

“Contact With Reality: Reflections Upon Completing a Good Beginning”

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Esther L. Meek, Ph.D., Professor of Philosophy, Geneva College

Contact With Reality, and Why the Book Matters

This year saw the publication of my book, *Contact With Reality: Michael Polanyi’s Realism and Why It Matters*.¹ This book presents Polanyi’s distinctive epistemic realism, centering on his recurrent “reality statement,” that a discovery’s having made contact with reality is attended by and attested to the discoverer’s sense of indeterminate future manifestations. Real is that which manifests itself indeterminately in the future.² After an introduction to Polanyian epistemology, the book presents this claim and develops it systematically. This includes a fine-grained attempt to connect, compare and contrast Polanyi’s realism with and to related discussions prevailing in philosophy of science. Since a large portion of the book a refined version of my never-published 1985 dissertation, the main conversants in this interchange of Karl Popper, T.S. Kuhn, Paul Feyerabend, and the like. However, since these philosophers of science still occupy a critical place in the history of philosophy of science and thus still figure into discussions to date, the interchange is important and current. The book’s freshly written chapters selectively update the still-prominent realist-antirealist debate, and how Polanyi’s work would abet that if invited into it.³ Finally, my *Contact With Reality* endeavors to offer a justification of Polanyi’s realism. This is something that Polanyi never seems to offer—simply because for him it was never a live question. My justification consists of turning to search the work of phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty for it, as other thinkers seem to. In the end, however, I determine that Polanyi’s realism is actually superior and provides its own justification. In conclusion I begin what I hope will be my happy inquiry in the coming years: utilizing the work of metaphysician D.C. Schindler, I delve into the implications of Polanyi’s reality statement for the nature of reality itself.

¹ Meek, *Contact With Reality* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2017) (hereafter CWR).

² Polanyi, *SFS*, 10; Meek, *CWR*, “Introduction.”

³ My book’s second part includes two chapters devoted to updating the book to reflect and engage the current ongoing realism-antirealism conversation. One of these chapters Polanyians are already familiar with: it is my engagement of the 2015 *Retrieving Realism*, by philosophers Charles Taylor and Hubert Dreyfus (“Contact With Reality: Comparing Michael Polanyi and Taylor and Dreyfus, *Retrieving Realism*” (*TAD* 43:3); “Contact With Reality: Retrospect and Prospect” (paper for the Polanyi Society Conference, Nashotah, Wisconsin, June 9, 2016. This became my 2017 book’s Chapter 12). The other chapter selectively represents and engages the work of philosophers convened by William Alston, and also the scientific realist proposals of Anjan Chakravartty. I reflect primarily on what difference it would make for Polanyi’s thought to be invited to contribute to this ongoing conversation.

In this paper I would like to acquaint you very briefly with my current views regarding Polanyian realism, its implications and prospects. After these introductory comments about why Polanyi's realism matters, first I will make a couple remarks regarding my ongoing effort to understand and appreciate Polanyi's realist statement. These are prompted by my finally being freed enough from writing to reread some Polanyi texts, including *Personal Knowledge*. And second, I will acquaint you with my fledgling effort to explore its implicit metaphysical dimensions, with the help of the work of philosopher D.C. Schindler.

Many of you know of my several-decade preoccupation with Michael Polanyi's realism. A smaller number of you may know why this has mattered so deeply to me. As I recount in the book's fresh reframing of my old work, as a child of 13 I began to be driven by two heartfelt philosophical questions, one of which was, how do I know that there is a reality outside my mind? I deemed it a crazy question, but felt I had no proof for this extremely essential matter. Bertrand Russell's "problem of the external world,"⁴ which he could not resolve but resolved to soldier through, was for me more of an existential crisis. Polanyi's "reality statement," when I found it in grad school, offered what I have continued to feel is the sole positive and hope-filled response to allay my skepticism. However, as my 2017 book represents, it took writing a dissertation on it, but then also living with it for some decades, for my skepticism actually to subside.

Because my own quest took decades, I wanted this two-part book to reflect the whole of the quest. Thus, in revising the dissertation decades later, reframing it, and complementing it with a fresh Part II, I was doing far more than updating the research. I hope I have presented a life of eventual transition from child skeptic to what I think of now as an exuberant realist, as well as a witness to the real. I know that part of this was just growing up. But I feel that it was maturing into the profound claims of Michael Polanyi. I hope that presenting this before and after will impact the reader as well.

As you may surmise from the book's title, I believe that Polanyi's distinctive proposal matters, not just to me, but far more broadly. I believe that my childhood question arises integrally in the epistemic stance that spawned modernity and still holds it in its thrall. I had the question because many people have the question. So Polanyi's utterly distinctive realism matters to everyone still embedded as we are in the modern age.

Modernity has proven to be an anti-realist age. It's arguable that Descartes' cogito, the vision which begins the era in its exaltation of the self to anchor certainty. This produces a "lonely" mind, by definition cut off, me-in-here, world-out-there-maybe, from reality.⁵ While the idea that a "knower" could just as possibly be given experiences false to reality is not new with Descartes and his evil genie, the idea of the self that births modernity renders the problem of realism as central to modernist epistemology.

⁴ Bertrand Russell, *Our Knowledge of the External World* (orig. pub. 1914).

⁵ D.C. Schindler, "A Pre-Modern Response to the Post-Modern 'Lonely Mind.'" The Dr. Byron I. Bitar Memorial Lecture Series, Geneva College, March 25-26, 2015.

Plus, the ideal of certainty appears to have been offered initially in hopes of “human mastery over nature”—control of rather than communion with the real. This still dominating ideal obviously defaces and threatens the yet to be known, even as it sustains unquestioned belief in knowledge by definition exact and articulate, with no epistemic remainder (and no responsibility necessary either). This vision defined the assiduous efforts of early philosophers of science. It can be seen still to hold sway in ongoing discussions of realism such as the ones selectively presented and assessed in Part II of my book.

Precisely because of the pervasive antirealism of the age, the question, what is real?, may be the most urgently felt question. I have only to recall the young man I met in August in Birmingham, smartly dressed in coat and bowtie, about to embark on graduate study. His face was a study of existential uncertainty. What he said was, “I don’t know what, if anything, is real.” I believe that people’s claims about private truth and reality bear witness to our distrust of the real, as do people’s claims to make reality however they want it to be. My students always seem to need “reality” defined for them, and find it unimaginable that it might refer to something objective.

Recently something came to my attention that showcases the utter distinctiveness and significance of this claim of Polanyi’s against the backdrop of this modern age. This fall I was privileged to be included in an email conversation concerning puzzlements in Polanyi’s personal story in his later years. Attached to one email was a couple of letters related to the question of T.S. Kuhn’s having been influenced or not by Polanyi’s work, and having done him any discredit in not crediting him. One of these letters was Kuhn’s own, responding to the matter. It was indeed an ambiguous response. In my opinion it was also ungenerous. But one thing stood out to me. Kuhn identified two reasons why he had been disinclined to associate his own work with Polanyi’s—two problems he had with what Polanyi was doing. One of them he referred to as Polanyi’s “ESP”: “Also I have been bothered to the extent to which Michael resorts to something very like ESP when trying to explain how it is that the dedicated scientist gains his insight into nature.” Later in the letter Kuhn also recalls dismissing Polanyi’s emphasis on apprenticeship as “another manifestation of the occasional quasi-mystical elements in Michael’s thought.”⁶ I trust I am not mistaken in inferring that that to which Kuhn refers as ESP, and as a quasi-mystical element, is just the topic of my lifelong fascination—Polanyi’s attestation as a discoverer to the sense of indeterminate future manifestations!

This to me is telling. It shows how Polanyi was regarded by Kuhn. I think it is appropriate to generalize: it shows how Polanyi was regarded by the dominant tradition in philosophy of science, and at an especially critical juncture of Kuhn’s anti-realist history-of-science departure from logical empiricism. I read it as follows: *Of course* scientific knowledge is exhaustively explained and justified claims; or if we are to acknowledge the conversion-like paradigm shifts that the history of science displays, we must settle for anti-realism, incommensurability, and arbitrary conventionalism over the acknowledgement of any hint of unspecifiable “mystical” attunement to reality. We must shift these “non-epistemic” factors outside knowledge to history, sociology, etc. Modernity guts Polanyi’s argument; it guts the witness of a

⁶ February 28, 1967 letter from Thomas S. Kuhn to William Poteat. Polanyi Archives, Regenstein Library, Box 6:9 [missing; but also in the Poteat Archives].

philosophically and culturally savvy premier scientist. It does so by ruling out of court both the evidence and the epistemic proposals he was making.

But by the same token, Polanyi's proposals are precisely and strategically what are needed to dispel modernity's deadening epistemic myopia and return hope and contact to human efforts to know. If it is heard, Polanyi's argument is compelling: no scientific knowledge has a prayer of coming about, being meaningful, being right or fruitful apart from the personal participation of the knower in all the ways *Personal Knowledge* delineates: valuations, powers, commitments, indwelling maxims and unknowns, subsidiary-focal integration, intellectual passions, selective, heuristic and persuasive, intuitively sensing clues and intimations, apprenticeship, connoisseurship, and a plethora of other tacit coefficients. And commitment to reality and truth must anchor it all and never be reduced or replaced by pseudosubstitution. That Polanyi is pointedly, explicitly, and effectively discrediting both positivism and what is known as "standard" philosophy of science is blatant in *Personal Knowledge*.⁷⁸

In my personal gradual growth to realism, I have not ever left behind the Polanyian statement of reality as that which manifests itself indeterminately in the future. I believe I have only grown into it and come to appreciate it more deeply. The final conclusion of the 2017 book's argument moves beyond that of the old dissertation: I conclude that Polanyian realism is superior to other candidates, it triumphs over antirealist efforts, and it offers its own justification. Polanyian realism uniquely focuses on discovery; this stands in direct challenge both to anti-realism and to realist efforts that turn on a pretheoretical anchorage such as typifies phenomenology.

I continue to want to understand the reality statement more. And I inaugurate one direction of this inquiry at the end of the book: that is, to pursue the matter of reality itself, metaphysically. I made sure to have the text's last word be, "beginning"; I feel that my childhood questions have been resolved and I have been set free to launch out in fresh ways.

⁷ In saying this I acknowledge that the compare/contrast which I labored over in my dissertation as required by my supervisor, in the effort to "connect" Polanyi with the prevailing discussion, no doubt failed to register that Polanyi had already "won the fight" with no help from anyone else. Polanyi did not need my effort to do it for him.

⁸ There is one other factor in play that I feel that later modernity would find deeply offensive in Polanyi's proposals. They could be viewed as elitist, and not at all democratic. It is evident that Polanyi is convinced that only a few people may be (and perhaps need be) geniuses in science. This goes with his heavy emphasis on apprenticeship, connoisseurship, etc. My sense is that the prevailing tradition in the epistemology of philosophy of science is essentially democratic and thus plebian (Polanyi's word is "philistine"): knowledge must be accessible to all, apart from any elitist talent or training. But in response to this objection, it must be pointed out that Polanyi devotes extended effort to connecting the genius (at the end of the chapter on articulation) to the animal (at the beginning of the same chapter). Polanyi accords expertise to the simplest perception, esp. in the meaningful indwelling of language, by every human being. One need not be a scientist to practice every dimension of the personal participation in knowing that he helpfully identifies. If learning the English language as a two-year-old doesn't count as apprenticeship to an expert, I don't know what would.

Fresh Re-Flection on Contact with Reality

On rereading *Science, Faith and Society*, and *Personal Knowledge* this fall,⁹ a couple things are apparent to me. One is that Polanyi labored to save scientific knowledge from self-destruction by reintroducing, expanding, and accrediting, the critically involved knower and the known (reality), which simply must bookend, stitch together, and justify anything that counts as knowledge. And these two, knower and reality, are intrinsically intertwined. Whatever risky assent and participation the knower exercises is entirely justified by submission to the half-understood real. Conversely, the actual phenomenon of indeterminate future manifestations could only ever be experienced, identified and accredited by an epistemology which accredits more-than-articulate knowledge. The knower's involvement is personal participation; the known's involvement is indeterminate future manifestations.

For example, Polanyi writes:

Such is the *personal participation* of the knower in all acts of understanding. But this does not make our understanding *subjective*. Comprehension is neither an arbitrary act nor a passive experience, but a responsible act claiming universal validity. Such knowing is indeed *objective* in the sense of establishing contact with a hidden reality; a contact that is defined as the condition for anticipating an indeterminate range of yet unknown (and perhaps yet inconceivable) true implications.¹⁰

The tandem exaltation of the ubiquitous personal participation of the knower along with the knower's capacity for contacting reality develops, in Polanyi's epistemic account, into the connected bracketing of confident utterance with personal passion and accredited facts within the structure of commitment.¹¹ This structure is Polanyi's direct challenge to positivism, "empiricism," objectivism and subjectivism, and relativism. Understanding, truth and reality are what they are within the commitment situation.

Secondly, as I reread the Polanyi texts, it appears to me that he considered this remarkable, predictable, frequent reality statement to be obvious and ordinary. Real things, once you find them, display their reality by cropping up repeatedly in various places and characteristically variant ways. Thus, indeterminate future manifestations. If it's real, it will be borne out in ways you can't even name at the moment. And the more real it is, the deeper and farther reaching, the more uncanny and surprising will be its manifestations. That's the witness of the subsequent work of Kepler, Newton and Einstein to the vision of Copernicus—to name only the grandest and most well-known one. Polanyi's realism isn't developed to counterbalance the personal participation of knowers. Its being accredited doesn't obviate the fact that it is an ordinary phenomenon that scientists and the rest of us bank on as a matter of course. So for example, Polanyi writes:

⁹ I have allowed myself to read Polanyi with my biennial philosophy of science class for the first time, rather than "standard" works.

¹⁰ Polanyi, *PK*, vii-viii.

¹¹ Polanyi, *PK*, 303.

For years I have written about this kind of anticipation, but only now can I see an explanation for such anticipations. I see that the anticipations offered to us by good problems should be understood in the same way as the anticipations aroused by all true facts of nature. Thus, when a coherent set of clues presents us with the sense of a hidden reality in nature, we are visited by an anticipation similar to that which we feel in seeing any object already recognized to be real.¹²

The IFM Effect just is the ordinary presentation of real things. At the moment of discovery, however, the discoverer would only have a sense of these as intimations or hints of the profundity and thus reality of his/her discovery. They are no different in epistemic status from whatever it is that supports the confident assessment of an expert that a certain problem is a problem, and is a good problem. So these unspecifiable intimations are specimens of essential, risky, responsible and expert, personal participation of the knower in the knowing. But they are simultaneously intimations of the real. It's just reality. Polanyi is just saying how to recognize it.

Just before I turn to the second part of this essay, I want to reflect on one other matter I'm attempting to put together as I reread Polanyi's work. In the past I have dismissed serious consideration of Polanyi's talk of levels of being. But now it seems to me that something like levels can't help but be correct. In my recent rereading *Personal Knowledge*, I have noted that Polanyi conceives of the scientist's search and discovery as being a matter of uncovering a principle.¹³ Finding such a principle—finding a hitherto hidden structure, a formula, a pattern, a law—something that connects the dots to reveal a “comprehensive entity”—Polanyi says, involves a logical leap to a Gestalt-like pattern that renders the particulars as meaningful clues and subsidiaries. It is to discover rationality in nature—as per Polanyi's argument in *PK* chapter 1. Polanyi himself aligns the two-level structure of subsidiary and focal in integration with emergent levels of meaning and being.¹⁴ The new thought I record here is that the breakthrough that is discovery seems intrinsically to be a breakthrough to a higher emergent level. The higher-level principle one discovers is irreducible to the clues which suggested it and receive full meaning in view of that principle. That principle is embedded in the rational coherence of the higher level. To find a *thing*, where previously one did not see *anything*, requires accessing a higher level of being.¹⁵ I believe we can also connect to this Polanyi's intriguing reflection on dwelling in and breaking out.¹⁶ This is just how the longing to understand, and the breakthrough to a higher-level understanding

¹² Meek, CwR, 235. Orig. Polanyi, “Genius in Science,” 60-61.

¹³ Polanyi, SFS, ch 1.

¹⁴ Polanyi, “Emergence,” chap. 2 in *TD*. I am considering this matter of emergent levels independent of the question of origins, and rather as a metaphysical matter.

¹⁵ I remember once noting the lingo of someone referring to the romantic status of two people's involvement with each other. This person asked, “Are they an item?” If the answer was yes, a new comprehensive entity could be said to be seen—one with indeterminate future prospects!

¹⁶ *PK*, 195-202.

feels: we are breaking out of what we have been dwelling in—the lower level—into the higher one. And why would we not desire that, especially if that higher level holds the interpretative and ontological key to the thing we desire to know? In the near future, I want to see if I can move on from here to connect these matters with Schindler’s metaphysics.

Ecstatic, Epiphanic, Knowing and Being: D.C. Schindler

Now to the ending reflection of my 2017 book, *Contact With Reality*. In the final chapter, the third of the book’s fresh second part, I connect Polanyian realism with the work of Catholic philosopher D.C. Schindler.¹⁷ I argued that Polanyi’s subsidiary-focal integration is an uncannily confirming concrete specimen of Schindler’s epistemic proposal that reason is ecstatic. (I’ll define that thesis in a moment.) From this I showed that Schindler gives us warrant to move on to the claim that being, or reality, is ecstatic. In the book, I was wanting to explore the notion that discovery is attested to by a sense of indeterminate future manifestations just because IFMs are the signature of reality itself. Schindler helped me affirm this.

But now, with the book in my rearview mirror, I want to go at the alignment from the other end. Rather than taking Schindler’s work to elucidate Polanyi’s subsidiary-focal integration and realism, I want to take Polanyi’s work as feeling its way to Schindler’s metaphysics. If reality, speaking metaphysically, is as Schindler (and others) recount, then it is reasonable (yet admirable) that a mind as sophisticatedly sensitive as Polanyi’s, unleashed to inquire deeply and authentically into his own heritage and experience as a discoverer, would express things that resonate with that metaphysics. Michael Polanyi, premier scientist with unbelievably profound insight regarding the philosophy and epistemology involved therein, was in his work also being intuitively metaphysical. It’s not that any of us can avoid this. But in his sustained effort to make sense of scientific discovery and to preserve it and Western culture, he was drawing deeply from subterranean metaphysical resources—resources within his own genius, highly educated, psyche, not to mention the European mind at its most classically developed. When an inquirer does accredit his/her own trust in inarticulable matters intuitively grasped and profoundly understood, this kind of foray occurs, is legitimate and can be deeply productive. It may be utterly mistaken; but it also may be right. —As we Polanyians understand.

Very briefly, to say that reason is ecstatic, according to Schindler, is to say that it is essentially always out beyond itself, self-transcending rather than exhaustively contained within itself. Reason, understanding, is a particular thought—and anticipatively more. And it must be seen to be ecstatic if there is to be real knowledge—if it is to be possible for us to be “surprised by truth.”¹⁸ That reason is essentially ecstatic solves the problem of the *Meno*.¹⁹ As I see it, in saying that reason is ecstatic, Schindler is fingering the very phenomenon of discovery, attended by inexhaustive indeterminate future prospects.

¹⁷ Meek, *CwR*, chap. 14: “Recovering Reality” 278-97.

¹⁸ Schindler, *Catholicity of Reason*, chap. 2.

¹⁹ Meek, *CwR*, 283.

Schindler offers this thesis in direct critique of self-destructive modernist epistemology, with its “unholy zeal and false modesty.”²⁰ He offers it as a philosopher fully trained not only in the work of Hans Urs von Balthasar, but also with him in the Great Philosophical and Christian Tradition, in conversation with Plato, Aristotle, Pseudo-Dionysius, Aquinas, Descartes, Galileo, Hegel, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty.²¹ There is nothing lacking in Schindler’s philosophical pedigree. If there was anything lacking in Polanyi’s philosophical accreditation for his message, Schindler’s more than makes up for it.

I cannot begin to represent to you the profound riches of the correspondence I find between his and Polanyi’s work. My book’s final chapter documents this only selectively; please turn there for some idea of it. But I will name a couple things here as I sketch out this fresh future inquiry of mine.

First let me say that I find Schindler’s work to accord even more fully with my own covenant epistemology than with Polanyi—something I chose not to emphasize or develop in the recent book. But since I saw my covenant epistemology developing directly out of Polanyi’s idea of contact with reality, the fact that Schindler’s work resonates with Polanyi’s in the same way, developing the “interpersonhoodness” (or something like it) of knower and known, is especially significant to me, confirming both Polanyi’s work and my own.²²

Here in brief are some of Schindler’s Balthasar-inspired claims about knowing. First, knowing has two centers of agency—not the self alone, but rather the self and the other.²³ Knowing involves “the soul” (a human’s intellect and understanding) and “being” (reality). Knowing, further, involves two simultaneous movements: the soul toward being, but also being toward the soul. And being makes the first overture.²⁴ In fact, being “gives itself to be known; it self-communicates.”²⁵ It is this understanding of knowing as two-centered which sets Schindler in opposition to phenomenology, which recognizes only one center—the soul. He agrees with Polanyi’s sense that phenomenology is essentially not enough to challenge modernity.²⁶

²⁰ Ibid., 246. This is how he characterizes Hegel and Heidegger.

²¹ Of these he is generally drawing with approbation on Plato, Aristotle, and Pseudo-Dionysius, making his claims accord with Aquinas, and critiquing everyone after and including Descartes.

²² Meek, *Loving to Know: Introducing Covenant Epistemology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011).

²³ Meek, CwR, 284.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., 289

²⁶ Schindler, *Catholicity of Reason*, 8-9.

Third, the event of knowing, or discovery, is encounter. This requires fundamentally that the structure of knowing be empathetic. Reason enjoys an immediate contact with reality.²⁷ The soul's contact with being is one of intimacy, feeling-with the other, consent and communion.²⁸ In fact, since the soul is itself being, knowing is "genuine ontological communion with the other."²⁹

You may well ask for the source of these grand claims. I would suggest that Schindler and Balthasar offer two sources. One is an accurate understanding of the Great Philosophical Tradition beginning with Plato ("who was not a Platonist" says Schindler). The other is reflection on "the mother's smile." "The little child awakens to self-consciousness through being addressed by the love of the mother."³⁰ For the baby, the mother's smile is "the excessively generous self-giving of love, ... the event wherein the baby receives the very conditions of possibility and the posture of delighted reach beyond herself to the other."³¹ The mother welcomes the child generously, but she remains personally and irreducibly other, freeing the child as well. This constitutes the child both personally and ontologically. This ontologically formative encounter is essentially an epiphany of beauty as well, where beauty is a visible manifestation of non-appearing depths—the splendor of the form.³² Even this very modest sketch displays the signature ingredients of knowing for Schindler.

It also displays the signature ingredients of being. Being "has a personal face."³³ Schindler devotes an extended portion of his argument in *Catholicity of Reason* to showing that modernity's notion of cause—mechanistic, externalistic, reductivistic, wonder-stripping—has sadly replaced Aristotle's fourfold cause (which is Plato's Good), especially as it is expounded by Pseudo-Dionysius. Causality as properly understood is the excessively generous, erotic (desiring the other), ecstatically creative goodness and personal love of God. It constitutes things in their particularity, even generously bestowing them with the desire to respond. The human's ever-delighted desire to know is our natural wonder-filled response to this ever-delighted desire that is the Good, God.³⁴ And it is not that mechanistic causality is erroneous. It is rather that it is sorely inadequate and metaphysically destructive if taken to be all that

²⁷ Ibid. 285. This aligns with Aquinas' conviction that being (*ens*) is the "first concept to fall into the imagination of the intellect." (Schindler, *Catholicity of Reason*, 5. Orig. quote Aquinas, *In sent.* 8.3)

²⁸ Ibid. Schindler records this delightful claim of Balthasar's: "The soul's most fundamental relation to the world is affirmation and joy in being." (*Catholicity of Reason*, 12; orig. quote Balthasar, *Glory of the Lord*, vol. 1, 244). Hear in this consent and delight.

²⁹ Ibid., 290.

³⁰ Schindler, *Catholicity of Reason*, 45, quoting the opening line of Balthasar's "Movement Toward God."

³¹ Ibid., 281.

³² Ibid., 47.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Meek, CwR, 291-92.

there is. Reality is too big for reductivist science or philosophy which endeavors to access it “from below.”³⁵

So Schindler is elaborating a reality that is not “from below,” but rather, “from above.” For him, this is what is known as the analogy of being—that being not only manifests itself in analogous ways, but that these ways devolve from above—“kataleptically”—rather than being emergent from below. Being opens itself from above. So being is ecstatic also, intrinsically itself and inexhaustively more. If you see knowing as the activity of the soul, and the soul as itself being, then knowing just is an instance of ecstatic being, opening beyond itself to an inexhaustible more. So knowing, according to Schindler is “genuine ontological communion with the other.”³⁶ To grasp being as analogical is “to be with and in it as it opens unceasingly beyond itself in ever-new beings. ... Reason is in fact the whole soul, the substance of the rational animal, out beyond itself in and with the world.”³⁷

Schindler specifically affirms that Polanyi is doing epistemology “from above”—and thus in direct challenge to the dominating epistemology of modernity.³⁸ As he sees it, Polanyi’s notion of indwelling just is the knower’s being out there beyond him/herself with the other. And the truth that begins in trust ends with disclosure of reality, in an epiphanic Gestalt that reveals how disparate aspects of reality fit together concretely in their otherwise hidden unity; “the fruit of a faithful dwelling with the object comes to term, as it were, in an abiding spirit of receptive wonder, and the resulting disclosure thus includes a promise of an inexhaustible ‘more.’ The clarity of the perception of truth is one with the hopeful expectation that keeps knowledge endlessly interesting. As Joseph Pieper puts it, . . . an inexhaustible light.”³⁹ Schindler is here underscoring many dimensions of Polyanian epistemology, including, integrally, the sense of indeterminate future manifestations.

Here is a most delightful comment of Balthasar’s that also reflects the presumption that contacting reality as a knower knows being results both in the conviction of insight and in a sense of future possibilities:

Truth as *emeth* does two things. On the one hand, it is conclusive, in the sense that it puts an end to uncertainty and endless seeking, to conjecture and suspicion, so that this condition of ever-shifting vacillation can give way to the clearly formed, solid evidence of things that are unveiled as they actually are. On the other hand, this closure of

³⁵ Ibid., 290.

³⁶ Ibid., from Schindler, *Catholicity of Reason*, 12.

³⁷ Ibid., from Schindler, *Catholicity of Reason*, 21.

³⁸ Schindler, *Catholicity of Reason*, 17. Meek, *CWR*, 286.

³⁹ Ibid., 78. Pieper reference is to his *Unaustrinkbares Licht* (Munich, Kosel, 1963). Schindler continues in the note: “For Pieper, the inexhaustible truth of things is due to their resting in the unfathomable creative knowledge of God. While Balthasar would ultimately agree, it is significant that he roots mystery more proximately in the very nature of finite being.”

uncertainty and its bad infinity is the unclosing and unsealing of a true infinity of fruitful possibilities and situations. Once truth has become present, a thousand consequences, a thousand insights, spring from it as from a seed. Once being has become evident, this evidence immediately harbors the promise of further truth; it is a door, and entrance, a key to the life of the spirit.⁴⁰

I trust that by now you are able to see easily the resonance between Polanyi and Schindler that I find so exciting, itself full of future prospects. In the near future I would like to move further to put together some pieces that I sense go together. These include: a fuller understanding of what Schindler is saying about the analogy of being, and aligning it if possible with what Polanyi is saying about emergent levels; further inquiry to substantiate my hunch that Polanyi is viewing discovery as a breakthrough to a higher level; how this event aligns with Polanyi's breaking out; deepening my understanding regarding this as knowing and being "from above"; exploring more fully what it means, most fundamentally to be a *thing*—how that requires Aristotle's notion of causality and thus Polanyi's account of knowing.

As I make only a tiny start to align Polanyi's claims with these of Schindler in these matters, it appears to me to be significant that MP was conceiving of the highest level of being to be the interchange of minds known as culture and thought. Polanyi doesn't have anything like the intimate but ontologically transformative mother's smile, except as an instance of conviviality (which is a tacit coefficient of knowing) But if you follow Balthasar and others in making the conviviality of the mother's smile more operative, then that starts to say something about reality, and of a level higher than human thought. Discovery is a breaking out into a higher level. The IFMs attest to its reality. They hint of the formal cause, the what of the thing, the miracle of a thing.⁴¹ But there is also a reference to the totality of being, and to inexhaustible depths, and that I am being addressed.

Then, it seems to me, as we might look to the development of the fetus to provide a window on evolution, why might we not look to the downward, opening out development anchored in the ontological communion of the mother's smile, to make sense of reality? Indeed, the former can fall short when it comes to putting your finger on what it means to be a person. The latter begins with interpersonalhood, which then is bodied forth.⁴² Someday I hope to write a piece called, "Descartes forgot his mamma." But perhaps Polanyi did a little bit too.

One may imagine that all this talk of a higher level than human thought and culture would call for a theology and theologizing. It calls for a level that is the person, interpersonalhood, of God the Holy Trinity. That's as may be. If this is indeed the true character of the highest level, while it is for just that reason impossible to plumb by those of a lower level, the fact is that the level of our humanness is pierced by

⁴⁰ Ibid., n. 79, 109–10. Meek, *CwR*, 288. Original reference: Balthasar, *Theo-Logic I*, 39.

⁴¹ Consider this climactic passage from Schindler, quoted by Meek, *CwR*, 292 (orig. reference Schindler, *Catholicity of Reason*, 223.

⁴² See Rolnick, *Person, Grace and God*.

witnesses to that higher one. One need only take to heart what Balthasar and Schindler (and Meek) are saying about the mother's smile.

In conclusion: to affirm Polanyi's reality statement—that we know we have made contact with reality by the sense we have of its indeterminate future manifestations—is to give oneself to a continual desire for that phenomenon. It is, I believe, desire 100 proof, which taps into the heartbeat of reality, perhaps even in a way that Polanyi himself was not able to understand—not restlessness as he sometimes suggests, but utter delight and generosity. But surely this delight was Polanyi's own testimony:

This endless delight is what the existing body of scientific thought means to the productive scientist: he sees in it an aspect of reality which, as such, promises to be an inexhaustible source of new, promising problems. And his work bears this out; science continues to be fruitful . . . because it offers an insight into the nature of reality.⁴³

⁴³ Ibid., 297. Polanyi, *TD*, 68-69.