

## An Introduction to the Wilken 1966 Polanyi Interviews

Phil Mullins

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

In the fall semester of 1965 and the spring semester of 1966, Michael Polanyi was in residence as a fellow at the Center for Advanced Study at Wesleyan University, Middletown, Connecticut. He gave a series of five lectures in the fall and these are available on the Polanyi Society web site ([Wesleyan Lectures](#)). In the spring semester on April 5 and 6, 1966, Ray Wilken, who was then a graduate student at the University of Illinois, conducted a set of interviews with Polanyi which he recorded. Wilken subsequently completed his doctoral work [1] and became a professor of education at Kent State University. He and his colleagues later organized two conferences on Polanyi's thought at Kent State University, including the centenary conference in 1991 attended by more than a hundred people.[2] Although he never published these conversations, Wilken transcribed three of the four tapes.[3] There are other published interviews of Michael Polanyi, but certainly this set, which ranges over a number of topics, is among the most interesting. Thanks go to Ray Wilken and Kim Sebaly (a former Kent State colleague) for work done in preparing these materials and for granting permission to the Polanyi Society to post them.

There are links to four separate audio files and three separate transcript files below. Each of the original Wilken transcripts is approximately twenty pages of PDF text and they reproduce the first three audio files, but the transcripts do not perfectly correspond to the audio files. These links should allow you to play the audio files or download them and the transcript files can be read online, printed or downloaded.

[Wesleyan Interview April 5, 1966 Audio File 1](#)

[Wesleyan Interview April 5, 1966 Transcript 1 File](#)

[Wesleyan Interview April 5, 1966 Audio File 2](#)

[Wesleyan Interview April 5, 1966 Transcript 2 File](#)

[Wesleyan Interview April 6, 1966 Audio File 3](#)

[Wesleyan Interview April 6, 1966 Transcript 3 File](#)

[Wesleyan Interview April 6, 1966 Audio File 4](#): There is no transcript for this 24 minute section of the 1966 Wilken interviews. This component primarily focuses on discussion of criticisms of Polanyi's ideas by prominent figures in the fifties and sixties. For example, Wilken asks Polanyi to respond to several comments that the English philosopher Michael Oakeshott made about Polanyi's ideas in Oakeshott's September, 1958 review of *Personal Knowledge*. [4]

Endnotes

[1]Raymond Edwin Wilken's 1970 dissertation directed by Harry S. Broudy at the University of

Illinois at Urbana-Champaign draws on his interviews with Polanyi and is titled "The Relation of Polanyi's Theory of Personal Knowledge to the Teaching of Biology."

[2]A collection of conference materials was edited by Richard Gelwick and published by the Polanyi Society in 1997 under the title *From Polanyi to the 21st Century: Proceedings of a Centennial Conference, Kent State University, April 11-13, 1991*. This 936 page volume includes the conference program, listing invited speakers and other papers, as well as written versions of most of the presentations. Some of this material was later republished (sometimes in revised form) elsewhere.

[3]While Polanyi was at the University of Chicago, Wilken recorded additional interviews with Polanyi on April 24 and 25, 1967. There is no transcript available for these recorded interviews but the audio recordings are available on the Polanyi Society web site ([April 24 and 25, 1967](#)). On May 1 and 4, 1969, Wilken interviewed Polanyi for the last time at the University of Chicago but these interviews were not recorded.

[4]Michael Oakeshott, "The Human Coefficient," *Encounter* vol. 11, no. 3 (1958): 77-80. See also (and compare to Polanyi's comments in this interview) Marjorie Grene's interesting two-page letter of response to Oakeshott's review in the following issue: Marjorie Grene, "Personal Knowledge," *Encounter* vol. 11, no. 4 (1958): 67-68.