

Contingency without Irony: Polanyi's Response to Richard Rorty

*...one of the less important sideshows of Western civilization—metaphysics—is in the process of closing down.*¹

—Richard Rorty

*Rorty appears...still to be trapped in the ideal of critical reason.*²

—John V. Apczynski

*Rorty's position...neglects the possibility and actuality of systematic, non-justificatory philosophy...*³

—R. T. Allen

Introduction

Why resurrect Richard Rorty? His star has passed. Those who find his position congenial have incorporated his vision and, for them, to think as does Rorty has become second nature. On the other hand, those who are offended by Rorty, regarding him as the apotheosis of the seductive toxins of our postmodern age, would like never again to hear his name. So, who is the audience for this late-in-the-game analysis of his thought? In responding to this challenging question, let us begin by noting that one of the things Rorty and Michael Polanyi have in common is that they possess a special appeal to a particular sort of reflective individual. That individual is someone who, exercising marked yet painful integrity, is attempting to formulate a point of view (and also construct a life) in which meaning, personal as well as for the world at large, is possible. This is an individual who, in his honesty, has forthrightly confronted the skepticism and doubt that reigns during our time, and seeks, in his ruminations, to pass beyond it. Rorty's response to this condition is well known and quite popular among persons such as described here. That stance, says Rorty, is a form of modesty predicated on a radical rethinking of the conditions that give rise to the intellectual and moral discomfort issuing from persistent skepticism and doubt. Polanyi is fully cognizant of the acidic impact of skepticism and doubt, and he too in response offers a radical rethinking of the conditions out of which it arises. But, in sharp contrast to Rorty, Polanyi outlines a grand and ambitious alternative—something approximating Christian salvation (perhaps even, as some believe, supplying the epistemology for that salvation itself). The audience for this study, then, consists, to begin with, of those individuals who, with Rorty, cashed in their chips early and potentially settled for something less than was necessary. That audience also includes not only readers attracted to Polanyi who have

yet to sort out just what it is in him that is so appealing, but also persons not yet acquainted with either Rorty or Polanyi who are grappling with the discomfort that unavoidably besets honest, thinking individuals in the wake of the collapse of the reassuring presuppositions of both the previously confident critical era and the period of naïve faith that preceded it.

The plan for the essay is as follows. In the first section we will conduct a preliminary exploration of Rorty's position with the intention of demonstrating that Polanyi and he have much in common. This discussion sets the stage for the next section in which there is a deeper examination of several central Rortian topics and related concepts. At the close of this section, through an examination of Rorty's celebrated "liberal irony," we will outline (to borrow a term from William James) the "cash value" of what Rorty has said. That discussion will be followed by a concluding section in which we will confront the ultimate, deeply personal decisions that arise for the explorer who honestly attends to Rorty's vision in light of Polanyi's deep reflections on man and the world.

Shared Perspectives and Common Ground

Let us begin with a confession. Your author initiated this study under the influence of a prejudice. Because of two prior encounters with Rorty,⁴ he was prepared to discover a monumental chasm between the villainous postmodernist and the comparatively blessed Polanyi. And, indeed, as we shall see, there are differences of the first order between them. Yet, in the process of discovering and elucidating these differences, one must be struck by the significant degree to which the two men share perspectives on very important matters. Even for the committed Polyanian there is much worth pondering in the thought of Rorty.

A particularly fertile issue on which to begin the encounter between Polanyi and Rorty is their rejection of relativism. In a discussion of commitment in *Personal Knowledge*, Polanyi, after stating that "I shall not argue with the sceptic" because "[i]t would not be consistent with my own views if I expected him to abandon a complete system of beliefs on account of any particular series of difficulties," goes on to affirm his "fundamental belief that, in spite of the hazards involved, I am called upon to search for the truth and state my findings."⁵ On Polanyi's account, this search for the truth is conducted under the authority of "self-set standards." He understands, however, that his position is an easy target for the charge of relativism. In response, Polanyi reminds us that the search for truth, even if proceeding under the authority of self-set

standards, is guided by universal intent (submission to such intent being a component of those standards). While it is to be expected that different competent investigators will in their findings sometimes disagree, they are all involved in the same effort to discover that which is real. “Therefore, though every person may believe something different to be true, there is only one truth” (315). This is because each and every explorer is involved in the same enterprise (specifically, searching for the truth under universal intent). Although, during this process, one typically assigns considerable weight to the surrounding consensus as well as to the views of relevant authorities, the process of arriving at the truth is necessarily, and intrinsically, personal (but *not* subjective). After stating that “[t]his position is not solipsistic, since it is based on a belief in an external reality, and implies the existence of other persons who can likewise approach the same reality” (316), he adds, “Nor is it relativistic” (*ibid.*). For Polanyi this conclusion follows because to speak meaningfully of relativism presupposes what his commitment-based analysis of truth precisely denies is possible, namely, that an individual can coincidentally entertain, in regard to a single matter, two or more conflicting contenders to the appellation “true.” One can of course think lazily or incoherently. But, in the case of the serious and competent inquirer claiming to have discovered what is true, there is in that act of affirmation a single conclusion expressed publically under universal intent. “There remains therefore only one truth to speak about” (*ibid.*).⁶

So, what has Rorty to say about relativism? He addresses the matter in a number of places. What he states in an article from 1983 is representative.⁷ Beginning with the familiar observation that relativism is self-refuting, he adds, “there is a difference between saying that every community is as good as every other and saying that we have to work out from the networks we are, from the communities with which we presently identify” (“PBL,” 202). As we shall see shortly, on Rorty’s account the human observer encounters his world through and in terms of a contingent framework (a “tradition”). Hence, “[t]he view that every tradition is an rational or as moral as every other could be held only by a god, someone who had no need to use...the terms ‘rational or ‘moral,’ because she had no need to inquire or deliberate” (202).⁸ Postmodernism is not, says Rorty, relativistic. Rather, “[t]o accuse postmodernism of relativism is to try to put a metanarrative in the postmodernist’s mouth” (202). The assertion of relativism, and the problems that it entails, are the product of a presupposition (namely, the coherence of metanarrative) that Rorty has earlier jettisoned.

Because it will prove extremely important later, let us also mention Rorty's reference to the presupposition of relativism to account for the tortured condition of what he refers to as "wet liberals." Such individuals are tormented by the thought that in their efforts to spread their values (e.g., abolition of racism, respect for women, freedom of expression, etc.) they are engaging in cultural imperialism.⁹ Because these liberals are sufficiently sophisticated to realize that different nations, cultures, and peoples inhabit various and often incompatible traditions, they, due to the influence of the presupposition that something equally authoritative to, or even more authoritative than, their own or any other individual tradition is both possible and necessary, suffer from the suspicion that, in expressing their preferences and acting to institutionalize them elsewhere, they are guilty of cultural bias. Rorty will join Polanyi in offering a forceful response to this sickly perspective.¹⁰

How is it that we inhabit the particular tradition through which we observe and in terms of which we appraise what we encounter? Polanyi, as part of his discussion of "calling" in *Personal Knowledge*, states, "we are creatures of circumstance. Every mental process by which man surpasses the animals is rooted in the early apprenticeship by which the child acquires the idiom of its native community and eventually absorbs the whole cultural heritage to which it succeeds" (*PK*, 322). Even the perspectives of "great pioneers," persons capable of effecting significant innovation, "remain predominantly determined by the time and place of their origin. Our believing is conditioned at its source by our belonging" (322). That we are born into one tradition rather than another is purely contingent. Moreover, the existence of particular traditions is itself contingent. For Polanyi, the universe emerges in an orderly fashion, but the order that we discover is triggered by random events.¹¹ Thus, mankind just happened to emerge, our tradition just happens to exist, and we just happen to be a product of it.

Contingency plays an equally fundamental, but considerably more prominent role for Rorty. It is possible to cite from his writings dozens of passages on the subject. Our purposes will be served by mentioning just a few. In *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*,¹² Rorty refers to contingency of conscience, itself a consequence of "the contingency of the vocabulary in which [human beings] state their highest hopes" (46). Later in the same book, in a discussion of George Orwell, after praising the author for recognizing "that things could usually go either way, that the future was up for grabs" (184), Rorty jarringly observes,

it *just happened* that rule in Europe passed into the hands of people who pitied the humiliated and dreamed of human equality, and that it may *just happen* that the world will wind up being ruled by people who lack any such sentiments or ideas. Socialization...goes all the way down, and who gets to do the socializing is often a matter of who manages to kill whom first. (184-185)

It is unsurprising, then, to hear Rorty referring to morality “as the voice of a contingent human artifact, a community which has grown up subject to the vicissitudes of time and chance, one more of Nature’s ‘experiments’” (60). This phrase could easily have come from Polanyi. Both men are deeply struck by the fact of contingency. At the heart of the present inquiry is the question of which of their responses to it is the more appropriate.

There are at least two philosophical consequences of contingency that Polanyi and Rorty recognize in common: ethnocentrism and the unavoidable circularity of justification.

Let us begin with the latter.

In Chapter 10 of *Personal Knowledge* Polanyi states, “Any enquiry into our ultimate beliefs can be consistent only if it presupposes its own conclusions. It must be intentionally circular” (299). Tellingly, Polanyi goes on to say that this very statement is an illustration of its meaning:

The last statement is itself an instance of the kind of act which it licenses. For it stakes out the ground of my discourse by relying essentially on the very grounds thus staked out; my confident admission of circularity being justified only by my conviction, that in so far as I express my utmost understanding of my intellectual responsibilities as my own personal belief, I may rest assured of having fulfilled the ultimate requirements of self-criticism; that indeed I am obliged to form such personal beliefs and can hold them in a responsible manner, even though I recognize that such a claim can have no other justification than such as it derives from being declared in the very terms which it endorses. (299)¹³

Such a position would be flagrantly subjective and arbitrary if one were at liberty to believe anything he wishes. But Polanyi goes to considerable lengths to demonstrate that, in any defensible conception of “belief,” he and we are not. The ideals to which Polanyi submits include respect for evidence and subordination to the reasonable opinion of appropriate

authorities. (These, too, however, are in the final analysis subject to the circularity noted by Polanyi.)

Remarkably, Rorty is perhaps even more forthright than Polanyi regarding the inevitability of circularity in justification. In an easily overlooked note, he states, “My point about...questions of the form ‘How do you *know* that...?’ ...is simply that there is no practicable way to silence doubt on such matters. Those who press such questions are asking for an epistemic position which nobody is ever likely to have about any matter of moral importance” (*CIS*, 54n).¹⁴ The central reason that such a position is not to be found is that “*We* have to start from where *we* are...[and] we are under no obligations other than the ‘we-intentions’ of the communities with which we identify” (198). Elsewhere, he observes, “there is no natural order of justification of beliefs, no predestined outline for argument to trace.”¹⁵ In a discussion of Dewey, Oakeshott, and Rawls, Rorty declares that each of these writers “would happily grant that a circular justification of our practices, a justification which makes one feature of our culture look good by citing still another, or comparing our culture invidiously with others by reference to our own standards, is the only sort of justification we are going to get” (57). In yet another essay Rorty adds, “We should say that we must, in practice, privilege our own group, even though there can be no noncircular justification for doing so” (“SO,” 29).¹⁶

In this last passage we are, of course, encountering ethnocentrism, a position that Rorty, referring to himself as an “anti-anti-ethnocentrist,” enthusiastically and without reservation embraces.¹⁷ In this connection, he states, “there is nothing to be said about either truth or rationality apart from descriptions of the familiar procedures of justification which a given society—*ours*—uses in one or another area of inquiry” (“SO,” 23). Such ethnocentrism is “inevitable and unobjectionable. It amounts to little more than the claim that people can rationally change their beliefs and desires only by holding most of those beliefs and desires constant...We cannot leap outside our Western social democratic skins when we encounter another culture, and we should not try” (“CWE,” 212). Under this view how are we to regard, for example, “enemies of [our] liberal democracy”? Rorty’s response, purportedly borrowing from Rawls, is to consider them “mad” (“Priority,” 187). In explanation, Rorty observes, “We do so because there is no way to see them as fellow citizens of our constitutional democracy... [who might] be fitted in with those of other citizens...They are crazy because the limits of sanity

are set by what *we* can take seriously. This, in turn, is determined by our upbringing, our historical situation” (187-188).

Polanyi, too, is self-consciously ethnocentric (though not as proudly so as is Rorty). He is compelled to be so, given that ethnocentrism is a vital component of his principal project of establishing meaning. Since this thesis has been argued in detail elsewhere, let us here cite just a single relevant passage from *Personal Knowledge*.¹⁸ In a section titled “Existential Aspects of Commitment,” Polanyi states,

Admittedly, the range within which I acknowledge mental activity as competent and beyond which I reject it as superstition, fatuity, extravagance, madness, or mere twaddle, is determined by my own interpretative framework. And different systems of acknowledged competence are separated by a logical gap, across which they threaten each other by persuasive passions. They are contesting each other’s mental existence. (*PK*, 318-319)

It should be noted that it is not only in intellectual terms that one may be called on to fight. Responding to the fact that the most important things—that which we regard as supreme (the practices, activities, and institutions that make possible the very self that we aspire to and believe is the proper object of our existence)—may be threatened with extinction, Polanyi (as well as Rorty, albeit less readily), acknowledges that it will on occasion be necessary to act forcefully in their defense.¹⁹ As we shall see below, such measures (and, equally, the less dramatic but no less essential activities of initiation and inculcation—what Polanyi calls “primary education”) are entailed by genuine appreciation of the contingencies in terms of which both Rorty and he interpret human existence.²⁰ There are no cosmic guarantees. Instead, the continuation of what we prize (including the self we would be) depends on what we say and do. In such a world ethnocentrism is vital to preservation; to run from it is foolishness which, left uncorrected, leads to self-destruction.

Rorty’s World

It is appropriate that our discussion of similarities between Rorty and Polanyi closed with reference to the self, for there is no more revealing element of Rorty’s position than his conception (or lack thereof) of selfhood. On his view, the self “is a tissue of contingencies” (*CIS*, 32).²¹ It appears to us in terms of a descriptive vocabulary (that is, via a sort of internal

reporting) that is both the product of time and place and in flux (73-74).²² Moreover, there is “no center to the self” (83); it is (merely) “a concatenation of beliefs and desires” (“Priority,” 185, note 24; cf. 189, note 39). Moreover, and very importantly, for Rorty this “network of beliefs, desires, and emotions with nothing behind it” is “constantly reweaving itself” in an ongoing adaptive process (199). Here we have a glimpse of Rorty’s underlying evolutionary perspective. True to his emphasis on contingency, as the self continually coalesces and reweaves in response to environmental stimuli, there is no pre-existing destination. Indeed, under Rorty’s model the very idea of endpoint must be revised. Any arrival is by its very nature transitory. In his conception of human thought and activity we have the comprehensive playing out of Oakeshott’s metaphor of the ship at sea, a vessel whose crew has no sense of from where it hails or to where it is headed, with its sole preoccupation being to keep itself afloat in as rewarding a fashion as is conceivable.

A central feature of the ideal postmodern self that Rorty sets forth in his most enthusiastic moments is its forgetfulness. What does it forget? Well, to begin with, Rorty associates the very meaning of postmodernism with the “forgetting of a certain philosophical tradition” (“CWE,” 222). More specifically, he wants to overcome “the persistence of Enlightenment rhetoric” with its glorification of presumably situation-less universal criteria and its propensity to label as “irrational” any claim that “cannot appeal to neutral criteria” (“OE,” 208). More broadly, Rorty is asking that we “put aside such topics as an ahistorical human nature, the nature of selfhood, the motive of moral behavior, and the meaning of human life” (“Priority,” 180). Ideally, an entire domain of legitimation and, more to the point, the desire that gives rise to it, will through benign neglect (180) be forgotten and left behind. The mechanism recommended by Rorty to effect such changes is eminently educational in nature. The vocabulary within which the concerns of the Enlightenment tradition are expressed, and through which its presuppositions operate, is no longer to be employed (188-189).²³ And, should such vocabulary nevertheless persist, it is, when encountered, to be ignored by changing the subject.²⁴ This is because the very act of engaging it contributes to the persistence that it is our object to overcome (*CIS*, 44).

Rorty’s portrayal of our postmodern era is an optimistic one. This is because our time is marked by ever-increasing hope for an even better future. What under his scenario is to be hoped for? To begin with, Rorty looks forward to “a postmetaphysical culture” (*CIS*, xvi) in which “we no longer worship *anything*, where we treat *nothing* as a quasi divinity, where we

treat *everything*—our language, our conscience, our community—as a product of time and chance” (22). But the vision is not merely liberationist. There is also positive content to it. Due to increasing sensitivity to the suffering and humiliation of others (that is, due to ongoing expansion via moral imagination of our conception of what counts as a relevant other²⁵), we will on an ever-growing scale act not only to eliminate cruelty but also to establish conditions in which all persons are properly cared for and can thrive. Rorty regularly speaks of his “liberal utopia.” Moving in this direction constitutes “an endless process” (xvi). Significantly, progress on this front “is a matter of weapons and luck, not a matter of having truth on your side, or having detected the ‘movement of history’” (91). There is no aligning with something larger, and there is no prospect here of completion “because there is nothing to complete” (42).²⁶ On Rorty’s account, the human race is completely on its own.

For Rorty, hope and the vocabulary in which its constituent ideals are experienced and expressed is what binds us together and makes movement toward a better world possible. In a postmetaphysical world bereft of any cosmic guarantees, hope and the solidarity derived from it are autonomous as well as “local and culture-bound” (“OE,” 208). Such aspiration and the resulting activity is both self-sustaining and the sole source of meaning. That is all that we have and all that we can have. But, for Rorty, this is enough.

Given that Rorty confesses to adopting “an air of light-minded aestheticism...toward traditional philosophical questions,”²⁷ is there any sense in which we can say that he speaks with seriousness? Interestingly, the answer is “yes.” How this is so emerges as we look more closely at his concept of “liberal irony.”

By “liberal” Rorty means the view that “cruelty is the worst thing we do”²⁸ and by “ironist” he means “the sort of person who faces up to the contingency of his or her own most central beliefs and desires—someone sufficiently historicist and nominalist to have abandoned the idea that those central beliefs and desires refer back to something beyond the reach of time and chance” (*CIS*, xv). He adds, “Liberal ironists are people who include among these ungroundable desires their own hope that suffering will be diminished, that the humiliation of human beings may cease” (*ibid.*). In this last sentence we encounter Rorty’s non-negotiable core. In this regard he elsewhere refers to “ends in themselves” (64, n. 24). There are two such ends: “expanding the range of our present ‘we’” and “self-invention” (*ibid.*). Rorty quickly adds, however, that by “end in itself” we simply mean a “project which I cannot imagine defending

on the basis of noncircular argument.” Despite such circularity and the lack of “grounds” for these commitments, Rorty is serious indeed about them. This becomes abundantly clear as we find him identifying as a “fundamental premise” the conviction “that a belief can still regulate action, can still be thought *worth dying for*, among people who are quite aware that that this belief is caused by nothing deeper than contingent historical circumstance” (189; emphasis added).²⁹ He also speaks of a wide range of duties incumbent upon each of us.³⁰ It is in the face of Rorty’s unexpected and somewhat peculiar seriousness that it is advisable now to turn to Polanyi.

Rorty through a Polanyian Lens: What Sort of Person Ought One to Be?

Polanyi’s thought taken as a whole, especially as it is articulated in *Personal Knowledge*, offers a human possibility and a promise of meaning that are inconceivable in the terms to which Rorty restricts himself. While both writers are penetrating in their exploration of the human condition, in the resulting reflections Polanyi emerges as the more consistent thinker. For that reason, he is also the more mature.

Rorty begins one of his most important essays by identifying three contrasting positions regarding the status of conscientious conviction following abandonment during our age of the formerly regnant Enlightenment view “that there is a relation between the ahistorical essence of the human soul and moral truth, a relation which ensures that free and open discussion will produce ‘one right answer’ to moral as well as to scientific questions” (“Priority,” 176).³¹ The first of the three positions is to continue to speak of proffered responses to “moral and political dilemmas” as possessing clear authority “without trying to back up such talk with a theory of human nature. [Under this view, w]e shall abandon metaphysical accounts of what a right is while nevertheless insisting that everywhere, in all times and cultures, members of our species have had the same rights” (176). The second position, labelled “pragmatist” by Rorty, asserts that when facing the need to assess claims to rights, we have access only to “something relatively local and ethnocentric—the tradition of a particular community, the consensus of a particular culture” (176). As noted in our earlier discussion of ethnocentrism, for Rorty (who ranks himself among the pragmatists) “what counts as rational or as fanatical is relative to the group to which we think it necessary to justify ourselves—to the body of shared belief that determines the reference of the word ‘we’” (177). The third position, says Rorty, is “often dubbed

‘communitarian’ [and consists of writers] who reject both the individualistic rationalism of the Enlightenment and the idea of ‘rights,’ but, unlike the pragmatists, see this rejection as throwing doubt on the institutions and culture of the surviving democratic states” (177).³² There are, for Rorty, three distinct rationales within the communitarian school of thought. Of these the one that primarily attracts his attention is “the claim that political institutions ‘presuppose’ a doctrine about the nature of human beings and that such a doctrine must, unlike Enlightenment rationalism, make clear the essentially historical character of the self” (178). In response, Rorty is going to 1) deny “that liberal democracy ‘needs’ philosophical justification at all” (178) and 2) argue that “a conception of the self that makes the community constitutive of the self [comports] well with liberal democracy” (179). How might we situate Polanyi in relation to Rorty’s divisions and categories?

Does Polanyi represent an abandonment of the Enlightenment tradition? This question is more complicated than is normally recognized. Sidney Hook, among the most astute American intellectuals of the twentieth century, upon reading Polanyi’s “Beyond Nihilism,” felt compelled to defend the Enlightenment.³³ On the other hand, Andy Sanders, a Polanyi scholar of considerable insight, observes that “notwithstanding his critique of objectivism and his post-critical perspective, Polanyi remains rooted in the tradition of the Enlightenment.”³⁴ The key to resolving this apparent conflict is to recognize that Polanyi wholeheartedly embraces central ideals of the Enlightenment (above all, the existence of truth about a reality discoverable through the efforts of a community of dedicated principled inquirers) but does so on revolutionary *grounds* (and, conspicuously, not on the basis of indubitable *foundations*). While it is fair to say that Polanyi to some extent thereby preserves the Enlightenment, it would be more accurate to assert that he *emulates* it. The perspective within which this is achieved is called “balance of mind,” a topic examined at length elsewhere.³⁵ The point of view characterizing this mind grasps the unavoidability of circularity in justification but is prepared to make commitments despite it. How do Rorty’s categorization of positions, and his own positive philosophy, appear to Polanyi’s balanced mind? To begin with, while Polanyi is second to none in emphasizing that we live at a time during which all conceivable claims are subject to doubt and hence any candidate for a foundational theory of human nature is dubitable, Polanyi, in opposition to Rorty, nevertheless offers a philosophical anthropology. Under this conception of human nature, Polanyi not only describes how we are but also what we ought to be. (All of this is done within

an evolutionary model.) Of central importance here is that Polanyi responds to the ubiquity of doubt in a fashion very different than does Rorty. This is a matter we will explore shortly. For the moment, however, it is important to note that Polanyi's frame of mind is as resolute as anything described by Rorty under the heading of "absolutist." Yet, Polanyi outlines a point of view that is penetrating, honest, and anything but naïve. It is a mind marked by a maturity that believes and acts more in spite of what it knows than because of what it knows.

Unlike, then, the first of the positions elaborated by Rorty, Polanyi will in fact articulate responses to moral and political dilemmas on the basis of a theory of human nature. In opposition to Rorty and the occupants of his first position, Polanyi opts not to abandon a metaphysical account (a ground) just because it can be doubted. To do that is to remain trapped within the confines of the critical era that Rorty allegedly has escaped. (Why must doubt immobilize belief?) Polanyi will offer a rationale where the first position will not. And, turning to the second position, Polanyi, as we saw earlier, is as penetratingly ethnocentric as is Rorty. (He is, in fact, even more so.) Both forthrightly acknowledge the contingency of the self. But, again, and as we will see, Polanyi responds to a vital insight in a manner far different than does Rorty. As for the third of Rorty's positions, it is certainly the case that Polanyi recognizes that the collapse of "individualistic rationalism" contributes to doubt regarding the justification of politics and morals. For Rorty, such discomfort is the consequence of an unnecessary and utterly dispensable appetite for a foundation that is illusory and impossible of fulfillment. Polanyi in this regard joins Rorty in the recognition of a fact. But the price paid by Rorty in his response would for Polanyi be too high. Polanyi will respond in a much different fashion in order to establish a meaning inconceivable to Rorty. In sum, while it may indeed be true, à la Rorty, that philosophical justification is unnecessary, Polanyi urges that we are far better off with a suitably modest, yet systematic, substitute for it. And, while a conception of the self as constituted by the community may be sufficient to keep afloat Oakeshott's ship at sea, resident within Polanyi's balanced mind is the conviction that a far more meaningful existence is available if only we act in the requisite manner.³⁶

We have in the last two paragraphs made a number of bold claims. It is now our task to elaborate the reasoning behind them. Let us begin with the matter of doubt. Doubt cannot be silenced, says Rorty, and it penetrates all the way down which, for Rorty, means that it even colors our attitude to the "final vocabulary" we employ (*CIS*, 54n, 73, 186). It is the

pervasiveness of doubt that makes one an ironist. But there must be something to doubt in order to occupy such a condition (88). Thus the ironic perspective is parasitic on prior socialization into a tradition. Once doubt sets in, the resulting emerging ironist suffers continuing discomfort. The only remedy, a remedy required in order for one to preserve the bearings (the “identity” and “sanity”) required to get along productively in the world, is ongoing conversation with others who employ the same (contingent) vocabulary (186). Now, there are aspects of this account that are reminiscent of Polanyi’s balanced mind, for which securing agreement from relevant authorities is vitally important. In this connection Polanyi speaks of “*persuasive* passion, the mainspring of all fundamental controversy” (*PK*, 159), a phenomenon that Polanyi likens to the attempt to convert (150-151). An essential part of coming to adopt a view is bringing relevant others over to our position. He announces, “Our vision must conquer or die” (150). But there is a difference between the two descriptions. While both begin from the conviction that doubt can never be eradicated, Polanyi aims effectively to mute doubt and put something inspiring and transformative in its place. Rorty, in comparison, is cynical and not a little masochistic. For, on his account, we are to remain permanently in doubt, drawing from its power a sense of distance from all conviction, thereby savoring one’s discomfort, rather like biting gently on an oral sore. Where Rorty dances about with delight, Polanyi recognizes a precious opportunity. Polanyi posits a meaning to the recognition of contingency and the triumph of doubt. We witness here the contrasting attitudes of the two men.

In *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, Rorty makes a statement that one could easily imagine coming from Polanyi: in the (ideal) future, citizens would “[combine] commitment with a sense of the contingency of their own commitment” (61). As we have seen, throughout his writings Rorty asserts that thoughtful persons in our age recognize that morality does not require foundations (and that, in any case, they are unavailable). These observations are prominent features of his larger project of “de-divinization” (*CIS*, 45). In this connection, Rorty speaks of his explicit contribution to “the disenchantment of the world” (“Priority,” 193), and sings the praises of that disenchantment (194). Altogether appropriately, he refers to his stance and the point of view he works to more widely establish as an “attitude” (180). But, no less appropriately, Rorty also speaks of the “resignation” at the heart of the ironist mentality (*CIS*, 76; cf. 99). Nothing could be further from what we find so clearly on display in Polanyi. The pages of *Personal Knowledge* crackle with the fire of aspiration for understanding of and affiliation

with the grand unfolding of that which defines the whole and thereby exceeds the bounds of one's time and place (though this drama is to be grasped only during, and through the resources of, that time and place). Where Rorty's irony counsels "avoiding the formulation of general principles except where the situation would require this particular tactic" ("PBL," 201), Polanyi issues an explicit call for articulation of and consistent commitment to such principles. That commitment is the portal to meaning. And where Rorty would dissolve the "urge to affiliate with somebody [or something] bigger" (*CIS*, 107), Polanyi simultaneously models and recommends precisely the opposite. The very core of Polanyi's project is *not* to dismiss that which Rorty would leave behind.³⁷

Before moving on to even more fundamental matters, a short aside is called for in anticipation of a possible objection from Rorty. To his credit, there is a strain of political and institutional realism in his thought. This is manifested not only in his grasp of certain principles of political physiology (e.g., the unavoidability and utility of ethnocentrism, the need for a common socialization and resulting consensus, etc.) but also in the expression of some wisdom regarding human nature (despite his loudly proclaimed nominalism).³⁸ Specifically, Rorty divides the citizenry into two. While everyone in his "liberal utopia" will emancipate themselves from the appetite for foundations and learn to live productively without them, only a select group will live a life of pronounced irony.³⁹ The two segments are marked by contrasting tastes and tolerances. This is fortunate because the lighthearted and presumably enjoyable play of the pronounced ironist would be impossible were everyone else thinking and acting as he does. (One is reminded of the case of Socrates and the perennial conflict between the priorities of philosophy and the demands of politics.) As we examine Rorty's enthusiastic description of liberal irony and his recommendation that its influence spread throughout our lives and institutions, we must keep in mind that he has two audiences in mind. It is far from clear that Rorty's liberal utopia is politically feasible.⁴⁰ That question is best examined elsewhere. For immediate purposes, let us simply note that it does our inquiry no harm to go along with Rorty and confine ourselves to the impact of our two authors on the thoughts and lives of those persons who are both capable of appreciating these matters and interested in them.

At the outset of this section it was noted that Polanyi's thought is more consistent than Rorty's and thereby more mature. It is time now to defend that claim. One way to do so is to recall that it is precisely in the name of consistency that Rorty ups the ante by reducing the game.

That is, the central move in his effort to break free of the presuppositions of Enlightenment rationalism and the issues to which they give rise is to walk away from the vocabulary in which they reside and instead change the subject by employing an alternate vocabulary (*CIS*, 44). Success in this enterprise is seen in the disappearance of the urge to universalize (i.e., to search for, discover, and then proclaim truths that obtain generally rather than in relation to particular contingent contexts). The troubling issues of traditional philosophical reflection, if they remain visible at all, will hold no interest for the speaker of the new vocabulary. It is important to note, however, that even within the world that is defined by this new vocabulary people “[insist] that the beliefs and desires they hold most dear should come first in the order of discussion” (“Priority,” 195).⁴¹ The question that commands our attention is how best do we honor those beliefs and desires? Practically speaking, what does it mean to hold them “most dear”?

Polanyi offers an unambiguous answer to this question. The degree to which we believe a statement to be true or a desire to be legitimate is shown by the actions, especially the exercise of persuasive passion, we take on its behalf. We have seen that Polanyi no less than Rorty acknowledges the contingency of belief and desire. But, when it comes to the defense and preservation of that which we believe and desire, the fact of contingency has for Polanyi no positive role to play. We would say that it is bracketed were it not that, on Polanyi’s account, recognition of contingency has an indispensable background function in providing the occasion for commitment and faith. Precisely because there can be no cosmic guarantee that the belief is true or the desire legitimate, we are called upon to affirm it. This is what we can do, and all that we can do, on its behalf. *That* is what it means to hold a belief or desire “most dear.” It is in this connection that Polanyi refers to speaking with “universal intent.” Such affirmation, we should note, is not at all similar to the claim of universality that is so often the target of Rorty’s criticism.⁴² Indeed, Polanyi outlines the vital role of universal intent specifically because the enterprise of universalization is illusory. Genuine stewardship of principle or ideal requires our commitment, and that commitment, executed explicitly in recognition of the absence of unshakeable foundations, is personal as well as open-ended and ongoing.

Although the affirmation of belief or desire, of principle and ideal, brings rewards (issuing above all in a sense of meaning), it is intrinsically a serious matter. After all, that which is most important is at stake. Acting in the concerted fashion outlined by Polanyi is what “caring about” means. Rorty candidly concedes that in our contingent universe it forever remains

possible that our community may “wholly die” (“SO,” 31). There always is the prospect of permanent loss and subsequent eternal darkness. Unlike Rorty who, in response, elects to remain lighthearted, Polanyi with all seriousness posits the reality of an emerging world of meaning animated by the operation of ordering principles.⁴³

So, what makes Polanyi’s response to contingency more consistent than Rorty’s? On a superficial level, as we have just seen, we can say that Polanyi more fully appreciates the implications of contingency and responds more fully and energetically to it. We would of course expect Rorty to counter by suggesting that Polanyi, unlike the more thoroughly cured ironist, still suffers from a highly suspect appetite for cosmic meaning and is simply exercising remarkable (if futile) ingenuity in seeking comfortable refuge from a random and uncaring universe. But something further can be said on Polanyi’s behalf. Rorty states, “the problem of how to finitize while exhibiting a knowledge of one’s own finitude...is *the* problem of ironist theory. It is the problem of how to overcome authority without claiming authority” (*CIS*, 105). Clearly, Polanyi, more effectively divorced from the presuppositions of the critical perspective than is Rorty, does not suffer from this problem. Although he never loses sight of his own fallibility,⁴⁴ Polanyi, quite without apology, is very much in the business of speaking authoritatively. Interestingly, this contrast between the two philosophers is due to Polanyi, not Rorty, being the more effective at jettisoning excess intellectual baggage, namely, the concern about claiming authority. If Rorty can view his ironist vocabulary as an advance beyond that of individualistic rationalism, Polanyi can view his authoritative vocabulary as an advance beyond what, for him, is an immature ironist vocabulary. Since contingency shows that nothing stands in the way of the Polanyian enterprise of positing and affirming meaning, we are at liberty to do so. From Polanyi’s confessedly circular perspective, it is incumbent that we do, and it is this stance that is most consistent with the fact of that contingency.

We would expect, however, for Rorty to respond by noting that all of this is a drama of Polanyi’s creation and that he (Rorty) is under no obligation to participate in it. It might seem, therefore, that we find ourselves back with Rorty’s account of conflicting vocabularies (offering varying descriptions or scenarios “of what may happen or has been happening” [*CIS*, 173]) that necessarily speak past each other. And perhaps in the end this is our unavoidable fate. But, before drawing that conclusion, a further question, one drawn from Rorty himself, needs to be addressed. This pertains to Rorty’s frequent invocation of the principle of utility.

In speaking of exceptional new books whose content or style exceeds the bounds of existing criteria, Rorty comments, “We have to see whether we can find a use for [them]” (*CIS*, 135). More generally, Rorty believes that particular questions or concerns should be left behind (i.e., that we should pay them no mind) when we no longer find them useful or “profitable” (“Priority,” 190-191). When that is the case we are “better off” without the question or concern and we can “get along” without it (192 & 193). Utility also has a positive dimension. Postmodernist liberalism, says Rorty, is to be adopted due to its “practical advantages” (“OE,” 209). Were Polanyi to employ this principle of utility he would prefer his philosophical anthropology and metaphysics of emergence and ordering principles (and the related claims regarding truth and reality) over Rorty’s ironic distancing from all such vocabulary precisely on the basis of their usefulness. After all, it is by embracing his master narrative and speaking and acting vehemently in its defense that we achieve meaning while avoiding what he perceives as the devastating consequences of succumbing to skepticism and doubt. What could be more useful than that? Where Rorty deems procedure alone sufficient for establishing a fruitful human enterprise (“Priority,” 178-184), Polanyi finds that scenario grievously lacking in substance. In order to get along peacefully and productively, Polanyi, contra Rorty, avers that we must be committed, and this in turn requires that we believe in the truth and reality of (specific) principle and ideal. Indeed, without such belief, what grounds are there for consistently and reliably adhering to procedure?

It is predictable that Rorty, were he participating in this conversation, would in response once again highlight the circularity of Polanyi’s reasoning. Only if we are convinced that affiliation with “capital letter” principle and ideal or a grand narrative of emergence (that is, only if we begin from the assumption that an urge—*not*, for Polanyi, a mere appetite—for such is a salutary and necessary requirement for human flourishing) would it follow that it is necessary to take steps to secure it. Perhaps so. But it is equally true that Rorty’s use of the criteria of usefulness, profit, etc. is subject to the same criticism. To say that something is useful (or useless) or profitable (or profitless) presupposes a prior commitment. The jihadist, for example, would have a quite different understanding of “practical advantage” from that embraced by Rorty. As the president of an increasingly fundamentalist Turkey recently commented, democracy is a useful bus that takes you to any destination you wish.

Given their shared view that ethnocentrism and circularity in justification are unavoidable, it is unsurprising that in our comparison of Polanyi with Rorty we find ourselves without the logical resources to definitively resolve the conflict between them. But, from a Polanyian perspective, there is something both apt and reassuring about this realization. It leads us to the truly fundamental question raised by Polanyi that resides deep within the many-faceted edifice of his thought: *What sort of person ought one to be?* In his writings, above all in *Personal Knowledge*, Polanyi directs this question to himself. By modeling the posing of this question as well as a response to it, he is inviting each of us, much in the spirit of St. Augustine's *Confessions*, to join him in his journey. Polanyi's answer to that question takes the form of "the balanced mind" mentioned above. With such a mind we have a deliberately deeper and more tragic individual than the liberal ironist proudly and playfully depicted by Rorty. Polanyi describes a life subject to disappointments that Rorty is determined to leave behind. But, in making such disappointment irrelevant, Rorty also destroys the possibility of a meaning that is, for Polanyi, paramount.

Polanyi's fundamental query, *What sort of person ought one to be?*, in turn leads to further questions, the examination of which makes his work so important to study with care. The most significant of these, because it is entailed by, and of the same cloth as, the fundamental question itself, is, *What are we willing to do—what must we do—in order to preserve the possibility of the balanced mind and make its appearance more likely?* Interestingly, this is a question that is well understood by Rorty. The matter, however, is central to any number of penetrating thinkers, even though the mind that would be preserved varies greatly among them.⁴⁵

We must conclude that neither Polanyi nor Rorty can logically overwhelm the other. Due to this fact, each thinking human being is faced with a decision. Although, as Polanyi frequently notes, we are not alone, this decision is nevertheless an eminently personal matter regarding the sort of person one would be and, inextricably tied to that conception, the character of the universe in which one would reside. Polanyi, our guide, fully grasps this. It is because he understands the landscape so well, and responds to it so powerfully and creatively, that your host in this inquiry is confident which path—that of Rorty or that of Polanyi—is the better one to follow.

April 1, 2018

¹ Richard Rorty, "Cosmopolitanism without Emancipation: A Response to Jean-François Lyotard" in *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 218. References to this article will occur in the text under "CWE."

² John V. Apczynski, "Richard Rorty and Michael Polanyi: Is There Truth after Foundationalism?" in *Tradition and Discovery*, Vol. XVIII, No. 1 (1991-1992), 12.

³ R. T. Allen, "Rorty and the Scope of Non-Justificatory Philosophy" in *Tradition and Discovery*, Vol. XII, No. 2 (Winter, 1984-1985), 35.

⁴ Jon Fennell, "Harry Neumann and the Political Piety of Rorty's Postmodernism," *Interpretation*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (Winter 1999), 257-273; and, "On Authority and Political Destination: Michael Polanyi and the Threshold of Postmodernism," *Perspectives on Political Science*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (July-September 2013), 154-161.

⁵ Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962 [first published in 1958]), 315. References to this book will occur in the text under "PK."

⁶ First-time readers of Polanyi's argument are likely to find his reasoning peculiar, if not downright deficient. In coming to grasp his meaning, it will be of considerable value to become acquainted with C. S. Peirce's conception of truth as the outcome, over time, of the efforts of relevant individuals constituting a community of inquiry. Reality, like truth, is the product of a process that unfolds within an open-ended universe. Allow your author, a longtime reader of Polanyi, to add that the more often one reads Polanyi's abbreviated argument against relativism, the less and less its brevity is a concern.

⁷ Richard Rorty, "Postmodern Bourgeois Liberalism" in *Objectivism, Relativism, and Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). References to this article will occur in the text under "PBL." See, too, "Solidarity or Objectivity" (in the same volume), 23. References to this article will occur in the text under "SO."

⁸ The reader is invited to enjoy the irony of applying this logic to our era's all-too-common affirmation of atheism.

⁹ See, for example, "On Ethnocentrism: A Reply to Clifford Geertz" in *Objectivism, Relativism, and Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 207. References to this article will occur in the text under "OE."

¹⁰ Sickly indeed, as Rorty's uncharacteristically harsh description makes plain: As a wet liberal, "[w]e begin to lose any capacity for moral indignation, any capacity to feel contempt. Our sense of selfhood dissolves. We can no longer feel pride in being bourgeois liberals, in being part of a great tradition, a citizen of no mean culture. We have become so open-minded that our brains have fallen out" (203). Might we say that Rorty has here presciently captured, in its haste to dissociate itself from America's achievements and the Western tradition generally, the character of a significant (and vocal) segment of Western educators and opinion setters?

¹¹ Contingent and accidental factors *release* principles inherent in the evolutionary process; they do not *produce* them. Polanyi avers that there are "ordering principles" in the universe. We now approach the subjects of emergence and emergentism (as well as teleology). This is extraordinarily complicated territory. See Jon Fennell, "Is Polanyi's Emergence Reductive?," *Appraisal*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (Winter 2017), 22-35.

¹² Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). References to this book will occur in the text under "CIS."

¹³ An equally revealing statement appears at PK, 324: "by contrast to a statement of fact claiming to be impersonal, an affirmation made in terms of a commitment gives rise to no insatiable sequence of subsequent justifications."

¹⁴ Not to be overlooked here is Rorty's acknowledgement, shared by Polanyi, that doubt can never be overcome. The most significant aspects of their respective positions center on the question of how we are to respond to this fact.

¹⁵ Richard Rorty, "The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy" in *Objectivism, Relativism, and Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 193. References to this article will occur in the text under "Priority."

¹⁶ "We want to be able, so to speak, to justify ourselves to our earlier selves. This preference is not built into us by human nature. It is just the way we live now" ("SO," 29). Note the strikingly parallel assertion from Polanyi: "To the question, 'Who convinces whom here?' it answers simply, 'I am trying to convince myself'" (PK. 265). This assertion is an amplification of an earlier statement from the same page: "Seen in the round, man stands at the beginning and at the end, as begetter and child of his own thought."

¹⁷ See, especially, "OE."

¹⁸ See Jon Fennell, “Can Alasdair MacIntyre Relieve Grene’s Polanyian Regret?” This paper, forthcoming in *Humanitas*, was presented at the November, 2017 meeting of the Polanyi Society and is available on the Society’s website at <http://www.polanyisociety.org/2017pprs/Fennell-PInyiPpr-2017MacIntyreRelieveGrene-10-8-17.pdf>

¹⁹ Rorty can even conceive occasions where it is justifiable to “use force” (“Priority,” 183). The position of both Rorty and Polanyi is captured in this fragment from Sidney Hook’s synopsis of Reinhold Niebuhr’s social theory: “Men can and should cooperate, but in a world of different bodies and interests wills conflict. It is always preferable to resolve conflicts by intelligence and principled compromise, but we may have to use coercion to defend ourselves against those who refuse to use intelligence or who run amok, blinded by illusions of total power or virtue.” See “The Moral Vision of Reinhold Niebuhr” in Sidney Hook, *Pragmatism and the Tragic Sense of Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), 186.

²⁰ See Polanyi, *Science, Faith and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964 [1946]), 71-72. For an extended discussion of the vital role of such education, see Jon Fennell, “On Authority and Political Destination: Michael Polanyi and the Threshold of Postmodernism,” 158-159 (see note 4 above). Do note that Rorty, too, calls for such a grounding (159).

²¹ “We are free to see the self...as a historical contingency all the way through” (“Priority,” 188).

²² And do note that “there is nothing beyond vocabularies which serves as a criterion of choice between them” (*CIS*, 80).

²³ See, for example, *CIS*, 87: “Such a person would not need a justification for her sense of human solidarity, for she was not raised to play the language game in which one asks and gets justifications for that sort of belief.”

²⁴ Cf. Rorty’s endorsement of Derrida: “He is not going to play by the rules of somebody else’s final vocabulary” (*CIS*, 133).

²⁵ “OE,” 207.

²⁶ In “Response to James Gouinlock,” Rorty states, “nothing is on the side of this hope except the energies and intelligence that those who share it devote to it.” The passage is from Herman J. Saatkamp, Jr., ed., *Rorty and Pragmatism* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1995), 91.

²⁷ “Priority,” 193.

²⁸ Cf. *CIS*, 177: “For all we share with all other humans is the same thing we share with all other animals—the ability to feel pain.” Ironically, precisely because people “can all be humiliated by the forcible tearing down of the particular structures of language and belief in which they were socialized” (177), in the name of liberal principle one must be careful about the expression of irony! We discover here a Rortian rationale for the “safe spaces” that are today widely found on college campuses.

²⁹ Cf. “OE,” 208. In *CIS*, Rorty states that “the liberal societies of our century [the 20th] have produced more and more people who are able to recognize the contingency of the vocabulary in which they state their highest hopes—the contingency of their own consciences—and yet have remained faithful to those consciences” (46). Rorty’s discussion at this point was sparked by a quotation from Joseph Schumpeter (cited approvingly by Isaiah Berlin) that is treated with bitter contempt by Leo Strauss. See Strauss, “‘Relativism’” in *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 17. It is fair to say that the question of the legitimacy of Strauss’s contempt is at the heart of the present essay.

³⁰ See “Pragmatism without Method” in *Objectivism, Relativism, and Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 67. References to this article will occur in the text under “PWM.”

³¹ Rorty then adds, “Such a theory guarantees that a moral belief that cannot be justified to the mass of mankind is ‘irrational,’ and thus is not really a product of the moral faculty at all” (176).

³² Authors that Rorty associates with communitarianism include Charles Taylor, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Michael Sandel.

³³ Sidney Hook, “In Defense of the Enlightenment” in *Pragmatism and the Tragic Sense of Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), 195-207.

³⁴ Andy Sanders, “Tacit Knowing—Between Modernism and Postmodernism: A Problem of Coherence” in *Tradition & Discovery: The Polanyi Society Periodical*, Vol. XVIII, No. 2 (1991-1992), 15.

³⁵ See Jon Fennell, “‘Balance of Mind’: Polanyi’s Response to the Second Apple and the Modern Predicament,” a paper presented at the 2016 San Antonio annual meeting of The Polanyi Society, forthcoming in 2018 in *Tradition and Discovery* and available at polanyisociety.org/2016pprs/Fennell-Balance-of-Mind-Ppr9-11-16.pdf.

³⁶ Yet another way in which to discern the chasm between Rorty and Polanyi in regard to the possibility and nature of meaning is to contrast their deeply incompatible estimates of the significance of science. Because for Rorty the scientific perspective is only one of a considerable number of equally authoritative ways of thinking and getting along in the world, his position is necessarily offensive to Polanyi and incompatible with his deepest commitments. Interestingly, however, there is a sense in which both Rorty and Polanyi are egalitarian. But, where Rorty views all narratives or “texts” to be equally pretentious and at heart no more than local reports of necessarily limited significance, Polanyi possesses the greatest respect for scientific activity, and sees in other serious pursuits—philosophy, technology, and the arts—the possibility of comparably significant activity. The stature of science is prominent in Bernard Williams’ critical commentary on Rorty. For Williams’ insightful comments on Rorty, not only on the questionable demotion of science, but also Rorty’s inconsistency (on Rorty’s own pragmatic grounds alone, he ought to be more respectful of science and should keep his hands off of it) and his “excessively optimistic” assessment of the vitality and *raison d’être* of what he labels “postmetaphysical culture,” see *Essays and Reviews 1959-2002* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 204-215 and 295-301. In the end, there is a question as to why we should take Rorty seriously at all (300). (One suspects that this suggestion would only solicit a smile from Rorty.) See too the comments regarding Rorty in Williams’ review of Thomas Nagel’s *The Last Word* (371-387).

³⁷ For more on the cosmic imaginary which is the product of Polanyi’s endeavors, see Jon Fennell, “Polanyi’s Revolutionary Imaginary” in Charles W. Lowney II, editor, *Charles Taylor, Michael Polanyi and the Critique of Modernity: Pluralist and Emergentist Directions* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 119-142.

³⁸ This comes out clearly in an address by Rorty in which, quite atypically, he shows an appreciation for conservative insight pertaining to political education and character formation. See “Education without Dogma,” *Dissent* 36, No. 2 (Spring 1989): 198-204.

³⁹ “In the ideal liberal society, the intellectuals would still be ironists, although the nonintellectuals would not” (*CIS*, 87).

⁴⁰ See Jon Fennell, “Harry Neumann and the Political Piety of Rorty’s Postmodernism” (see note 4 above).

⁴¹ Cf. “SO,” 29: “We should say that we must, in practice, privilege our own group, even though there can be no noncircular justification for doing so.”

⁴² In making this very point, Dale Cannon points us to *Personal Knowledge*, 300-303 and Polanyi’s *The Tacit Dimension*, 78. See “Polanyi and Post-Modernism” in *The Political Science Reviewer*, Volume XXXVII (2008), note 9. In this essay, Cannon does a masterful job of distinguishing the post-modern (“hyper-critical”) intellectual ethos from the post-critical intellectual ethos, and contrasts both, in a manner very reminiscent of Polanyi’s account of western intellectual history, to both the pre-modern (“pre-critical”) and modern (“critical”) ethos.

⁴³ See Jon Fennell, “Is Polanyi’s Emergence Reductive?” (note 11 above).

⁴⁴ See Jon Fennell, “Can Alasdair MacIntyre Relieve Grene’s Polanyian Regret?” (note 18 above).

⁴⁵ Sometimes urgent concern with preservation of a human possibility is not clearly compatible with professions of security and necessity found elsewhere in their work. C. S. Lewis comes to mind. See Jon Fennell, “A Polanyian Perspective on C. S. Lewis’s *The Abolition of Man*,” *Journal of Inklings Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (April 2014), 93-122.