

Tradition & Discovery

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See p. 64 for information on submissions

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PREFACE

I begin by announcing that Charles Taylor has agreed to join two sessions of our 2014 Annual Meeting in San Diego. For more information, see the Call for Papers that leads off “News and Notes” on p. 2. There, you will also find updates on this summer’s Poteat Conference and other matters. Minutes and Treasurer’s Report from the 2013 Polanyi Society Board meeting can be found on pp. 61-63.

At the center of this issue of *Tradition and Discovery* is Michael Polanyi’s intriguing little essay, “Forms of Atheism.” Written for a 1948 meeting of the Moot, it was not published until 1981 in *Convivium*. Phil Mullins’ “Prefatory Note” puts Polanyi’s essay in its historical context. The text of Polanyi’s “Forms of Atheism” is then followed by three interpretive essays. Martin Moleski, S.J., sees in the piece Polanyi’s rejection of the false gods of the age and asks the reader to be circumspect in attributing too much to Polanyi’s invocation of the God of the Bible. Diane Yeager undertakes an intellectual history by showing how “Forms of Atheism” represents an important step in Polanyi’s emerging ideas of moral passion and moral inversion. Richard Gelwick briefly contrasts the atheisms Polanyi describes in his essay with the new atheism of today, but mostly explores how his oblique references to the God of the Bible might cohere with Polanyi’s larger work.

We also reprint David Rutledge’s “William Poteat: the Primacy of the Person” for an American audience. The essay first appeared in 2008 in *Appraisal*, the journal of the UK’s Society for Post-Critical and Personalist Studies. We are grateful that Richard Allen and *Appraisal* has allowed us to do this, for it seems timely in light of this summer’s Yale Conference (again, see “News and Notes” for the latest information on this event). In this essay, Rutledge, a former student of Poteat, carefully lays out the contours of Poteat’s ideas. Whether it is possible to craft a straightforward introduction remains to be seen, however, for in email correspondence, Rutledge wryly observes that “true Poteat disciples believe, of course, that if you make Poteat clear (which I tried to do), you’ve misunderstood him.”

By way of book reviews, we have Walter Gulick’s review essay of Paul Craig Roberts’s new *The Failure of Laissez Faire Capitalism*, to which Roberts responds. Roberts was one of Polanyi’s last graduate students and was Assistant Secretary to the Treasury in the Reagan Administration, so his views command attention. In addition, we have reviews of two new books, the first a collection of essays on Polanyi’s relation to 20th-Century liberalism edited by Richard T. Allen and the second Creighton Rosenthal’s appropriation of Thomas Aquinas to resolve debates on the relationship between faith and reason, a topic of ongoing interest to Society members. We also have a review of one older book, Jeremy Begbie’s 1991 book on theology and the arts.

That about sums it up for this issue, which in retrospect, almost completely follows the old adage of, “Something old, something new, something borrowed...” Now, if we only had something blue...

Paul Lewis

P.S. Observant readers will note that membership renewal information is included again in this issue. This is *not* an attempt to get anyone to pay twice, but a friendly reminder directed to those who have misplaced or forgotten to respond to the October mailing. Everyone gets the information, however, since U. S. Post Office regulations require all issues to be identical in weight.

NEWS AND NOTES

2014 Annual Meeting News & Call for Papers

Charles Taylor to Speak

The annual meeting of the Polanyi Society in 2014 is tentatively scheduled for November 21 and 22 in San Diego. The Society is pleased to announce that the eminent Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor has accepted the Society's invitation to participate in two sessions. The first session will feature a presentation by Taylor on tacit knowing with a stress on its importance for social theory. Taylor will be explicitly interpreting and critiquing Michael Polanyi's thought in this session. Several respondents will comment on Taylor's presentation before the general discussion.

This call for papers is addressed primarily to those who wish to write an essay on some aspect of Taylor's thought. The second session will feature these papers and Taylor's responses to them. Proposals featuring some Polanyian themes in Taylor's writings are encouraged but not at all required. In addition, the Society welcomes receiving proposals on some aspect of Polanyi's thought not connected with Taylor to be presented during a possible third session.

The deadline for receiving proposals of 200-300 words is April 1. They should be submitted to Walter Gulick at wgulick@msubillings.edu.

The Primacy of Persons: The Legacy of William Poteat

The Polanyi Society is sponsoring a conference on the legacy of William H. Poteat (1919-2000) on June 6-8, 2014 at Yale University.

William Poteat was instrumental in bringing to the American philosophical and theological communities the ideas of Michael Polanyi—ideas that converged with and deepened his own profound critique of the self-abstracting tendencies of modernity.

From the mid-1950s onward he drew on Polanyi's work in his own writing and teaching as he sought to advance Polanyi's approach to reclaiming the tacit existential "mindbody" roots of all of our explicit endeavors. Together they powerfully advocated a post-critical paradigm shift within contemporary intellectual culture. By identifying "mindbody" as the tacit ground of all human feats of sense-making and sense-giving, Poteat provided a comprehensive and concrete framework for recovering a sane understanding of responsible personhood. The Poteat-Polanyi connection, in both directions, will be a prominent theme addressed on the first day of the conference: where each influenced the other, where each differed from the other, and how that vital connection extends and radicalizes Polanyi's work to constitute a uniquely Poteatean approach to understanding and redeeming personhood.

The Fall Conference Donation Campaign benefited from twenty generous donations ranging from \$50 to \$500 that provide a fund sufficient to cover the deposit required by Yale while reducing conference fees significantly and allowing for substantial student subsidies. Fees for the conference, lodging and meals, including a dinner, are set to cover all remaining conference expenses, including liability insurance and a fund for unanticipated expenses. Optional choices among registration, lodging, and meals will be available.

Over thirty Society members and former Poteat students and associates have expressed their determination to attend, of whom about twenty have proposed to offer presentations. From that, a total attendance of between thirty and fifty is inferred, possibly including some from the Yale community to whom Polanyi and Poteat are not yet familiar.

The conference planning group (Dale Cannon, Walter Mead, and James Clement van Pelt) anticipates that online registration will become available in January. Because Yale requires that a maximum number of attendees be specified well in advance, early registration assures a conference seat and

offers a fee discount. Given the likelihood that airline costs will increase in 2014, booking flights sooner rather than later should result in significant savings. See <http://yalecollege.yale.edu/content/transportation-and-travel> for detailed travel options.

The registration website address, travel tips, accommodations, and other details are to be provided to those who have already expressed an interest in attending and to those who do so by emailing Dale Cannon at cannodw@wou.edu.

Polanyi in Recent Scholarship

The thirteenth biennial Science, Technology Policy and Management in Latin Ibero-American Context Conference was held on October 28-30, 2013, in Porto, Portugal. It included a workshop on Michael Polanyi that coincided with the publication of Eduardo Beira's Portuguese translations of *Personal Knowledge* and an anthology of Polanyi essays entitled, *Science and Technology* (Beira has earlier published translations of *The Study of Man* and *The Tacit Dimension* and plans to publish translations of *The Contempt of Freedom* and *Meaning*.) In the workshop, Dr. Beira discussed his interest in translating Polanyi's work. Phil Mullins also gave a talk entitled, "Michael Polanyi's Post-Critical Vision: Science, Technology and Society." Two Portuguese and two Brazilian scholars interested in Polanyi's thought responded.

Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences (2013) 12 has material on tacit knowledge and interactional expertise, a concept developed by Harry Collins. See Evan Selinger's introductory essay, "Tacit Knowledge: New Theories and Practices" (247-249) for a review of the essays in this issue. Selinger's essay is available online at DOI 10.1007/s11097-012-9280-0.

Economist Ricardo Hausmann has published a Project Syndicate opinion piece entitled, "The Tacit Knowledge Economy" which argues that some developing economies, despite urbanization, schooling, and Internet access, do not transmit effectively the tacit knowledge required to be productive (<http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/on-the->

[mental-sources-of-productivity-growth-by-ricardo-hausmann](#)).

The latest issue of *Appraisal* is now available (vol. 9, No. 4, October 2013). It contains the following articles: Dries Deweer, "The Person and the Political Paradox: The Personalist Political Theory of Paul Ricoeur;" J. Cutting, B. Toone and M. Trimble, "The Merits of a Phenomenological Analysis of Dreams;" and R.T. Allen, "Personalism and the Free Market."

Polanyi is mentioned several times in a "Roundable on the Sociology of Religion: Twenty-Three Theses on the Status of Religion in American Sociology—A Mellon Working Group Reflection," in the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 81/4 (December 2013): 903-938. This essay is part of a celebration of Robert Bellah's work.

Contributing to the Polanyi Society

The Society offers three exciting opportunities to support our work:

1. Dues (\$35 for individuals, \$25 for libraries, and \$15 students) support the cost of annual meetings and the production of *TAD*.

2. The Travel Assistance Fund supports students and other young scholars planning to attend Polanyi Society Annual Meetings. Wally Mead is the fund administrator (wbmead@ilstu.edu).

3. The Endowment Fund supports occasional projects, such as the Loyola Conferences. David Rutledge (david.rutledge@furman.edu) administers this fund.

Those living in the United States should send a check to Charles Lowney, Dept. of Philosophy, Baker Hall 124, Washington and Lee University, Lexington, VA 24450. Those living outside of the U.S. should use the Pay Pal payment option on the Polanyi Society membership web page (<http://polanyisociety.net/register/join-renew.php>).

A Prefatory Note on Polanyi's "Forms of Atheism"

Phil Mullins

Key words: Michael Polanyi, modern atheism, Polanyi's cultural analysis

ABSTRACT

This introduction to Polanyi's little-known 1948 essay "Forms of Atheism" discusses the context in which Polanyi wrote these reflections for a discussion group chaired by J. H. Oldham.

The following short paper by Michael Polanyi, written in 1948, was not published until 1981. It was included in the October 1981 issue of *Convivium* (Newsletter No. 13, pp. 5-13) which was a publication of the British Polanyi study group of the same name. In the early nineties, *Convivium* ceased publication and the *Convivium* group merged with the Polanyi Society. It is almost certainly the case that Polanyi biographer Bill Scott, who was already at work reviewing Polanyi materials, provided the publication copy of this forgotten short essay when it was published.¹ The "News and Notes" section of this issue of *Convivium* mentions that in Polanyi Society meetings in North America at the American Academy of Religion there had been recent discussion of "the different interpretations of Polanyi's views about religious truth" and that this discussion was to be published in an upcoming issue of *Zygon* which would include "Professor W. T. Scott's 'adjudication'" (2).² In sum, Polanyi's 1948 essay was originally published at the time that interesting questions about Polanyi's ontology, and particularly its application to religion, first emerged.

This Polanyi essay has long been out of print and has relapsed into the obscurity of its first thirty-three years of existence. This is an interesting short essay that it now seems timely to re-publish.³ In the last few years, a spate of "popular atheism" books has been published which have sold many copies for their authors and publishers and stirred the waters of controversy. More importantly, scholars like Charles Taylor have provided a searching cultural analysis and criticism of modern forms of atheism in books like *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 2007). See, for example, the discussion of what Taylor terms "a new, more nuanced map of the ideological terrain" in which he suggests that there is a three-cornered and—perhaps a four-cornered—struggle in contemporary culture between religious belief, the "humanist primacy of life" vision, and what he calls "the immanent counter-Enlightenment" perspective (636). In a somewhat similar fashion, Wesley Wildman, in *Religious and Spiritual Experiences* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), recently described the contemporary religious landscape as a contested domain in which there is interaction between supernaturalists, supranaturalists (i.e., those who conceive ultimate reality as an active, aware and purposive personal being), religious naturalists, and anti-religious naturalists (23). It is easy enough to see some affinities between the type of four-fold analysis Polanyi did in 1948 and ideas put forth more recently by Taylor and Wildman.

A word about the original context into which Polanyi's essay fits may be helpful. Polanyi prepared this essay for a December 17-20, 1948 meeting of a group convened by his friend J. H. Oldham where it (along with other papers) was discussed. This was either the ninth or tenth such Oldham-convened

meeting that Polanyi participated in. The earliest ones were in 1944 (June 23-25 and December 15-18) in the group called the Moot which officially dissolved after the death of Karl Mannheim (January 9, 1947), although Oldham began convening other Moot-like groups (some even called the “Moot”) almost immediately. Keith Clements, the Oldham biographer who recently edited *The Moot Papers, Faith, Freedom and Society, 1938-1947* (London: T & T Clark, 2010), has suggested that, after the death of Mannheim, Polanyi’s ideas and writings often were the focus of attention in Oldham’s discussion groups which always included a number of important religious and literary intellectuals (17).

The archival correspondence between Polanyi and Oldham makes clear that Polanyi sent to Oldham most of his essays (including the Riddell Lectures) published in the forties (Box 15, Folders 3-5 in MPP).⁴ Oldham often reported that he found these essays illuminating and he often included them as part of the reading material for his discussion group meetings and he sometimes set aside discussion time on his meeting agendas specifically for treatment of Polanyi’s papers. After first reading “Forms of Atheism,” Oldham wrote to Polanyi “I am profoundly grateful to you for your paper. You could not have written anything that goes more to the heart of the situation or more deserving of discussion by the group” (11 October 1948, Box 15, Folder 4 in MPP). Oldham’s “Note on Agenda” (Box 15, Folder 8 in MPP) sent to those planning to attend the meeting of December 17-20, 1948 suggested that Polanyi’s “Forms of Atheism” should be the lead-off paper presented and discussed on the evening of December 17, 1948 and the following morning of December 18. He also suggested that on December 18, “we might, perhaps, give the evening session to a consideration of what Polanyi says on pp. 1-2 of his paper about the fiduciary mode.”

The meeting on December 17-20, 1948 was a follow-up to some earlier discussion group meetings and often Oldham’s meetings had a rather diffuse topic. In a May 13, 1948 letter to Polanyi, Oldham described the upcoming December meeting as “a continuation of our conversations about God, approached from the standpoint of modern atheisms” (Box 15, Folder 4 in MPP). In this letter, Oldham mentions the possibility of inviting “Father Lubac, the French Jesuit” to this meeting. Oldham had apparently recently read—and Polanyi’s essay confirms that he had also read—Lubac’s *Drame de l’humanisme athée*.

Polanyi’s initial response to Oldham’s comments on the topic of the upcoming December 17-20 meeting is interesting:

I also feel a little at a loss as to how I could contribute to the subject which you suggest. Our meetings leave me increasingly with the feeling that I have no right to describe myself as a Christian. So perhaps I may feel the part of the outsider in the discussion. But my dominant sentiment is really this: Whatever meeting you may call and invite me to, I shall certainly attend. I don’t think the subject will make very much difference to the benefit which I will derive from such a meeting (31 May, 1948, Box 15, Folder 4 in MPP).

Oldham’s response of June 1, 1948 (Box 15, Folder 4 in MPP) assured Polanyi that the shape of the upcoming meeting was still open and would remain so until he talked further with Polanyi. Polanyi’s later letter to Oldham (25 June, 1948, Box 15, Folder 4 in MPP) proposed that he was “restive about the combination of Marxism and Biblicism” that he increasingly found in writings of members of Oldham’s groups as well as elsewhere. Polanyi was quite pointed in questioning this linkage and Oldham invited him to formulate his ideas in a paper for the December 17-20, 1948 meeting. Apparently, Polanyi wrote

“Forms of Atheism” only after reading Lubac’s book, as well as studying some of the other material prepared by others for the December meeting.

ENDNOTES

¹Drusilla Scott, who put together this issue of *Convivium*, wrote to Bill Scott on March 9, 1981 and her letter suggests that she had received a copy of “Forms of Atheism” from Bill Scott. I am indebted to Marty Moleski, S.J. for a copy of excerpts from Drusilla Scott’s letter.

²Drusilla Scott is referring to what became known in the Polanyi literature as the “Gelwick-Prosch” debate. In 1979 in *Ethics* (82 [January 1979]: 211–216), Harry Prosch reviewed Richard Gelwick’s *The Way of Discovery: An Introduction to the Thought of Michael Polanyi* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004) and criticized Gelwick’s account of Polanyi’s ontology. This led to lively discussions at two Polanyi Society annual meetings in the early eighties and articles in *Zygon* 17:1 (March 1982) in which matters concerned with Prosch’s interpretation of Polanyi and his role in co-authoring *Meaning* were debated. In 1985, Drusilla Scott’s *Everyman Revived: The Common Sense of Michael Polanyi* (Lewes, Sussex: Book Guild Limited, 1985; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995) was published and Prosch also reviewed her book (*Tradition and Discovery* 13:2 [1985–86]: 20–22), raising questions similar to those raised about Gelwick’s book. In 1986, Prosch’s *Michael Polanyi: A Critical Exposition* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1986) was published and it outlined his reading of Polanyi’s ontology, repeated his criticisms of figures like Gelwick and Scott and even extended his account of Polanyi to criticize what he took to be Marjorie Grene’s misreading of Polanyi. In sum, Polanyi’s ontology and particularly its applicability to the realities of the noosphere has been hotly debated; although the early discussion was in the eighties, questions about Polanyi’s ontology have regularly resurfaced in more recent scholarly discussion about topics like Polanyi’s realism (see *Tradition and Discovery* 26:3 [1999-2000]) and his account of the levels of reality (see *Tradition and Discovery* 39:2 [2012-2013] and 40:1 [2013-2014]).

³Thanks go to Professor John Polanyi for granting permission to make the essay easily accessible in *Tradition and Discovery* and as a part of the collection of Polanyi essays on the Polanyi Society web site.

⁴Archival materials are in the Papers of Michael Polanyi (MPP) in the Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library, 1100 East 57th Street, Chicago, Illinois 60637 U.S.A.

Forms of Atheism

Michael Polanyi

[**Editor's Note:** Neither the Key Words nor the Abstract were part of the original article. We have preserved the spelling, capitalization, and punctuation of the original typescript even when there are questions about its correctness.]

Key words: Michael Polanyi, the development of modern social ideas, Polanyi on religion and society, modern atheism and social philosophy

ABSTRACT

This brief and provocative 1948 essay by Michael Polanyi was produced for discussion by a group of religious intellectuals convened by J. H. Oldham. Polanyi outlines the sources and contours of modern social and political ideas in terms of the interaction of four types of "substitute deities" that have emerged in modern society and displaced what Polanyi identifies as the "God manifested in the Bible."

(1) I agree with P re Lubac in his "*Drame de l'Humanisme Ath e*" that we need not concern ourselves with the atheism that is merely verbal. There were always people who made fun of priests or doctors, and yet continued to fear the gods and take medicines. We are concerned with the convinced repudiator in modern times of God as manifested in the Bible, rejecting him in favour of other gods. There is a wide range of these substitute deities, but they can be reduced for convenience to four types: Athene, Clio, Dionysus and Prometheus.

Belief in the God of the Bible was first overthrown by the followers of Athene, the goddess of reason. They were horrified by the religious wars and disgusted with clerical obscurantism. They believed that the spirit of doubt would destroy fanaticism and establish the rule of tolerance. For the past 300 years (since Collins and Bayle) this belief has been consistently upheld. Though it declined on the continent of Europe during the 19th century, it is still powerfully held in Britain and America. Bertrand Russell is its most distinguished active interpreter today.

The horror of religious fanaticism which animates this oldest form of atheism (its roots go back straight to Lucretius, and then to Democritus) remains one of the most powerful forces opposing the acceptance of any theological authority, based on revelation. I am, myself, very responsive to this kind of horror and never feel at my ease when told that religion "*is the blessed sacrament*" or that the decisive fact of Christianity is that "the tomb was empty." May I explain this a little.

(2) I reject doubt as a supreme guide, because it logically cannot justify the empiricism which it wishes to promote. Yet in my view all categorical forms of assertion are misleading (no matter whether they assert a certainty or a probability). Only the fiduciary mode, used in the first person "I believe this or that" can be self-consistently upheld. I am ready to claim universal validity for my beliefs, even though I recognize that such commitment inevitably transcends evidence. I take this jump, trusting that God demands it of me and hoping that I may succeed for reasons that pass my limited understanding.

Such is the paradox of faith: it demands that we do now what on further reflection must seem unjustifiable. The same antinomy is reflected in the simultaneous demand for self extinction. The rigorous fulfillment of my responsibility as a believer requires that I reduce to zero the part played by my own will as a finite person in the making of my fiduciary decision. My beliefs are surrenders, accepted to avoid further delay which I believe unjustifiable. They simply represent a collapse at the point where I have loaded myself with responsibility to the breaking point. Knowing (or believing) that my beliefs are thus achieved, I shall try always to apply them in a manner consonant with their origin. I cannot hope that they carry report of more than one aspect of reality and would fully expect that this may appear flatly to contradict other true reports on different aspects. I hope it to be fully consistent with my belief in the transcendent origin of my beliefs that I should be ever prepared for new intimations of doubts in respect to them. I have seen how young students of science wrestle in vain with meaningless questions which they cannot help raising in view of the elementary stage of their knowledge, but which could not be asked at all in terms of a more precise formulation. I may add that even in their most profound presentation, our present physical theories tend to break down when pursued to certain ultimate consequences, known as the “infinities”. Yet nothing more recondite is involved here than the interactions of inanimate particles. I believe, therefore, that when we come to the central mysteries of Creation and Incarnation the texts on which we rely for our knowledge of them can give only one aspect of the truth and may well be compatible with other apparently contradictory reports. Nor can I believe that these texts can be strictly interpreted to answer a great many far-reaching questions. The number of questions we can ask about God in their context seems to me greatly in excess of the range that is likely to possess meaning. Indeed I often wonder whether a consistent application of the doctrine of Encounter might not reduce all references to God, that are not addresses in the form of prayer, to the secondary status of crude statements. Those who accord final theological authority to the words of the Bible clearly do so in a sentiment of true submission, but they must realize that the moment they meet other minds their position turns into a claim of their own infallibility, expressed in the rigid finality of their beliefs. I believe that when we pray “Thy will be done” we should offer to surrender to the will of God all our specific beliefs, excepting only what is logically implied in this act of surrender. In this sense I concur with much of the tendencies that find expression in rationalist atheism of the kind I have put down to Athene.

(3) Athenic Reason would have had a fair chance of dissolving God or at least attenuating him to an imperceptible residue, if the deity it was opposing had been any other than the God of the Bible. The 18th century might have led us back to Stoicism or the cult of politeness after the manner of Confucius. But the vision of salvation had opened men’s eyes and they could no longer achieve that indifference to human suffering at the price of which the mind of antiquity (from Socrates to Marcus Aurelius) secured its serenity. Thus Athenic reason failed to dissolve God and merely succeeded in chasing him underground. He embodied himself in various human aspects such as History, Individuality, Political Reform (Clio, Dionysus, Prometheus), each of which may truly claim to be part of the divine process, but turns into a demon if it demands to be the whole. The tragedy of atheism is that it makes this hybris inevitable.

For the most part this is familiar ground. Yet great questions remain looming unsolved. The apparently most innocuous of the three new gods, Clio, is perhaps the most intractable. Historic forces do exist which largely control our destinies. And some of these do appeal to all my heart. I believe that the British sense of national brotherhood is among the most potent forces of salvation today. I believe that in cultivating that brotherhood British people are obeying the will of God. Yet the claims of German brotherhood under Hitler were denied. And what about Zionists? Or the great Socialist Fatherland?

Where nations are struggling for their existence and this leads to mortal conflict between them, what is then the right? We do not really know.

The least dangerous of the trio is in my view the riotous Dionysus. Nietzsche's attempt to shout down the claims of human mercy are comparatively harmless in an age whose chief vice lies in moral perfectionism.

(4) Prometheus the planner of the Good Society is in fact the most potent embodiment today of God among unbelievers, and Christians are prepared to go with them a long way in this. Since to avoid the torments of Hell has ceased to be their greatest concern, they are inclined to agree that the ability of Christianity to eliminate the evils of this world is a test of its validity. Or at any rate, this is one prevailing Christian mood. Another—which is complementary to the first—is to plunge into the perfectionists' hatred of existing institutions and thence turn away angrily to a wholly transcendent conception of Christianity.

The potency of the modern Prometheus is derived from his combination with Clio. The revolutionary historicism which they produce together is an apt substitute for the Christian hopes of Salvation. It embodies the paradox of faith, by identifying our own actions with something that is happening to us. In its perspective History, Prophecy and Command are all one, and right action is always submission. The doctrine of Marx that freedom is the acceptance of historic necessity, stands in close parallel to the Gospel's teaching that freedom is the service of God. The parallel enables Marxism to absorb and transform into hatred the hopes of Christianity and likewise fortifies Christian Marxists with a vein of materialistic truculence. Acceptance of the utopian hopes of Marxism allies such Christians to the great humanitarians, like Shaftesbury, Lincoln, Gandhi, while the sinister machinery of Marxist dialectic assures them against Pelagian weaknesses to which humanitarians are prone. Thus Marxism has come to appear to an important section of Christian thought as a true and indeed an indispensable introduction to the Christian faith.

This seems to me like using a fan to drive a windmill by which the fan is powered. For I can see little truth in Marxism apart from its perverted content of Christian hope. This brings me to the main point of this ever-lengthening note. I would like to urge a radical break with belief in Progress, and ask that we consider the position of atheists as well as Christians—and of the body of humanity in general—after the elimination of this belief.

(5) About 1820 Fourier wrote that in the Phalanstere every child will easily master twenty different industrial arts—both physical and intellectual—by the age of four. From this crazy statement to those of our own time, announcing that science had solved the problem of abundance and that we had now to plan an Age of Plenty, we find an uninterrupted series of similar paranoid manifestations. We must now vigorously shake off this whole swarm of daydreams.

In view of recent historic experience, I should outline the scope of social improvement as follows. We are committed to a mode of production based on a large number of highly specialized industrial plants drawing on a great variety of resources and catering for myriads of different personal demands. This method could be discontinued only at the price of reducing the population of the West to a fraction of its present numbers and would make the remainder miserably poor and utterly defenceless. I do

not feel that this is a possible line of policy. Marx was right on the whole in saying that the utilization of a certain technique of production is possible only within the framework of certain institutions. He rightly recognized, with the followers of Adam Smith, the system of private enterprise operating for a market as the adequate embodiment of industrialism, as it existed then. He was wrong in assuming that this technique of production was in the course of being replaced by another which would require to be embodied in a centrally directed economic system. His forecast of progressive capitalist concentration was clever, but extravagant. The followers of Adam Smith were wrong in letting their onslaught on protectionism grow into a glorification of capitalism as a state of economic perfection. They were doubly wrong in opposing regulative economic legislation on principle, instead of welcoming it as an essential condition for the rational operation of capitalism. Marx was right in attacking the evils of unregulated capitalism and closer to the truth than his opponents among classical economists in exposing the deep-seated economic disharmonies manifested in recurrent mass unemployment. His manner of evaluating these observations, however, was again fantastic. His blind faith in progress made him conclude that since capitalism was faulty, it would necessarily be supplanted by a new set of institutions, which would eliminate these imperfections. As Columbus inevitably identified the Antilles with India which he had set out to discover, Marx identified the new system of which he had thus thought to have proved the necessity with Socialism. This was the argument for which he claimed that it transformed Socialism from a Utopia into a science. The same manner of reasoning can be observed even today wherever the demand for Socialism is derived from an exposure of the shortcomings of Capitalism. It underlines the most advanced socialist theories which expose the general imperfections of capitalist competition and expect Socialism to restore the perfect competitive market.

Indulging thus in blind hatred of social evils and blind confidence in social salvation, Marx and his successors lost sight in effect of the truth which Marx had been pre-eminent in emphasizing, that social institutions must form an adequate framework for the existing technique of production. *Delirant reges, plectuntur Achaii*. Almost fifteen million Russians had to perish in the famines of 1923 and 1932 to impress on their rulers the conclusion that the allocation of resources to a modern industrial system can be conducted only through a market; that wages must be adequately graded and enterprises must be required to make profits. Each of these features of capitalist economy was introduced after desperate resistance against overwhelming economic necessity. No effort was spared to make them unrecognizable under a cloak of socialist terminology. The manner in which the system works has never been revealed in detail, but enough of it is apparent to show that the only important difference from private enterprise lies in the handling of all major investments by the State. The capital market is eliminated and replaced by the decisions of a large number of public authorities, loosely co-ordinated from the centre. Thus the chances of risk-bearing are carried by the general public, on whose behalf a number of public officials undertake to allocate capital for new enterprise.

The modern theory of Socialism, as developed in the last 15 years, confirms that the central management of a modern industrial system is impossible and leaves no reason to suppose that Socialism can differ from Capitalism in much more than its nomenclature of an identical set of economic functions. Deliria of abundance and perfect justice are dissolving. We are touching earth again. Or at any rate, we touch it so far as a century of sanguine and often sanguinary daydreaming has not finally unfitted us for the hard struggle of stepwise improvement.

Henceforth we shall have to face once more the fact that the condition of man is miserable and that social institutions are full of obvious defects which cannot be eliminated. We shall try to reduce particular defects, but shall know that it will make on the whole only a small difference if we succeed. We shall have to resign ourselves once more to the inevitability of such social evils as economic wastage, competitive struggle, inequality and oppression.

The question is, whether humanity can learn to live once more without the opiate of progress? This largely constitutes, in my view, the “Drame de l’humanism athée” today. Dionysian overbearing has happily lost its major appeal. With Clio and Prometheus reduced to infirmity, the Néant naturally tends to fill our perspective. Can we fall back once more on Athene? We cannot, for the reason why she proved insufficient before is still there. It is “the intolerable shirt of flame, which human power cannot remove”—as Eliot described Christian love.

Accepting Imperfection: The Social Creed of a Christian Capitalist

Martin X. Moleski, S.J.

Key words: Polanyi, atheism, belief in progress, moral perfectionism, God of the Bible, reason, history, individuality, political reform, regulative economic legislation, transcendence, national spirit

ABSTRACT

“Forms of Atheism” is, despite its title, a plea for modest expectations in the economic and social sphere. Polanyi identifies five kinds of false “gods” who have led our culture astray. Although he criticizes an ideal of progress inspired by the Christian tradition, he affirms the importance of love and praises “the British sense of national brotherhood” as a force for good that derives from “obeying the will of God.” What Polanyi means by “God” is left to the reader’s sympathetic intuition into Polanyi’s character.

The “main point” Polanyi wanted to make in “Forms of Atheism” was “to urge a radical break with belief in Progress” (§4).¹ If he defends theism, it is a theism without a theology. What Polanyi offers in place of five failed gods—the “God of the Bible” (§1), Reason, History, Individuality, and Political Reform—is a non-dogmatic and practical form of Christianity. Speaking as a cultural Christian, Polanyi recommends that we repent of the “chief vice” of our age, “moral perfectionism” (§3), and instead accept the unavoidable imperfections of a market economy.

Polanyi expresses “horror” at the prospect of accepting “any theological authority based on revelation” (§1). He agrees with the rationalists that this form of religion produces “religious wars,” “clerical obscurantism,” and “religious fanaticism,” and consequently denies that “religion ‘is the blessed sacrament’ or that the decisive fact of Christianity is that ‘the tomb was empty’” (§1). For him, the “central mysteries” are “Creation and Incarnation,” but “the texts on which we rely for our knowledge of them can give only one aspect of the truth and may well be compatible with other apparently contradictory reports” (§2). Polanyi suggests that specific theological or dogmatic assertions have “the secondary status of crude statements” and ought to be held only provisionally in view of any reader’s fallibility (§2). The one positive aspect of the Christian tradition that survives the rationalist critique is compassion for others: “the vision of salvation had opened men’s eyes and they could no longer achieve that indifference to human suffering at the price of which the mind of antiquity (from Socrates to Marcus Aurelius) secured its serenity” (§3). What keeps Polanyi from fully embracing Athenic (rationalist) atheism is the fact that “Christian love” endures as an “intolerable shirt of flame, which human power cannot remove” (§5).²

The problem for Polanyi is that the Christian “vision of salvation” (§3) gave rise to “the opiate of progress” (§5), which fueled the “revolutionary historicism” of Marx and “transform[ed] into hatred the hopes of Christianity” (§4). In place of the absolute perfection of society predicted by Marx and demanded by Marxists, Polanyi offers a more modest “scope of social improvement” that can never eliminate “economic wastage, competitive struggle, inequality, and oppression” (§5). These are concomitants of the economic realities that “the allocation of resources to a modern industrial system can be conducted only through a market” and that “wages must be adequately graded and enterprises must be required to make profits” (§5). Polanyi’s practical spirituality recommends that we renounce perfectionism in social theory: “Henceforth we shall have to face once more the fact that the condition of man is miserable and that social institutions are full of obvious defects which cannot be eliminated. We shall try to reduce particular defects, but shall know that it will make on the whole only a small difference if we succeed” (§5).

Polanyi concedes that the articles of his creed are not much different from those “that find expression in rationalist atheism of the kind I have put down to Athene” (§2). An atheist could accept that there are limitations to the scope of reason, that the forces of history are not absolute, that the individual may rightly be required to yield to the just demands of society, and that we are best served by a realistic outlook on what might be hoped for from “regulative economic legislation,” which Polanyi portrays as “an essential condition for the rational operation of capitalism” (§5). Atheists undoubtedly would take issue with the thought that there is any Christian monopoly on compassion for human suffering. To paraphrase Tina Turner, they might well ask, “What’s God got to do with it?”

Polanyi invokes God several times in these notes. He believes that there is divine sanction for the acts of faith that he makes with universal intent: “I am ready to claim universal validity for my beliefs, even though I recognize that such commitment inevitably transcends evidence. I take this jump, trusting that God demands it of me and hoping that I may succeed for reasons that pass my limited understanding” (§2). He speaks of a “transcendent origin of my beliefs” (§2) and identifies himself with people of prayer: “I believe that when we pray ‘Thy will be done’ we should offer to surrender to the will of God all our specific beliefs, excepting only what is logically implied in this act of surrender” (§2). Although he has no principle by which to distinguish British nationalism from Nazism, Zionism, or love of “the Great Socialist Fatherland,” he nevertheless believes that “the British sense of national brotherhood is among the most potent forces of salvation today” and that “in cultivating that brotherhood British people are obeying the will of God” (§3).

Precisely because Polanyi rejects two traditional foundations for theology—the natural theology derived from contemplating the existence of God and positive theology derived from the Word of God—it is difficult, if not impossible, to pin down what the word “God” meant to him when he wrote this note. Polanyi’s God does not speak definitively to believers. Believers may speak to God, but not about God. Nevertheless, Polanyi trusts that God will reward acts of faith and does discriminate between those whose national spirit is praiseworthy and those whose national spirit is corrupt. Polanyi clearly holds that the worship of false gods poisons society; by implication, perhaps, he suggests that we need a true God to save us from absolutizing our ideals.

Polanyi might best be thought of as a non-denominational Christian before non-denominationalism became popular. He could also be understood as a person who, to use a phrase popular in our own day, was “spiritual but not religious.” “God” clearly functioned for him as the highest possible regulative ideal, toward which all of our intentions strive and by which all of our hopes are realized. We cannot say much more than that, for Polanyi did not leave us a record of his prayer to God as he understood God. What Polanyi thought when he prayed—if he thought when he prayed, if he prayed—is a secret that he has not disclosed to us.

ENDNOTES

¹All references are to the five sections of the article.

²The image is from T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*, “Little Gidding,” IV: “Love is the unfamiliar Name / Behind the hands that wove / The intolerable shirt of flame / Which human power cannot remove. / We only live, only suspire / Consumed by either fire or fire.”

Exploring the Underground: Silent Assumptions and Social Pathologies

D. M. Yeager

Key words: Christianity, conscience, moral passion, moral inversion, motivation, Reinhold Niebuhr, relativism, moral anthropology

ABSTRACT

*Convinced that reason is far from transparent to itself, Michael Polanyi, even in the earliest of his non-scientific texts, sets about the work of exposing the influence of unacknowledged presuppositions, commitments, and mental dispositions. Beginning in 1950 he identifies certain of those dispositions as “moral passions,” but in earlier texts he explores this feature of experience in a variety of tentative, preliminary ways that mark stages in the shaping of his moral anthropology. Set alongside “To the Peacemakers” (1917) and the final section of *Science, Faith and Society* (1946), “Forms of Atheism” (1948) offers an instructive moment in this development. The three contrasting analyses all point toward and illuminate the mature account of moral passion (and the associated theory of moral inversion) that supersedes them.*

Both good and evil grow in history, and . . . evil has no separate history, but . . . a greater evil is always a corruption of a greater good.

—Reinhold Niebuhr

Although Michael Polanyi first identified the linked phenomena of moral passion and moral inversion by those names in 1950 in the essay “The Logic of Liberty: Perils of Inconsistency,”¹ the phenomena themselves had occupied his attention in a number of earlier texts. The language that he settles on in “The Logic of Liberty” remains stable for the remainder of his career, but an examination of a few of these earlier arguments provides insight into the development of these distinctive notions and facilitates a better understanding of the difference between moral and intellectual passions. “Forms of Atheism,” reprinted in this issue of *Tradition and Discovery*, represents an important moment in the gestation of these ideas, even though the text is sketchy and speculative—and even though the religious language deployed in it is subsequently abandoned.²

“Moral passion” and “moral inversion” are terms that are closely identified with Polanyi’s social, historical, and political analysis of Europe in the first half of the twentieth century. The association is so tight that it is important to stress that my intention in this article is strictly limited to early studies of the captivity of reflection by submerged convictions, studies that offer preliminary steps toward the notion of moral passion. It is not my purpose to examine the development of his thinking about the social order (a study for which different texts would be more appropriate). While these pre-1950 analyses prefigure, none entails his heuristic leap in 1950 to the proposal that human beings are animated by something legitimately called moral passions, which can find expression in either humanizing or “inverted” (pathological) ways.

“Forms of Atheism,” prepared in 1948 for discussion at the December meeting of J. H. Oldham’s revival of “The Moot,” is particularly interesting because it was composed only a short time before the solidification of his mature conceptualization of this subject. I will contrast the imagery used in “Forms of Atheism” with that found in two widely separated prior discussions: his 1917 article “To the Peacemakers,” and the *credo* with which he ends *Science, Faith and Society* in 1946. In all three of these texts, Polanyi is preoccupied with the fact that reasoning, for all its power, rests on operations and influences that

affect reflection and action but elude the awareness of those who are reasoning and acting. Though other texts could be examined instead of or in addition to these three, these particular arguments enable us to see that at different times Polanyi imaged these influences quite differently: in one case as a fatal “idea,” then as the pull of “transcendent obligations,” and, in “Forms of Atheism,” as the continuing influence of the repudiated biblical God. What we see over time is the steady enrichment of his moral anthropology as he explores the motive power that impels human beings to try to remake on a better pattern whatever social world they inhabit.

The Underground Influence of a Fatal Idea

“To the Peacemakers” is an analysis of futility. Considering the horrors of the war just ending, Polanyi argues that the reasons for the conflict are actually to be found in the mismatch between a traditional dominant “idea,” and the technological and economic world within which persons and nations now act. Specifically, the primary source lies in the “epidemics of distrust” that are “a logical consequence of the idea of unlimited sovereignty, i.e. that the greatness and welfare of one’s own state is more important than those of the others.”³ When that thought becomes the guiding conviction shaping the relations among six large states in an industrialized world of motorized transport and devastating weaponry, war becomes inevitable. So long as peacemakers fail to understand the fatal power of this idea, they can do nothing to ensure a lasting peace. Yet this is a conception of states and sovereignty so deeply embedded in the framework of European political life that it has become invisible—serving as the unexamined supposition of all parties rather than being the subject of critical evaluation or contention. Bending all their efforts toward addressing the reasons that national representatives can recognize and voice in explaining the resort to violence, the peacemakers have been misled. Unable to recognize the true problem, they misdirect their efforts, and their well-intentioned work is, sadly, worthless: “Despite the fact that our age has denied ‘all prejudices’, it has not freed itself from prejudices at all. For they are rooted in tacit presuppositions which determine our thoughts without our being aware of them. That is why they cannot be renounced. Only if we thoroughly clarify our concepts can we then take notice of them, and only this can free us from them—if they are false” (22).

In their biography of Polanyi, William Scott and Martin Moleski, S.J., offer this parenthetical comment about the passage just quoted: “In his mature philosophy, Polanyi realized that ‘silent assumptions subconsciously directing our reasoning’ are the basis of knowledge as well as of prejudice, and he came to see that no amount of clarification or articulation could ever eliminate the tacit dimension of thought.”⁴ On the surface, this seems like an apt comment. Although Polanyi displays here his signature argument that conscious reasoning and explicit justifications rest on tacit commitments of which the reasoner is often quite unaware, Polanyi does appear, at this point, to view unexamined, tacitly held ideas as a problem that can and should be remedied by expanding the reach of awareness. Scott and Moleski are right to notice that his confidence here in the corrective power of reason does stand in marked contrast to later work in which he treats the “tacit dimension” as the largely unsearchable understorey of all reflection. Had Polanyi confined himself to arguing that the violence, having been caused by an outmoded concept of social organization, could be put right by a rational process of developing and adhering to a better concept, I would have no quarrel with their observation. There is, however, more going on in the essay. Polanyi alternates between treating this “idea” as a mistaken or outmoded concept and treating it as a “feeling” (24), an “inner moral force” (26), and an object of devotion that is deeply embedded in “our flesh and blood” (24). It is an idea that funds “religious anger” (25) and makes of war “the most devastating crusade for which the religious idea has ever sacrificed its believers” (23). He thus vacillates between treating the idea of unlimited sovereignty sometimes as a false and correctible concept and other times as a moral force or ruthless god. In this shift from the register of faulty intellectual premises to the register of moral fault we find the germ of the notions of moral passion and moral inversion.⁵

In observing that Polanyi's mature thinking about the *from-to* structure of knowing would require recasting his complaint in "To the Peacemakers," Scott and Moleski leave the impression that the unacknowledged governing idea of the unlimited sovereignty of European nation states could reasonably be thought to amount to a prejudice or commitment akin to all other contestable convictions relied upon in any given operation of rational reflection. But to the extent that Polanyi introduces, in a submerged line of argument, elements that suggest not just neutral social analysis but negative normative judgment, it seems less reasonable to imply that he would later become more comfortable with tacit reliance on the sorts of ideas that necessarily exact such high human costs. Reflection along these lines sharpens for us a very important question: If it is the case that we are all always relying on indefensible and unjustifiable perceptions, bodily processes, passions, longings, learnings, beliefs, customs, practices, and traditions, and if these vary dramatically from individual to individual, as well as from culture to culture, and if it is acknowledged to be the case that much of that upon which we rely will at any given time be to some degree mistaken, how is there logical space to assert, as the theory of moral inversion will later require, that some of these "silent assumptions" or "tacit presuppositions" are plainly pathological? To put this another way: Is Polanyi's objection to the idea of unlimited sovereignty simply the rant of someone who believes in a different "idea"? Or is it an objection raised on some platform from which a relatively nonpartisan normative judgment can be persuasively rendered, a judgment that ought to be intelligible to those that hold the position that is criticized?

Conscience, or the Human Core

In the rich development of Polanyi's thought between 1917 and the 1940s, the focus on the rational reassessment of received ideas gives way to a growing interest in features of knowing and acting that lie beyond the reach of reason or defy definitive rational assessment. The lectures published in 1946 as *Science, Faith and Society* constitute a sustained meditation on what it means to pursue truth once one admits the role of unquestioned commitments and acts of faith even in the most empirical and scientific knowledge claims. He accordingly moves from disagreements in science, where the development of consensus is facilitated by the fact that premises are to a large degree shared, to more intractable disagreements among communities who share few premises. Then in the final pages he arrives at disagreements in which practically no premises are shared, as in the disagreement between those, like himself, who dedicate themselves to the discovery of truth and those, like the romantic nihilists and Marxists, who do not. Where there is no logical possibility of conclusively verifying or falsifying either his own views of human possibility or the Marxist's views, conversion represents the only means of resolving the conflict.

The closing pages of the book seem to suppose some sort of categorical division within the domain of unverified reliances. Polanyi appears to separate the essential capabilities and aspirations that define human beings as human from the vast range of contingent social beliefs, practices, arrangements, and commitments that we adopt as we learn and grow. "To the Marxist," he writes, "this [conversion] would merely mean the withdrawal of his transcendent beliefs from their embodiment in a theory of political violence and their establishment once more in their own right."⁶ Less than luminously clear, this observation certainly seems to require a separation of two layers or domains within the sphere of the Marxist's unexamined reliances. To begin with, it posits the domain of "transcendent beliefs" which Polanyi earlier described as "ultimate reliances" (78). In addition, there is the domain of the entire specific worldview of the committed Marxist—with its texts, social structures and practices, assumptions, interpretation of history, vocabulary, and expectations—in which those transcendent beliefs happen to be contingently "embodied" and from which they can be "withdrawn" and redirected. The deeper layer represents something that Polanyi, at least at this point, considers constant through generational change (83) and, apparently, invariant across the contingencies of cultures.⁷ These "transcendent beliefs" constitute "the very core of humanity in [the person]" (82). He links this core to "conscience," by which he means an indeterminate

“susceptibility” to “obligations” (82), especially, “transcendent obligations” such as fidelity to “truth, justice, and charity” (83). These compelling duties—which, in modernity, are frequently ridiculed and denied—arise out of “spiritual reality” and are embodied in accessible forms in “spiritual spheres” such as science, law, “the great arts,” religion, and “freedom in general” (81).⁸ The “purpose of society” is only secondarily to provide the economic arrangements by which we secure our well-being; its “real” or primary purpose “lies in enabling its members to pursue their transcendent obligations” (83)—which no one functioning in isolation could grasp, let alone mold into concrete social forms or fulfill.

This distinction of strata underwrites an important contrast between acceptable and unacceptable commitments. At one level we have contingent variations in beliefs and commitments from which arise different forms of life and all the productive disagreements that are a healthy, constructive, and inevitable part of human striving to make our views more nearly true. No matter how contentious, incommensurable, implausible, or unyieldingly held these beliefs may be, they contend, as it were, on a level playing field where all have critics and defenders and where, over time, the community of judgment and persuasion will integrate some array of these claims into a set of common (generally held) convictions and will exclude others as incompatible with that dynamic frame of reference. The excluded views may constantly threaten to destabilize the existing social arrangements, but they are no more dangerous to the human project than the views enshrined in the social consensus. There is nothing *pathological* about cranks, dreamers, and misfits, and a good many of these marginalized voices will turn out to be the ones who successfully grasp dimensions of reality to which mainstream experts remain blind. The problem arises because beneath all this fallible, variable, legitimate, and creative contention, there is, according to Polanyi, that deeper, transcultural level of commitment and obligation that is not similarly contingent and fungible. Our fidelity to truth, justice, and charity is, to be sure, indeterminate, but it is not legitimately contestable. It is indeterminate in the sense that each new generation must embody the human response to these transcendent obligations in the contingent, changing, particular social forms available to it. What counts as justice in a particular social world is, therefore, subject to dispute, but the contention that justice is a fiction deployed in the self-interest of the powerful is not, from Polanyi’s point of view, just one more interesting item in the market place of ideas. Such a contention is, rather, an exercise in self-cancellation. From his point of view, then, the disturbing paradox of modern European thought is that the contingent, cultural beliefs and practices that embody these “ultimate reliances” are so framed as to negate the reliances which fund them. The result is pathological and socially devastating in a way that is not characteristic of contention among culturally contingent beliefs that do not touch upon “the very core of [our] humanity.” In pathological situations, we do not have finite, imperfect knowers fielding multiple interpretations, theories, hypotheses, or truth claims in the heuristic process of testing and discovery. What we have instead is a self-denying negation of what Polanyi believes to be the fundamental (and fundamentally moral) structure of distinctively human motivation. It is a denial that, if fully achieved, would reverse or erase the emergent powers by which human beings came to be differentiated from all other mammals.

Happily, the gap between what is consciously asserted and what is unconsciously accepted as the grounds of action is so great that this final self-erasure is very difficult to achieve. The fact that the “society-forming knowledge of abiding things” (83–84) has upheld civilization(s) for at least three millennia gives us confidence, he suggests, that this “core of humanity” is very durable. Nonetheless, it is not beyond corruption, and he worries that “romantic nihilism” with its “cult of brutality” may finally actually accomplish in practice just that horror of total dehumanization that it speculatively embraces. But the complete destruction of the core is not the only worry. Polanyi introduces here the notion that these distinctively human aspirations—the awareness of social obligations, the capacity for love, and the disposition of devotion—will find expressions or “embodiments” even when the social environment does not recognize them and cultivate them for what they are. When any contingent society denies the human reality upon which it ultimately rests, those expressions or embodiments will destroy what they purport to secure in a paroxysm of oppression and violence.

The Repudiated and Re-embodied God

The trope of “substitute deities” is a common one in the literature looking at modern atheism, but examining “Forms of Atheism” against the background provided by the two earlier texts makes it obvious how different Polanyi’s treatment actually is. The familiar argument is that God, as conceived in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, functions in the lives of the faithful in particular ways (grounding morality, providing consolation and hope, explaining suffering, and so forth); people beset by religious doubts continue to feel the same needs and will necessarily fill the empty space with other more plausible alternatives—reason, humanity, life, nature, democracy, the fatherland, art, or some such. Polanyi instead suggests that a hidden, intact, but disowned biblical God now “embodies” itself in various twisted forms.

The article—really just a set of talking points for discussion—presents a number of puzzles. To begin with, it is not transparently clear what Polanyi means by “God as manifested in the Bible” (§1.1, with similar language in §1.2). There are three good reasons, though, to take the phrase pretty much at face value. First, this was a period in Polanyi’s life when his interest in and affinity with Christianity was relatively robust (despite his self-deprecating comment to Oldham that the discussions left him “with the feeling that I have no right to describe myself as a Christian”⁹). Second, his speculative and elusive remarks about God in the final paragraph of *Science, Faith and Society* confirm that he entertained some conception, however heterodox, of a continuing divine reality.¹⁰ And third, only if we read his intent here fairly literally can we appreciate the substantive contrast he draws between the Greek and Christian worldviews: “The vision of salvation” that is conveyed by the Bible and was embraced by the first Christians “had opened men’s eyes and they could no longer achieve that indifference to human suffering at the price of which the mind of antiquity (from Socrates to Marcus Aurelius) secured its serenity” (§3.1). History, particularly human suffering in history, matters in the Christian framework, and once the alleviation of suffering is grasped as a responsibility, there is, in Polanyi’s view, no going back. This element of “Forms of Atheism” is particularly important, not only because it explains why the Christian God, once repudiated, does not simply fade away, but also because it provides a clue, not obvious elsewhere, to the driving motivation that Polanyi believes to lie behind prophetic social reform in both its constructive and its pathological manifestations.

Since Henri de Lubac’s *The Drama of Atheist Humanism* is the occasion for Polanyi’s reflections, one may be tempted to look there for further clues about how Polanyi construes “the God of the Bible” (§1.2). More insight can be gained, however, from Reinhold Niebuhr’s *The Nature and Destiny of Man*.¹¹ Niebuhr, like Lubac, is concerned with modern atheism, and he shares Lubac’s belief that modern atheism, in its most serious forms, is dehumanizing. It is Niebuhr, however, who draws a strong contrast “between ‘natural theology’ and a [preferable] theology which rests on a biblical basis” (2:120). Moreover, it is Niebuhr who focuses on the “human experience . . . of being confronted with a ‘wholly other’” (1:131). According to Niebuhr, “the God whom we meet as ‘The Other’ at the final limit of our own consciousness is not fully known to us except as specific revelations of His character augment this general experience of being confronted from beyond ourselves” (1:130). This is a passage that coheres revealingly with Polanyi’s argument at the end of *Science, Faith and Society*. Although Niebuhr does, to be sure, present this God-who-confronts as the creator, he emphasizes that the biblical God is the wrathful judge of all human activity through the entire sweep of fallen history. Held to account against God’s absolute justice, human unworthiness, imperfection, and self-deception are relentlessly exposed. Righteous schemes for the perfection of self and society are condemned both as a futile strategy for dealing with the wound of sin and as one of sin’s most intractable manifestations. The perfect justice of God is never doubted by the biblical writers; rather, “the question which hovers over the whole of biblical religion” is, according to Niebuhr, “Is God merciful as well as just? And if He is merciful, how is His mercy related to His justice?” (1:132). The biblical answer is Christ, which funds the “Pauline disavowal of perfection” (2:103), and Polanyi has

spoken of his own “very close relationship with the Pauline scheme of redemption.”¹² Niebuhr condemns fanaticism and utopian messianism as “the two evils inhering in the historical emphasis” of Abrahamic religions (2:viii), a condemnation that tracks remarkably well with Polanyi’s condemnation, in “Forms of Atheism,” of (1) the Christian history of religious wars, obscurantism, fanaticism, and intolerance that makes Athenic reason so attractive and (2) the baleful influence of (two of) the substitute deities whose promises of progress and perfection have only compounded social evils.

If the God that Athenic Reason “succeeded in chasing . . . underground” (§3.1) is neither a faulty God nor a false and deceptive human construction, the logic of the argument offered in “Forms of Atheism” must go something like this: The believers who become fanatical in serving the biblical God invite the attack of rational secularists who make no distinction between right and wrong relationships with God; for them, to reject the fanaticism entails denying God. This explicit denial makes this transcendent reality conceptually (but not experientially) inaccessible to them—that is, it drives the operation of this reality “underground.” But being, in truth, what Niebuhr calls “‘The Other’ at the final limit of our consciousness,” this reality is not something that can be “dissolved” by denial or forgetfulness; modern atheists continue to experience themselves as “confronted from beyond [them]selves”—that is, they continue to experience themselves as under judgment, condemned in their imperfection but required to seek justice and to care about suffering. The problem is that they must now do so without the complex self-understanding and resources of the repudiated tradition in which the God of the Bible was historically housed and manifest. That is to say, they must do so without (1) the attendant awareness of fallibility and dependency, (2) the relativizing transcendent frame, and (3) the possibility of an appeal to grace (the hope of saving mercy that makes unworthiness bearable). This contradiction between what is actually operative and what is understood to be operative, between the aspirations and the resources for realizing them, sets up precisely the dynamic that Polanyi will in the next few years identify as moral inversion.

If it is something of a challenge to ascertain what he thinks has been “chased underground,” what he takes to be going on above ground presents its own problems. To begin with, the four “substitute deities” are not operationally the same and (probably for that reason) are not, in Polanyi’s view, equally objectionable.

“Athene, the goddess of reason” (§1.2) is a force comparable to and contending against “God as manifested in the Bible.” Although Athene fails to “dissolve” the biblical God; she gains a victory of sorts in vanquishing arrogant and intolerant religious postures that overreach human capabilities by claiming to possess eternal truth. Athene is definitely not, as the other three seem to be, a disguised, partial, and warped “embodiment” of the underground God. In fact, Polanyi admits to being positively drawn to this relatively wholesome substitute deity, with her strong truth-seeking bent.

The three other gods—Clio (History), Dionysus (Individualism), and Prometheus (Political Reform)—have nothing to recommend them; the sole concession he makes is the admission that Clio is formed from an apprehension of the very real power of historical forces, some of which, such as “the British sense of national brotherhood,” exercise a very strong appeal even to his own “heart” (§3.2). While he suggests at one point that they may all be “part of the divine process,” each being rendered demonic only to the extent that it represents itself as the entirety, this analysis is not pursued and seems inconsistent with his treatment of devotion to Clio and Prometheus as pathological. Among these three, he is really only worried about Clio and Prometheus, particularly in the combination that he calls “revolutionary historicism” (§4.1).

“Riotous Dionysus” merits a sum total of three sentences, in which Nietzsche, his votary, is dismissed as “comparatively harmless in an age whose chief vice lies in moral perfectionism” (§3.3). In any case, he later observes, “Dionysian overbearing has happily lost its major appeal” (§5.6). “Forms of Atheism” thus makes clear Polanyi’s reluctance to join other advocates of the recovery of tradition in identifying

modern individualism as a primary adversary. It hardly seems outrageous to speculate that he included individualism among the deceptive gods both to acknowledge concerns voiced by others in Oldham's circle (T. S. Eliot comes to mind) and to make the point that he considered their concern to be misplaced. Still, even on that reading, his remarks would have to be understood as more than a sly and offhand collegial reprimand. In 1948, he published "The Case for Individualism," making it seem remarkable that it even occurred to him to include individualism in his pantheon of distorted substitute deities.¹³ However, his 1951 volume *The Logic of Liberty* reveals the complexity of his thinking about freedom. In his preface to that book, he differentiates "private individualism" from "public liberty," indicating that the "logic" of the latter is his subject.¹⁴ In a discussion of "private freedom" later in the book, he makes the point that most "individualistic manifestations . . . do not contribute to any system of spontaneous order in society" (157). What has only minimal "social effects" cannot constitute much of a threat to public liberty. While there are a few situations (serfdom, for example) in which "private freedom and public liberty are jointly reduced to zero" (158), the restoration of private freedom first requires the restoration of public liberty, not the other way around. Leaving aside such extreme situations, "the scope of socially ineffective personal liberties" is no reliable measure of a free society because in existing social arrangements, private freedom and public liberty are as likely to be "inversely related as they are to be correlated" (158). The very brevity of Polanyi's treatment of individualism in "Forms of Atheism" serves to remind us that this remains a dimension of his thinking that merits further investigation.¹⁵

Hegel lurks behind Clio (History) as Marx is the explicitly named representative of Prometheus (Political Reform). The argument Polanyi makes here about the destructive alliance of Clio and Prometheus is all of a piece with his remarkably stable critique of totalitarianism (on the right or the left) throughout his career. What makes this version distinctive is the presentation of these political pathologies as "embodiments" of the underground biblical God. The first notable effect of this framing is to accent the notion of a moral calling. This puts a foundation under the sense of "transcendent obligations" that he explored in *Science, Faith and Society*. It then allows him to accent the devastating irony of a moral aspiration and responsibility that can only embody itself in patently immoral and destructive ways. The second notable effect is to accent the friction within the Western heritage of the Greek elements against the Christian elements. It is from the Christian side that the drive toward justice rises because it was within that tradition that "indifference to human suffering" ceased to be an option. Having introduced the moral obligation to act to diminish social evil at the beginning of his remarks, Polanyi returns to it at the end. Even as utopian "daydreams" fail and the "deliria of abundance and perfect justice" dissolves (§5.4), we are not able to return to Stoicism or the worship of Athene. Despite our inability to rid the world of evil, we can no longer be indifferent to the plight of others, but are *afflicted* with love—wrapped in "The intolerable shirt of flame / Which human power cannot remove" (§5.6).¹⁶

Conclusion

Although they overlap in many ways, the three texts considered above constitute a progression toward Polanyi's settled notion of moral passion. In the very early essay, he advances an interesting and comparatively straightforward complaint that the analyses being conducted by those trying to construct a pathway to peace are simply not conceptually deep enough. In *Science, Faith and Society* we see a different model. Here Polanyi is not talking about strata of ideas (or foundational concepts) but about strata of conviction in the domain of unconscious *motivation*. In "Forms of Atheism" he reconfigures the structure advanced in 1946, clarifying the means by which, in Niebuhr's words, "both good and evil grow in history" such that "a greater evil is always a corruption of a greater good."¹⁷

Although Polanyi's treatment, over his long career, of the phenomena of moral passion and moral inversion—particularly in relation to his condemnation of totalitarian governments—seems more notable

for the stability of the argument than for the variations, three things worthy of notice emerge from the study of these preliminary explorations.

First, attention to these early texts makes clear the degree to which the development of this line of argument was inflected by religious thinking, particularly his understanding of the theology and social analysis of Reinhold Niebuhr. This is not obvious from the neutralized language from 1950 onward, mostly because Polanyi himself drifted away from Christian conversations and secondarily because he sought to present his arguments in philosophically convincing ways.

These early texts also reveal how little the phenomenon that Polanyi is investigating has in common with any recognizable account of psychological emotions. While R. T. Allen is pursuing a useful project in investigating Polanyi's contribution to the "rehabilitation of emotion,"¹⁸ such efforts must begin with attention to Polanyi's distinction between the appetites and the passions. Moreover, it is important to appreciate the relentlessly *moral* character of moral passion. As *Science, Faith and Society* makes clear, Polanyi's notion of moral passion, construed as the felt weight of obligation, is much closer to what has traditionally been designated "conscience" than it is to emotion. "Forms of Atheism" presents the underground biblical God—the totally 'Other' who calls, judges, demands, and in some sense must be appeased—as the origin of responsible action, not the origin of a rich array of psychological responses.

Finally, attention to the preliminary ventures offered in these three texts enables us to differentiate a little more clearly between moral and intellectual passion. I continue to think that the difference between moral and intellectual passion is far less important to Polanyi than the difference between the appetites and the "mental passions" (a term that Polanyi used in *Personal Knowledge* to include both intellectual and moral passions),¹⁹ but familiarity with these earlier arguments does sharpen our understanding of what the moral passions do that the intellectual passions do not, and it thus provides insight as to why he tends in later work to treat moral passions as the deeper ones.²⁰ Moral passion is the motive power behind action oriented in social hope—specifically in the hope of a communal future that is better than the present. That is its tie to the prophetic. Among our primal human cravings or motivations, then, is not just the implacable desire to understand but also the animating felt *need* to (re)construct a social world of institutions, articulated systems of cooperation, customs, roles, and practices. Moral passion is thus the foundation of action. Were it not for the curb of tradition, the ballast of established arrangements, and the resistance of the unpersuaded, this dynamic future-oriented passion would (despite its beneficent objectives) unsettle our social reality altogether.²¹ At the same time, since we do enter a world already made, this motive force must always express or embody itself within the framework afforded by extant social realities. The passion or motive force can never itself be pathologically distorted, but pathologies or perversions can develop either (1) when there are no curbs or limits on its expression so that it pushes toward chaos or (2) when it is expressed in a social world where widespread belief in and commitment to the humanizing realities of truth, justice, and love have been dismantled, leaving a moral vacuum. In such a vacuum, the plausible tools and objectives that present themselves (both internally and externally) to the hungry passions have been reduced to power, economic (material) interests and well-being, and the consuming, conflictual effort to satisfy individual appetites.

In closing let me return to the question I raised as I thought about Scott and Moleski's parenthetical comment on "To the Peacemakers": How is there logical space to assert, as the theory of moral inversion seems to require (and as all three of these essays suppose), that some of these "silent assumptions" or "tacit presuppositions" are plainly the bearers of social pathologies? The first help we get with this comes from the separation, in the final pages of *Science, Faith and Society*, of two different strata of unexamined convictions. Much of what we think of as the tacit dimension involves the convictions that are a function of the accidents of history—we are raised, formed, educated in a particular context, and we act within the institutions, traditions, expectations, roles, and arrangements of a particular historical moment. But the

tacit dimension also includes “ultimate reliances,” those aspirations that Polanyi presents as features of our emergence and reality as human beings. Pathologies can develop because there is no necessary harmony between “ultimate reliances” and the beliefs and commitments that ground particular worldviews and social arrangements. It is Polanyi’s moral anthropology—which we have seen emerging in these earlier texts and which he clearly does *not* consider to be a feature of his particular, historical circumstances—that provides the platform from which he holds that he can reliably analyze and normatively judge some cultural arrangements and systems of belief to be diseased distortions.

But in addition, as Polanyi’s thought on this issue steadies and gains definition, it becomes plain that the pathology is not limited to the domain of the tacit. There is, to be sure, the mismatch between, for example, the passion for justice and the package of beliefs and convictions that constitutes a worldview in which talk about justice is considered to be a self-serving disguise for the pursuit of power or wealth. But because we are physical, temporal creatures who are thrown into a world already constituted by prior generations, there can also be a mismatch between our moral passions and the social institutions and arrangements within which those passions must be embodied and given socially efficacious form. The moral passions are indeterminate, but not tractable—they *will* be embodied or expressed. A social world that does not grasp their reality is, in some sense, at their mercy. But they can only be embodied in the world that comes to hand. To the extent that social arrangements and social commitments do not support them, their embodiment can only be twisted and distorted—like the embodiments of the biblical God who has been driven underground.

ENDNOTES

¹Michael Polanyi, “The Logic of Liberty: Perils of Inconsistency,” *Measure: A Critical Journal* 1/4 (1950): 359. This essay was reprinted with only minor changes as chapter 7, “Perils of Inconsistency,” of *The Logic of Liberty: Reflections and Rejoinders* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1951), where the relevant passage appears on p.106. An earlier, variant version of this material appeared as “The Authority of a Free Society” in 1949 in *Nineteenth Century and After* 146 (Dec. 1949): 347–60. While this essay speaks of “the moral needs of man,” alludes to a process that is the “inverse of Freudian sublimation,” and makes a generic reference to “the force of a blind moral passion” (355), this essay does not include the paragraph found in the 1950 and 1951 versions in which “moral passion” and “moral inversion” enter Polanyi’s vocabulary as distinctive terms. For the information that led me to these prototypes for chapter 7 of *Logic of Liberty*, I am indebted to R. T. Allen, Appendix 1: “Annotated Bibliography of Michael Polanyi’s Publications on Society, Economics, and Philosophy,” in Michael Polanyi, *Society, Economics, and Philosophy: Selected Papers*, edited by R. T. Allen (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1997), 365.

²Michael Polanyi, “Forms of Atheism,” *Tradition and Discovery* 40/2 (2013–2014): 7–11. The article is reprinted from *Convivium*, newsletter no. 13, pp. 5–13. Rather than citing page numbers when I quote from this text, I will cite the number of the section and the number of the paragraph within that section.

³Michael Polanyi, “To the Peacemakers: Views on the Prerequisites of War and Peace in Europe,” trans. from the Hungarian by Endre J. Nagy, in *SEP*, 18, 19. Page citations will be given parenthetically in the remainder of this section.

⁴William Taussig Scott and Martin X. Moleski, S.J., *Michael Polanyi: Scientist and Philosopher* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 45. Scott and Moleski quote the passage in a different translation: “our age did not get rid of all prejudices by denying all prejudices. They have their roots in silent assumptions subconsciously directing our reasoning. . . . Only by clarifying our concepts thoroughly can we find them and only so can we get rid of them.”

⁵For my analysis of moral inversion in *Personal Knowledge* and the essays collected in *Knowing and Being*, see D. M. Yeager, “Confronting the Minotaur: Moral Inversion and Polanyi’s Moral Philosophy,” *Tradition and Discovery* 29/1 (2002–2003): 22–48. There are two aspects of that essay that I have reconsidered. I now think that Polanyi’s notion of moral passions is both more complex and more central than I suggested in that essay, and I am now less inclined to argue that Polanyi understands his critique of totalitarian government to rest on nothing more than his commitment (expressed with universal intent) to a competing worldview. To put this another way, I am now less sure that Polanyi is a social constructionist “all the way down.”

⁶Michael Polanyi, *Science, Faith and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946, 1964), 81. Page citations will be given parenthetically in the remainder of this section.

⁷Admitting that this commits him to universalism of a sort, he insists that his position has little in common with eighteenth-century rationalist universalism (for his differentiation of the two, see 82–83).

⁸In the new preface to the book that Polanyi wrote in late 1963, he notes, “In *Science, Faith and Society*, I interpreted this [what upholds the creative life of a community] as a belief in a spiritual reality, which, being real, will bear surprising fruit indefinitely. To-day I should prefer to call it a belief in the reality of emergent meaning and truth” (17). It is not clear from this how much of those last five pages of *Science, Faith and Society* he later wished to disown.

⁹Michael Polanyi to J. H. Oldham, May 31, 1948, Michael Polanyi, Papers, Box 15, Folder 4, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library, 1100 East 57th Street, Chicago, Illinois. Quoted in Phil Mullins, “A Prefatory Note on Polanyi’s ‘Forms of Atheism,’” *Tradition and Discovery* 40/2 (2013-2014): 4-6.

¹⁰He suggests that inasmuch as untold generations have managed to make “new additions to our spiritual heritage” despite all the threats to the core of our humanity, it is reasonable to postulate some sort of “continuous communication with the same source which first gave men their society-forming knowledge of abiding things” (84). Thus, awareness of the true nature of our human reality and “acceptance” of the “transcendent obligations” have the power to “reveal to us God in man and society” (84). Anticipating some features of “Forms of Atheism,” he even voices the belief “that modern man will eventually return to God through the clarification of his cultural and social purposes” (84).

¹¹Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation*, 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1941, 1943). Volume and page citations are given parenthetically in the text in the remainder of this section. Polanyi remarked in a 1966 interview that in the course of his “gradual [though not ‘complete’] attraction to Christianity,” “the decisive point which brought me into very close relationship with the Pauline scheme of redemption was the reading of Niebuhr’s two books . . . his Gifford lectures.” Polanyi goes on to remark that it is from Niebuhr’s work “that I have derived the idea, borrowed the idea, that our relationship to perfection . . . is one which we can conceive validly only as an irreducible tension.” See Interviews of Polanyi by Ray Wilken/Wesleyan Interview Transcript 3 File, pp. 3, 4, unpublished material accessible on the “Essays and Lectures by Michael Polanyi” page at www.polanyisociety.org. Scott and Moleski establish that both Polanyi and Niebuhr received honorary degrees at Princeton on October 19, 1946, that Niebuhr had attended at least one meeting of the Moot, and that “it was probably through the Moot that Polanyi became acquainted with the theology of Paul Tillich and Reinhold Niebuhr.” See Scott and Moleski, *Michael Polanyi*, 202, 213, 262, 318 n. 11, and 322 n. 61. They also draw attention to some archival materials, including notes Polanyi made on Niebuhr’s work (Michael Polanyi, Papers, Box 24, Folder 10, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library) and a short manuscript archived as “Opening Address, Niebuhr celebration, New York, February 25, 1966” (Michael Polanyi, Papers, Box 38, Folder 8, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library). “Niebuhr celebration” refers to the events marking the twenty-fifth anniversary of the

journal *Christianity and Crisis*. Because Niebuhr was so closely identified with the journal (as founder and, for many years, editor), this anniversary celebration seems to have been promoted as a tribute to Niebuhr (though he was not able to attend because of ill health). The dinner on the night of February 25 is in some places called the “Niebuhr dinner,” and the speaker was Hubert Humphrey, then the Vice-President of the United States. The celebration, held at Riverside Church, included a day-long colloquium on “The Crisis Character of Modern Society.” Polanyi opened the morning session with remarks on the Hungarian revolution. Other panelists included Roger Hilsman, Candido Mendes de Almeida, Richard Goodwin, and Johannes Hoekendijk. The afternoon panelists were Hannah Arendt, Herbert Blau, Vincent Harding, Gerald Holton, George McGovern, and Bayard Rustin. See the documents related to the colloquium collected in *Christianity and Crisis* 26/9 (May 30, 1966): 107–23,

¹²Wilken, Wesleyan Interview Transcript 3 File, p. 4. See also Michael Polanyi, “Faith and Reason,” *Journal of Religion* 41/4 (October 1961): 247.

¹³In some bibliographies the title is given this way, in others the article is cited as “Ought Science to be Planned? The Case for Individualism.” It appeared in *The Listener* (a newsletter of the BBC), 40 (September 16, 1948): 412–13. It was incorporated into chapter 6 of *The Logic of Liberty*.

¹⁴Polanyi, *Logic of Liberty*, vii. Page numbers will be given in parentheses in the remainder of this section.

¹⁵Zdzislaw Najder’s early, biting critique of Polanyi’s treatment of moral inversion accuses Polanyi of remaining trapped within the confines of Western liberalism and suggests that “Polanyi’s conceptual framework remains thoroughly individualistic or rather, to be more precise, rests on a sort of an individualistic-intellectualistic syndrome.” See Zdzislaw Najder, “‘Moral Inversion’—or Moral Revaluation?” in *Intellect and Hope: Essays in the Thought of Michael Polanyi*, ed. by Thomas A. Langford and William H. Poteat (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1968), 383. Although new and interesting work is being done in this area, the question of whether Polanyi’s thought was structured by liberal individualism or whether he advances an alternative to liberal individualism remains unresolved. For a useful analysis, see R. T. Allen, *Beyond Liberalism: The Political Thought of F. A. Hayek and Michael Polanyi* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1998). For an argument that Polanyi’s notion of public liberty cannot be linked to liberal, individualistic accounts of liberty, see Phil Mullins, “Michael Polanyi’s Early Liberal Vision: Society as a Network of Dynamic Orders Reliant on Public Liberty,” *Perspectives on Political Science* 42 (2013): 162–71.

¹⁶The quotation is from “Little Gidding” (the last of the *Four Quartets*), section 4, lines 11–12. See T. S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays 1909–1950* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1962), 144.

¹⁷Niebuhr, *Nature and Destiny*, 2:ix.

¹⁸R. T. Allen, “Polanyi and the Rehabilitation of Emotion,” in *Emotion, Reason and Tradition: Essays on the Social, Political and Economic Thought of Michael Polanyi*, ed. by Struan Jacobs and R. T. Allen. (Aldershot, Hampshire, U.K.: Ashgate Publishing, 2005), 41–53.

¹⁹For a discussion of the differences between appetites and passions, see Yeager, “Confronting the Minotaur,” 36–39.

²⁰How Polanyi conceives of the relation of the moral and intellectual passions probably cannot be settled. Although he makes no clear distinction between them, he often seems to treat them as separate phenomena divided along the lines of social action and reflective inquiry. Walter Gulick, however, interprets “the moral passions as a strongly felt subset of the intellectual passions, a subset dealing with ideal intraspecies relationships but, like the intellectual passions, centered on promoting the conditions that conduce to security” (Walter Gulick, email message to author, July 5, 2013). My own belief, as a result of this study, is that intellectual passions are actually a subset of moral passions. The latter provide the well-springs of action, whether the action is directed toward truth or justice. This would explain why, in *Personal Knowledge*, Polanyi in one place refers to the passion for justice as an intellectual passion and, in other places includes the passion for truth in lists of moral passions, while also treating moral judgments and intellectual valuations as similar acts of appraisal and therefore “akin.” See Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958, 1962), 309, 214.

²¹In this article, I have not given attention to the moderating effect of tradition because it is not a prominent feature of the texts I have been examining. It becomes an important strand of argument from *Personal Knowledge* onward.

A Clue Toward Knowing Truth and God, and Polanyi's "Forms of Atheism"

Richard Gelwick

Key words: Polanyi, atheism, truth seeking, universal and unfolding reality, radical monotheism, idolatry, faith and tacit knowing, theological inquiry, God of the Bible, Pauline scheme of redemption, Augustine, the Moot, T.S. Eliot

ABSTRACT

The topic of atheisms of our time brings to the fore Michael Polanyi's own beliefs about God which underlie and are briefly expressed in his essay, but need to be shown in a fuller exposition. His beliefs arise from two main sources. One is Polanyi's intense life of pursuing of truth through science and also responding to his society in its destructive wars and revolutions. The second source is his belief in the God of the Bible which presents an ongoing journey of fidelity to truth seeking. In developing a new epistemology, he offered a clue toward knowing truth and God.

Truth, Inquiry, and God

Michael Polanyi's 1948 essay, "Forms of Atheism," a *tour de force*, displays much about his depth and intellectual prowess as well as central concerns of his developing philosophical outlook. There are so many hints and suggestions of Polanyi's major views that it is difficult to stay focused in discussing it. Nevertheless, I want to call attention to Polanyi's belief about faith and God. Put simply, Polanyi is an ardent advocate for the freedom of science to seek the truth and state its findings, contributing to the general pursuit of truth in society.¹ In the larger frame of his developing epistemology, the pursuit of truth is situated in his sense of an unfolding and universal reality. As he formulated his views justifying the independence and freedom of science, he saw Christian faith as part of the civilization that provided some of the major premises that led to the development of modern science's capacities to advance knowledge and improve human life. Of particular importance from the Christian tradition is the role of faith, or the fiduciary component in knowing, in the aim of knowing toward the truth and in the unfolding nature of reality to human knowledge. What follows throughout my discussion is an interwoven and overlapping treatment of Polanyi's epistemology with the biblical God.

The God of the Bible

Polanyi's thought generally reflects the influence of the biblical story of the Hebraic and Christian monotheism that develops and grows from a local henotheism toward an ethical and radical monotheism.² This development has a kinship with what Polanyi sees as the universal intent of the truth seeker. This influence, though not the only one, is important for Polanyi's view of science's need for freedom to choose its own research problems and methods. The independence of truth about reality and the freedom of conscience from the captivity to any human conception is a part of the perennial process of discovery and growth of knowledge in science and everywhere. Polanyi did not make this exact comparison, but his views do compare with the biblical narrative of the faith of Israel struggling to serve a unity of being described as one God. While his view of growing knowledge limits all stages of knowing from being final, it does not deny a center and standard of universality toward which the growth of knowledge aims.

Polanyi emphasizes this dynamic of an unfolding of knowledge throughout his major works. In *The Tacit Dimension*, he expressed briefly and incisively his view of the human knower as a seeker or explorer confronting problems and trying to understand and deal with them. There he states that the person and problems are more real than cobblestones “because of their capacity to reveal themselves in unexpected ways in the future.”³ In his final chapter on “A Society of Explorers” he pictures organized humanity engaged in the pursuit of truth as an unfolding knowledge of reality.⁴ His association of his theory of knowledge with ideas from scripture show a genuine relationship to biblical ideas of faith in God as a journey.

The Pauline Scheme of Redemption

The following text is a *locus classicus* for seeing Polanyi’s relation to Christian faith and the pursuit of truth.

The stage on which we thus resume our full intellectual powers is borrowed from the Christian scheme of Fall and Redemption. Fallen Man is equated to the historically given and subjective condition of our mind, from which we may be saved by the grace of the spirit. The technique of our redemption is to lose ourselves in the performance of an obligation which we accept, in spite of its appearing on reflection impossible of achievement. We undertake the task of attaining the universal in spite of our admitted infirmity, which should render the task hopeless, because we hope to be visited by powers for which we cannot account in terms of our specifiable capabilities. This hope is a clue to God, which I shall trace further in my last chapter, by reflecting on the course of evolution.⁵

This passage is helpful in seeing the knower who is limited by her/his own self-centeredness yet keeps reaching for the seemingly impossible and may be met by the solution she/he is seeking. The solution, however, is limited by the seeker’s aptitude, historical horizon, and readiness to understand. The fallen state is a subjective mental condition or self-centeredness in a self which is delivered by turning its focus to the gift of the spirit that calls us toward a more universal perfection despite its difficulties. This point appears in Polanyi’s closing reference in the essay to Eliot’s lines in “Little Gidding.” I give the larger immediate passage from which Polanyi quoted:

The dove descending breaks the air
With flame of incandescent terror
Of which the tongues declare
The one discharge from sin and error:
The only hope, or else despair
Lies in the choice of pyre or pyre-
To be redeemed from fire by fire.

Who then devised the torment? Love.
Love is the unfamiliar Name
Behind the hands that wove
The intolerable shirt of flame
Which human power cannot remove.
We only live, only suspire
Consumed by either fire or fire.⁶

The biblical image of the spirit of God descending is the background. The gift of the spirit turns the self outward and toward pursuing the awe and wonder of being itself, which is like a Christian worshipping God.⁷ Reason alone cannot redeem the human state because we are lovers. Love is “the intolerable shirt of flame which human power cannot remove – as Eliot described Christian love.”⁸ Our reason is moved by what we love. It can be the solving of a puzzle or a problem or life-long challenge and quest. Problem solving everywhere and especially in greatness in science involved the earnest and passionate pursuit of the knower; dedication and surrender are a part of the role of faith in the pursuit of truth and essential to it.

T.S. Eliot and Augustine

In Polanyi’s use of Eliot there is a blending of the human drive and condition with what Augustine expressed in his *Confessions*, “that our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee.” Applying this to Polanyi’s own life, we can see it in his dedication and drive for freedom to pursue the truth, in the problems that he faced, in his decisions to move from Germany to England, and to change careers from medicine to physical chemistry to social and philosophical thought. Eliot’s verses help Polanyi to speak of self-giving to the ongoing pursuit of truth.

There is a duality in this love of the knower and the known. The knower is searching for fulfillment of her/his love and the known is responding. The same can be said of problem-solving in Polanyi’s epistemology of scientific discovery, wherein the potential of a problem attracts the researcher, and the researcher chooses a strategy for the problem. The knower’s action—interest, urge, desire, love—has a self-centered need represented in her/his seeking. They are self-set standards searching for a destination of satisfaction.⁹ There is a dynamic that commits her/him to act as she/he must, to move from the subjective self toward the objective and universal aspect of reality. This from-to relation of knowing shows the enduring pursuit of truth. The subjective self, embodied in passionate striving, is redeemed in its finding of illumination or understanding, which is similar to the grace of God of which the apostle Paul spoke. Significantly, the divine-human relation, which must include doing the truth, includes both the *eros* of wanting the good and the self-giving *agape* of the divine. In the *eros* of desire there is also an *agape* of self-giving, of risking, of even sacrificing for truth. In the seeking process that becomes surrender to what is found, we are changed. This change forms a new standpoint or even a revolutionary change of view. Biblically, one might say it is a conversion.

From Augustine: Key Principles of Faith and Knowing

Among many instances and forms of the tacit dimension that underlies the personal in all knowing, Polanyi found in the Christian tradition the principle stated by Augustine of Hippo, *nisi credideritis, non intelligitis*.¹⁰ Polanyi referred to him as a theologian who expressed clearly what Polanyi was developing about the nature of knowledge: “unless you believe you will not understand.” In contrast, Polanyi marks John Locke as one of the founders of the modern mind’s dismissal of faith as based on persuasion and not empirical evidence.

Augustine also thought truth and God are one. In Augustine’s neo-Platonic thought to know well one has to desire wisdom or truth. To desire something, however, one has to know to some degree that it is there or one would not desire it. Such desiring indicates that the knower has within some beginning awareness of this truth that she/he is seeking. The similarity to Polanyi’s later structure of tacit knowing is fitting. The hunch, intuition, intimation of something hidden that could be revealed prompts exploration and investigation which lead toward truth-finding.

Polanyi is not a neo-Platonist, but his theory of knowing has a from-to structure of relying on an inner prompting that leads to discovery of new knowledge. Where is God in Polanyi’s theory of knowing? God

would be the infinite and unfolding reality within and beyond the clues that prompt our quest for truth. Theologically, any move toward truth and good is movement toward God.

At a middle stage of Polanyi's turn toward social and philosophical thought in Manchester when he was still the chief physical chemist, he gave a religious talk at a school where he quoted extensively from Augustine four times on the theme that faith precedes understanding and one time that truth is our God. He related this view to John 8:31-32 where Jesus says to the Jews who accept him, "You will know the truth and the truth will set you free."¹¹ Polanyi, however, is not appealing to the authority of scripture to settle a question of Jesus' divinity. Instead, his point is that seeking truth is a guidepost for a moral life. Such truth-seeking appears in Polanyi's ardent concern for freedom in science and implicitly in all areas of learning and research.

Polanyi and Theological Inquiry

Polanyi's relation to Christian contemporary theologians was diverse in 1948 as well as later. Through the Moot, he knew theologians and their various attempts to state Christian theology effectively for the current time. In the Moot were theologians John Baillie and H. A. Hodges as well as the convener, J. H. Oldham. Baillie was a Calvinist and Scottish theologian who thought that all genuine knowledge, from revelation in religion to science, was of the encounter type where one meets the objectivity of reality and in meeting learns from it.¹² H. A. Hodges was an Anglican philosophical theologian with a special interest in bringing together the Church of England and the Eastern Orthodox Church. Sir Walter Moberly, formerly vice-chancellor of the University and one of the persons who aided in bringing Polanyi from the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute to the University, was a university leader in the Student Christian Movement in England. Oldham was a major leader in bringing Christian thinkers from diverse Christian affiliations to consider together what were called "Christian frontiers" and was regarded by many as a founder of The World Council of Churches. Through them, Polanyi was well aware of contemporary Christian thought as lively, with some contending for traditional views and others proposing modifications. In *Personal Knowledge*, Polanyi stated an affinity for the progressive Christian theology of Paul Tillich.¹³ Near the end of his life, Polanyi made Barthian Scottish theologian Thomas F. Torrance executor of his literary estate. These disparate choices demonstrate in Polanyi an openness and respect for ongoing theological inquiry with its differences.¹⁴ For Polanyi, the knowing and understanding of Christian faith itself was a continuing enterprise of exploration and discovery, which fits his larger outlook that the truth that we know and seek to follow is an unfolding one even in theology. Implicitly, it also means that the search for understanding between the Christian faith and other world religions should develop in fidelity to truth-seeking about reality itself. For Polanyi, no theology or tradition has absolute and final truth, though some may claim it. Also, controversy within science and evaluation by the scientific community has some similarity to these developments in Christian theological tradition.

The development of Christian theology is complex and more dynamic than its denominations and modern atheistic opponents understand. The basic reasons are seen in Polanyi's perceptive distinction between Christian worship and theology. He says: "A heuristic impulse can live only in the pursuit of its proper enquiry. The Christian enquiry is worship."¹⁵ As in science, the inquirer needs to focus on the subject, which is God. The problem of the standpoint from which one judges is fundamental to judgment. Standing outside the circle of natural science or outside Christian worship limits greatly what can be known about nature or God. Polanyi's idea of Christian worship as the basis for understanding what Christians mean by "God" calls for experience of the meaning of God through the Christian's rites that center on God.¹⁶ He also says: "...theology as a whole is an intricate study of momentous problems. It is a theory of religious knowledge and a corresponding ontology of the things thus known."¹⁷

Such a view is challenging to theological studies in the United States, where focus in theology is mainly in seminaries preparing persons for service in churches. Polanyi observes several theological problems in this essay that remain dangerous and in need of attention. First, “where nations are struggling for their existence and this leads to mortal conflict between them, what is then the right?” Second, is “the ability of Christianity to eliminate the evils of the world a test of its validity?” Third, are institutions the problem and should Christianity be mainly transcendent, i.e. spiritual?¹⁸

Modern Culture and Belief in God

Understanding the nature of truth and God is a momentous issue in the crisis of beliefs in the modern world because it is distorted by a misunderstanding of truth in science as bare facts. By addressing this problem in his essay, Polanyi is focusing mainly upon rival deities that also arise out of the ways they have led us to seek and use the truth.

A witness of totalitarian misuse of and interference with science, Polanyi’s passionate and costly commitment to the pursuit of truth is similar to the spirit of the prophets and the spirit of the Confessing Church in Nazi Germany that struggled in their historical context “to obey God rather than men.” Not a church leader but a leading scientist, he is like a prophet who speaks out against the corruption of science’s mission to pursue the truth. In a society where truth is decided from the top down without openness to criticism and dissent, loyalty to the greater truth of all reality is denied and left in the hands of the most forceful.¹⁹

Polanyi’s view of truth is one of the chief motivations behind his arduous drive for a new epistemology. He sees that the rationalism and critical doubt of the Enlightenment had led to an ideal of objective detachment that undermined transcendent values of truth seeking, liberty, and justice. To counter this mistaken view, Polanyi drew upon his own experiences as a Hungarian scientist rising to leadership in the Kaiser Wilhelm Gesellschaft and then the University of Manchester. Schooling and practice in choosing a problem, the art of guessing right, the value of scientific conviviality, and many other important skills in scientific practice and judgment are essential to scientific practice. All of these practices and skills are akin to rites of worship that aid persons in attending to their subject.

Importance of Truth for the Individual and Society

Polanyi’s thought, as indicated above, emphasizes that allegiance to finding truth guides a free society, corrects and balances a free society’s direction, and is an essential civic obligation. It endorses both individual search and the guidance of practices of a community of scientists. Among the institutions giving rise to a free society in the Western world are the synagogues, churches, schools, universities, and research centers, which have taught and called people to loyalty to a transcending reality that is knowable yet always exceeds our full grasp. No institution can know completely the truth, but the person and the society are always called to its discovery and meaning for their time. The four forms of atheism in this essay are “repudiators” of this reality and “the God manifested in the Bible.”²⁰

Polanyi’s Inaugural Address on Science, Faith, and Society

“Calling” and “vocation” are words used often by Polanyi, indicating a response from within to a higher obligation.²¹ He felt this way about his work as a scientist and as a philosopher. His record of responding to a significant problem or need indicates his sense of high and guiding ideals. He was not a person doing science as just an occupation but a person passionately concerned about his society’s destructive views and how to correct them. Belief in God, transcendent reality, and values are essential

backgrounds of his view of the unfolding nature of truth in science and history, along with our common moral responsibility to follow it. The Riddell Lectures at the University of Durham published as *Science, Faith and Society* in 1946 were an inaugural address for the principal philosophical work he pursued for the rest of his life.²²

I shall re-examine here the suppositions underlying our belief in science and propose to show that they are more extensive than is usually thought. They will appear to coextend with the entire spiritual foundations of man and to go to the very root of his social existence. Hence, I will urge, our belief in science should be regarded as a token of much wider convictions.²³

Within these lectures of 1946, we have a basic outline of Polanyi's beliefs that illuminate his 1948 essay and the post-critical philosophy that he later develops.

Rival Gods

Idolatry in Modern Form

One of the most important discoveries of biblical monotheism is idolatry, and one of the most important features of Polanyi's epistemology is his monumental effort to deal with idolatry in its modern forms by developing an epistemology that attacks it at its intellectual foundations. Through his views, we see the limited and misleading gods that abound in modern forms and fail to deliver us. They do not identify themselves as gods, but as intellectual and social forces that weaken or replace our commitment to the pursuit of truth and the God of the Bible.

Compared to "the new atheism" of our day, Polanyi's "forms of atheism" are more subtle and more serious. The deities represented in "forms of atheism" are undercover and secular.²⁴ The "new atheisms" generally attack the idea of God in terms of a supernatural being based on a literal reading of scripture which they criticize inconsistently as being unscientific. However, according to their own standards as spokespersons for modern science they are not being scientific either. One example is seen in Richard Dawkins' *The Blind Watchmaker* and *The God Delusion*.²⁵ It is hardly empirical for an Oxford professor to make judgments of this kind without at least noticing that few Oxford professors of theology and biblical studies are biblical literalists and their theology is not based in a three-story worldview designed by a super engineer. The new atheists' rant is comical and tragic, since in the name of truth telling and criticism, they ignore the search for truth in their own university and modern theology generally. Their attacks do represent, however, an example of Polanyi's concerns in the atheisms of this essay. They are, however, a part of what Polanyi is attacking, a philosophy of science and epistemology that has obscured and lost its foundation for understanding the role of belief in all knowing and especially the role of belief within science's pursuit of truth.

Dangerous Deities Again

Polanyi stresses the problem of atheism, not in the popular debates of his time or of the past, but in the power that four ancient deities represent. Unlike a traditional philosopher examining basic beliefs by logical and categorical analysis, Polanyi apotheosizes these four powerful forms of belief behind the world wars, totalitarian regimes, and mass killings: Athene (goddess of reason), Clio (goddess of history), Dionysus (god of ecstasy), and Prometheus (god of progress). Using these deities, Polanyi shows their allurements and dangers in their modern form when they work together. Then he offers not a philosophical concept of God but a biblical image of the self grasped by an attraction that is as consuming as fire, i.e., the shirt of flame from Eliot's poem mentioned above. To see better how Polanyi's pursuit of truth is a clue to God, we need to understand these deities in relation to the God of the Bible.

Polanyi introduces his discussion: “We are concerned with the convinced repudiator in modern times of God as manifested in the Bible, rejecting him in favor of other Gods.”²⁶ Here is a familiar biblical theme, the struggle of the Hebrews to remain loyal to the God of the covenant and not worship the pagan gods of fertility. The temptations of other gods remain a part of monotheism to the present as Polanyi is showing. The biblical prophets challenged their culture with “choose whom you will serve,” gods of nature or the one God of their covenant who is disclosed in critical events in Hebrew history.²⁷ However, we must caution that Polanyi’s concern is not defending orthodox Christian faith but explaining the challenges to belief in the God of the Bible.

Polanyi’s Sympathy for “the Repudiators”

Approaching his main topic, Polanyi admits he has sympathy for some reactions against religious fanaticism, “which animates the oldest form of atheism.” He appreciates the reaction when religious orthodoxy that seems to insist upon acceptance of personal beliefs without allowing for personal judgment. Statements presented to him as unquestionable such as “religion *is* the blessed sacrament” and “the decisive fact of Christianity is that the tomb was empty” are offensive.²⁸ Acceptance of such statements should allow for their assessment and credibility. If Polanyi accepted these dogmas without his own appraisal, it would be an approach of faith against reason. His position of “I believe in order to know” combines with “faith seeking understanding.” The heuristic or discovery nature within knowing is a believer’s—and especially the theologian’s—task of faith seeking understanding. He takes very seriously the contributions of science to deepening our understanding of religious faith and seeks a partnership for science and religion because of their epistemological common ground shown in his theory of tacit knowing.²⁹

Faith and Reason in Symbiotic Relation

This relationship of faith and reason is a symbiotic one. The structure of tacit knowing shows a basic connection between the embodiment of the clues leading to and within reasoning that lead to our explicit knowledge. As is carefully demonstrated throughout *Personal Knowledge*, reasoning itself is a bodily action and relies upon much more than the explicit rules of logic, including such things as neural pathways, syntax, and the meaning of sentences. Tacit knowing provides the basic structure of this process. It shows how, by relying upon the tacit subsidiary awareness, a knower attends to a focal integration of subsidiary clues into a meaningful whole.³⁰ Our relying upon the tacit to guide us is an essential element of trusting in our powers to guide us toward truth.

Enlightenment Deities

Moving on, Polanyi adroitly encapsulates western cultural, social, political, and intellectual development into his four deities which I term “idols.” My comments address them as idolatry and Polanyi’s pursuit of truth as a clue to the God of the Bible. All four of the deities that Polanyi criticizes are offspring of the Enlightenment and share the heritage of doubt as a supreme guide to truth. They are a family of causes that produce the ideal of objective detachment as true knowledge and its devastating consequences.

Ten Confessions on Inquiry, Truth, and God

Polanyi confesses a number of things that are personal reactions to Christian experiences and points out his correlating faith, knowing, and truth-finding as a permanent quest. Distorting Polanyi’s eloquence, I condense them as follows. First, “My beliefs are surrenders....” Second, “I cannot hope that they carry more than one aspect of reality....” Third, “I hope it to be fully consistent with my belief in the transcendent origin of my beliefs that I should ever be prepared for intimations of doubts in respect to

them.” Fourth, “. . .our present physical theories tend to break down when pursued to certain ultimate consequences. . . .” Fifth, “When we come to the central mysteries of Creation and Incarnation the texts [of the Bible] on which we rely for our knowledge of them can give only one aspect of the truth and may well be compatible with. . .contradictory reports.” Sixth, “The number of questions we can ask about God in their context seems to me greatly in excess of their range. . . .” Seventh, “The doctrine of Encounter might reduce all references to God, that are not addresses in the form of prayer, to. . .crude statements.” Eighth, “Those who accord final authority to words of the Bible. . .must realize. . .their position turns into a claim of their own infallibility.” Ninth, “When we pray ‘Thy will be done’ we should offer to surrender to the will of God all our beliefs, excepting only what is logically implied in this act of surrender.” Tenth, as shown, “I concur with much of the tendencies that find expression in rationalist atheism of the kind I have put down to Athene.”³¹

A Matter of Life and Death

Polanyi’s essay recognizes that how we understand the nature of knowledge is a matter of life and death, just as Polanyi once observed that the choice of language is a matter of life and death.³² Modern science’s effect of discrediting the role of faith in knowing has led to destructive consequences and will continue to do so without an epistemology that includes the essentials of faith that he clarified through tacit knowing. The four gods of reason, history, ecstasy, and progress have combined in the modern world into what Polanyi saw as a dynamo-objective coupling and moral inversion that drove the thought of the totalitarian leaders.³³ This coupling is not sudden but the development and combination of ideas over centuries into a cultural and social force. Its basic logic and structure can be briefly stated as follows. Rational skepticism undermines God as the center of loyalty and values because God cannot be verified by natural scientific standards and therefore is dubious. The hopes of humankind for salvation arising from the God of the Bible are driven underground but are still alive. In the place of God, other gods appear to provide answers to human hopes: Athene as the power of scientific thought, Clio as the inspiration for historical progress, Dionysus as individual perfectibility, and Prometheus as utopian politics. The outcome of these subterranean gods is that they join and reappear in the guise of hopes of individual and social progress through doctrines that absolutize themselves. Today, it could be metaphysical capitalism that believes that the highest values are in free markets and individual initiatives.

Polanyi states that critical reasoning itself might have weakened the meaning of God to a leftover from the past if it were not dealing with “the God of the Bible.” Instead the biblical vision of salvation gave hope for moral and social improvement in this world. With the reawakening of reasoning through the successes of modern science and its positivistic interpretation, the guidance of the moral and spiritual ideals of biblical religion were weakened and the secular hopes of Europe turned to new ideologies. Nazism (not mentioned in this essay) and Marxism provided new gods of economic and political reform supposedly based on science.³⁴ These gods produced a belief in historical progress and perfection of society through Marxist science. Returning to my main thesis, Polanyi’s critique of Marxism and of capitalism is a significant part of his thought, but his criticism and protest arises in the spirit of his belief in the God of the Bible. This God reduces and criticizes all sciences and philosophies that claim absolute truth and close inquiry.

Through Eliot’s poem, Polanyi suggests the combined forces of reason, history, individuality, and reform are not enough to satisfy our human longings. Our power to know seems to leave us with nothingness unless it is the knowledge or experience of transcendence that draws us into the search for truth. Both Eliot and Polanyi suggest that self-giving is our way to pursue the truth, a truth like the God of the Bible will give to us. How do we give our selves to the truth? By seeking it and stating our findings. This answer would not be enough, however, if it were not grounded in the God of the Bible who presents us

hope. The search for truth through our knowing provides a purpose bearing on eternity, as Polanyi said at the ending of *The Tacit Dimension*:

Men need a purpose which bears on eternity. Truth does that, our ideals do it; and this might be enough, if we could ever be satisfied with our moral shortcomings and with a society which has such shortcomings fatally involved in its workings.

Perhaps this problem cannot be resolved on secular grounds alone. But its religious solution should become more feasible once religious faith is released from pressure by an absurd vision of the universe, and so there will open up instead a meaningful world which could resound to religion.³⁵

ENDNOTES

¹Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 299.

²H. Richard Niebuhr, *Radical Monotheism and Western Culture* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960), pp. 132-133, *et passim*. Niebuhr developed the use of henotheism, monotheism, and radical monotheism.

³Michael Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1966; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), p. 33. See also pp. 55-92 for his discussion of the explorers confronting problems.

⁴Polanyi, *TD*, pp. 32-33 and Chapter III.

⁵Polanyi, *PK*, p. 324.

⁶*T.S. Eliot, The Complete Poems and Plays* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1952), pp. 143-144.

⁷Polanyi, *PK*, p. 405.

⁸Michael Polanyi, "Forms of Atheism," final sentences. Hereafter this work will be cited as "Forms."

⁹There are twenty eight references in the index of *Personal Knowledge* indicating how self-set standards lead us toward the universal in our intent.

¹⁰Polanyi, *PK*, p. 266.

¹¹The Michael Polanyi Papers in the Department of Special Collections, University of Chicago, Box 23, Folder 1.

¹²John Baillie, *The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956). See also my use of Baillie in "Discovery and Theology," *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 28 (August, 1975): 301-322.

¹³Baillie, p. 283.

¹⁴In my fourteen years working with Polanyi, he also showed a knowledge of the debate over Bultmann's demythologizing, Paul Tillich, H. Richard and Reinhold Niebuhr. Also, it should be noted that the first president of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute was Adolph von Harnack, a foremost leader of the liberal theology against which Karl Barth and others revolted.

¹⁵Baillie, p. 281.

¹⁶In this regard, Polanyi and Harry Prosch have given account of how Christian worship is a rite that brings together the infinite transcendence of God with the finite and ordinary elements of worship that

stage the experience of God, just as a drama stages the murder of a person. The murder is only true on the stage, but it tells us something about the meaning of murder. See Michael Polanyi and Harry Prosch, *Meaning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), pp. 155-156.

¹⁷Polanyi, *PK*, p. 281.

¹⁸Polanyi, “Forms,” paragraphs 6, 8, and 9.

¹⁹Polanyi’s critique of totalitarian Marxism as moral inversion enabled by a “dynamo coupling” of scientific objectivity and moral passions is very carefully, critically, and helpfully examined in D.M. Yeager’s “Confronting the Minotaur: Moral Inversion and Polanyi’s Moral Philosophy,” *Tradition and Discovery*, 29/1 (2002-2003): 42-48.

²⁰Polanyi, “Forms,” paragraph 1.

²¹For example, the index in *PK* lists eleven passages where Polanyi describes calling in response to finding truth.

²²“Inaugural Address” is my term used in Richard Gelwick, *The Way of Discovery, An Introduction to the Thought of Michael Polanyi* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1977 and Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2004), pp. 42-47.

²³Michael Polanyi, *Science, Faith and Society* (London: Oxford University Press, 1946), p. 7. The republished edition, *Science, Faith and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964) has a new introduction and omits this opening paragraph.

²⁴By “new atheists,” I refer to Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Sam Harris, and Christopher Hitchens and their followers.

²⁵New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1986 and Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006.

²⁶Polanyi, “Forms,” paragraph 1.

²⁷Some theologians would say “revelatory events” but the terms “revelation” and “revelatory” have become mired in the debates between fundamentalist and liberal theology.

²⁸Polanyi, “Forms,” paragraph 2.

²⁹This issue has been explored concerning a dialogue between Paul Tillich and Michael Polanyi in 1963 in *Tradition and Discovery* by Durwood Foster, Richard Gelwick, Melvin Keiser, Donald Musser, Charles McCoy, and Robert Russell. See online www.missouriwestern.edu/orgs/Polanyi/authors.

³⁰Polanyi, *TD*, Ch. 1.

³¹Polanyi, “Forms,” paragraphs 2-4.

³²Polanyi, *PK*, p. 113. Polanyi is discussing the importance of words and language.

³³See note 19.

³⁴Polanyi restrains himself from using his experience as a Jew according to Hitler’s policies even though Polanyi had converted to Christianity at the time of his marriage.

³⁵Polanyi, *TD*, p. 92.

William Poteat: The Primacy of the Person

David W. Rutledge

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Key words: critical tradition, Descartes, exteriorization, Polanyi, 'space' vs. 'place,' extra-territorial, the static visual model, the mindbody, orality

ABSTRACT

This essay provides an overview of Poteat's thought, beginning with his basic problem of the eradication of the embodied person from accounts of human knowing in the critical tradition. Poteat's analysis of the move from "place" to "space" as the arena of living shows his procedure. I isolate six elements of the recovery of the person in his work: the necessity of his strange vocabulary, the need to embed knowing in time, the primacy of speech over writing, the centrality of the body to all knowing, the mindbodily unity of the person, and the mindbody as the ground of all meaning-making. I conclude with three questions: Is Descartes, or bourgeois culture, the real villain of modern thought? Isn't language, rather than the mindbody, a more appropriate place to locate the absolute center of the Real? Isn't there a need to flesh out Poteat's individualistic focus with the communal dimensions of personhood?

I propose to introduce you in this article to the thought of William Poteat, a provocative and fertile American thinker who has cleared a path to recovering the richness and solidity of the human person as the center of all knowing and meaning-making. An early admirer of Michael Polanyi, whose work decisively influenced his own, Poteat adapted and extended Polyanian insights in new, even revolutionary, ways. Despite having a relatively low profile in today's Academy, Poteat's work offers one of the twentieth century's most distinctive and important efforts to re-establish social and intellectual values within the person, thus helping us to escape our 'ripening flirtation with godhood, with infinity, restlessness, tumult, and madness' (Poteat 1985, 4). After a brief description of Poteat's context and the problem that gripped him, I will devote the bulk of the essay to some of his central ideas, before concluding with a brief evaluation of his work.

Poteat and His Problem

William H. Poteat (1919-2000) spent most of his career as Professor of Religion and Comparative Studies at Duke University, though he also taught philosophy at the University of North Carolina, taught at an Episcopal seminary, and held visiting professorships at Stanford and Texas (Nikell and Stines 1993, 3-5). Through his co-editing of a major collection of essays on Michael Polanyi's thought, and the supervision of numerous doctoral dissertations on Polanyi and others concerned with the issue of personal knowing, Poteat was prepared at the end of his career to publish three volumes of his reflections, and assist in the publication of a volume of essays published over a thirty-year period. What is distinctive about Poteat's intellectual life is the persistent, tenacious focus on the problem of finding a suitable home within the modern ethos for the human person, a home that would allow that person to claim his or her knowledge, belief, actions and creations as real, as true, as full of meaning as they are prior to entering upon reflection about them. In his doctoral dissertation on 'Pascal's Conception of Man and Modern Sensibility' (Duke, 1951), Poteat opposed Pascal's search for the *esprit de finesse* behind our rational powers to Descartes'

claim that the *esprit de géométrie* lay behind such powers. He later recalled that ‘Here was shaped for me the problem that has occupied me now for more than thirty years: the nature of rationality and logic in an intellectual climate in which Descartes’ legatees have prevailed and left us culturally insane’ (Poteat 1985, 6). What is this problem with Cartesian rationality and logic, whose effects would merit the charge of ‘insanity’?

Such a strong claim cannot be unpacked briefly without distortion, but at least a sketch, a short version of the story must be attempted if we are to appreciate the restorative task to which Poteat devoted his energies. Beginning perhaps with the late medieval period and continuing into the early modern, we find western thought gradually replacing communal solidarity with solitary individuality, replacing knowing as a harmonious union of faith and reason with a purely mental picture of reason guided by methodological doubt, and replacing a sense of the mystery of the world with an aim to render knowledge of the world fully explicit.¹ When the ‘disenchantment of nature’ began with the Copernican revolution, theology and philosophy had already begun to withdraw human beings from their rootedness in a world that accredited myths, stories, poetry, history, drama and art as sources of knowledge about that world, in order to sharpen the tool of critical rationality. That such a critical reason was still believed to be the gift of God did not prevent later thinkers from thoroughly secularizing it, which accelerated the transition from a society which unproblematically practiced a humanistic personalism to one which elevated scientific objectivity as the guarantor of all meaning and truth.

For Poteat, the chief figure in this transition was Rene Descartes, whose elevation of an isolated, individual cogito, his use of radical doubt as the primary instrument for investigating the world, and his severing of body and mind in a metaphysical dualism all contributed to the shaping of a new vision of what knowing was, and who human beings are. Coupled with the mathematization of physical theory effected by Galileo and Newton, Descartes’ philosophical anthropology, while rarely explicitly stated, nevertheless provided a powerful justification for the triumph of critical reason not only in science, but throughout wide areas of western scholarship. Poteat saw this triumph of ‘exteriorization’ as far from beneficent. As he states elsewhere:

... it is the perennial temptation of critical thought to demand total explicitness in all things, to bring all background into foreground, to dissolve the tension between the focal and the subsidiary by making everything focal, to dilute the temporal and intentional thickness of perception, to dehistoricize thought... to lighten every shadowy place, to dig up and aerate the roots of our being, to make all interiors exterior, to unsituate all reflection from time and space, to disincarnate mind, to define knowledge as that which can be grasped by thought in an absolutely lucid “moment” without temporal extension, to flatten out all epistemic hierarchy, to homogenize all logical heterogeneity... (Poteat 1993, 261-262).

Here the problem of western intellectual society is described as precisely and intriguingly as an Escher drawing, and the strength of Poteat’s work comes from his single-minded focus on ‘recovering the ground’ of meaning that we lost to the critical model of knowing. A massive displacement of the person had occurred, a chronic amnesia of the spirit in which what it actually meant to be a human being was forgotten. In a letter to a colleague, Poteat once wrote: ‘In *Polanyian Meditations* and *A Philosophical Day Book* I have labored mightily—not always with success—to arraign the whole philosophical tradition lock, stock, and barrel. I have said this repeatedly, but either people don’t listen or they refuse to believe what they hear.’²

Perhaps the best example of the way Poteat re-reads the history of the western intellectual tradition is his 1974 essay, ‘Persons and Places: Paradigms in Communication,’ where he traces carefully the transformation of perspective that occurred in the Italian Renaissance in which science and art combined

their emerging visions of reality to elevate space as the fundamental arena within which human being must be understood, above the sense of place that had held this position prior to the Renaissance. This was a fateful moment in the displacement of persons from human culture:

...let me repeat, the commonsense view of spatiality that has come down to us from the fifteenth through the seventeenth centuries, and which has tacitly become for us the ontologically primordial view, is radically incoherent. What is worse, its incoherence is humanly intolerable. Persons have places. The conception of space under review systematically preempts the notion of place (Poteat 1993, 33).

Using the work of Alexander Koyré and Sigfried Giedeon, philosophically applied to the Cartesian revolution through the insights opened up by Pascal, Poteat shows how fundamental to our sense of ourselves as persons is a notion of our place in the world, a “whence” from which all other ordinations—such as the geometrical quantifications of modern science—are grasped. Our relationship to our own bodies is not the same as our relationship to external objects in space, either logically or experientially. This fundamental truth was obscured by Descartes when he wrote that ‘...the nature of matter or of body in its universal aspect, does not consist in its being hard, or heavy or coloured...but solely in the fact that it is a substance extended in length, breadth and depth.’ (quoted, Poteat 1993, 31) Poteat comments on this ‘paralyzing incoherence’:

I have argued that “extensions” or the perception of “extended” things presupposes a prereflective oriented whence from which radiating vectors distinguish length, breadth, and depth, which is to say that “extended” things are derivative, while the prereflective oriented whence...is radical. All this then means that for me, existentially, as the concrete person I am, extension is not first of all space, but rather is place...(Poteat 1993, 33).

The replacement of place, so understood, by space in our thinking was a major step toward the ‘disenchantment of the world,’ the ‘dissolution of the cosmos’ which has been so often remarked by modernity, and which caused Auden to term our time ‘the Age of Anxiety.’ Poteat then shows the relevance of this moment by tracing signs of this dissolution in John Donne (‘The Sun is lost, and the earth, and no man’s wit/ Can well direct him where to looke for it.’); in Franz Kafka’s Gregor Samsa, suddenly transformed in his bed one morning into a gigantic insect; in David Riesman’s outer-directed man in a ‘lonely crowd;’ in Salinger’s Holden Caulfield, afraid to cross a street in New York City, lest ‘I’d just go down, down, down, and nobody’d ever see me again...’; and in Jean-Paul Sartre’s *The Flies*, where Orestes admits to Zeus’s charge that he is insubordinate: ‘Foreign to myself—I know it. Outside nature, against nature, without excuse, beyond remedy....Nature abhors man, and you too, God of Gods, abhor mankind’ (Poteat 1993, 37-41). The litany could be extended, of course, (think of Dostoevsky’s Raskolnikov or Kirilov, or Camus’ *The Stranger*) showing the overwhelming sense of loss, of lostness, that characterizes persons in modernity: ‘In fact, as we can now begin to see, the whole of modern culture could be described as an assault upon place, status, and room for personal action by the abstracting intellect’ (Poteat 1993, 39). Ironically, this loss of his place in the universe made modern man desperately uneasy, seeking ‘a deliverance from every particular place, every particular status, and the ambiguity of every particular moral action’ (Poteat 1993, 40). Despair may issue in restless passion, as well as in passivity, as Michael Polanyi saw in his description of ‘moral inversion.’

However helpful such revisioning of the accepted history of philosophy is in understanding the problem Poteat found in our culture, he is emphatically not interested in simply correcting the record by undertaking a full-scale historical or archaeological project; there is a strong sense of mission in his effort to recover a sane place to stand. Let me now turn to some of the major motifs in Poteat’s effort at recovering the personal.

The Way Back to Firm Ground

Perhaps the most salient of Poteat's signposts on the path of recovery are the following (necessarily somewhat distorted by my stating them so simply and bluntly): (1) that the infection of western language by critical assumptions forces him to use a strange and awkward vocabulary to impeach those assumptions; (2) that we must demur not only to the dominance of the spatial arena in critical thought, but also to its emphasis on the timeless, eternal moment; (3) that speech—the oral-aural reciprocity of ordinary conversation—is the proper home of thought, rather than in the abstractions of the printed page; (4) that what place, temporality, and speech reveal to us is the prereflective omnipresence of the body in all our formal articulations—knowing can only be incarnate; (5) that the mind/body dualism of the critical tradition must be understood to be overcome in the unity of the two, for which mindbody is an appropriate term; (6) that grasping our mindbody as the ground of all orientation, sense, and meaning-making is the first, major step in recovering our personhood. Let me take up just a few of these elements, so that my reader can get some sense of how Poteat's thinking proceeds, and can hear him articulate that thinking.

One of the most irritating features of Poteat's work is that he refuses to write and think within the normal patterns laid down by the academic orthodoxy within which almost all his readers were trained, but he has reasons for this practice. Poteat works outside the professional philosophical guild because it is hopelessly in thrall to critical assumptions ('The more deeply I indwell the new place in the world that this book [*Polanyian Meditations*] provides, the less I find it possible to read books on philosophy. I feel like a man who believes the earth is round reading books by authors who think it's flat. I am utterly tongue-tied in philosophical colloquy.'³ Poteat's 'extra-territorial' posture toward the tradition gives him, however, a good ear for the dissonances in other thinkers, and he writes perceptively on the critical assumptions of authors who should know better (Karl Popper, George Steiner, and Walker Percy, among others; Poteat 1993, Part 3, 201-278). If the customary way of doing philosophy does not get us beyond critical thought, then we must find a new way to think and talk that will not betray our best instincts. This Poteat attempts to do in what may be one of the most controversial of his strategies, namely the adoption of a written style that he admits is an 'extraordinarily mixed bag' of rhetoric. He is therefore very attentive to matters of form and style, which leads him to write 'meditations,' a 'daybook,' a series of reflections in epistolary form. In speaking of the style of his last book, *Recovering the Ground*, he writes:

In its style—awkward syntax, nonlinear progression, reflexivity, dialectical reduplication, an unfamiliar and often deliberately "atonal" diction congested with what will appear to be pretentious or merely clever coinages that, together, allow my radical insight lucidly to oppose itself to the conceptual landscape from which it has been elicited and to impede yet another bemused lapse into our familiar dualisms—I have obeyed the demand upon me of this primitive reality to educe and then body forth the logos that endows my mindbody with sentience, motility, and orientation, both before I have yet spoken and after I do, as itself the condition of speech (Poteat 1994, xiv).

Is this really necessary, we might ask? Only if, Poteat would answer, you *really* want to escape the confines of a critical worldview, to experience yourself united once more, body and mind, as one whole person. He sees the acts of writing and reading not as reports about meaning we have conceptualized, and merely need to express—even if these are properly post-critical reports—but as themselves actual experiences of making or finding meaning. 'I aspire to place the reader in an agonistic relation to the text' (Poteat 1994, xv), meaning that the book must work on us, 'dismembering' our Cartesian cogito in order to allow new possibilities for knowledge to appear.

In language that intentionally attempts to force us away from conventional, comfortable ways of thinking, Poteat tries to show how Polanyi's placement of the person, in all his richness and complexity, at

the center of knowing leads to revolutionary perspectives that are at the same time the familiar and ordinary understandings that gave our world meaning before we were bewitched by critical assumptions. In his evocative words, 'It is my view that rationality, that is, the 'hanging togetherness' of things for us, and logic, that is, the articulated form of the 'making sense' of things for us, is more deeply and ubiquitously, though inexplicitly, embedded in our ordinary thinking and doing than we are likely to notice...' (Poteat 1985, 9). Conceptual innovation is reflected in misleadingly simple language: 'reason' equals 'things hanging together for us,' while 'logic' is the articulate expression of this 'hanging together,' or 'making sense' of things for the knower. This is a broad notion of rationality and of logic that would include most poems, songs, novels, jokes, sermons, and musical compositions as fully rational, an assertion that we only find odd in the setting of critical philosophy.

With some sense now of the reasons for the way he writes, we can turn to other of Poteat's motifs. He points in the essay mentioned above, 'Persons and Places,' to Kierkegaard's treatment of Mozart's opera Don Giovanni, which discloses another of his major themes, the substitution in the history of critical thought of sight for sound, of the printed page for the act of speech on which it is based. In *Polanyian Meditations*, Poteat explores the way in which the critical tradition has construed knowing as an instantaneous, or better, timeless, phenomenon. With the mathematical image for knowledge on which Galileo and Descartes insisted, critical thought argued that clarity and distinctness must be hallmarks of real knowledge, as they are of number. The perceptual moment is ideally depicted as a timeless instant, excluding the possibility that objects of our cognizing could change while we investigate them. This assumption coheres naturally with a visualist sensibility, in which sight is elevated above the other senses as the paradigm of knowing: 'The static, visual model dominates the epistemological exposition of the (atemporally) logical structure of the conditions of knowledge, conceived as an established fact' (Poteat 1993, 40). What this leaves out of the account of knowing, of course, is the rich oral-aural world of actual speech, of language as it exists prior to its being fixed in printed form by reflection. The work of Walter Ong and Jack Goody on oral cultures, and the ways in which literacy obscures the spoken roots of language, led Poteat into a new appreciation of how experience cannot be made, logically, to yield an act of knowing completely divorced from temporality, because it is part of the very form of hearing, and so of language and thought. Analyzing J.S. Bach's "First Prelude in C" in the *Meditations*, Poteat concludes that music has a logic (a sense, a 'hanging together,' a 'connectedness'), and that this logic is inherently, unavoidably temporal. So the visual picture of rationality that has dominated western thought is not the only possibility; that we have restricted our reflections on logic ('form,' 'order,' 'whole,' 'integrity,' etc.) to a visual rather than an auditory model is a matter of history, not of eternal necessity.

To the recovery of the importance of place and time to the human person, Poteat adds a third crucial ingredient, the body that actually constitutes our place in the world. The stimulus and conversation partner in this effort is M. Merleau-Ponty's exploration of the irreducible coherency of body, mind, and perception in the *Phenomenology of Perception*. Through his own phenomenological examination of his bodily being in thinking, writing, bike-riding, and playing tennis, Poteat reveals the insidious tendency of the critical tradition to make us think of our body as a thing like other things, when in fact it is, for us, radically unlike anything else in the universe. It is the center from which all our stretching forth toward the world commences, beginning:

in my mother's womb, within which her beating heart rhythmically pumps the blood of life through my foetal body, forming itself toward my primal initiation into the very foundation of my first and most primitive cosmos.... These forms are for me, even still for conscious, reflective, critical me, archetypically the forms of measured time: tempo, beat, strophe, pulse.... There is then an archaic prejudice far older than I in my prereflective and unreflecting mind/body to indwell all form, meaning, and order in the world as the kindred of the first order I have known, the order of my mother's beating heart (Poteat 1985, 22-23).

The ground of the human notions of order, measure, “connectedness,” of “hanging together” (that is, logic) lies in this prelingual level of awareness, which is inescapably ours, which never leaves us, and from which all the articulations of higher thought are educed. Where else would the human sense of pattern, order, rhythm have come from, if we were not, long before formal reflection, not already immersed in a world that gave us meaning?

...it is clear that if the tonic mindbody is the omnipresent and inalienable matrix within which all our acts of meaning-discernment are conceived and brought to term, if, that is to say, the new picture of ourselves as beings in the world actively engaged in asking, seeking, finding, and affirming clearly situates us in the moil and ruck of the world’s temporal thickness, marinating there in our own carnal juices, then our rationality can only appear here, inextricably consanguine with our most primitive sentience, motility, and orientation (Poteat 1985, 246-247).

In thinking about this radical suggestion, we are led necessarily to consider the role of language in our lives, particularly in our intellectual lives, and I will conclude this section with a description of Poteat’s re-instatement of speech at the heart of language.

Having already noted the tendency of the critical tradition to construe the arena of knowing in spatial, visual, timeless, purely mental terms, we should not be surprised to find Poteat gravitating to the ignored role of human speech, and the oral-aural arena within which it occurs. Against the abstracting linguistics of a Chomsky or Skinner, Poteat argues that knowing cannot be made intelligible without attention to the language in which such knowledge is expressed, and that language makes no sense if it does not always acknowledge, even tacitly, its prelinguistic rootage in our bodies. Though the term ‘mindbody’ and its cognates are awkward at first, Poteat coins these terms to insist upon the ‘prelingual performing’ of our minds in our bodies, as Polanyi described it in *PK* (pp. 70ff.). He is extending Polanyi’s cryptic assertions by constantly ‘leaning against’ the terms and patterns which are regnant in philosophical discourse so that space might be created for a new way of thinking. Our knowing is not just mental, it is not just bodily, it is always both together, as our mindbody, a ‘mindedbody,’ an ‘embodiedmind’ that is knowing. He writes further:

I claim that language—our first formal system—has the sinews of our bodies, which had them first; that the grammar, the syntax, the ingenuous choreography of our rhetorical engagement with the world, the meaning, the semantic and metaphorical intentionality of our language are preformed in that of our prelingual mindbodily being in the world, which is their condition of possibility (Poteat 1985, 9).

‘Language has the sinews of our bodies.’ In this synaesthetic commingling of human experience, Poteat tries to overcome the discarnate, disembodied mentalism of critical philosophy. Beginning his meditations by reflecting on Polanyi’s own dependence on his mindbody in writing *PK*, Poteat continues with numerous examples of experimental data from language acquisition studies (by Church, Lewin, Trevarthen, and Condon) to echo his points, and uses extended analogies of listening to music and playing tennis to drive home the ubiquitous mutual entanglement of mind and body:

The structure of this picture is expressed in “language”: in the style of our movement; in the bearing and mien, the timbre and mood of either our erect or of our recumbent bodies; in the pitch and the color of our voices; in the key, the tempo, and phrasing of our gaits; in the resonance and the hue of our glance; in the pace, the diction, weight, momentum, and metaphorical intentionalities of our speech (Poteat 1985, 14-15).

Here Wittgenstein's 'form of life' is fleshed out, incarnated, in language that itself attempts to perform, to create, a vivid experience and example of the power of words to make meaning: "A sentence uttered makes a world appear" (W.H. Auden, quoted by Poteat 1985, 116).

Beyond the helpful term 'mindbody,' (which seems both natural and necessary to those who have immersed themselves in his writings) Poteat attempts to re-think language as speech and hearing rather than as written grammar, and uncovers the insidious distortions of the model of visual perception which has been the standard vehicle for knowledge in the critical paradigm. By stressing speech – 'lively oral-aural reciprocity' (Poteat 1985, 113)—rather than sight as the faculty that makes us human, Poteat is able to re-direct knowing from the individual mind in contemplation of the world, to the dialogue between the knower and the one who calls him or her into personhood through address, through summons. While Poteat's radical re-statement of central terms in philosophy may not speak to everyone, he does make clear, I believe, how fundamentally revolutionary Polanyi's work was, and his own extension of that work is, preventing an easy domestication of personal knowledge into a trite truism.

In summary, William Poteat argues rationality as construed by the modern Academy has so truncated, refined, isolated, abstracted knowing from the people who do it that persons can no longer affirm what they know with the full sense of their being. People who know lots of things, and live quite unproblematically relying on such knowledge, are suddenly stricken mute and disoriented when the modern intellectual tradition demands an accounting of this knowledge, on its terms. What an absurd situation! The dynamic, temporally situated, oral-aural reality of our minded bodies/embodyed minds, richly entangled in a place and a world of speech, memory, and hope, is ruled illegitimate to speak before the bar of critical reason, which demands an explicit, timeless report of fixed and certain objects, fully illuminated and thus exhaustively available to sight, delivered by a discarnate mind in a universal theater of reflection. To help us recover from this alienation from our ordinary selves, Poteat has overcome a wrongheaded notion of "logic" that is shaped by a static, visual, discarnate model of knowing, and rooted logic instead in the mindbody. In the setting of everyday life, then, we see people doing all kinds of things in organized, patterned ways that people around them find sensible, so full of meaning that these others engage quite naturally with them in conversations on all sorts of topics, and activities of all kinds. He is therefore able to say, at the end of his agnostic reflections:

In a sense nothing has changed: everything remains essentially the same. We may go on talking as we pretty much always have...The world remains pretty much what we have always commonsensically thought...What an effortful way to declare that we are incarnate beings, irreducibly carnal spirits, actually existent mindbodily persons! (Poteat 1985, 166)

Evaluating the Critic

This concluding section of the paper can be relatively brief, in part because there has not yet been a great deal of critical examination of Bill Poteat's work—the emphasis has been on understanding what he is trying to say. Three important questions have been raised by interlocutors.

First, E.M. Adams, a friend of Poteat and his colleague in philosophy at North Carolina, has argued that Descartes cannot, or should not, be made the villain of modern western thought as Poteat has done (Adams 1994-95, 45-50). Adams points out that Descartes was not the first to separate the mind and knowing from the body; that he does not find the influence of Cartesianism so prevalent today; and that the malign effects of modernity are more the effects of 'a shift in the governing values of the society,' than any epistemology stemming from the Enlightenment: 'Modern Western culture was generated not so much by the work of philosophers as by the development of a new form of life, what we may call bourgeois life, focused on materialistic values—values grounded in our materialistic needs...' (Adams,

1994-95, 48). While it is certainly true that social, political, and economic forces would have to be taken into consideration in any account of the rise of ‘modernity,’ Poteat’s brief, occasional comments on Marx suggest that he would find behind any such social change in values a philosophical anthropology whose very language about human beings and their actions would be formative influences on the individuals in that society (Poteat 1990, 30, 92; 1994, 140). One could suggest that the very reason sociology presumes to be a science is that it abstracts from actual human persons in a way that renders it helpless when trying to apply its ‘scientific findings’ to those persons, precisely because it ignores the issue of its own anthropology, and those of its subjects.

A second question about Poteat’s work is raised by Ronald Hall, one of his students, who worries that the late emphasis in Poteat on the ‘mindbody’ has occluded the importance he gave earlier to speech and language as the center of human being (Hall 2000-2001, 11-15). In a letter to Poteat, Hall once wrote:

I sometimes get the impression, Bill, that you think that the mindbody is our access to the Real. I think we might part company here, for I am inclined to think that words are our access to the Real.... There is a difference in saying that the mindbody is the center of the Real and saying that it is its ground. I quite agree with you that the pre-reflective mindbody is the ground, and that we need to recover it, but I remain convinced that it is in words that we find its absolute center (Hall, 2000-2001, 15).

Hall, who is well acquainted with all the subtleties of Poteat’s thought, senses an ambitious desire to give the *coup de grace* to modernity, and that the ‘mindbody’ became in Poteat’s mind the silver bullet to do that. But isn’t there an important distinction to be made between the prelingual biological realities of infants, and the spoken and written words of adults that form culture, that allow the extraordinarily complex reflections of the *Meditations* to occur? ‘Mindbody’ is certainly to be preferred to a mind/body dualism, but it is speech, after all, that unites mind and body. Is not the mindbody of a reflective adult sufficiently different from that of a pre-speech infant to justify Hall’s concern? I doubt that Poteat would want to elevate one aspect of our being-in-the-world, either speech or the mindbody, but would rather insist on the thorough, complete entanglement of both in everything a person does or says, so unified that ‘no relativizing skepticism can get a foothold’ (Poteat 1985, 162).

Finally, let me mention one further question that has been raised about Poteat’s work, concerning whether or not he gives sufficient attention to the sociality, the inter-personal relationships, that lie at the heart of human life.⁴ Poteat’s intellectual companions in his work—Pascal, Descartes, Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein, Merleau-Ponty—are not thinkers known for their attention to the social dimension of existence, though none of them avoid it completely. Only Michael Polanyi perhaps, in his study of the scientific community in *SFS*, in his chapter on ‘Conviviality’ in *PK*, and in parts of *Meaning*, gave adequate attention to the social. There are no references to ‘society’ or ‘community’ in the indices to Poteat’s books, and little attention to these topics in articles about Poteat. Yet his insistence on recovering life as it is lived prior to reflection would seem to require attention to the social, to people in relation, to the networks of mutuality that language and the nurture of infants entail. In *Polanyian Meditations*, in contrasting the Greek focus on sight with the Hebrew on sound, Poteat draws close to the relational aspects of human being, but the mention is brief, and never followed up: ‘[A speech-act, at]... its heart, as *speech-act*, is the absolutely novel and underivable act of owning one’s words *before another*. Indeed, ... to be a person is nothing other than to be able before another to own one’s words...’ (Poteat 1985, 95). Yet he gives this crucial social situation—I and another—none of the careful, detailed, exhaustive attention that he gave to the spatial, oral, and temporal features of the mindbody.

Poteat does, in *Philosophical Daybook*, briefly respond to this criticism, but only in one brief entry (that for 8/10/87) that somewhat querulously, to my mind, argues that the problem of sociality is a function

of the modernist, critical temper, with its emphasis on the isolated *cogito*, and thus social relations are not a problem for his post-critical perspective, in which all meaning derives from the same source, the mindbody:

For *Polanyian Meditations* ... it is our integral, sentient, oriented, motile mindbodies, bonded in their efferent intentions to a world prior to reflection, which are the *radical* given. . . . In other words self and other, I and you, solitude and society, individuation and socialization have at bedrock the same provenance for *Polanyian Meditations*.

This hardly seems adequate, however, as a display of how each of us begins and goes through life tied to others, implicated in their lives, taking our cues and making our plans with others ‘in mind.’ It would seem a natural extension of Poteat’s wonderfully insightful use of research on the speech and movement of infants to see what research says about the necessarily *social* character of early life, but this has not yet been ventured. Though his argument is not weakened by this omission, it would certainly be strengthened by further work in this area.

While other comparisons could be drawn between Poteat’s work and the work of those he studied—Heidegger, or Wittgenstein, or Polanyi; and though we could try to place him in the usual shorthand catalogues of the professoriat—is he a ‘hedgehog’ or a ‘fox’? an ‘edifying’ philosopher or a ‘systematic’ philosopher? a ‘splitter’ or a ‘lumper’? is he primarily concerned with epistemology or with ontology? etc.—I hope that the issues raised both in exposition and in criticism convince you of the richness, the distinctive originality, and the tantalizing promise of William H. Poteat. I encourage you to *Read his Books*.

ENDNOTES

¹See also the account of Poteat’s intellectual perspective given by Jim Nickell and Jim Stines in their excellent “Introduction” to *The Primacy of Persons*, pp. 6-10, which describes this period as replacing theonomy with autonomy, community with solitary individuality, and a sense of reality as an expression of God with a sense of reality as an object of thought and of sense perception. For brief accounts by Poteat himself on this history, see the essay, “Persons and Places: Paradigms in Communication” in *Primacy of Persons; Polanyian Meditations*, pp. 6-9 and 252-254; and William H. Poteat, *Recovering the Ground: Critical Exercises in Recollection*, “Appendix,” esp. pp. 202-203.

Other scholars have, of course, traced this same history. See, for example, Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity*; Louis Dupré, *Passage to Modernity: An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture*, Part II, and *The Enlightenment and the Intellectual Foundations of Modern Culture*, ch. 3; and Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*.

²Poteat, unpublished letter to Houston Craighead, September 1, 1989, p. 1.

³Poteat, unpublished letter to David Rutledge, June 25, 1987, p. 1 (now in the Yale Divinity School Library Poteat Archives).

⁴The first person to raise this question about Poteat for me was Professor Martha Crunkleton, though I do not think she has published on this suggestion.

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A Review Essay and Response:

Paul Craig Roberts' *The Failure of Laissez Faire Capitalism*

Paul Craig Roberts, *The Failure of Laissez Faire Capitalism*. Atlanta: Clarity Press, 2013. Pp. 190. ISBN 13: 978-0-9860362-5-5. \$18.95 pb.

Roberts' Account of How Multinational Corporations Have Dismantled the US Economy and Impoverished Its Workers

Walter Gulick

Key words: Paul Craig Roberts, Michael Polanyi, J.M. Keynes, globalization, regulation, offshoring production, economic theory, "self-regulating" markets, printing money, foreign worker visas, Federal Reserve, spontaneous order, wealth inequality, multinational corporations, free trade, ecological economics

ABSTRACT

Roberts' The Failure of Laissez Faire Capitalism offers a persuasive and serious indictment of US economic policy. Neither political party seems capable of even challenging corporate-influenced policies like the outsourcing and offshoring of jobs, policies which further enrich the very few at the expense of the many.

Paul Craig Roberts has put into book form the brash, prophetic insights that pepper his regular columns available on line. *The Failure of Laissez Faire Capitalism* is an impassioned critique of most every major decision that the US government has made during the past twenty years. Roberts' critique of economic globalism and free market ideology is bound to no particular ideology and certainly to no political party. Although he was Assistant Secretary of the Treasury in the Reagan administration, current Republicans can take no comfort from Roberts' claims. Neither can Democrats.

The heart of Roberts' critique is presented in Part One, "Problems in Economic Theory." Part Two, "The New Dispossession," recounts in more detail the results of the US (and world) economy gone wrong. The book includes a fairly brief Part Three, "The End of Sovereignty," which is focused on the aspiration of the EU and the European Central Bank to undermine the sovereignty of EU member states so that banks don't suffer losses. The German edition of this book was published in 2012 and includes a twenty-page Preface by Johannes Maruschzik, now translated and included in the American publication. A two page Conclusion and an Appendix disputing claims of a significant recovery from the Great Recession conclude the work.

A political economist, Roberts was among the last graduate students of Michael Polanyi. The University of Virginia Economics Department released Roberts to study with Polanyi at Oxford in 1964-65. As he made evident in his article, "Michael Polanyi: A Man for All Times" (*Tradition and Discovery* 32/3), Roberts was deeply influenced by Polanyi the person as well as Polanyi the thinker. Indeed, he writes that "Michael was the most exciting man I ever encountered" (15). In the late 1960s, Roberts and Polanyi were invited to the University of California to give jointly a course on Polanyi's epistemology, an invitation which Polanyi felt he had to decline.

Polanyi was an advocate of liberalism in the classical sense of that term. Classical liberalism emphasized the liberty articulated in human rights and economic reliance on suitably structured markets. Polanyi

particularly celebrated the liberal spirit of vigorous debate in a cosmopolitan culture that he experienced in his youth in Hungary prior to World War I. However, he viewed classical liberalism as falling into decline both through its own narrow allegiance to a laissez faire version and through the rise of several forms of socialism. Consequently he yearned to recover “the intellectual leadership of the world which the exportation of a doctrinaire liberalism has foolishly lost us” (*SEP* 209). Unfortunately, fifty-eight years after Polanyi wrote those words they could still be applied by Roberts to the world economy today. Roberts’ book may be seen as an attempt to begin the process of recovering a liberal economic policy that Polanyi calls for in the following excerpt from “Civitas,” an unpublished proposal written in 1944 to found a new quarterly journal devoted to describing and promoting progress toward a good society.

For the last hundred years liberal economic policy has been conducted without effective guidance from liberal theory. It was in fact made up of a series of disjointed concessions from a theory of laissez faire to the claims of humanitarianism and the obvious demands of the public interest. This unsatisfactory intellectual situation has caused comparatively little trouble so long as the major premises of liberalism were uncontested. To-day it must be remedied without delay if liberalism is to be restored again. The great task of laying down a system of liberal economic policies must be shouldered forthwith (MPP, Box 50, Folder 3).

Polanyi’s strong pleas for economic reform were all too often ignored. Roberts, however, can be seen to identify with Polanyi’s assertion of the “grave, and in many respects fateful, error of the followers—particularly the popular followers—of economic orthodoxy in adopting a negative attitude with respect to social reform” (*Full Employment and Free Trade*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1945, p. 145). Not only does Roberts identify with Polanyi’s willingness to challenge prevailing opinion, he has developed it into an edgy art form. Smoke and heat emanate from most every page of Roberts’ book. He mentions Polanyi on only one page of this book, but it is enough to suggest an influence on the supply-side economics that Roberts promoted during the Reagan years. Roberts claims that in *Full Employment* Polanyi has gone beyond Keynes’ strict concern with maintaining appropriate demand.

Polanyi anticipated Milton Friedman and the American monetarists. Polanyi interpreted Keynes’ theory to mean that widespread unemployment meant that there was *a dearth of money*. What the government needed to do was to expand the monetary circulation. It could do this, Polanyi noted, simply by printing money to finance its deficit. . . . He said that it was expensive for the government to borrow money, on which it had to pay interest, in order to cover its deficit and that this expense was pointless. Government could more cheaply provide the missing purchasing power by printing the money to cover its budget deficit (38).

Polanyi emphasized regulating the amount of money in an economy to efficiently harmonize the relation between supply and demand and thus keep employment high while minimizing inflation. The supply-side economists like Roberts added insights into how marginal tax rates affect the production of goods. “Supply-side economics says that some fiscal policies shift the aggregate supply curve, not the aggregate demand curve. Specifically, if marginal tax rates are raised, aggregate supply will decline. There will be fewer goods and service supplied at every price” (40).

In any case, Polanyi’s advocacy of printing money—a lot of it—is exactly what the Federal Reserve Board is doing currently. By the Fed purchasing Treasury bonds with newly printed money, the federal budget deficit is being financed. To the extent this money enters the world economy, demand for US dollars will weaken and inflation result. Roberts notes that the US standard of living has been protected by international recognition of the dollar as the world reserve currency, protection threatened by pro-

longed trade deficits and offshoring of jobs. Most members of the European Union cannot print their own money, which has contributed to the economic crises experienced in Greece especially, but also in Spain, Italy, Ireland, and Portugal. Should the dollar be replaced by some other currency as the world reserve, printing additional money will have more negative impacts in the global marketplace, and our economic troubles would be multiplied. As it is, I would observe that the printing of money rather than borrowing funds has driven down interest rates, so that investors looking for a place to earn better returns often turn to securities. Many suspect that Wall Street stocks are overvalued as a result (although Roberts does not raise this particular concern). Has a new bubble been created that, if it bursts, will seriously diminish retirement income and create a new recession or depression?

Polanyi's vision of a thriving economy is centered on establishing regions of spontaneous order properly structured by government regulations that "serve to regulate, guide, correct and supplement the market without ever trying to suppress and replace it" (*SEP* 170). Presumably these regulations would discourage rampant speculation, expose corrupt manipulations, and reform other malfunctions of an unregulated market. Roberts shows convincingly that, in contrast, the "new economy's" order is structured to benefit the few on the backs of the many. And Roberts is decidedly on the side of the many being exploited by the few. The US response to the 2008 economic crisis is instructive regarding the degree to which the rich are protected while the poor are not.

An audit of the Federal Reserve released in July, 2011 revealed that the Federal Reserve had provided \$16 trillion—a sum larger than US GDP or the US public debt—in secret loans to bail out American and foreign banks, while doing nothing to aid the millions of American families being foreclosed out of their homes. Political accountability disappeared as all public assistance was directed to the mega-rich, whose greed had produced the financial crisis (32-33).

In the US currently, those on the right tend to blame the federal government for the current mess, while those on the left tend to blame multinational corporations and the mega-rich. Both are right because politics has evolved to the point that there is little difference between the interests of big business and governmental policy. Regulatory agencies are routinely run by those who were the heads of the corporations to be regulated. A republican form of governance involving checks and balances and founded on people's commitment to public liberty, which Polanyi advocated, is far from what is in play today. Roberts quotes Herman Daly to the effect that economic globalism is the "space into which transnational corporations move to escape regulation by national governments" (70, see also 174).

What is the burden of Roberts' critique? He is particularly critical of mainstream economists, who he says share blame for creating and sustaining a tiny but hugely wealthy class at the expense of the middle and lower economic classes. The reforms Roberts advocates are primarily directed to American economic policies and secondarily to European policies and practices. American business managers might object that in a competitive global economy, the restrictive regulations Roberts proposes would put them at a competitive disadvantage. Indeed, a criticism of Roberts' approach to be set forth shortly is that he pays insufficient attention to the global context of business. Before addressing that issue, however, here are five persuasive claims Roberts advances.

First, mainstream economists have promoted the fallacious notion that markets are self-regulating. Roberts reminds us that what is regulated is not a market, which is a social institution rather than an actor.

People act, and it is the behavior of people that is regulated. When free market economists describe the ideal as the absence of any regulation of economic behavior, they are asserting that there are no dysfunctional consequences of unregulated economic

behavior. . . Why is it that economists recognize that robbery, rape, and murder are socially dysfunctional, but fail to see unlimited debt leverage and misrepresentation of financial instruments as socially dysfunctional? (79)

Second, in accord with Polanyi, Roberts advocates sensible policies of regulation designed to promote the common good, not the current situation in which regulatory agencies have been captured by the industries they regulate (58). Even where an appropriate regulatory regime is in place, enforcement is often either absent or too weak to ensure compliance.

Third, the alleged benefits of free trade are challenged. Mainstream economists have lauded free trade on the basis of Ricardo's theory of comparative advantage. But, as Roberts states, the economic conditions of the 19th century, in which the theory made sense, no longer prevail. In our era of instant capital mobility and a demand for short term profits, production tends to flee to areas of low labor cost (48-49) and rewards accrue to those executives who can best slash wages and externalize other costs.

Fourth, as a result of the cost-slashing practice of offshoring jobs, America has been largely de-industrialized and the economic future of its young pauperized. "As the production of most tradable goods and services can be moved offshore, there are no replacement occupations for which to train except in domestic "hands on" services such as barbers, manicurists, and hospital orderlies. No country benefits from trading its professional jobs, such as engineering, for nontradable domestic service jobs" (102). The political dominance of free trade ideology, in which "protectionism" is a dirty word, portends that the current economic prospects for US workers will only get worse in the future. Roberts fiercely deplores the corporate practice of offshoring American jobs, a practice furthered by such free trade agreements as NAFTA.

A fifth flaw in current economic theory and practice, Roberts states, is that "economists have failed to understand that infinite growth in a finite system is impossible" (71). He advocates thinking in terms of what he calls "full-world" economics rather than the standard "empty world" economics that considers natural resources to be virtually unlimited. Man-made capital cannot fully substitute for nature's capital, as the Solow-Stiglitz production function assumes (67). There are ecological limits to economic growth that ought to be included in any economic policy making.

Our society has been unjustly reshaped by these theories and practices. We hear frequently the phrase, backed by statistical evidence, that "the rich are getting richer and the poor poorer." The reality is even starker than the phrase suggests. "The distribution of wealth in the US is so highly concentrated that the 400 richest US families, all of whom are billionaires, have the same net worth as the fifty percent less well-off Americans. When 400 have the same wealth as 150,000,000, clearly things are out of balance" (135).

While for the most part Roberts focuses on the dysfunctional status of the US economy, he does offer some potential remedies. "The U.S. could bring home its offshored production by abolishing the corporate income tax and taxing corporations according to whether value is added to their products at home or abroad. Corporations that produce their products in the U.S. would have a low rate of tax; those that offshore their production would have a high rate of tax" (46). But, I would ask, in a world without effective international regulations, would such a change in taxing policy motivate corporations to move their headquarters to countries that look favorably on offshored production and thereby diminish taxable income in America?

Another of Roberts' proposals is to "break the connection between CEO pay and short-term profit performance" (116). However worthy a goal this may be, it seems unlikely that there is the political will

to intrude in such a way into private transactions. Roberts does not provide specifics about how such an adjustment would be worded, enacted, and implemented.

Roberts notes that the repeal of the Glass-Steagall act separating investment from commercial investment banking is what set off the fraudulent transactions culminating in the Great Recession of 2008 (146). The reinstatement of the Glass-Steagall Act would again separate commercial banking, for which FDIC insurance is a reasonable guarantee of economic stability, from investment banking, with regard to which there ought to be no federal support of reckless speculation. TARP funds (Troubled Asset Relief Program) from taxes paid by all of us would then no longer be available to “businesses too big to fail,” and risky economic behavior would be curtailed. There seems to be a reasonable chance that a new Glass-Steagall bill can be passed.

Roberts agrees with those who believe the federal budget is bloated. An obvious way to cut the deficit is to trim the military budget. “The U.S. could reduce the budget deficit by hundreds of billions of dollars by ending its pointless and illegal wars, by closing hundreds of overseas military bases, and by cutting an overstuffed military budget” (45, see also 157). In our artificial climate of fear, to challenge the military and its dependent businesses would take courage nowhere evident in the contemporary political scene.

Finally, there needs to be effective enforcement of laws that theoretically prohibit the replacement of US workers by more poorly paid foreign workers. Roberts chronicles various ways corporations get around the requirements for H-1B visas, which states foreign workers may only be hired when there are no qualified Americans that can be found to do the work in question. “Business organizations allege shortages of engineers, scientists and even nurses. Business organizations have successfully used public relations firms and bought-and-paid-for ‘economic studies’ to convince policymakers that American business cannot function without the subsidy provided by H-1B visas. The evidence is conclusive that the visas do not fill a ‘skills gap’” (107).

Roberts cautiously suggests that planning is useful to “reduce the rate of the exhaustion of nature’s resources and preserve the U.S. dollar as world reserve currency . . .” (74). But in an environment where government has largely become controlled by corporate interests, can governmental agencies be trusted to plan for the common interest and enforce those plans? Here again, Polanyi’s preference for putting in place systems of spontaneous order that serve society as a whole ought to be promoted. Top-down planning is too easily skewed in favor of special interests.

Although Roberts provides a keen, sharp-edged critique of failures in American economic practices, it seems to me that in our age of globalization his broad agenda for reform is incomplete because the international context of doing business is largely peripheral in his account. When multinational corporations are free to situate their businesses in countries where they can negotiate the lowest labor costs, be restricted by the fewest environmental and other regulations, and externalize the most costs, then those countries whose regulations better protect the welfare of their citizens will continue to lose business. But surely, it might be thought, the IMF, the WTO, and the World Bank do not permit corporations to exploit poor nations and peoples. Unfortunately, for the most part these international trade and financial institutions do not set minimal conditions for fair trade and socially beneficial business. Rather the conditions of trade and doing business are established through contracts, often arranged between partners decidedly unequal in power. Organizations like the International Chamber of Commerce exist to resolve disputes between parties to a contract, not to establish fair contracts. Certainly, some laudable attempts to provide stable, fair international business practices exist. For instance, the BASEL regulations advance banking practices designed to prevent fiscal crises. But these regulations are voluntary; they do not have the force of law. In general, minimal conditions needed to support social welfare do not have legal standing in the

global context. I find myself wondering to what extent the reforms Roberts would like to see instituted are feasible without there being some way to control multinational businesses. Without an enforceable set of international rules, offshore tax havens, constant relocation to secure ever cheaper labor, and profiteering by the few will continue to be the norm.

As Roberts makes clear, laissez faire economics favors the wealthy, who have been effective in installing political and economic policies that benefit themselves and harm others. Before changes can be made, perhaps of a Polanyian sort, the scope and seriousness of the problem needs to be made clear. Roberts' book is a great tool of education. While *The Failure of Laissez Faire Capitalism* is replete with redundancies, the net effect of the repetitions is to underscore the seriousness of the problems and the need for reform. This is a powerful book that deserves wide distribution and discussion.

An Appreciative Response to Walter Gulick

Paul Craig Roberts

Keywords: Keynes, Polanyi, globalism, offshoring, short-term profits, regulation capture, economic stimulus.

ABSTRACT

Gulick's description and analysis of my The Failure of Laissez Faire Capitalism is largely on target, but in this response I point out several of his misperceptions and elaborate on several points made in my book. For instance, I note that Polanyi's monetary prescription for stimulating the economy is no longer relevant when so many US jobs have moved offshore. Polanyi's interest in achieving full employment has been replaced by Federal Reserve policies that keep risk-taking banks solvent.

I appreciate Walter Gulick's excellent review of my book, *The Failure of Laissez Faire Capitalism*. I would like to take the opportunity that his review presents to clear up some misinterpretations and misperceptions.

It might look on the surface as if "Polanyi's advocacy of printing money—a lot of it—is exactly what the Federal Reserve Board is doing currently." However, the differences between Polanyi's policy prescription and the Fed's current policy are vast. Indeed, there are no similarities.

On the simplest level, in Polanyi's policy the central bank does not print money with which to buy the Treasury's bond issues. There are no bonds. The Treasury itself prints money in lieu of borrowing, just as President Lincoln printed Greenbacks to finance the war to prevent secession.

On the policy level, Polanyi was addressing a situation in which government policy had inadvertently shrunk the supply of money. In the UK it was the government's decision to return the British pound to pre-war (WWI) parity with gold. Too much new money had been issued for the pound to have pre-war parity and the result of shrinking the money supply to restore parity collapsed employment. In the US the failure of the Federal Reserve to sufficiently expand the supply of money to offset the shrinkage caused by bank failure collapsed employment. (There was no FDIC, so when a bank failed the money supply shrank by the amount of the bank's deposits).

Polanyi uniquely interpreted J.M. Keynes to mean that the government could use a deficit in its budget to raise the level of overall spending or aggregate demand by printing the money to cover that part of government expenditures that was in excess of tax revenues.

Keynesians, particularly the American ones, interpreted Keynes to mean that the government would cover its deficit by borrowing. As Keynesians thought the problem was an excess of savings over investment, the borrowing would not raise the interest rate and depress economic activity. In the Keynesian view, there was no role for monetary policy and no need to create new money. Fiscal policy was sufficient.

Milton Friedman later made it clear that both taxation and borrowing from the public reduce private sector spending. For fiscal policy to be effective, it must be accommodated by monetary expansion.

There are other important differences between Polanyi's policy and the Fed's current policy. Polanyi's policy was keyed toward restoring full employment. The Fed's policy is keyed toward protecting the balance sheets of banks.

"Too big to fail." The Fed says that its low interest rate policy is for the purpose of stimulating the economy while admitting that it can do little to do so. This is public cover for a policy of supporting bond prices. All debt instruments move together. By driving up the price of Treasury debt, the Fed drives up the prices of the debt-related derivatives on the books of the banks, thus preserving the banks' solvency.

As I make clear in my book, there is a fundamental difference between the effectiveness of stimulative economic policy in pre-jobs-offshoring times and today. In Polanyi's time the jobs were still there. All that was needed was a large enough money supply to support full employment. Plants were shuttered, but the work had not been moved to another country. However, today the jobs are moved offshore. As the jobs are moved abroad, stimulative policy cannot put people back into jobs that no longer exist.

Gulick suggests that my solution for bringing offshored jobs back to the US is open to the criticism that it "pays insufficient attention to the global context of business." Corporations, Gulick suggests, would argue that my proposal "would put them at a competitive disadvantage" and cause them to move their headquarters abroad. Here are a number of interrelated confusions.

Globalism is the context of my book. I point out that globalism, far from being the beneficial expansion of free trade that its advocates pretend, is a mechanism for dispossessing First World labor and for destroying the self-sufficiency of Third World societies by turning their agriculture into monocultures. Globalism is nothing but a process for looting.

I demonstrate that jobs offshoring has nothing whatsoever to do with free trade or with trade of any kind. Jobs offshoring is not the result of comparative advantage or competitive pressures. Jobs offshoring is nothing but labor arbitrage across national borders.

Jobs offshoring was not a response to international competition. It was produced by three factors: (1) the collapse of the Soviet Union which changed the attitudes of India and China to foreign capital, (2) the rise of the high speed Internet that permits tradable professional skills to be distantly performed, and (3) Wall Street's success in changing business ethics.

The Soviet collapse resulted in vast under-utilized labor supplies in India and China becoming available to First World capital. The low cost of living and the large excess supplies of labor mean that labor can be paid less than its contribution to output. This difference is captured by the offshoring corporations as profit. Offshoring jobs transferred what had been American wages into profits which are distributed as performance bonuses to executives and to shareholders as capital gains.

The high speed Internet allows engineering, design, research, indeed any tradable professional skill to be performed offshore with the results sent in via the Internet.

The former business ethic that corporations have responsibilities to customers, employees, communities, and shareholders was reduced by “shareholder advocates” to responsibilities only to shareholders. Corporations were threatened by Wall Street with takeovers if the firms failed to reduce costs and boost profits by moving operations offshore.

A fundamental tenant of economics is that labor is paid according to its productivity. The reason US wages have been high relative to China, for example, is that US labor, working with abundant capital, modern technology, and business know-how, was much more productive. American labor’s higher wage was justified by American labor’s higher output.

However, when China, for example, gains the same technology and business know-how from the location in China of US plants producing for their home markets in the US, Chinese labor becomes just as productive, but the vast overhang of surplus labor on the labor market suppresses wages. The difference between the value labor adds and the wages paid becomes profit.

Jobs offshoring is not traditional foreign investment. Traditional foreign investment is when a company invests abroad in order to sell in the foreign country, not in order to bring the products back to the home market. Traditional foreign investment can result from a variety of purposes or reasons, such as to avoid transportation costs and to avoid import quotas or tariffs.

Taxing corporations according to where they add value to their product is a way of offsetting the profit advantage of using foreign labor to produce for home markets. Gulick’s suggestion that US corporations might respond to such a method of taxation by departing the US and becoming foreign corporations is not feasible. Most corporations are public entities, and they are registered in the US. The only way that this can be changed is if the US corporation is purchased by a foreign company and the purchase meets with shareholder approval.

In other words, companies cannot pick up and move for tax reasons whenever they wish. However, they can move their production for their home markets and do so when the labor cost savings are larger than the transportation and import costs.

There are many external costs associated with jobs offshoring. Careers for Americans are terminated. US GDP and tax base are given to other countries. The offshored production returns as imports, which increase the trade deficit and erode the value of the US dollar. Under the existing system of corporate taxation, jobs offshoring erodes the domestic economy.

In the US, corporate CEOs are usually in that position for a short period. Most rise to it late in their career. It is during these few years as CEO that they can make their fortune. Consequently, they tend to have a short-term outlook and operate to maximize short-term profits, which can be at the expense of the longer term. They gain from jobs offshoring even though the longer run effect is to destroy the US consumer market and growth performance of the US economy.

Gulick writes that my proposal to “break the connection between CEO pay and short-term profit performance requires intrusion into private transactions.” But this intrusion occurred when Congress put a ceiling of \$1 million on executive pay that is deductible as a corporate expense unless it is performance based. Supposedly, this was to keep executives from paying themselves large sums that their performance did not justify.

The consequence of this intrusion has been to focus executives on short-term profit maximization. This manifests itself in ways other than jobs offshoring. They skimp on service. They allow corporate infrastructure to deteriorate. Loyal long-term employees are replaced with short-term contract labor.

Nuclear energy plants store used fuel rods in water tanks inside the reactors, leading to such disasters as Fukushima presents.

Gulick suggests that *The Failure of Laissez Faire Capitalism* can be seen as an attempt to begin the process of recovering a liberal economic policy that Polanyi called for. This is true in part. However, the world today and the accumulating problems are far different from those addressed by Polanyi.

Polanyi's interest in macroeconomic policy (discussed above) was spurred by his fear that the combination of the failure of Western economic policy with the prestige of Soviet central planning would result in the loss in the West of a spontaneous economic order and lead to harmful restraints on a "society of explorers." Of course, the seventy-year focus on Soviet planning disappeared with the Soviet Union. The type of planning that I suggest is necessary in order to deal with the fact that resources are finite has nothing in common with the practices and goals of Soviet planning. Foresight is not inconsistent with spontaneous order.

As George Stigler observed several decades ago, government regulatory agencies generally end up captured by the industries that they are supposed to regulate. But corporations can pursue their own interests at the expense of the common interest just as effectively as unregulated entities as they can by capturing the regulatory agencies. So it does not follow that we must not plan for resource scarcity because special interests will capture the plan process. As long as any plan is made public and is not secret, it is possible to perceive when the common interest is being subverted. Indeed, this is one of the main functions of a spontaneous order.

Libertarians especially are perplexed by the title of my book. How, they ask, can "crony capitalism" be equated with the failure of laissez faire? What libertarians fail to perceive is that today's crony capitalism is the direct result of the deregulation and privatization of the past quarter century in the US, UK, France, and elsewhere. It was the removal of regulation that allowed capitalists to become cronies. Regulation makes it more difficult for capitalists to become cronies even when they capture the regulatory agencies, because regulation makes cronyism illegal, which means that they can be prosecuted. This constraint on behavior is missing in a laissez faire environment.

The Age of Globalism is an age of looting. Countries are beginning to turn away from it. In Greece and Spain there are violent protests to the looting and privatization of their public sectors. The BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) are forming as an alternative to the financial imperialism imposed by the US under cover of globalism. South American countries are finding independent voices. The EU and the euro are in partial disarray. As I write, the "superpower" is shutdown, unable to govern itself, much less establish its hegemony over the rest of the world. The economy, undermined by jobs offshoring, cannot produce a revenue base that can support Washington's commitments. Washington is showing an inclination to bridge the enormous gap between revenues and expenses by cutting social services and income support programs. The result would further collapse the consumer economy and widen the revenue-expenditure gap. Sooner or later the dollar will lose its reserve currency status, and American power will decline with the dollar.

A different world is waiting to be born. It could be worse or it could be better.

REVIEWS

Allen, Richard, ed., *Michael Polanyi (Vor-) Denker des Liberalismus in 20. Jahrhundert*. Gummersbach, Germany: Theodor-Heuss-Akademie of the Friedrich Naumann Stiftung für die Freiheit, 2012. Pp. 132. No ISBN number or price but direct inquiries about this publication to corinna.schulz-roggenkamp@freiheit.org.

This short anthology is aptly identified by its German title which, when translated into English, reads as follows: *Michael Polanyi: Precursor of Liberalism in the 20th Century*. It is a collection of eleven papers of varying lengths which were originally presented as talks at a Polanyi seminar which took place at the Theodor-Heuss-Akademie of the Friedrich Naumann Stiftung für die Freiheit in Gummersbach, Germany, from July 28-31, 2011. As the editor notes, and as is attested to in the various papers, the objective of the various authors was twofold: one, to introduce Polanyi's thinking to people who might be new to the field of Polanyi studies, and, two, to give these new readers of Polanyi a sense of the breadth of Polanyi's thought, particularly as it relates to political, social and economic matters, which, until recently, were a dimension of Polanyi's thinking that was somewhat neglected in favour of focusing on Polanyi's epistemological and psychological interests. This anthology begins to meet both of these objectives. Of course, from a reviewer's perspective, reviewing anthologies always poses a potential problem inasmuch as the reviewer is obliged at times to bring unity to a collection of disparate pieces where sometimes little or no real unity exists. Fortunately, this little work sins only venially in this regard.

The first paper is by the editor and well known British Polanyi scholar, Richard T. Allen, and is a combination schematic biography and abbreviated intellectual biography which has as its primary function to give the new reader of Polanyi a sense of who Polanyi was and what sort of challenges he faced as a member of an upper middle class, secularised Jewish family from Budapest, educated in the natural sciences in Germany after WWI who eventually found himself in the U.K. in the early

1930s. While this paper is by no means highly detailed, it is definitely a piece that should give the fledgling Polanyi scholar a taste of what awaits him or her should he or she decide to press on in the field of Polanyi studies.

The next two papers serve somewhat as introductions to Polanyi's political and economic thought proper. The first of these is by Endre Nagy, and it deals with Polanyi's early writings on liberty, while the second is by Phil Mullins, and it focuses on the "planned science" movement in the U.K. in the mid-1930s. This movement was headed by a small group of British Marxists (i.e., J. D. Bernal, *The Social Function of Science*, Lancelot Hogben, *Science for the Citizen*, et al.) who, mimicking the Soviet Union's focus on pursuing only "socially useful knowledge" and not "knowledge for its own sake," aimed to have the British government of the day do likewise—i.e., support only research designed to produce immediately useful results, and thus advance the well-being of the working classes—rather than the more abstract goal of advancing knowledge in general. Of course, Polanyi opposed this movement, and Mullins explains why.

The fourth paper is by Simon Smith. Speaking as a political philosopher, I have to say that I found this little piece most interesting. The author divides authority into two categories, *specific* and *general*. By *specific authority*, Smith has in mind the sort of authority that is explicitly in the possession of the state and its attendant institutions, while by *general authority*, he means the kind of norms that are laid down by the continuing and evolving conversations that take place amongst the residents of a given state in an effort to define themselves in time, and the author does a very nice job of analysing these two forms of authority. There is only one small but important point that is lacking in this piece. In the course of describing these two types of authority, the author maybe ought to have reminded his readers of the growing tendency amongst the holders of specific authority to want to manage the evolution of general authority in ways that breakdown the necessary barrier separating the two forms of authority. This

development will lead inevitably to the complete collapse of general authority, which is, of course, not unrelated to the efforts that are currently being made by the holders of specific authorities to control the content and development of civic culture so as better to manipulate those who inhabit the political community. See James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), a very Polanyian work, although Polanyi's name is mentioned but once in this piece.

The fifth and sixth papers, by Viktor Genk and Tihámér Margitay respectively, deal with the subject of *moral inversion*, a subject that was dear to Polanyi. Genk speaks of the psychological and political aspects of moral inversion, while Margitay writes on consumer societies and moral inversion. Moral inversion can be described best as being a pseudo-moral stance emanating from a tendency amongst ideological thinkers to be so committed to their plans to transform society in a wholesale fashion that they see no problem at all with turning traditional morality—bourgeois morality, the Marxists would say—on its head in their quest to bring about what they view as being *the absolute moral good*. Murdering millions in an effort to bring about a Utopian solution to man's condition—which, of course, cannot be achieved (1) because ours is a condition to be lived and not a problem to be solved, and (2) because we live in an imperfect and changing world—is viewed as perfectly acceptable. In fact, it is designated as the ultimately virtuous act. And there be madness of the very highest order.

The seventh and ninth papers are by Richard M. Moodey, and Moodey seems to throw a breaking-ball at us. The seventh ostensibly deals with the *from-to* structure of economic thinking, and the ninth with the sociology of economic life. In the seventh paper, it seems to me that Moodey presents us with a picture of a Polanyi who is more focused on what is explicit than tacit, and I repeatedly find myself wanting to ask Moodey if centering our attention on “models” is appropriate when it comes to describing Polanyi's thinking at this stage in his career. Of course, it may very well be appropriate, but if it is, then it must be that Polanyi had yet to reach his final destination which has everything to do with tacit knowing and the

realm of the subsidiary in the development of explicit knowledge, and very little to do with models and model building. Moodey's second paper (or ninth in the collection) on the sociology of economic life may be the confirmation of my suspicions. These are both very interesting papers and they cause one to reflect on the fundamentals of Polanyi's thesis as he feels his way towards his final goal.

The eighth paper, entitled “A Polanyian Account of the Relationship between Politics and Economics,” is by Richard Allen, the editor of this anthology. In this paper, Allen presents us with a well-crafted statement dealing with Polanyi's concept of *dual control*. The expression “dual control,” Allen informs us, refers to the way in which the rules that govern a lower level of being in the world are left open at the top for further specification, such that an entity is, in the words of Allen, “controlled on two levels: that of its particulars, e.g. the molecules...; and that of the more comprehensive entity...” In practice, what this can mean is that the laws of molecular biology, for instance, control the functioning of man's body, while social conventions and various social practices control our interactions with one another, which may or may not frustrate the way in which our molecules function at the lower level. As an example, some forms of social strain, for instance, are known to cause physical disease, while other forms are known to be not only beneficial but also essential to our realisation of ourselves as human beings. Of course, this puts the lie to the modern tendency to reduce everything to material or lower level causes. Parenthetically, although Allen does not mention this in his paper, E. F. Schumacher raises this very same theme in his less-well-known work, *A Guide for the Perplexed* (1977), Chapter 2, entitled “Levels of Being.” Allen may want to explore what Schumacher had to say on the subject.

The tenth paper is by Klaus-Ulrich Newmann, and it deals with science in “Polanyi's day and now.” The theme of this paper is that things have not changed since the 1930s, '40s and '50s. While engineering projects can be scheduled and planned down to the smallest detail, science cannot be planned because a discovery cannot be scheduled to happen on command. A discovery is not something that a scientist can have take place whenever he or she wishes it to happen, but an engineer can plan

the realization of a project at a given time, barring unpredictable problems usually having to do with the supply of raw materials. The point here is that discoveries are not inventions. They are the products of unforeseen and unforeseeable breakthroughs in our knowledge, and since prior to making the breakthrough, we cannot know what we come to know only as a result of making the breakthrough, then discoveries cannot be predicted. Now, it appears to me that it would have been appropriate here if the author had drawn attention to Aristotle's threefold division of knowing into theoretical (*theoria*), practical (*phronesis*) and productive (*techné*) knowing (see Book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics*), and then noted that science seeks an insight into what is eternal about reality (*theoria*) whereas engineering is a form of *techné* or art, and hence it is not concerned with coming to know and eventually knowing a given reality, but is concerned primarily with constructing artificial realities. So, not only have things not changed since the first half of the twentieth century, they have not changed for more than two thousand years.

The anthology concludes with an enigmatic paper by Klaus Allerbeck, in which the author seeks to show that Polanyi was "almost a sociologist" because of his judicious insights into the problems of the era in which he functioned as a scholar and the complex relations he entertained with other well-known academics of the day. I wish that the author of this paper had been somewhat less parsimonious with his analysis, for he appears to know a great deal more about his subject than he is prepared to reveal in this too-brief piece.

The work formally concludes with a short bibliography which focuses on new, reissued, and translated works about and by Polanyi by scholars writing in English, German, Italian and Portuguese.

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Jeremy S. Begbie, *Voicing Creation's Praise: Towards a Theology of the Arts*. Foreword by Colin Gunton. New York and London: T & T Clark, 1991. Pp. xix + 291. ISBN 13: 978-0567291882. \$55.00 pb.

In this work, Begbie attempts to show what light can be shed on artistic activity in Christian theology—especially in the Protestant tradition. The book is written in three parts: Part I: Paul Tillich—Art and Ultimate Reality; Part II: The Dutch Neo-Calvinists—Art, Creation and Beauty; and Part III: Towards a Theology of the Arts. In this short review of a book published over twenty years ago (but still in print), it is to the third section that I direct the most attention, especially to the author's chapter, "Art and Metaphor," and to his understanding and use of the thought of Michael Polanyi as a resource towards a third alternative to Tillich and the Dutch Neo-Calvinists.

Regarding Tillich (Part I), the author finds Tillich's philosophy of art to be a rich resource, yet the author claims that, in Tillich's scheme, "Christology tends to be swallowed up in an idealist ontology; the penetrating sounds of the Gospel muffled by his 'system'" (74). Begbie then leaves Tillich for a look at the Dutch Neo-Calvinists, which includes such theologians as Kuyper, Bavinck, Dooyeweerd, Rookmaaker, and Seerveld. Regarding these thinkers, Begbie advises the reader to heed an observation by Alasdair Heron: "It is the almost inevitable fate of those who work 'on the boundary' to find that they do not satisfy those on *either* side" (74). In his explorations, Begbie notes that historically the Protestant church has hesitated in making theological use of the arts. He hopes to provide a basis for correcting this neglect.

In the third section enter Polanyi. Begbie is interested in what he calls the elusive reality of redemption and how to go about seeking it. He believes that it can be sought "with the help of metaphor [which is] the key to the nature of art." He especially relies upon the thought of Michael Polanyi on the topic of metaphor, upon which I will focus for the remainder of this review. Begbie uses an example from "Romeo and Juliet" to illustrate metaphor. In the metaphor "Juliet is the sun," Juliet is the "tenor" and the sun is the vehicle. This example is not a descriptive simile in which it is

said “Juliet is ‘like’ the sun.” When we say “Juliet ‘is’ the sun” we enjoy the fusion of unlike elements and are carried away by the metaphor into our own diffuse subsidiary experiences. We are embodied in the metaphor and surrender ourselves to it. Here Polanyi’s thought is comparable to Tillich’s early philosophy in which a concern to find meaning in existence is central. Begbie notes that “for Polanyi it is clear that metaphors are quite capable of being vehicles of cognitive content by which we gain epistemic access to the world” (238). Since Begbie believes that all the arts can be seen as human artifacts that function metaphorically, he is making the case that Christian theology ignores a valuable entry to reality if it does not take the arts seriously. This raises a further question: to what extent might theology be seen as a work of art?

Rather than “Juliet is the sun,” I would like to take an example from *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* to explicate metaphor and its transforming power. It seems as if the men in the Therapeutic Community were seen by the story’s protagonist McMurphy, and the other group members themselves, as “rabbits.” “I am a rabbit” seems to be similar to “Juliet is the sun.” The metaphor reveals much about their understanding of themselves. McMurphy (played by Jack Nicholson in the movie) wanted to show the men that they should not understand themselves to be rabbits. He realizes that this is not to be done by lecture. Rather he involves them in a new metaphor: “I am a gambler.” McMurphy, for his efforts, is given shock treatments. But in the end, the Indian Chief, one of the group members, makes his escape from Nurse Ratched and embodies the antithesis of the “I am a rabbit” metaphor. Indeed he becomes a gambler, big time. A similar transition can be seen in the Client-Centered Therapy of Carl Rogers, where the change is often from the metaphor “the therapist is the answer” to “I am the answer.” The change is evoked by the non-directive climate evoked by the client-centered therapist. The arts and theology, too, are evocative vehicles for transformation.

Begbie’s primary purpose has been to open up paths along which other might usefully travel; he hopes that a way might be paved for a reintegration of dimensions of our lives which have been disastrously torn apart in modern times. Metaphors are crucial

to his effort: they are interactive in their conveying of meaning; are intrinsically irreducible; work in the cognitive domain of knowing; and are major vehicles for manifesting the “more than we can say” of the tacit. There is a lot of the “more than we can say” in this book: it is long, expensive, scholarly, and hard to review. It is also edifying and makes extensive use of Polanyi’s thought.

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Creighton Rosental, *Lessons from Aquinas: A Resolution of the Problem of Faith and Reason*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2011. Pp. xv + 252. ISBN 978-0-881462531. \$45.00 hb.

Rosental’s purpose in this book is “to provide a detailed account of precisely how Aquinas reconciles faith with Aristotelian reason” by providing a detailed exegesis of Aquinas’s own texts (240). Every quotation from Aquinas is given in both English and Latin, making this a valuable resource for those who are interested in grappling with the original text.

The author uses Alvin Plantinga’s work on “epistemic responsibility” as a guide to define the terms of the problem of faith and reason (15), but takes a different tack in his final analysis of how Aquinas’s resolution of the problem is to be understood (230-231). The epistemology of “Classic Foundationalism” makes it seem as though faith is an unreasonable or irrational act because, by definition, faith deals with “the evidence of things unseen” (Heb 11:1). Classic Foundationalism holds that belief in a proposition “is epistemically responsible if and only if there is sufficient evidence” for the proposition (16). There is sufficient evidence if the proposition is “properly basic (... self-evident, incorrigible, or evident to the senses)” or else if the proposition “is believed on the evidential basis of other beliefs that are epistemically responsible and that support [the proposition] deductively, inductively or abductively” (16).

Rosental shows that Aquinas is consistent with Classic Foundationalism in his treatment of “perfect *scientia*,” which implies “cognition of a necessary

truth” as well as “cognition that the proposition is necessary and why it is true” (68). Affirming such knowledge is clearly an epistemically responsible act. By contrast, there is an imperfect kind of knowledge based on reasoning from effects to causes, “*scientia quia*,” knowledge that there is a cause that is not directly observable which can account for an effect which is observable (158). This is the kind of knowledge we have of gravity or of electro-magnetic radiation—or of the existence of God as disclosed by the Five Ways (172).

The knowledge gained by reasoning from effect-to-cause is real and valuable—the effects of gravity and electro-magnetic radiation can be calculated precisely—but we do not understand the essence of gravity or of the quantum-electrodynamics behind electro-magnetic fields in such a way that we not only know how to calculate their effects but also see that the effects could not have been other than what they are and know why this is so. Knowledge that there is an unmoved mover behind all motion, an uncaused cause behind all efficient causality, a necessary being behind all contingent being, an infinitely perfect being behind all that is good, noble, and true in the universe, and an intelligence behind all order in the universe provides a good reason for being open to revelation, but does not directly disclose the articles of faith—“that God is triune or that He is incarnate” (93), that the world had a beginning in time (149-172), and other propositions of “sacred doctrine” (183).

Rosental’s thesis is that “Aquinas held that faith did not involve proof, nor require evidence in support of it” (xiv). The Five Ways do not take the place of God’s self-revelation in the Word made flesh. The knowledge that “comes by hearing” (Rom 10:17) has “certitude while lacking vision” (91). While this places the act of faith beyond the scope of Classic Foundationalism, Rosental argues that the quality of certitude in the act and habit of faith qualifies it for a place in a revised understanding of what qualifies as a rational act. Besides perfect *scientia*, “perfect seeing by the light of natural reason,” and *scientia quia*, knowing that there is a relationship between cause and effect, Rosental and Aquinas recognize the value of “seeing by the light of faith” that “makes one see the things that are believed”

(ST II-II.1.4 ad 3; 113-114). Such a form of seeing—very different from the force of logic or direct observation—justifies assent. Rosental calls this “Faith-Inclusive Foundationalism” (206). It adds a new criterion to those of Classic Foundationalism: assent is epistemically responsible when a person sees by the light of faith that something is to be believed, and consequently assents to the proposition on this basis (207). Such an act of faith “has certitude because the source of the light of faith and the grace that helps guide the will both come from God, the most reliable source of truth there is” (198).

I am not entirely comfortable with this resolution of the problem of faith and reason. It seems to succeed only by changing the meaning of “reason” in the course of the argument. Rosental seems to be aware of this weakness in his argument:

If we count [Faith-Inclusive Foundationalism] rather than [Classical Foundationalism] as the correct version of foundationalism, then we can count faith as rationally justified. Those who are inclined to cringe when justification is separated from evidence will recoil from describing Aquinas’s faith as rationally justified. So be it ... Because faith does not violate the epistemic norms of reason under Aristotle, Aquinas seems to have achieved an epistemic compatibilism between faith and reason (208).

Those who prefer the more narrow definition of reason in Classical Foundationalism almost certainly would have no difficulty in dismissing the assurance felt by believers that God is a reliable source of truth. Whether God exists and whether God has revealed Himself to us are precisely the kind of questions that the Classic Foundationalists intended to separate from the field of rational activity: “William Clifford made the rather strong assertion that ‘it is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence’” (15). I doubt very much that such foundationalists would admit personal conviction of God’s graceful activity in the believer as the kind of evidence that is needed for a responsible epistemic act.

Rosental seems to be ambivalent about this result. Given his stated purpose of describing what Aquinas understood in his own day by reading

Aquinas's own texts, he may simply have discovered that Aquinas had a different understanding of reason from that affirmed in Classical Foundationalism. My impression is that Rosental does not want to leave it at that, but believes that Faith-Informed Foundationalism offers a better account of reason and should be used as a resource in contemporary conversations about faith and reason.

Rosental does not advert to Polanyi in this book, but if he does intend to advocate Faith-Informed Foundationalism, then Polanyi's fiduciary program (*PK*, 299) might help him make the case. In exploring the fiduciary foundations of reason, Polanyi uses the model of Pauline conversion—grace from above coming to us in our weakness—to illuminate his experience of assenting to what he could not prove (*PK*, 285). Rosental restricts his consideration of “faith” almost entirely to the realm of “Christian faith,” and so inadvertently isolates himself from the apologetic resource offered by Polanyi's understanding that scientific reasoning requires acts of assent that have the same structure as the act of faith in Christian revelation. Polanyi knew that his fiduciary epistemology of science could inspire a religious renaissance:

Men need a purpose which bears on eternity. Truth does that; our ideals do it; and this might be enough, if we could ever be satisfied with our manifest moral shortcomings and with a society which has such shortcomings fatally involved in its workings. Perhaps this problem cannot be resolved on secular grounds alone. But its religious solution should become more feasible once religious faith is released from pressure by an absurd vision of the universe, and so there will open up instead a meaningful world which could resound to religion (*TD*, 92).

At best, Rosental only reaches the point at which he sees that Aquinas uses a broader definition of reason than the Classical Foundationalists. Polanyi goes a step further in showing that a broader understanding of reason is essential for an adequate account of reason's great accomplishments in the scientific arena.

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Polanyi Society Board Meeting Minutes
October 22, 2013
Baltimore, MD

President Rutledge called the meeting to order at 7:50 p.m. The Minutes of the 2012 Board meeting were approved by consent.

Charles Lowney distributed copies of the Treasurer's Report for the fiscal year Sept. 1, 2012 to Aug. 31, 2013 (see page 63 of this issue). Highlights include the (1) slow growth of the Endowment Fund with \$3,020 contributed in the fiscal year, including \$1,000 in stock; (2) seven gifts to the Travel Fund; (3) reduced cost for *TAD* because Mercer now subsidizes the postage; (4) setting up a separate category for donations solicited for the June 2014 Poteat Conference, and (5) the observation that we have sufficient funds to cover the honorarium for Charles Taylor, who will speak at the 2014 San Diego annual meeting. Walter Gulick, chair of the 2014 Program Committee, noted that he presently is seeking joint sponsorships with interested groups, some of whom might help with Taylor's expenses; the AAR has agreed to pay for Taylor's room.

Lowney also suggested that the Society should invest a portion of cash on hand in the endowment account in some combination of stock and mutual funds. After discussion of a variety of possibilities, President Rutledge referred the matter of concretely formulating an investment policy to the Endowment Committee; the committee will provide Lowney with specific instructions for investment. The Board approved in principle Lowney's suggestion and congratulated him on the clarity of his bookkeeping.

The Nominating Committee (Mead, Meek, with Gulick as chair) recommended (1) reappointing Breyspraak and Grosso for second three-year terms now that they have completed their first, (2) appointing Rutledge for a third three-year term, and (3) appointing Mullins for a three-year term to the position formerly held by Tony Clark. All nominees have agreed to serve and the Board unanimously approved the nominations.

Lewis reviewed high points from his pre-circulated report on *TAD*: (1) producing and mailing *TAD* at Mercer appears to be cheaper than at Missouri Western (see Treasurer's Report, above), (2) he is working on some changes in internal accounting so that he can track costs more accurately, (3) a new editorial board has been formed, (4) a more comprehensive style guide has been developed, (5) he and Lowney had been contacted by and were scheduled to meet with representatives from Maney Publishing to explore the possibility of having them take over the production and distribution of the journal. Overall, the transition from Western to Mercer has been smooth. The Board congratulated Paul on his good work. There was also a brief discussion of how much exposure *TAD* should give to Charles Taylor and the 2014 annual meeting. Paul will discuss this matter with the editorial board.

Mullins reviewed major points from his pre-circulated report on the PS web site: (1) in the last year, Ray Wilken's unpublished 1966 Polanyi interview and the 1965 Wesleyan Lectures have been posted; (2) work on posting the Duke copy of the Gifford Lectures is proceeding and should be completed soon; (3) work with Eduardo Beira on the posting the 1940 Polanyi film "Unemployment and Money" and related archival material is proceeding. Mullins suggested that the Society likely should consider new digital ventures, such as a blog.

On the matter of the 2014 meeting, the Board congratulated Lowney for taking the initiative to invite Taylor, who has agreed to appear in two sessions, Much remains to be decided, however. Will one of these sessions be in a slot available from a cooperating group or AAR program unit? Can we prominently advertise Taylor's program in the 2014 AAR Program Book? Is it best to have a panel of respondents for

Taylor in one or more sessions? These are all questions which need to be addressed. Lewis, Lowney, Gulick and others on the 2014 Program Committee will sort out such matters by early in 2014.

On the matter of the June 2014 Poteat Conference at Yale, Rutledge called attention to Dale Cannon's pre-circulated one-page summary of dollars raised, projections for attendance, and projected schedule. Wally Mead and James Van Pelt were available to answer questions. Van Pelt has a position at Yale Divinity School and has put together three international conferences there. He has been working closely with Cannon and Mead as the person-on-the-ground and reported that the early planning for the Poteat conference seems typical. He assured the Board that Yale adjusts the contract based on actual numbers of participants and is flexible in working with planners. There was some discussion about how to cover the liability insurance required by Yale. Rutledge and Van Pelt received a quote which was less than \$400. Yeager asked specifically about the policy for returning registration dollars in the event of an unexpected crisis, which might lead many who had planned to attend to cancel late in the cycle. The original contract does not seem to provide for return of registration dollars in such cases. James Van Pelt, after indicating that Yale is acting as a collection agency not liable for returning fees, agreed to confer with Yale whether this element of the contract is negotiable. Lowney suggested language that would limit the Polanyi Society's liability should there be late cancellations. The board accepted the suggested language and Rutledge offered to incorporate the requested change into the appropriate documents subject to acceptance by Yale. Lowney suggested that budget planning should include a 10% buffer. Van Pelt indicated that the initial calculation had a 5% buffer, but the success in fund raising and the measures to avoid the sales tax on food and lodging effectively raises the contingency fund to over 10%. There was some discussion about how to incentivize early registration and how to make the conference appealing to those in the New Haven community. Mead thanked Van Pelt for his hard work on the scene. At the end of the discussion, Rutledge moved that the Polanyi Society sponsor the conference, with the understanding that these issues be investigated further. Breyspraak seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

Rutledge indicated that preliminary plans have been made to acquire a piece of sculpture from Poteat's friend, the Greek sculptor Evangelos Moustakas, for Yale Divinity School in honor of Poteat. The Polanyi Society has been asked to receive contributions for this piece from donors. Discussion followed pertaining to the benefits and potential challenges of using the Society's accounts to receive and hold donations for this project. Lowney saw no problem in managing the money, so long as it was not interpreted as the Society commissioning or otherwise taking responsibility for the procurement of the statue. Grosso moved to authorize the Society to receive contributions for this project, but not to authorize the Society to act in any other way (i.e., to commission the sculpture, to conduct negotiations between the donor and the Divinity School, etc.); Breyspraak seconded. The motion carried. Rutledge will communicate with those raising dollars for the piece of sculpture and with Yale Divinity School.

Submitted by Phil Mullins and Walt Gulick

POLANYI SOCIETY TREASURER'S REPORT
Fiscal Year September 1, 2012-August 31, 2014

General Fund

<i>Opening Balance:</i>		\$10,683.62
<i>Revenues:</i>		9,094.43
Dues:	3,085.00	
Undesignated Donations :	485.00	
Donations for endowment:	3,020.00	
Donations for Poteat Conf:	1,380.00	
Donations for Travel Fund:	1,015.00	
Misc (incl. \$2.55 adjustment):	109.43	
<i>Transfers Out:</i>		5,415.00
Endowment:	2,920.00	
TAD Acct MWSU	1,480.00	
Travel Fund	1,015.00	
<i>Expenditures:</i>		823.61
Software and postage	143.71	
Bank and Paypal fees	32.57	
TAD Mercer Printing/Postage	679.90	
<i>Closing Balance:</i>		\$13,539.44

Travel Fund

<i>Opening Balance:</i>		\$1,077.61
<i>Donations:</i>	1,015.00	
<i>Interest:</i>	1.36	
<i>Closing Balance:</i>		\$2,093.97

TAD Account (MWSU)

<i>Opening Balance:</i>		\$199.95
<i>Transfer from General Acct:</i>	1,480.00	
<i>Expenditures:</i>		
Printing at MWSU	983.25	
Postage at MWSU	682.58	
<i>Closing Balance:</i>		\$14.22

Endowment Funds

<i>Capital 360 Opening Balance:</i>		\$11,403.04
Donations:	1,920.00	
Interest:	45.89	
<i>Capital 360 Closing Balance:</i>		\$13,368.93
<i>E*Trade Stock:</i>		
Donation	1,000.00	
Activity	1,430.00	
<i>Total Endowment Funds:</i>		\$15,798.93

SUBMISSIONS FOR PUBLICATION

Articles, meeting notices, and notes likely to be of interest to persons interested in the thought of Michael Polanyi are welcomed. Manuscripts normally will be sent out for blind review.

Articles should be sent to Paul Lewis at lewis_pa@mercer.edu

Book reviews should be sent to Walter Gulick at wgulick@msubillings.edu.

All manuscripts should be submitted as a Microsoft Word file attached to an email message (.doc or .docx) and formatted as follows:

- double-spaced
- with 1” margins
- in a reasonable typeface (Times New Roman 12 is preferred)
- with paragraphs indented 0.25”

As to other matters of style:

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

2. *Citations*: We recognize that Polanyi’s work connects with scholars who work in diverse disciplines and typically use different style guides such that we are “fluent” in different conventions for citations, capitalization of titles, and so forth.

• Our preference is for Chicago’s parenthetical/reference style in which citations are given in the text as (last name of author, year, page number), combined with bibliographical information at the end of the article.

• Endnotes should be used sparingly and be placed before the reference section.

• To the extent that our software allows, we will, however, accept other styles (e.g., APA or MLA) so long as the author is consistent and careful in following it. The main point, of course, is to give the reader enough information to locate and engage your sources.

• We do encourage one exception to this practice. Polanyi’s major works may be cited parenthetically: for example: Polanyi argues that (*TD*, 56). Full bibliographical information should still be supplied in the references section since many of us may work with different editions of his works. If you take this option, please using the following abbreviations (note that abbreviations are italicized):

<i>CF</i>	<i>Contempt of Freedom</i>
<i>KB</i>	<i>Knowing and Being</i>
<i>LL</i>	<i>Logic of Liberty</i>
<i>M</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
<i>PK</i>	<i>Personal Knowledge</i>
<i>SEP</i>	<i>Society, Economics, and Philosophy</i>
<i>SFS</i>	<i>Science, Faith, and Society</i>
<i>SM</i>	<i>Study of Man</i>
<i>STSR</i>	<i>Scientific Thought and Social Reality</i>
<i>TD</i>	<i>Tacit Dimension</i>

Deadlines:

- For Number One of a Volume (October): 1 July
- For Number Two (February): 1 November
- For Number Three (July): 1 April

Notes on Contributors

RICHARD GELWICK (rprogel@juno.com) is one of the few alive today who studied personally with Polanyi on his epistemology. His work includes the first major bibliography and microfilm of Polanyi's papers. He also wrote the first doctoral dissertation on Polanyi's epistemology and the first introductory book, *The Way of Discovery, An Introduction to the Thought of Michael Polanyi*. A former coordinator of The Polanyi Society and editor of the newsletter that became *Tradition & Discovery*, he last taught as Professor of Medical Ethics and Humanities at the University of New England and as Adjunct Professor at Bangor Theological Seminary. He is now retired and lives on the coast of Maine with his spouse, cat, and sailboats. Occasionally he gives university lectures on Polanyi, most recently at Yale.

WALTER GULICK (wgulick@msubillings.edu), Book Review Editor for *TAD*, not only enjoys arranging for books to be sent to reviewers, but appreciates the opportunity that Polanyi's wide range of interests provides to write reviews or review articles on diverse topics. The issues that Roberts raises happens to mesh nicely with Gulick's non-professional concern that there are serious problems in our political economy that need addressing.

MARTIN MOLESKI (moleski@canisius.edu) is a Jesuit priest and Professor at Canisius College in Buffalo, New York. He has degrees from Boston College (BA, English, 1973), Fordham University (MA Humanities, 1977), and The Catholic University, of America (PhD, 1991). His most recent publication is *Judging Religion Justly: A Catholic Introduction to Religious Studies*, Cognella University Readers, 2011.

JERE MOORMAN (jeremoor@sbcglobal.net) is a Leadership Development Consultant at the Center for the Studies of the Person in La Jolla, CA.

PHIL MULLINS (mullins@missouriwestern.edu) is Professor Emeritus at Missouri Western State University and is also Editor Emeritus of *TAD*. He has written essays connecting Polanyi or Polanyian ideas with other thinkers, including H. Richard Niebuhr, Marjorie Grene, Harry Prosch, and Charles Sanders Pierce. He is particularly interested in the historical development of Polanyi's philosophical perspective

PAUL CRAIG ROBERTS (pcr3@icloud.com), B.S., Ph.D., was educated at Georgia Tech, University of Virginia, University of California, Berkeley, and Oxford University where he was a member of Merton College. He has held many university appointments, including Stanford and Georgetown universities, served in the congressional staff, was Associate Editor and columnist for the *Wall Street Journal*, and was appointed Assistant Secretary of the US Treasury for Economic Policy by President Ronald Reagan. He is the author of 12 books and many articles in scholarly journals. His first book, *Alienation and the Soviet Economy*, was dedicated to Michael Polanyi.

DAVID RUTLEDGE (david.rutledge@furman.edu) is Pitts Professor of Religion at Furman University in Greenville, S.C. He was first alerted to Polanyi's thought by Bill Poteat at Duke and then wrote his dissertation on Polanyi at Rice University. He is currently President of the Polanyi Society.

D. M. YEAGER (yeagerd@georgetown.edu) is the Thomas J. Healey Family Distinguished Professor of Ethics in the Theology Department at Georgetown University. Her Ph.D. in Religion and Culture is from Duke University, and her eclectic interests ooze dismayingly across the disciplinary boundaries of ethics, literature, philosophical theology, and social theory. She has published articles in journals such as *Tradition and Discovery*, *The Political Science Reviewer*, *The Journal of Religion*, and *The Journal of Religious Ethics*.

MABEN WALTER POIRIER (maben.poirier@concordia.ca) teaches political theory and political philosophy at Concordia University in Montreal, Quebec. His writings focus mostly on Michael Polanyi and Eric Voegelin.

WWW Polanyi Resources

The Polanyi Society web site (polanysisociety.org/ or polanysisociety.com/) provides information about Polanyi Society membership and meetings. The site also contains the following: (1) digital archives containing all issues of *Tradition and Discovery* and its predecessor publications of the Polanyi Society going back to 1972; (2) indices listing *Tradition and Discovery* authors, reviews and reviewers; (3) the history of Polanyi Society publications; (4) information on *Appraisal* and *Polanyiana*, two sister journals with special interest in Michael Polanyi's thought; (5) a link to the "Guide to the Papers of Michael Polanyi," which provides an orientation to archival material housed in the Special Collections Research Center of the University of Chicago Library, Chicago, IL 60637; (6) photographs of Polanyi; (7) links to a number of Polanyi essays (available on the Polanyi Society web site and other sites), Polanyi's Duke Lectures (1964) and Wesleyan Lectures (1965), as well as audio files for Polanyi's McEnerney Lectures (1962), Ray Wilken's 1966 interview of Polanyi, and Polanyi's conversation with Carl Rogers (1966).

Electronic Discussion List

The Polanyi Society supports an electronic discussion group that explores implications of the thought of Michael Polanyi. Anyone interested can join. To join yourself, go to the following address: http://groups.yahoo.com/group/polanyi_list/join. If you have difficulty, send an e-mail to James van Pelt (james.van-pelt@yale.edu) and someone will see that you are added to the list.

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