

# **Civil and Free Society in the Frame of a Polanyian Intellectual Freedom**

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## **I. Introduction**

My paper structures and analyzes civil and free societies in the framework of my 2017 dissertation A Polanyian Tack: Political Implications. Intellectual freedom (IF) justifies social freedom and is justified as the pursuit of truth. I hold that intellectual freedom is the creative exercise of Polanyian tacit knowing, a new way to truth. It brings together Polanyi's social, moral and epistemic theories. Civil and free society serve as foil to get at intellectual freedom.

I imagine (1) free society's (FS) intellectual freedom as negative or primarily critical doubt and opposition to Community, Authority and Tradition (CAT); and (2) civil society's (CS) intellectual freedom as positive or the overemphasis of CAT. (1) and (2) are untenable and eliminate intellectual freedom by (1) nihilism; and (2) totalitarianism. Nihilism starts in a wrong understanding of truth and how it is pursued while totalitarianism stems from an overemphasis of CAT. I overcome their discrepancy by re-imagining a Polanyian IF.

Polanyian IF joins two triads: (1) the early Polanyian society-social freedom-truth triad; and (2) the late Polanyian theory of tacit knowledge (TTK) triad. To join (1) and (2), I revisit "The Foundations of Academic Freedom." Their synthesis is signified as: Intellectual freedom (IF) justifies social freedom (IF) and is justified as the pursuit of truth.

Tacit knowledge presupposes CAT on the from side of tacit knowledge's notation and overcomes CAT's restraints by tacit knowing's going to truth. Polanyian tacit knowing is discovery, a way to new truth. Extended to CS and FS, it gives a Polanyian free and good society.

Here, I briefly review standard accounts of a free and a civil society with a view to extricate their negative and positive social freedoms. Since SF is justified by IF, I propose a new Polanyian IF abstracted from “Foundations of Academic Freedom”: Polanyian intellectual freedom is the creative exercise of tacit knowing going to truth.

## **II. Civil Society and Free Society**

Civil society<sup>1</sup> (CS) is broad concept hence only a general sense is rendered as background to my restating Polanyi’s IF as the justification of SF. First, CS indicates a freedom of association. Moreover, CS is (1) independent of, yet interdependent with, the state and economy; (2) voluntary; and (3) existing for public benefit. From (3), we will see CS’s link to Polanyi’s public liberty; public liberty is one in which individualism performs a social function (Burke 1790 ). Thus Polanyi’s public liberty is a species of liberty in the space of CS.

CS arose substantively and theoretically during the epic shift from the medieval to modern eras and the rise of nation-states, extensive markets and political movements for freedom. Scottish Enlightenment contributed much to CS’s initial formulation: A. Ferguson saw CS as the seat of society’s ethical sensibility while Adam Smith believed CS to be constituted by the market (Ehrenberg 1999:xiii). Smith saw CS as the “sphere of moral sentiments, arts, sciences, morality and all other benefits of civilized life” (Ehrenberg 1999:xiii) Smith’s CS appears analogous to Polanyi’s FS in many respects.

The conservative thinker, Edmund Burke, observed the socio-political function of CS, denoting it as little platoons: “To be attached to the subdivision, to love the little platoon we belong to in society, is the first principle ... of public affections. It is the first link in the series by which we

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that Polanyi does not refer to civil society as such.

proceed towards a love of our country and to mankind.” Politically, CS serves as a space within which individuals gather together to express and advance their convictions politically by means of political parties.

In thinking about prosperity and poverty (economics), Fukuyama speaks of cultural communities which are not formed by explicit rules and regulations but by a set of ethical habits and reciprocal moral obligations, internalized by each of the community members (Fukuyama 1995:26). Such communities enable spontaneous sociability (Fukuyama 1992:27). These shape the foundations of trust and grounds of a civil society. Novak argues, “Both (a democracy and market economy) require a special moral cultural base...Lacking that moral-cultural base, neither can be made to work (Novak 1982:16). The moral-cultural base, to my mind, springs from and are transmitted by the tacit functions of CAT’s socio-epistemic functions.

While some thinkers see CS is as remedy to the individual’s anomie of modernity (Fukuyama 1995), others see it as problematic. Marx, for example, identified CS as the problem to be solved rather than its solution. Ehrenberg, a Gramscian Marxist<sup>2</sup>, sees CS as problematic in light of the multinational corporation dominance, and growth of the bureaucratic state; he holds it requires reformulation (Ehrenberg 1999).

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<sup>2</sup> See [https://www.google.com/search?q=Is+John+Ehrenberg+a+Gramscian+Marxist&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8&amc=1&udm=50&aep=42&cu=0&qsubts=1779792544910&source=chrome.crn.rb&mstk=AUtExfD-T4dbxVgj3m\\_2sLTU\\_qvbF3wMevG\\_13-j9FSs1njK1JFFLjOdWSLoMB81UBX3cCVQ87qti2MkW\\_xOpjlyV4jQNChBvch6GGXRZySL\\_DP\\_N\\_bTqymAJ6tuAZyPzbt5RXd\\_DYbl8I5UXhsEIJds\\_D1V3nn96idY7c5U8WuhM-ljnKoQv-nzxeVUS2vPS\\_bGS\\_wi0F1us-8Z4XorqKXyl8PI\\_MmUQE1zW1srazqw2WfaPu9Lg-8jwCqEQU\\_fX3Xlr8aJ9XlyjR2WsuUUhywuxf\\_pjLCnGUF3Ifn0dsw7Moizm-PC3UfhKtUVmzGAs04XZk9wXDBLixhoUul4ryB8Fu8BP7emPB6JzPhy8Ylu4gO54EAWL2kKU7phjVYg97nflcD0vx5RR435EoPe4Efv3lh5swx-rqowvTfkLPfOJtccywNLAofOUrhzSxrmXpJXFYcPgyHSJ4&csuir=1&mtid=onoVasG3E-2L7NYPIP7dka4](https://www.google.com/search?q=Is+John+Ehrenberg+a+Gramscian+Marxist&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8&amc=1&udm=50&aep=42&cu=0&qsubts=1779792544910&source=chrome.crn.rb&mstk=AUtExfD-T4dbxVgj3m_2sLTU_qvbF3wMevG_13-j9FSs1njK1JFFLjOdWSLoMB81UBX3cCVQ87qti2MkW_xOpjlyV4jQNChBvch6GGXRZySL_DP_N_bTqymAJ6tuAZyPzbt5RXd_DYbl8I5UXhsEIJds_D1V3nn96idY7c5U8WuhM-ljnKoQv-nzxeVUS2vPS_bGS_wi0F1us-8Z4XorqKXyl8PI_MmUQE1zW1srazqw2WfaPu9Lg-8jwCqEQU_fX3Xlr8aJ9XlyjR2WsuUUhywuxf_pjLCnGUF3Ifn0dsw7Moizm-PC3UfhKtUVmzGAs04XZk9wXDBLixhoUul4ryB8Fu8BP7emPB6JzPhy8Ylu4gO54EAWL2kKU7phjVYg97nflcD0vx5RR435EoPe4Efv3lh5swx-rqowvTfkLPfOJtccywNLAofOUrhzSxrmXpJXFYcPgyHSJ4&csuir=1&mtid=onoVasG3E-2L7NYPIP7dka4)

Philosophy's communitarian stream also sets community over individual; among its adherents are Charles Taylor, Michael Sandel, Alistair MacIntyre and Michael Walzer (Mulhall and Swift 1997). Indeed, MacIntyre is brought into conversation with Polanyi by Mitchell (Mitchell 2006) Communitarians emphasize community (here CS) over social freedom or individual, or, in my triad, CAT over IF. Consequently, it tends to be totalitarian, or the loss of intellectual freedom going to truth.

### **III. The Free Society**

Having sketched an outline of CS in its social dimension as preparation to incorporate its formulation as the overemphasis on CAT, let me summarize core social features a Free Society (FS) as prelude to its conversion into Polanyian terms, the overemphasis of critical reason. Its constellation of core concepts are individualism, social freedom and progress (Freedman 1998 ); others add reason (Heywood 2000). FS is institutionally characterized by: (1) rule of law; (2) individual rights; (3) democratic representation; and (5) economic freedom. It adheres to tolerance, pluralism and voluntary association and epistemically, to critical reason. In terms of IF, FS's overemphasis of critical reason gives nihilism. Even more, critical reason leaves it vulnerable to Polanyi's 'moral inversion', the fusion of moral skepticism and moral passions bedeviling modernity.

### **IV. Polanyi's analysis of liberal free society**

Liberalism's FS overemphasizes private over public freedom hence tends to nihilism and is embodied in Romanticism's unique, lawless individual (Polanyi 1951:40). Private freedom performs no social function (Polanyi 1951:194) Indeed, it prepares the mind for submission to public despotism (Polanyi 1951:194), leads to anarchy, even barbarism (Polanyi 1940:57) By

contrast, public freedom performs a social function leading to social cohesion (Polanyi 1951:194). Utilitarianism's individualist freedom is a private and negative freedom (Polanyi 1951:40)

## **V. A Polanyian free society**

I differentiate a Polanyian from liberal FS. It operates by what he denotes the principle of coordinated action or spontaneous order.

Coordinated action consists of the adjustment of each scientist's activities to the results achieved hitherto by others... We see... a two-fold claim that... the actions of individuals may become spontaneously-and yet efficiently coordinated... under the two-fold condition that each suggested new step can be readily judged as to its correctness or otherwise and that each step can be rapidly brought to the notice of all participants and taken into account by them when they make their own next move (Polanyi 1951:41,42).

A 'spontaneous order' is achieved among humans by allowing them to interact on their own initiative-subject only to laws which apply uniformly to all of them (Polanyi 1951:195). This, to Polanyi's mind, is the justification of liberty: it is of public benefit (Polanyi 1951:195). A spontaneous order exists only under the condition each member can take into account what others have done before in the same context (Polanyi 1951:196). This requires that information about the state of affairs be available to each member of the group (Polanyi 1951:195).

The essay, "Foundations of Academic Freedom" identifies 'coordinated action' and 'spontaneous order.' It links academic freedom, that is, individual creativity and the rigorous demands of a scientific CAT, a joining of negative and positive freedoms (Polanyi 1951:48). The two spring forth from the scientific community's belief in coherent spiritual or transcendent realities; their beauty and obligations impels and guides both creativity and discipline of science in establishing

contact with a transcendent reality. We have a glimpse of authentic IF, as the pursuit of truth or contact with reality.

## **VI. Towards a Polanyian ‘Intellectual Freedom’: ‘Moral Inversion’**

Both CS and FS fail to account for an epistemic dimension which guides and compels societies and their individuals, that is, an account of IF. If the grounds and justification of IF fail, it succumbs to totalitarianism or nihilism. ‘Moral inversion’ (MI) notes the lack of grounds for morality in the liberal order. Because MI marks a distorted IF rooted in a wrong epistemology, it links in Polanyi’s shift from SF to epistemology. The move marks his perception of a moral contradiction of an explosive dynamic at work in Western thought, a disturbance he termed moral inversion (MI); to this I turn.

MI answers the question of why Polanyi shifted his focus from SF to the questions of epistemology and justification of moral knowledge. MI, its causes and consequences shifts his argument from the grounds of freedom to the grounds of truth in the endeavor to achieve contact with a spiritual reality capable of revealing itself by Indeterminate Future Manifestations. MI gives the basis for hope in humankind’s perplexing and dark hours.

MI, to Polanyi’s mind, is more than nihilism as it is too dynamic to be mere nihilism. It is born out of a deep contradiction between Greek moral skepticism and Christian moral passions at work in Western thought, the contradiction explaining its violent dynamism. MI accounted for the extreme passion present in Marxists.

MI is present throughout the Polanyi corpus but with a variety of approaches. ‘Perils of Inconsistency’ (Polanyi 1951:Ch 7) considers how liberal intellectual freedom stressed moral skepticism thereby negating intellectual and social freedom. MI is significant in the

“Conviviality” (Polanyi 1958:Chap 7) as he gives an account to what he terms the ‘dynamo-objective’ to explain MI’s moral power. “Beyond Nihilism” considers how the moral passions residing in Judaism and Christianity fused with the moral skepticism rooted in critical thought giving MI powerful moral dynamism (Polanyi ed Grene 1969Chap 1).

Because of its centrality in the Polanyi corpus, most Polanyi scholars give it some attention. But D.M. Yeager’s study of MI is an outstanding analysis of the concept and deserves attention here (Yeager 2002-2003). Yeager constructs her work around Polanyi’s MI around the notion of moral passions (Yeager 2002-2003:23-37) which sets her work apart from most Polanyians (who emphasize its skepticism). Moral passions, she writes

belong to the tacit dimension of my being...at its proximate root, it is a communally engendered emotion or motive, that a directed longing or desire, a power of acting towards achievement impelling my person towards an anticipated but as yet unreal state of affairs...moral passions...can be misbegotten or misdirected (Yeager 2002-2003;36)

Going back to Polanyi, “Freedom of thought (IF here) is rendered pointless, and must disappear, where reason and morality are deprived of their status as a force in their own right” (Polanyi 1951:133); the power he speaks of here I take to point to moral power, a power of identifying significance, conviction and persuasion (Polanyi 1958:Chap 6). These powers are the grounds of intellectual freedoms including freedom of conscience.

In contrast to objectivism, the moral realm is a valid and vital part of thought to Polanyi’s mind:

By establishing these freedoms, society constitutes itself as a community of people believing the validity and power of the things of the mind and in our obligation to

them...There is no justification for demanding freedom of thought unless you believe that thought has a power of its own. (Polanyi 1951:238)

Finally, he notes

(I)n the mental development of some people in our own days, the causal sequence has been reversed. They discovered that they could no longer bear to repeat lies and must contradict, and only later believed this implied a belief in truth and the obligation of telling it.” (Polanyi 1951)

The above dynamics preceded yet foretold the Hungarian Revolution (Grene 1969:Chap 2) and the collapse of communism at the 80’s end. It was succinctly stated by V Havel in his essay, “The Power of the Powerless” (Havel 1985). The power of thought grounded in and pointing to a spiritual reality constitutes the grounds of Polanyi’s hope.

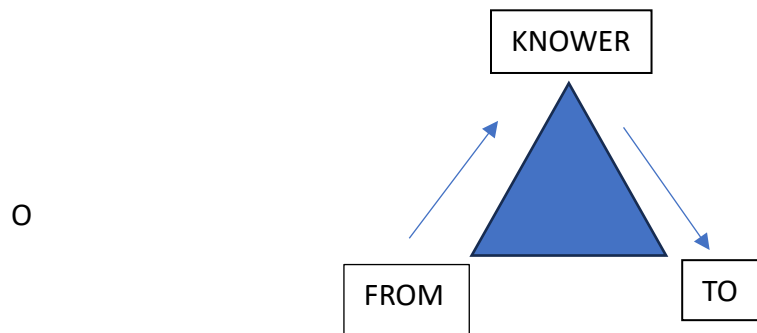
## **VII. Polanyi’s Turn to Epistemology:**

The presence of MI and its genealogy in objectivism brings Polanyi’s focus to the realm of epistemology, the philosophical study of knowledge, how it is apprehended, of relations between knower and known and its limits. He believes that MI points to a deep malaise which entered Western culture with Enlightenment: epistemic objectivism. Objectivism falsifies our understanding of science, that is, how it functions, its structures and aim. It distorts our understanding of the world, ourselves and knowledge.

Polanyi states science absent its intellectual passions,

can then no longer hope to survive on an island of positive facts around which the rest of man’s intellectual heritage sinks to the status of subjective emotionalism (Polanyi 1958:134)

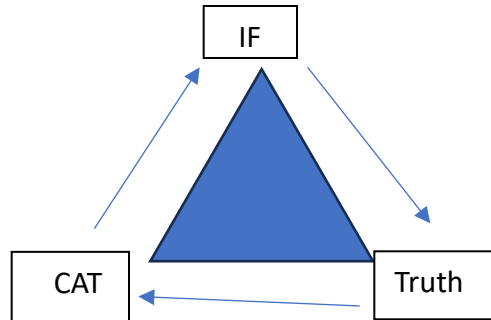
TTK entails his critique of objectivism and rejoinder to it. primarily in two works: Personal Knowledge (Polanyi 1958) and The Tacit Dimension (Polanyi 1966). It is shown as:



TTK is stated here as: tacit knowing moves from by the act of tacit knowing to the object being known. From engages personal, clues or parts, subsidiary, proximate, bodily embodied, intellectual frameworks, premises, involves CAT and finally experience. The knower in the act of knowing uses skills, integration, perception, intellectual passions, intuition, originality, imagination, freedom, creativity, intentionality, judgment, the tacit powers of the mind and indwelling or interiorization. To involves the object, whole, focal, distal, mind, undisclosed reality, theory, truth or knowledge, articulated rationality and further problems pointing to reality, the IFM phenomenon.

I take the theory of tacit knowledge and fuse it with Polanyi's earlier social theory to come up with a new understanding of intellectual freedom. All tacit knowing involves CAT on the from side of tacit knowing notation. CAT is both social and epistemic therefore. The creative act of tacit knowing on the from side involves CAT (is limited by CAT) and transcends the limits of CAT in going to truth (disclosure of a new aspect of an IFM reality.) Intellectual freedom is tacit knowing going from CAT but overcoming its limits in going to truth.

## VII. Conclusion: Closing the hermeneutical circle of IF



IF's hermeneutical circle can now be closed. The act of creative tacit knowing reconstitutes the self of the knower and results in the formation of a new CAT emerges. This on the conditions that (1) while I accept truth as independent of my knowledge of it; and (2) accessible to all. IF means that (1) I can force no-one to see or believe it. (Polanyi 1964)

This is on the grounds and conditions that our love of truth is affirmed by our adherence to a traditional practice within a community dedicated to truth. Our adherence to the community is an act of conviction, that is faith. The metaphysical believer believes that it is possible to convey a hint of mental satisfaction that the other is lacking and this hint may lead to a process of conversion. Hence, the believer can gather a group of adherers by the strength of her/his convictions and a new CAT comes into being, this on the condition that genuine contact with an IFM reality has been established. This, the hermeneutical circle of my re-interpreted TTK, shows that both CS and FS need a bearing that only truth, goodness, compassion and beauty give. It does open the possibility of a religious answer and from it, a response of worship.

Burke, E. (1790 ). Reflections on the Revolution.

Ehrenberg, J. (1999). Civil Society: The Critical History of an Idea. New York, New York University Press.

x Civil society is an old idea and has long provided fruitful vantage point from which to evaluate the central categories of political thought. But many of the lessons that the past offers are obscured by the restricted political environment that conditions much contemporary work. Because its antecedents have never been adequately explored, civil society is often deployed in a thin, undertheorized and confusing fashion. There is considerably more to this concept than meets the eye and an explication of tradition can help us evaluate contemporary assumptions about its democratic potential. This book examines the historical, political and theoretical evolution of the way civil society has been theorized for two and half millennia of Western political theory.

This book examines the historical, political and theoretical evolution of the way civil society has been theorized over two and a half millennia of Western political theory. Broadly, speaking, three distinct modes of thought have marked its development, though considerable cross-fertilization has always enriched each tradition. Reflecting its orientation toward broad categories of analysis, classical and medieval thought generally equated civil society with politically organized commonwealths. Whether its final source of authority was secular or religious, civil society made civilization possible because people lived in law-governed associations protected by the power of the state. Such conceptions shaped the way civil society was understood for centuries. As the forces of modernity began to undermine the embedded economies and universal knowledge of the Middle Ages, the gradual formation of national markets and national states gave rise to a second tradition that began to conceptualize civil society as a civilization made possible by production, individual interest, competition and need.

Frieden, M. (1998). Ideologies and Political Theory. Oxford, UK, Clarendon Press.

Fukuyama, F. (1992). "The End of History And The Last Man."

This book is an attempt to reformulate in the wake of collapse of communism a universal history and end of man or a recovery of teleology by means of re-establishing a more realistic or perhaps Hegelian model of anthropology.

Fukuyama, F. (1995). Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity New York, Free Press.

Greene, M. e. (1969). Knowing and Being: Essays by Michael Polanyi. London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, Ltd.

This is a wide ranging collection of essays by Polanyi gathered by Greene. It contains the work "The Lesson of the Hungarian Revolution" as well as "Beyond Nihilism"

Havel, V., et al (1985). "Power of the Powerless."

A series of essays by Czech dissidents which deals with the dominant features of the new or post totalitarianism and the way forward. They insist that there is a linkage between morality and politics

Heywood, A. (2000). Key Concepts in Politics. Palgrave Study Guides. Basingstoke, Palgrave.

This work appears to be an excellent introduction towards more precision in the use of political concepts embodied in political terms

Mitchell, M. T. (2006). "Michael Polanyi, Alasdair MacIntyre, and the Role of Tradition." Humanitas **14**(1&2): 97-125.

Mulhall, S. and A. Swift (1997). Libertarians and Communitarians. Oxford, Blackwell Publishing.

Over the past decade, one of the most controversial and influential challenges to liberal political theory has been mounted by a number of writers usually labelled 'communitarian.' Focusing primarily upon the philosophical and metaphysical underpinnings of liberal accounts of justice, these critics have argued that such accounts presuppose and inadequate conception of the person and the relationship between individuals and their communities, resulting in an impoverished view of the role of the state.

Novak, M. (1982). The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism, Simon & Schusterr.

Polanyi, M. (1940). The Contempt of Freedom. London, CA Watts & Co.

This is a series of essays written from 1935 to 1940. In these years the ideas of liberty were left almost uncultivated.

Polanyi, M. (1951). The Logic of Liberty. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.

Polanyi, M. (1958). Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-critical Philosophy. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.

Polanyi, M. (1964). Science, Faith and Society. Chicago, University of Chicago.

Polanyi, M. (1966). The tacit dimension. Garden City, N.Y, Doubleday.

Yeager, D. M. (2002-2003). "Confronting the Minotaur: Moral Inversion and Polanyi's Moral Philosophy." Tradition and Discovery **29-1**: 22-46.

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