the superstructure which predominates on an insufficiently developed metaphysical basis.) (Notes, Sils-Maria, 5 August 1963, Box 23, Folder 16, 0770 to 0771, MPP)

After returning to England following the Duke lectures, Polanyi wrote, in the fall, to Hadley Cantril, a psychologist with broad interests that Polanyi appreciated: “I have lately tried to make contact with parallel

view points, such as yours.” He noted, “I feel that there is a chance of finding support by others coming from very different starting points, such as Husserl’s phenomenology. Merleau Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception* seems to show that this movement can make rich contributions to our enquiries.” Polanyi also added Erwin Straus, Carl Rogers, and Arthur Koestler to this list and commented that “as a result of this sense of companionship I am feeling my way towards establishing a more permanent contact between these various similar endeavours” (Polanyi to Cantril, 6 October 1964, Box 6, Folder 6, 0357, MPP).

Some Later Comments Indicating Polanyi’s Continuing Interest in Heidegger and “Existentialism”

In the MPP, there are several interesting archival documents suggesting that, in the middle sixties, Polanyi continued to be interested in connecting his ideas with those of Heidegger and other contemporary thinkers.

In the manuscript of the comments Polanyi delivered at the October 1966 Reinhold Niebuhr celebrations in New York (i.e., events marking the twenty-fifth anniversary of the journal *Christianity and Crisis*), Polanyi reflects on the origins of the “crisis that permeates our current culture,” which underlay the division of the world and which, Polanyi contended, can be traced to the nineteenth century. But Polanyi candidly noted, in contemporary culture, the more recent undermining negative contributions of Sartre and Heidegger as philosophers with only contempt for contemporary standards operating in society:

Submission to accepted standards is, according to Sartre, an act of bad faith because man must exercise self-determination and be the author of his own values. Heidegger teaches the same contempt for standards that have been established by universal acceptance. (Opening Address, dated 25 February 1966 for 6 October 1966 Niebuhr Celebration, New York, Box 38, Folder 8, 0510, MPP)

In 1966 and 1967, Raymond Wilken conducted two sets of interviews with Michael Polanyi when Wilken was a graduate student at the University of Illinois.⁸ Polanyi was in residence at Wesleyan University in part of 1966 and also later was interviewed again in 1967 in Chicago. In the 1966 and 1967 interviews (see the online introduction to the 1966 and [1967](#) interviews written by Mullins, n.d.), “existentialism” is a recurrent topic in the discussion. There are ten different instances in which “existentialism” is mentioned in connection with Polanyi’s ideas in the 1966 conversations with Wilken!⁹ Polanyi comments on topics such as self-set standards and the authenticity of beliefs, knowledge as indwelling, meaning in Polanyi’s view versus the “existentialism way,” the “existentialism postulate,” and the “existentialism dilemma.” Heidegger (identified as “the beginning of the modern existentialism”) as well as Hegel (but, Polanyi notes, “I am not sufficiently familiar with this Hegelianism”), Sartre, Nietzsche, and Merleau-Ponty are all mentioned. Clearly, Polanyi seemed very interested in and committed to discussing “existentialism” and sorting out the relationship between his ideas and “existentialism.” He contended that “now I am just as much concerned with the failures of existentialism” as previously with positivism and later added this: “At the moment I am only concerned with...finding a way in which one can avoid the existentialist’s postulate that we must be able to, well that existence comes before essence, that is that we create ourselves, and must create ourselves if we should be authentic. Well, that is complete nonsense” ([Wesleyan Interview, April 6, 1966, Transcript 3 File](#), see pp. 12 and 13).

Polanyi also noted his interest in the relationships between the “structural elements actually in my tacit knowledge” and things “that have been described by the existentialists,” but he suggested that this is an open issue: “what the end product of this relationship is I don’t know” (part 3, p. 12). In sum, these Polanyi comments in his interview with Ray Wilken show how during the second half of sixties Polanyi was looking for connections with “existentialism” but was also trying to discover alternatives to the “existentialism way” based on his theory of tacit knowledge.

In Polanyi’s 1968 correspondence, there is a text that is apparently a letter of recommendation for a possible stay of D. W. Millholland in Oxford.¹⁰ In this recommendation, Polanyi says,

I met D.W. Millholland for a few days in 1964 at Duke University and learned from him about Husserl and Heidegger in their bearing on my own ideas. Recently I have read his dissertation, which I found most interesting, both in his account of Camus’s works and in its critique of my writings. (10 October 1968, Box 7, Folder 5, 0261)

Polanyi was interested in collaborating with Millholland if he came to Oxford; he indicates in his letter that he knew Millholland’s plan to work “in a direction that I personally feel to be essential for the recovery of our balance after the disasters of the 20th century.”

David William Millholland (1932–2000) received his PhD from Duke University in 1965 after graduating from Duke University and Union Theological Seminary. He was working on his dissertation (as a student of William Poteat) when Polanyi was in residence in 1964 at Duke and gave the Duke Lectures. Polanyi met with Millholland, whose 1966 Duke dissertation (582 pages) was *Beyond Nihilism: A Study of the Thought of Albert Camus and Michael Polanyi*. Millholland was later professor of religious studies at several American universities.

Orus Barker was another Poteat graduate student whose dissertation was on Rilke; like Millholland, he met Polanyi in his 1964 Duke residence and later corresponded with Polanyi. Barker’s letter to Polanyi of 17 March 1966 (Box 6, Folder 8, 0600-0601) recommended some Heidegger texts for Polanyi and commented on some other Heidegger texts; he also commented on Heidegger’s turn away from Nazi affiliation. Barker noted that he found no “moral inversion” (an important Polanyi theme in the sixties) in Heidegger but that Heidegger’s account of Nietzsche was one that noted moral inversion.

In an undated letter apparently written at some point soon after the publication of the 1964 Torchbook Edition of *PK*, Gyula Hollo, a lifelong correspondent and friend from Polanyi’s days in medical school in Hungary, commented on the new *PK* preface: “I wish I could talk to you in person about your new preface to P.K.” (Hollo to Polanyi, Box 14, Folder 4, 0228). He noted, however, that “I think you do yourself an injustice by putting yourself quasi into the shadow of Heidegger.” About Polanyi, Hollo says, “You are more than an existentialist, and you have to show it.” Hollo apparently meant that Polanyi’s basic distinction between focal and subsidiary awareness was a fundamental insight regrounding knowledge. Polanyi perhaps responded to these comments from his friend, although no response has yet been located in archival materials.

In his 1966 essay “The Logic of Tacit Inference,” Polanyi suggests that his tacit knowledge theory may be called “a phenomenology of science and knowledge, by reference to Husserl and Merleau-Ponty. This would correctly relate my enterprise both to analytic philosophy and to phenomenology and existentialism.” And he adds, “Admittedly, my view that true knowledge bears on an essentially indeterminate reality and my theory of a stratified universe are foreign to these schools of thought. And again, while knowledge by

indwelling is clearly related to Dilthey and existentialism, its extension to the natural sciences is contrary to these philosophies” (Polanyi 1966, 17).

Conclusion

Heidegger (and sometimes Husserl, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and “existentialism”) is persistently alluded to in unpublished Polanyi materials, including correspondence, lectures, and other archival texts written in the sixties by Polanyi. There are also a few brief references to Heidegger and some of these other figures in Polanyi publications. Perhaps the comment on Heidegger included in his 1964 Torchbook preface is the most prominent. Clearly, the larger body of unpublished materials outlines the background for understanding Polanyi’s broader interest in building bridges between his epistemological account and contemporary philosophical ideas at the time often generically dubbed “existentialism” (although this seems to have included some “phenomenologists,” who rejected the label “existentialist”). Recognizing Polanyi’s interest in links with Continental philosophers, which has been largely unrecognized, should perhaps inspire further study of these connections.

ENDNOTES

¹Many thanks to Phil Mullins, who shares my interest in the topic treated here and who has helped me organize the final version of this essay with many threads.

²She wrote “a hasty and atrocious dissertation on the concept of *Existenz* in contemporary German Philosophy,” she notes in Grene 2002, 7, and in comments in Grene 1995, 5.

³In the preface to her 1976 collection *Philosophy In and Out of Europe*, she comments, “Participation in Carnap’s research seminar in Chicago in 1937-38 had sufficed to show me the impotence of logical positivism (or logical empiricism) as a foundation for philosophy; the decades wasted by so many in ‘logical reconstruction’. I am happy not to have shared” (Grene 1976, ix).

⁴In addition to Grene, this first wave includes Charles Hartshorne, Paul Weiss, and Sidney Hook. Later figures, such as Hannah Arendt, Glenn Gray, Richard Rorty, Daniel Libeskind, and Herbert Marcuse, Woessner also mentions (Woessner 2011, 9). Although influential, they had less influence on the dissemination of Heidegger’s thoughts in America. Woessner discusses Grene’s role and the early connections of Heidegger’s students in Freiburg in detail in his first chapter.

⁵For a discussion of Grene’s push to get Polanyi to study Merleau-Ponty, see Mullins 2022. Polanyi remained critical of aspects of Merleau-Ponty. But perhaps because Grene insisted that he study carefully some Merleau-Ponty texts, Polanyi does seem to find more common ground with Merleau-Ponty than other figures he generically dubs “existentialists.” In mid-sixties publications, he comments on Merleau-Ponty. See Mullins 2022 for a discussion of comments in the essay “The Structure of Consciousness” (Polanyi 1965). Polanyi notes, in his 1968 “Logic and Psychology,” that Merleau-Ponty anticipated the existential commitment present in tacit knowledge, but did so without recognizing the triadic structure which determines the functions of this commitment—the way it establishes our knowledge of a valid coherence. The contrast between explicit inference and an existential experience imbued with intentionality is not sufficient for defining the structure and workings of tacit knowing. We are offered an abundance of brilliant flashes without a constructive system. (Polanyi 1968, 34)

⁶In some Polanyi manuscripts, there is a superscript (footnote) to Barrett, though Polanyi did not complete his reference. But the reference is almost certainly to William Barrett’s *Irrational Man: A Study of Existential Philosophy*, a 1958 publication that introduced contemporary “existentialist” thinkers like Heidegger and Sartre (as well as Nietzsche and Kierkegaard) to English speakers.

⁷See note 6 about the superscript 1 in the quotation. The “s” and the colon in brackets have been added here since the sentence seems to be garbled.

⁸Thanks to Phil Mullins for calling my attention to these Wilken recorded interviews [available online here](#) on the Polanyi Society website. Most of the audio has been transcribed and the text files are cited hereafter. Wilken used the contents of the

interviews in his PhD dissertation under the direction of Harry Broudy at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. Wilken later taught at and retired from Kent State University in 1996. He sponsored two important conferences on the thought of Michael Polanyi during his tenure at Kent State University.

⁹See the [Wesleyan Interviews of April 5 and 6, 1966](#), in the following sections: [Transcript File 1](#), pp. 15–16; [Transcript File 2](#), pp. 29, 34, and 39; [Transcript File 3](#), pp. 8, 12; and File 4, p. 1 (around 1:20) and 5 (after 16:54). Transcripts of files 1, 2, and 3 are by R. Wilken. I have made a rough transcript of the final twenty-four minutes of these interviews that was File 4 (a file for which Wilken provided no transcript), and the page numbers are my pages for the typescript. Quotations and summaries of comments in the next sentence are from these interview materials.

¹⁰Thanks to Dale Cannon and Gus Breyspraak for helping identify Poteat graduate students Millholland and Orus Barker, whose correspondence is discussed below.

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