

# An Introduction to the Wilken 1967 Polanyi Interviews

Phil Mullins

[mullins@missouriwestern.edu](mailto:mullins@missouriwestern.edu)

On April 24 and 25, 1967 at the University of Chicago, Ray Wilken conducted the second of three sets of interviews with Michael Polanyi. The first set of Wilken interviews (available in four MP3 audio files along with transcriptions of three of the four files) can be accessed elsewhere on the Polanyi Society web site ([April 5 and 6, 1966 interviews](#)). Here there is also an introduction to Ray Wilken and his work with Michael Polanyi; this is briefly summarized below. For further information, see the memorial notice on Wilken available in the [digital-only "News and Notes"](#) section in *Tradition and Discovery*, 44:2.

Wilken was a graduate student working with Harry S. Broudy at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in the sixties. His three sets of interviews were used in his dissertation "The Relation of Polanyi's Theory of Personal Knowledge to the Teaching of Biology," completed in 1970. For Wilken's second round of interviews April 24 and 25, 1967, he apparently formulated a set of questions which he prepared after further study of the 1966 set of interviews as well as some Polanyi texts that he had not earlier considered. Wilken thought this second set of interviews focused most significantly on two general topics: nihilism in contemporary culture in relation to the free individual and self-transformation as an aspect of education.[1] In fact, the discussions in the second set of interviews range over a wide array of subtopics some of which are merely mentioned and others probed in some depth. The subtopics include—but are not limited to—the following: Polanyi on the importance of puzzlement; science as rooted in discovery; comments on Thomas Kuhn's ideas about science; religions and the stratified universe; intellectual passions; comments on Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow and existentialist thinkers. The April 24 and 25, 1967 Chicago interviews do include a few glitches (e.g., the phone rings and the tape is stopped and restarted). The link should allow you to play the MP3 file or download it.

[April 24, 1967 Interview](#)

[April 25, 1967 Interview](#)

## Endnotes

[1]After teaching 29 years at Kent State University, Ray Wilken retired in 1996. In 2011, over the next several years, as he cleaned out his files, Wilken, with the help of his colleague Kim Sebaly, sent to Phil Mullins (then editor of *Tradition and Discovery* and the person responsible for the Polanyi Society web site), many materials from his early work with Polanyi, including recordings of his 1966 and 1967 interviews as well as recordings of most of the invited addresses for the important 1991 Kent State University centennial Polanyi conference, "Polanyi and the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," which Wilken organized. In the material Wilken and Sebaly sent to Mullins, is a brief document "Raymond Wilken's Polanyi Works," which described the 1967 Chicago interviews in terms of the two general topics noted here. However, another document Wilken and Sebaly sent, "Topics Raised in Chicago Interview (1967)," outlines in a cursory fashion a much larger list of subtopics, some of which are also noted here.