Deep Postmodernism: A Review Essay

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ABSTRACT: Key Words: modernism, postmodernism, deep postmodernism, constructive postmodernism, post-critical, tacit knowing, lived body, metaphysics, epistemology, meaning in language, Alfred North Whitehead, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Michael Polanyi, J. L. Austin, Jacques Derrida, Francois Lyotard, Michel Foucault, Jerry H. Gill.

This article is a review of Deep Postmodernism *by Jerry H. Gill. In this book Gill juxtaposes and compares the philosophies of Whitehead, Wittgenstein, Merleau-Ponty, Polanyi, and Austin—philosophies that on the surface are very different but, examined closely, are remarkably complementary and convergent in respect of their challenging and revising key assumptions of modern thought relating to topics of reality, linguistic meaning, embodiment, and knowing. Their critiques resonate with several of the critiques of well-known postmodern thinkers but go deeper by reconstructing the key assumptions in question. I compare Gill's conception of deep postmodern philosophy with Polanyi's conception of post-critical philosophy. Gill's book is significant in setting out in one place the beachhead that these five thinkers (and others akin to them) have established in overcoming the philosophically sterile dead-ends that modernist and postmodernist thought have bequeathed us.*

With this book, Jerry Gill has attempted to pull off a remarkable feat, a feat his Ph.D. advisor, William H. Poteat (my advisor too, by the way), sought to do in his graduate seminars at Duke. Poteat regularly brought several great philosophical critics of modernity (including three of the four Gill covers in this book) into dialogue with each other and with his students (*occasionally* throwing a modern or postmodern foil into the mix). Thereby, in the midst of this dialogical context, Poteat helped his students come to experience a radically different, liberating kind of reflection and sensibility about the human condition from the modern intellectual sensibility predominant in the academy to which they had long since become captive—indeed, to which they had become subtly enslaved. They came to experience a shift and liberation into what Polanyi and Poteat call a *post-critical* sensibility, that Gill in this book calls *deep postmodern*.[1] It wasn't just acquiring new thoughts that they hadn't held before but thinking things through, holistically and constructively, in a different, self-recovered way, as opposed to the self-absented kinds of thinking to which they had become accustomed. Gill's attempt comes off well in several respects, though the book's relation to its reader lacks the tacit interpersonal qualities that Poteat embodied in his own teaching and how Poteat geared them to the unique conceptual entanglements from which his students needed liberation. Gill's book pays little attention to its readers' need to undergo this shift from a critical into a post-critical sensibility and the challenges that that shift may entail. This may be due to Gill's supposition that the shift from the one to the other is a shift in basic assumptions rather than also a comprehensive shift in attitude and orientation of oneself toward oneself and the world. For Poteat and for Polanyi, I think, the problematic assumptions of modernity have perhaps more to do with the attitude and self-orientation that lies behind them than with those assumptions taken by themselves.

Nevertheless, in this review I want to call attention to the apt way that Gill seeks to expose his readers to these four thinkers—Whitehead, Wittgenstein (in his later work), Merleau-Ponty, and Polanyi—brought

into dialogue with each other on four different themes: reality, meaning, embodiment, and knowing, together plotting out essential features of a deep postmodern / post-critical sensibility.

Gill begins the book with a brief review of three of the principal critiques of modernism by well-known postmodernists (Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault) and shows how each critique, while insightful, ultimately falls short of what is needed because, in Gill's terms, they don't go *deep enough*. Their critiques end up invalidating their own statements and positions no less than the modernist assumptions they criticize. What is called for instead is a more profound conceptual critique and constructive reform of the sort found in the four thinkers covered in his book. That is why Gill calls them "deep postmodernists" and the others "shallow postmodernists." The three critiques, in order, are as follows: "(1) Derrida and Lyotard question the modernist assumption that language has the capacity to represent reality and thought accurately in a fixed and stable manner, by showing there is no escape from ambiguity, vagueness, and historical-cultural-hegemonic bias. (2) Foucault and Derrida deny the modernist assumption that truth and reality can be reliably apprehended only if approached from a detached, historically and culturally unsituated, objective standpoint, for such a standpoint is utterly impossible to attain; indeed, the very presumption to do so masks a socio-political agenda. Lastly, (3) Derrida and Foucault debate modernism's assumption that a transcendence of social-cultural and personal prejudice can be achieved through constructing a complex, all-encompassing, monolithic system of thought, for any such efforts cannot escape projecting and reifying the set of conceptual prejudices with which it begins, closing it off from other perspectives.[2]

By way of contrast, the four thinkers in question, Gill claims, appreciate the truth of much of postmodernism by realizing the untruth of each of these modernist assumptions. By failing to replace these assumptions with anything better, shallow postmodernists cannot avoid drawing relativistic and nihilistic conclusions.

> While fully acknowledging that their own perspective, as well as anyone else's, can lay no claim to being the 'final truth,' they [i.e., these four philosophers] have struck philosophical postures in which there remains the possibility of aiming at or striving for a correct understanding of the "way things are" in the world and in our daily lives. Whitehead, Merleau-Ponty, Wittgenstein, and especially Polanyi, are very careful to delineate their understanding of the dynamics of knowledge so as to incorporate the problems of relativism without undercutting the search for truth. (21)

Whereas the postmodern critiques in question end up being invalidated by their own criticisms, Gill's four thinkers go deeper and replace modernist assumptions with more sensible, deep postmodern ones. Moreover, they keep track of their own statements, arguments, and systems of concepts and are careful to show how they agree with these alternative assumptions and their own philosophical insights.

In the four chapters that follow, Gill gives exposition to the thinking of each of his four deep postmodern thinkers around four different themes and, with each theme, a different sequence of four sections, one on each thinker's understanding of that theme. The first thinker dealt with in each chapter is one whose work, particularly as Gill expounds it, gives special priority to that theme as compared to the remaining three: Whitehead on Reality, Wittgenstein on Meaning (in Language), Merleau-Ponty on Embodiment, and Polanyi on Knowing. On the whole, I found these sections to be more clear, easy to follow, and key to understanding that thinker's views on the other three themes though the latter may have come earlier in the book (as in, "Oh,

now I understand what his point was!").

Chapter One takes up the theme of reality and how each of the four thinkers—Whitehead, Wittgenstein, Merleau-Ponty, and Polanyi—challenges the modernist paradigm of what is real according to Newton's account of physical matter—a closed, deterministic system of determinate objects—and the correlative mirror theory of objective cognition that gets developed by Descartes and others, a theory paradigmatically exemplified, as Gill points out, in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*. By way of contrast, reality in these four thinkers is conceived as interactive and open-ended, organismic and in process, while our understandings of reality are relational and developmental, situated alongside or immersed within the reality being understood.

Both in his characterization of modernist thought and of these thinkers, Gill proceeds by identifying key metaphors at work in the view under discussion and then elaborates it in terms of these metaphors, bypassing what otherwise could be an overwhelmingly complex and lengthy account and making the ideas more easily grasped by his reader's imagination. That strategy, of course, runs certain risks. Readers acquainted with any of these thinkers in depth and in detail may wonder why certain ideas and important passages are ignored altogether or only hinted at. Gill makes extensive and repeated use of metaphors[3]—often geometric metaphors, which to my mind seem to be more abstract than he may realize given his intention to make things more concrete through their use. Some of these metaphors he seems to have drawn from one or more of the four thinkers—e.g., reality as a "woven fabric" with warp and weft, drawn primarily, it appears, from Whitehead and Merleau-Ponty and "an axis [with its revolving constituents]" likely drawn from Wittgenstein—plus his own insightful anecdotes to illustrate or clarify a given point. At times Gill seems to revel in mixing or compounding the metaphors. The repetition of the metaphors, their use in contexts where their aptness is not always clear, and an occasional compounding of them makes for distraction from the concentration I needed to comprehend what was being discussed.

The principal problem with the Newtonian atomistic paradigm, according to Whitehead, on Gill's account, was its presumption to take fundamental and indestructible particles moving about in a closed and finite universe as the primary objects of reality—i.e., to be the most real and concrete features of the world—whereas these notions are in fact highly abstract conceptual constructs designed to insure that we will be able "to locate, measure, and trace every aspect of the world around us" (29)—that is, to render the world objectified and quantifiable. Whitehead dubbed this "the fallacy of misplaced concreteness." Accordingly, the world thus described by the hard physical sciences is not the world as it really and concretely is, but is a derived abstraction of certain of its features, however accurate, while ignoring others (e.g., the interactive relationships from which they arise) in service of specific purposes. Instead, Whitehead proposes replacing the static notion of objectified "physical objects" as the building blocks of reality with a much more concrete notion of reality as process and things as the outcome of "relational interactions that weave the fabric constituting the warp and weft of the cosmos" (29). In this way, Whitehead sought to develop a speculative metaphysical system and correlative novel lexicon that would serve in taking account of the whole of reality as a best approximation to its changing, ever-evolving, interconnected, and open-ended character. Most of the key metaphors and concepts that Whitehead introduces are biological or at least pertain to living things and life: organism, becoming, features of objects and objects themselves as emergent from relationships rather than vice versa, "actual occasions" as the fundamental actual entities, relationships as "prehensions" (which for Whitehead seems to be an adumbration of subjectivity at the microscopic level) between and among actual occasions, "societies," etc. Later in the book, Gill summarizes, "He [Whitehead] thought of reality as a 'society' of interpenetrating and interacting 'occasions' or 'events,' which, when they cluster around a given axis, form

the various dimensions and 'nexus' that serve as the intersections among and between them. He saw reality as a vast cosmic web or fabric woven by the symbiotic and ongoing process of creativity and relationality" (85).

I want to mention here that the shift from the abstractness of the fundamental concepts with which we construe reality to a more concrete set of concepts is itself a mark of the shift from the modern to the deep postmodern (and from a critical to a post-critical sensibility). However, as Gill points out later in chapter four, Whitehead's very attempt to devise what he hoped would be much more concrete turned out to be esoteric and abstract from commonsense and ordinary experience and extraordinarily difficult for the layman to understand. For such reasons, this attempt seems to me to fall, to some extent at least, under Whitehead's own critique regarding the fallacy of misplaced concreteness.

On the surface very differently from Whitehead, Wittgenstein's point of departure is a repudiation of the modernist insistence on the requirement in principle of absolute precision and complete knowledge (as in a fully explicit "picturing"). This false ideal, for Wittgenstein, is neither possible nor necessary, and so there is no need for everyday speech and ordinary language to be cleaned and tidied up after the manner of an ideal logical calculus; it is fine just as it is. Language has multiple functions beyond picturing reality that are embedded within what he called "language games," ordinary human activities which in turn find their place within the "human form of life"—"a reciprocal interaction between persons, language, and our physical and social realities" (37). It is this "common fabric" (Gill's metaphor) of reciprocal interaction that constitutes the "bedrock" (Wittgenstein's metaphor) of our cognitive activity. There is no point to looking further for a more "ultimate" foundation. Other key metaphors Wittgenstein uses include game playing, tool using, going places, speaking as a doing of multiple kinds of things, doing as a form of knowing, getting "tasks accomplished," "finding one's way about," language as a "collection of tools" or as the "layout of a city," etc. Gill points out how Wittgenstein's metaphors model language and reality, like Whitehead's, as being in process and multifarious in its intentional activity, dynamic and transactional, interactive and open-ended, with distinctive forms emerging out of the give-and-take of reciprocal activity. Gill goes on to discuss how in Wittgenstein's account the relation between reality and our grasp of it is a lot more flexible and reciprocally interactive ("symbiotic" Gill calls it) than the modern paradigm is able to accommodate.

Merleau-Ponty in Gill's account implies a no less radical understanding of reality over against the modernist paradigm—namely, as "an unending series of interpenetrating organic fibers or tissues" (43). His starting point is the undeniably pervasive, crucial presence of "the lived body" ["the body as subject in the world" as distinct from "the body as object in a world of nothing but objects," my phrasing drawn from Merleau-Ponty]—which Gill somewhat understates as "the embodied character of human existence and experience" (43). What Merleau-Ponty means by the lived body is a concept completely absent, please note, from the modernist Cartesian bifurcation of the world into *res extensa* and *res cogitans*. The lived body isn't just a missing piece, however. For Merleau-Ponty it is the point of access to all of the rest and the interpretive key to solving most of the conundrums created by the modernist bifurcation: "The body is the vehicle of being in the world, and having a body is, for a living creature, to be intervolved in a definite environment, to identify oneself with certain projects and to be continually committed to them" (44, quoting Merleau-Ponty). The peculiarly interactive, intertwining, mutually participating, paradoxical role of our embodied selves with the world and all within it is a source of perpetual fascination at the center of his thought. Key metaphors for him include "closely woven fabric," "interweave," "intertwine," "intervolve," "organic networks," "living tissue," dynamically functioning organic bodily systems, "pregnancy" of possibility, and "flesh." Particularly

important are the "intentional threads which attach us to the world," which our best reflective efforts can at best "slacken" to bring them to our notice, but never sever in an objectivizing detachment. In this respect Merleau-Ponty establishes a deep postmodern, "middle position between the objectivism of modernism and the epistemological anarchy of much of postmodernist thought" (49). Gill points out the close kinship of much of what Merleau-Ponty has to say with Whitehead and Wittgenstein. "All such references lead us to the conclusion that for Merleau-Ponty the dominant model for reality is that of organic membranes perpetually intertwining with one another" (44).

My own impression of Merleau-Ponty in relation to Whitehead is that whereas each ends up saying similar things about the organic relationality of all things in the world and while Whitehead is certainly more systematic, Merleau-Ponty's concepts and metaphors are much more concrete and accessible to a more commonsense, lay person's understanding.

According to Gill, Polanyi contributes to the deep postmodern paradigm of reality as process and interaction with his key notion of reality as structured according to a series of emerging levels, or "strata." Gill spends most of this section explaining this notion. What he does explicate is clear, important, and illuminating—e.g., in illustrating the principle of irreducible emergence of higher levels of reality by way of relating the story of the invention of the game of basketball by James Naismith in 1891. Gill keeps his account of Polanyi's concept of emergence pretty much focused on the issues of irreducibility, supervenience, and marginal control rather than linking it in much depth to more controversial evolutionary issues such as the emergence of life or of human life in particular, let alone to recent research into these issues, though these topics are briefly mentioned. He emphasizes the open-ended and interactive character of Polanyi's multi-leveled understanding of reality and how it resonates with the postmodern conception of reality of the previous three thinkers (though not in as much depth as I would like to see developed). However, Gill makes no mention of how Polanyi's notion of levels of reality (more precisely, levels of the reality of "comprehensive entities") was not Polanyi's own point of departure but was, according to Polanyi, itself derived from and built upon (and perhaps overly dependent upon) his analysis of the from-to, tacit structure of perceptual gestalt-integrations. Though it may not at first seem relevant to the theme of chapter one, Gill might have taken up here Polanyi's explicit paradigm of scientific knowing—namely, "knowledge of an approaching discovery" (*TD* 23-25)— which is where Polanyi makes what could be his most unique contribution to a deep postmodern understanding of *reality*. There Polanyi speaks of the act of discovery as a matter of making "contact with reality: a reality which, being real, may yet reveal itself to future eyes in an indefinite range of unexpected manifestations" (*TD* 24). This definition is not mentioned at all in Gill's chapter on Polanyi's account of reality or at any other place. Other uniquely Polanyian contributions to ontology that might have been mentioned but do not get discussed include: the reality of independent thought and humanistic ideals of truth, justice, beauty, and the good; the nature of reality in the humanities as well as in the sciences and their relationship; the ontological spectrum of living organisms that Polanyi spoke of as "ultra-biology" (a panorama of normative elements in the hierarchy of life requiring our critical participation to recognize and appreciate); the intimate relation between meaning and the real; and what Polanyi speaks of as the *being* of our knowing (via our embodied indwelling and acquaintance relationships with things, other forms of life, and other persons).

Some final comments on chapter one: Gill's full title of chapter one is "Reality: Interactive and Open-Ended." With this and the other chapter titles, Gill aims to encapsulate the elements common to the four thinkers on the chapter theme. More, I think, could helpfully be said by way of a summarizing synthesis for this chapter, but the subtitle does highlight two of the most important elements. Beyond these two, an

implicit theme running throughout the chapter (and the chapters to follow), but never explicitly brought out in the way that it deserves to be as a general feature of "deep postmodern" views of *reality* is the participation of the knower, alongside other knowers, in apprehending, acknowledging, comprehending, and in important respects constituting the reality known—as well as vice versa. Reality for "deep postmodern" thought is inherently relational toward us; we cannot refer to it (even as existing apart from us) without implicating our embodied acknowledgment. The very idea of reality standing alone or apart is incoherent for deep postmodern thought.

Chapter two takes up meaning—specifically the meaning and purpose of language—first in Wittgenstein, followed by Merleau-Ponty, Polanyi, and then Whitehead. Again Gill's pattern is to articulate the modernist (and, particularly in this chapter, pre-modern "traditionalist"[4]) assumptions about language, highlight briefly the "superficial" postmodern challenges to these assumptions, and then follow with the four thinkers' cases for radically different and deeper postmodern assumptions. In opposition to the assumption that the purpose of all language is "to accurately depict the facts comprising the world around us" (60) and to the superficial postmodernist critique that language must instead be entirely open-ended and incapable of any fixed meaning whatsoever, Wittgenstein directs us to look carefully at how ordinary language functions in concrete contexts of actual usage. Here meaning, purpose, and success in language depends not on fixed meanings and ideal essences but on the roles that words and phrases take on in the "language-games" of our lives, and as we move from one context to others having "family resemblances" to it. Ordinary language is not something "primitive" whose confusion, vagueness, and ambiguity needs a philosophical "fix" in accordance with some more perfect "ideal" language. No, the proper philosophical task is to extricate us from the philosophical perplexity that arises when we misunderstand how language is actually used in specific contexts by thinking of it in abstraction from these contexts.

Merleau-Ponty comes at this issue from quite a different though complementary angle. For him, both modernist and traditional views of language take language to be essentially incidental to the constitution of both the world and human life and having its meaning essentially stable and independent. On the contrary, language is an expression of my own bodily being, communicating as much by the way and how something is said as it is by what is said; it "plays an integral role in the actual weaving and shaping of both the world around us and of our own social being" (70f). Language is rooted in bodily "gesture" and gesture is already language and meaning on its surface. It is here, in connection with language, especially language in the "metaphoric mode" of "originating speech," that Merleau-Ponty brings to light our participative role in constituting reality to be what it is for us and simultaneously constituting our own thought and being through it. "Therefore, our knowledge of the world, and thus of 'reality' is neither 'subjective' nor entirely 'objective,' but is, rather 'inter-subjective' in the sense that it arises within the push-and-pull of our mutual interaction with one another and with our environment" (73f).

Gill's treatment of Polanyi on meaning in language draws primarily from Polanyi's essay, "Sense-Giving and Sense-Reading." Here Gill emphasizes Polanyi's primary contribution as "the realization that grasping and imparting meaning through language is not fundamentally an intellectual process, but is rather the result of the [dynamic, as Gill emphasizes,] tacit integration of the particulars of our subsidiary awareness by means of our bodily interaction with them, what Polanyi terms 'indwelling'" (75). "What one comes to know tacitly, by continuously integrating subsidiary factors into fresh, meaningful wholes [including the rules governing the underlying generative grammar], gradually forms the axis around and from which a native speaker operates in his or her own language" (77). These integrations are not all one way, for we shift back and forth,

sometimes dissolving the integration in order to attend to what is subsidiary and at other times re-integrating to a more profound meaning, and sometimes what is focal in literal meaning becomes subsidiary in symbolic or metaphoric meaning and vice versa. Through all of this, there is a dynamic interaction between imagination and intuition coupled with an inborn desire to be part of the surrounding community of other persons. To illustrate Polanyi's understanding, Gill recounts an anecdote of his one-year old daughter in the process of acquiring competence in speaking through chattering just like an adult on her toy phone with everything but the words. Again here, as elsewhere, Gill connects what he is here explicating with ground covered earlier, multiplying the connections based on the "family resemblances" between Polanyi's, Wittgenstein's and Merleau-Ponty's thoughts about meaning in language.

With Whitehead, Gill has to make several qualifications, as Whitehead's explicit view of ordinary language was that it was fundamentally deficient and in need of correction in order to carry through with his metaphysical intention to grasp the "essence of the universe" (82). However, Whitehead's corrections were more on the order of creatively stretching words in an intentionally metaphoric usage, rather than in accord with an ideal logical language of strictly literal meanings. Nevertheless, his work in various respects becomes, in Gill's words, "convoluted and extended," so much so that Gill admits his own difficulty in following Whitehead's development of his metaphysical system beyond its very beginning stages (86). Even so, Whitehead, along with Wittgenstein and Merleau-Ponty especially, stresses the interconnectedness of all of language with human activity and the world around us, which seems "to belie what he [Whitehead] has to say about the deficiencies of speech" (86). Though his effort to provide an accurate metaphysical account of the way things are in the universe places him more in the league of traditional and modern thinkers who have sought to "do" speculative metaphysics, his attempt to rework the enterprise from the ground up in a metaphorical mode in accord with the criteria of everyday experience qualifies him, in Gill's thinking, as a deep postmodernist.

Some final thoughts about chapter two: although the focus of the chapter is meaning in language, a theme set by Gill's fine exposition of Wittgenstein's views at its beginning, it is significant that meaning in a broader sense, and the relations between meaning and reality rightly understood, was a significant topic taken up by Merleau-Ponty, Whitehead, and Polanyi—as well as at some rare places in Wittgenstein's work—yet Gill has chosen to focus on meaning in language alone. Was the larger topic too much to take on? The elements common to each of the four thinker's views on Gill's chosen focus are identified in his chapter title: "Meaning: Contextual and Functional." Meaning is neither objectively fixed nor subjectively arbitrary, but is flexibly grounded in the shared purposes, mutual agreements, and contexts of human interaction with each other and the world. It needs no other foundation.

Chapter three focuses on embodiment—the center and basis of our engagement with everything in the world, including our ourselves—starting with Merleau-Ponty, then followed by Polanyi, Whitehead, and Wittgenstein. Interestingly, the body as this center and basis, considered in retrospect, is conspicuously absent from modern and shallow postmodern thought but also from most of traditional Western philosophy. Gill picks up and goes over again much of what he had to say about Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the body in chapter one but at a deeper level and, remarkably, more clearly (at least to me), bringing out the ubiquity of its usually overlooked presence in every dimension of our lives. It isn't our body considered in the third person as a sophisticated biological organism that he has in mind, but our body as our place in the world "here," oriented out toward an encompassing horizon, our body in its movement and interaction (its "motility") with others, and our body in its "momentum of existence" that has, prior to our deliberate intention, already committed us

to certain projects and a distinctive way of being-in-the-world. Gill quotes Merleau-Ponty, "Our own body is in the world as the heart is in the organism: it keeps the visible spectacle constantly alive, it breathes life into it and sustains it inwardly, and with it forms a system" (96).

Gill's account of Polanyi's understanding of embodiment takes a different tack than might be expected. He chooses to focus on the role of bodily activity in Polanyi's account of the "construction" (Gill's word[5]) of intellectual and scientific knowledge. He locates Polanyi's position midway between the two more popular extremes of "the traditional objectivist" view, which has held that objectivity depends on eliminating the embodied personal dimension, and the more contemporary "conventionalist" view (which Gill goes on to associate or equate with "subjectivism"), which holds objectivity unachievable due to the impossibility of eliminating the embodied personal dimension. This point is sharpened by a comparison with the ideas of Peter Winch, who divides social sciences from natural sciences over this supposed incompatibility. To the contrary, Polanyi contends for a revised understanding of objectivity grounded in our interaction with the physical and social dimensions of our shared world through our bodies and through speech. It is within a community of knowledgeable experts holding each other responsible in passionate pursuit of truth about reality with universal intent that competent, though fallible cognitive judgments about that reality, transcending the biases and distortions of subjectivity, are reached. Gill goes on to bring out how Polanyi highlights the ubiquity of bodily based cognitive skills and the use of tools and instruments in science.

I find it noteworthy that Gill does not specifically take up in this chapter Polanyi's insightful discussion (nor Merleau-Ponty's) of how we know each other through empathetically indwelling each other's bodies.

Whitehead does not focally take up human embodiment in the way Merleau-Ponty or Polanyi do, but when examined in light of what these two thinkers have to say about the human body, Whitehead's philosophy exhibits a remarkable awareness that at the core of our participation in and knowledge of all of the processes going on around us and in us stands our bodies. He speaks of it as the "withness of the body" (105). Though elusive and usually overlooked, it is intimately involved in all aspects of our experience of the world. Toward the end of the section, Gill takes up Whitehead's notion of the universe as "the body of God" (110) and as standing in relation to God much as our bodies stand in relation to us. I am left unclear though as to how this discussion relates to the overall theme of the book.

Lastly, Gill takes up Wittgenstein's understanding of the body and, like Whitehead, we find that Wittgenstein doesn't have much to say directly about the body or embodiment. But when examined in light of Merleau-Ponty and Polanyi's understanding of the centrality of the body, much of what Wittgenstein has to say does reflect it as well. For Wittgenstein, linguistic meaning revolves around human *activity*, both in practice and in theory, kinds of activity that necessarily entail our embodied life. This is particularly evident in what Wittgenstein in his later writings speaks of the "integral" and "symbiotic" (113, Gill's metaphors) connection of speech and embodied action, saying and doing (especially, what *shows* itself in our doing), in the "language games" of human life, and in his comparison of words and phrases to tools and other things we manipulate. Wittgenstein has much to say about reaching "bedrock" (a remarkably embodied physical metaphor) in and through our processes of justification. He writes (quoted by Gill) that the end of a justification process "is not an ungrounded presupposition: it is an ungrounded way of acting" (117). In Gill's words, "The grounds for our justificatory processes, as well of our various language-games, is our common social activity, and while no justifications for these can or need be articulated, they reveal themselves tacitly in the course of our joint behavior patterns—they *show* themselves even though they cannot and need not be *said*" (117). This common

social activity, of course, revolves around our embodiment.

Some final thoughts about chapter three: this chapter seems to have a little more unity than the previous two chapters. Yet its title, "Embodiment: Integral and Axial," strikes me as somewhat obscure and abstract in relation to the content; I'm left somewhat unclear about what it is supposed to mean, due probably to irrelevant connotations that the words continue to carry in my own mind, despite Gill's repeated use of them in relation to our embodiment. The "lived body" (Merleau-Ponty's phrase, though Gill doesn't use it) is central and crucial to a deep postmodern sensibility; and, despite its elusive and tacit role, all else revolves around it. I think that is what Gill's phrase basically means, but I'm left a little unsure.

Chapter four takes up the theme of knowing, first in Polanyi, then Wittgenstein, Whitehead, and finally Merleau-Ponty. The chapter claims to build upon Gill's account of Polanyi's theory of tacit knowing, and epistemology, in Gill's estimation, is perhaps the most crucial element that distinguishes both "various forms of postmodernist thought from both traditionalist and modernist approaches" and "deep, constructivist postmodernism" from "its deconstructive counterpart" (119). These introductory remarks led me to expect Gill's best work both in the first section on Polanyi and throughout the chapter. Unfortunately, on my reading, it seems to be one of the weaker parts of the book.

In setting out what he calls "the dynamics"[6] of tacit knowing according to Polanyi, Gill immediately proceeds to lay out a geometric grid of three "dimensions" or "continua" (later identified as "vectors" because of their directionality) of human experience, which he presents as if it were Polanyi's own analysis: first, there is an "awareness dimension" extending between subsidiary and focal poles (which Gill claims can equally well apply in a perceptual or a conceptual context), or between proximal and distal poles, or between attending-from and attending-to poles. He states that "what is focal in one situation may well be subsidiary in another, and vice versa, but no factor can be both focal and subsidiary at the same time" (121).[7] Second, there is an "activity dimension" extending between bodily and "conceptual" (or "mental") poles. Polanyi insists, writes Gill, that we are "always *in* or *with* our bodies in whatever activity we may be engaged" (122). Third, there is a "cognitivity dimension" extending between "tacit knowing" and "explicit knowing." He explains that the third dimension "emerges from the intersection" of the first two: the convergence of focal awareness and conceptual activity yields "explicit knowledge" while the convergence of subsidiary awareness and bodily activity yields "tacit knowledge." He then visually presents all three in the form of a diagram of three geometric axes which he says "should help make all of these distinctions and relationships at least adequately clear" (122). Note how Gill presents this, his own secondary analysis as if it were Polanyi's own: "Having laid out the basic dynamics of the interaction between the awareness and activity dimensions of human experience, and having indicated how the two dimensions intersect and interact to produce the cognitivity dimension of human experience, Polanyi went ahead to delineate the particular features of the two poles of this latter dimension, those of explicit and tacit knowing, respectively" (123).

Gill's portrayal of Polanyi is quite different from Polanyi's own accounts as I read them, which start and develop by way of considering concrete examples of knowing familiar to us about most of which we know quite well but cannot specify, not abstract dimensions all of whose features are rendered specifiably explicit in an analysis or diagram presented in the third person (despite being about the tacit). It is in retrospect that Polanyi identifies the from-to, subsidiary-focal, proximal-distal, and gestalt-integrative aspects of awareness of the examples he cites, not in prospect. Though he might have, he does not differentiate a separate "activity" dimension (with bodily and conceptual poles) at all, nor a "cognitivity" dimension. Instead, he points out

that most of the subsidiary particulars from which we attend are in our bodies as we live and attend to other things from within them, and these are for the most part unspecifiable (at least by ourselves). When he talks about the conceptual aspects of our knowing, it is in connection with what is rendered explicit via the representative capacity of language and symbols. But more importantly, strictly speaking Polanyi does not as a result of his analysis present explicit knowing as if it were a different sort of thing than tacit knowing, even as opposite poles along a continuum (though occasionally to get his analysis off the ground, so to speak, he does speak as if the two were different things). Rather, Polanyi is intent upon bringing to light tacit aspects of every instance and feature of whatever we might suppose is explicit in knowing of whatever sort—i.e., the *tacit dimension* of our supposedly explicit knowledge. Moreover, the tacit aspects of which Polanyi speaks are not just the subsidiary aspects located within our bodies or the particulars of a physiognomy that we may be contemplating; they also include tacit intimations of as yet undisclosed aspects of that to which we are attending, the ways we reach out and indwell in a deepening acquaintance relationship with the things that occupy our attention, the way we attend from what has been heretofore rendered explicit (including scientific theories) as instruments of the reach of our imagination to discover new aspects of the reality partially grasped in the explicit account, and the mentoring way that skillful knowing is transmitted in traditions of expertise. For Polanyi, some knowledge is entirely tacit, but none is entirely explicit; what is explicit is not a separate or distinct kind of knowledge from tacit knowlege but is at best an aspect of the tacit knowledge of some person or persons.

Happily, Gill goes on in the latter part of the chapter to discuss a broad array of examples of tacit knowing of the sort that Polanyi cites, both everyday and scientific, and an account of how knowledge is acquired and authenticated basically in line with Polanyi's own account (though he does speak one more time of the "cognitive continuum extending and operating between the poles of explicit and tacit knowledge" [126] as one of the two major points stressed in all of Polanyi writings on human knowing). Gill even quotes Polanyi saying "no knowledge can be wholly explicit" (125). There he stresses how, for Polanyi, tacit knowing is "logically prior to" and "more fundamental than" explicit knowing (127). He concludes that while many may suppose that taking the foundation of all our knowing to rest in a tacit dimension that we can never fully articulate or render explicitly justifiable will lead to skepticism, nevertheless "the reliability and veridicality of our claims to tacit knowing *show* themselves within the warp and weft of the fabric of our common social interaction" (128).

Gill's account of Wittgenstein's contribution to a deep postmodern epistemology draws on Wittgenstein's final work, *On Certainty*, which focuses on when is it reasonable and when unreasonable to raise doubts about knowledge claims such as that the external world exists. In this work, Wittgenstein takes on the critical project of modern philosophical method—namely, *to doubt claims unless and until they have been proven true*. That project has supposed that some sort of foundation of absolute certainty must first be established for any claim to knowledge to be credible. To solve this issue Wittgenstein turns to an examination of the language-game in which talk about doubting arises, for it makes no sense to doubt outside of such a context and for no specific reason. Nor does establishing absolute certainty or reasoning from such a condition have a role to play in the game. Being certain in the sense of being sure or confident, of course, does have a role to play, but this is a matter of affirming that one is in a position to know, that one has good reasons for claiming to know, and that others may rely on one's word. There the key is establishing the reliability of the judgment about the matter in question when there is some reason to question it. Doubting always presupposes a great many things that are not doubted and so appropriately comes only after and in a context of belief. Somewhere we must begin, in the middle as it were, with non-doubting in the midst of our common social life. In nearly all cases of claims

to knowledge, we take a person's statements to be true unless we have specific reasons to doubt them. In that case, the good reasons we will have for doubting rest on the confidence we have in the processes of making good judgments that we share together. That is to say, "The grounds of our justificatory processes . . . is our common social activities, and while no justifications for these need or even *can* be given, they reveal themselves tacitly in the course of our interactive behavior" (131). Toward the end of this section, Gill draws on Wittgenstein's deep postmodern view to respond to Richard Rorty's deconstructive postmodern attempt to move beyond mere skepticism about the possibility of finding ultimate truth by denying that the search for truth, because there is no final definition or criterion, is itself a meaningful enterprise. Despite Rorty's assumption that the later Wittgenstein supported his dismissal of philosophical questions as meaningless, Gill points out how Wittgenstein claimed that "philosophical problems, while not being strictly factual or logical in nature, do involve conceptual confusions that are both serious and resolvable." (134).

Whitehead's view on epistemology, Gill confesses, given Whitehead's idiosyncratic terminology, is almost overwhelmingly difficult to sort out.[8] Accordingly, I found it difficult to follow Gill's own exposition. In brief compass, Whitehead's view seems to come down to this: in every cognitive context, "Both the epistemological subject and the epistemological object help define and constitute one another by means of their mutual, interactive and reciprocal relationship" (138). Relationships and processes such as this one in Whitehead's vision of reality, which he calls "prehensions," are prior and deeper and more real than any distinction we might make between subject and object as more or less unchanging, autonomous entities. It is by failing to appreciate this primordial interactive relationship between knower and known that virtually all the epistemological conundrums of modern philosophy derive.

Merleau-Ponty proceeds in a somewhat similar way to Whitehead in critiquing both the empiricist and rationalist schools of modern philosophy in their failure to recognize "the symbiotic and interactive quality of perception" (143)—the former in its psychological atomism that overlooks the holistic or *gestalten* character of perception, and the latter in its conception of the perceiving subject as a passive and static recipient cut off from the real world and incapable of accounting for error. For Merleau-Ponty, the gap between knower and known is "eliminated before it arises by virtue of our embodied involvement in and with the world, both physically [especially tactilely and kinesthetically] and socially" (145). Quoting Merleau-Ponty, "it is a fact that I believe myself to be first of all surrounded by my body, involved in the world, situated in the here and now" (145). This is the ground of my confidence in my own perceptions and judgments and those of others; there is nothing farther back or deeper down to which I can resort. In reaching this view, Merleau-Ponty follows in the track of Edmund Husserl's formulation of phenomenology, though he refines and reformulates it a good deal. Husserl's project was to return from all of our philosophical preconceptions and abstractions to a careful examination and description of the way things are given to begin with in our experience. He imagined he could make this project into a systematic science, but Merleau-Ponty pointed out that going completely back to the beginning of the givenness of things is not possible, for we are always already engaged. At most, as has been already stated, we can only "slacken the intentional threads" which attach us to the world and, in that slackening, bring to our notice how things arise in our experience out of our interactive engagement with them in the world. In the same way, our knowledge of other minds is mediated to us through our embodied engagement with them even before we come to think of our own selves as distinct persons.

A final thought about chapter four: Gill's title of the chapter is "Knowing: Dynamic and Tacit." Somehow I don't think the subtitle quite captures the overall thrust of the chapter, which is that for deep postmodern thought our knowing of whatever sort rests upon a ground of *pre-reflective* and *acritical*[9] bodily

confidence in our connection with the world and our access to things, including ourselves. Being pre-reflective and acritical, it isn't readily available for our critical inspection and analysis, but we cannot help taking it for granted in all that we do and say in our ordinary lives.

A concluding chapter/epilogue takes up J. L Austin's enterprise of "linguistic phenomenology." Gill takes it to be another example of deep postmodernism, complementing, summing up, and reinforcing the understandings of the four thinkers he has covered in his book. Austin's focus is upon uses of language that seek to perform actions in the world as distinct from presuming that the principal purpose of language is to describe states of affairs. Specifically, he gives special attention to "the use of conventional phrases in well-prescribed circumstances in order to perform an action *by uttering* them" (152). These he called "performative utterances" or "performatives." The overall point of his later work is that all speech is best understood as an activity consisting of different dimensions or "forces" that taken in context are best not evaluated simply as to their truth or falsity but also in terms of their appropriateness to other parameters of judgment. To get at these considerations, we need to pay careful attention to the details that normally go without notice of the many different sorts of what we say, when, and in what circumstances. In Austin's words, "Certainly, then, ordinary language is *not* the last word: in principle it can everywhere be supplemented and improved upon and superseded. Only remember, it is the *first* word" (161). This enterprise, with some hesitation, he ventured to call "linguistic phenomenology." It has several close affinities with the later Wittgenstein's methodology of examining ordinary usages of language and Merleau-Ponty's "slackening the intentional threads," Whitehead's idea of coming to know the world by being participants in its continuously unfolding evolution, and Polanyi's accrediting of our tacit cognitive powers in general, even when and as we question them in any particular instance. In his essay "Other Minds," Austin brings out how saying "I know" has a performative logic quite similar to saying "I promise." It is quite distinct from a description or a report. Even if it may turn out not to be the case that I know, as long as I have good reason to think that it is so and genuinely believe it to be I am entitled to claim that I do, for saying so is (in Austin's words) to "*give others my word: I give others my authority or saying* [what I claim to know]" (160). "This posture . . . enables one to stand in between the seeming arrogance of modernism, on the one hand, and the skeptical, 'hermeneutical suspicion' of deconstructive postmodernism, on the other hand . . . [I]t enables us to both acknowledge and make use of the dynamics of our knowledge of the world around us, including one another, without claiming to have 'arrived' at the final truth concerning reality" (155).

Some final reflections: I am still unconvinced that the phrase "deep postmodernism" or "constructive postmodernism" quite does the job that "post-critical" does to name what these five thinkers together represent. Perhaps I am too familiar with Polanyi's phrase and too enamored with its connotations. It clearly is not something with which intellectuals today are widely familiar, whereas in referring to "postmodernism" Gill makes use of a widely known term. But the phrase does name the central critical project of modernity—namely, to think critically in such a way that nothing is taken for granted, that there is given no place for the faith that the world and our knowledge of it is as we have pre-critically taken it to be—as something that these thinkers are convinced lies at the root of the problems of modernity and have sought to go beyond it. A *post-critical* sensibility is one where we are able confidently to reassume our engagements and passions and deepest convictions—indeed, our epistemological faith—though now chastened and more humble after having passed through the baptism of fire of modern critical thought.

Overall, *Deep Postmodernism* is an important book full of rich insight and correlations between these thinkers, more for what it attempts than for what it ultimately accomplishes. Few if any other books

have sought to set out in one place the beachhead that these five thinkers (and others akin to them) have established in overcoming the philosophically sterile dead-ends that modernist and postmodernist thought have bequeathed us.[10] Jerry, I congratulate and thank you for what you have done. I hope it inspires others to continue this good work.

Endnotes

[1]Gill doesn't make use of the term "sensibility," however. At the end of the introduction to his book he acknowledges that David Ray Griffin's phrase, *constructive postmodern* refers to much of the same thing as *deep postmodern* (25). Griffin identifies the view he advocates as "constructive postmodernism" in opposition to "deconstructive postmodernism." At a few points late in the book, Gill makes use of Griffin's phrase to refer to the four thinkers he is treating as "constructive" or "constructivist postmodern thinkers" (e.g., 118), sometimes in opposition to "deconstructive postmodernism." His use of these words rather than "deep postmodernism" at this late stage of the book suggests to me that in an earlier version of the manuscript he may have been using the phrase "constructive" and/or "constructivist postmodernism" throughout and that these passages were overlooked in the editing process. Very late in the book and in passing Gill mentions, with very little discussion, Polanyi's use of the phrase *post-critical* to refer to his own philosophy as getting at the same thing as *deep postmodern* (126).

[2]These three modernist assumptions, as Gill points out, are embodied in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* (see p. 36 of Gill's book), which Wittgenstein completely repudiates in his *Philosophical Investigations* and later writings.

[3]For example, "woven fabric" with "warp and weft" or "warp and woof," "axis"/"axial," "polysignificant," "nexus," "diachronic" vs. "synchronic," "symbiotic"/"symbiosis," a "di-polar"/"bipolar" character of relations, "vector"/"vectorial," "vortex," "nodal point," "pivot"/"pivotal," "dynamics," "integral," among still others. Often his own metaphors are introduced in a casual way that seems to presume that the reader will understand perfectly well their meaning and have few if any qualms about the connotations they may bear in relation to their current context.

[4]Gill is a little confusing in his use of the word "traditionalist" when used to modify a set of ideas. Sometimes, he seems to be referring to pre-modern philosophical ideas (as if they were a single tradition) and at other times he uses it in reference to mainstream modernist ideas (especially Descartes, Hume, and Kant). At still another point, he uses it in reference to postmodernists.

[5]In using this word in reference to Polanyi, Gill gives no explanation or reference to social constructivist theory from which Polanyi explicitly distanced himself.

[6]I remain puzzled by Gill's use of this concept/metaphor. Mostly, what Gill has to talk about at this particular juncture of the book is his understanding of the *structure* of knowing, in which "tacit knowing" (as he understands it) plays a major part. This account is remarkably static rather than dynamic (I take these two concepts to be commonsensically opposed), and considerably different from and removed from Polanyi's own analysis of the structure of tacit knowing in *The Tacit Dimension*. Much of what I understand to be involved in tacit knowing is unfortunately absent. [For my own views, the reader may consult my article, "Construing Polanyi's Tacit Knowing as Knowing by Acquaintance Rather than Knowing by Representation: Some Implications," *Tradition and Discovery* 29:2 (2002-2003): 26-43.] I should say that Gill's use of "dynamics" later in the chapter (e.g., 125) exhibits a more active and interactive meaning.

[7]Actually, for Polanyi, what is subsidiary very often cannot be made focal, and not just for oneself.

[8]Because of these difficulties, I do not understand why Gill chooses not to draw upon any of the numerous helpful commentaries and secondary expositions of Whitehead by scholars who have wrestled at

length with Whitehead's metaphysical system and terminology.

[9]"Pre-reflective" is a concept Merleau-Ponty makes much use of and it fits well with much of Polanyi's understanding of the tacit underpinnings of our knowledge, though Gill doesn't make use of it. Similarly, "acritical" is a concept Polanyi makes use of that is particularly relevant to what Gill is driving at, though he doesn't make use of it either. Polanyi distinguishes "acritical" from both "uncritical" (or "precritical") and "critical" to refer to convictions that are not only prior to critical reflection (i.e., are pre-reflective) but are themselves presupposed by critical reflection.

[10]There are several editorial oversights in the book. One somewhat disturbing one appears early on (14) where Gill speaks of Derrida introducing the notion of "*différance*" but which Gill's spell-check editor appears to have mistakenly rendered "difference," making Derrida's point almost incomprehensible. Another, late in the book, occurs when Gill presents J. L. Austin's three fold analysis of a speech act (153). There Gill mistakenly identifies a speech act's "illocutionary force" as "*why* it is said." To the contrary, Austin means by "illocution" the *action* that is conventionally performed by saying what is said in these certain circumstances (e.g., making a promise). Its "force" is what effects or accomplishes this conventional (ritual) performance, not "why" it is said. Similarly, "locution," not "locutionary force," is *what* is said (e.g., saying "I promise . . ."), whereas "locutionary force" is the saying of it (or what produces the saying). And "perlocution," not "perlocutionary force," is the overall results or effects resulting from the saying (e.g. having someone take me at my word, among other things), whereas "perlocutionary force" is the bringing about of these results (or what produces them). In other places in Gill's book, words or phrases occasionally appear to be missing or a wrong word occurs in place of another. Sometimes misspellings occur. At one point, "Ludwig" occurs where "Alfred North" should occur.