

# Tradition & Discovery

## The Polanyi Society Periodical

Volume XXVI I

Number 3(completes Volume XXVII)

2000--2001

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# Preface

This issue brings you both riches from things recently past and things soon to come. Both the program for the June 8-10, 2001 Polanyi Society conference at Loyola University, Chicago and the program for the May 31, 2001 Michael Polanyi Liberal Philosophical Association conference in Budapest are included. Undoubtedly, some of the papers presented at these events commemorating Polanyi's 110th birthday will eventually appear in *TAD* and *Polanyiana* or on the web. A few months from now (November 16 and 17), the Polanyi Society annual meeting will be held in Denver. This year's sessions are co-sponsored by the American Academy of Religion's "Religion and Science" group. They focus on the work of Philip Clayton. The program and information about the meeting are on page 4.

William H. Poteat and Elizabeth Sewell, names many will readily associate with Michael Polanyi, have died within the last 15 months. Both were friends of Michael Polanyi who early recognized the importance of his work; both taught others to appreciate "post-critical" thinking. Both were figures whose own work deeply incorporates important Polyanian themes. In short articles in this issue, Ron Hall, David Schenck and I remember Poteat and Sewell to honor their passing.

George Hunsberger's "Faith and Pluralism" is a careful response to the review article Richard Gelwick wrote for the last issue of *TAD*; Gelwick commented on Christian theologian Lesslie Newbigin's use of Polanyi's epistemology and on Hunsberger's recent book on Newbigin's ideas. Hunsberger opens up what looks like a fruitful venue for further dialog among persons who want to use Polanyi's post-critical perspective to analyze the cultural and theological problems that pluralism brings. Ron Hall's review article treats Jerry Gill's new book, *The Tacit Mode: Michael Polanyi's Postmodern Philosophy*. Gill was kind enough to provide a brief, pointed and insightful response.

For the *Reviews* section, John Puddefoot has written a substantial review of two of William Dembski's controversial books. Puddefoot, like Dembski, is trained in both mathematics and philosophy/theology. Finally, this issue includes Richard Schmitt's interesting discussion of a book by John Gedo, a psychoanalyst influenced by Polanyi's work.

Phil Mullins

*Tradition and Discovery* is indexed selectively in *The Philosopher's Index* and *Religion One: Periodicals*. Book reviews are indexed in *Index to Book Reviews in Religion*.

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## NEWS AND NOTES

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The electronic discussion group of the Polanyi Society is soon to change addresses. Subscribers will automatically be transferred to the new address once negotiations are completed. For the present, new subscriptions and all questions about the discussion group should still go to John Apczynski at the address provided in the Electronic Discussion List box on page 7.

The March 2001 issue of *Appraisal: A Journal of Constructive and Post-Critical Philosophy and Interdisciplinary Studies* includes the following articles: Chris Goodman, "Polanyian Epistemology: A Critical Summary"; David Britton, "An Introduction to Torrance's Theology and a Plea for Christian Platonism"; and Richard Hain, "Autonomy and Euthanasia: A Evidence-Based Approach." Additionally, there are the following reviews: Chris Goodman reviewed Anna Makolkin, *The Genealogy of our Present Moral Decay: An Essay in Comparative Philosophy*. R. T. Allen reviewed Book 1, "The Philosophical Roots of Economic Liberalism," of Heinrich Plesch, *Liberalism, Socialism and Christian Social Order*. For *Appraisal* subscription information, go to the following web site: <http://homepage.ntlworld.com/rt.allen/subs.htm>. The next *Appraisal*-sponsored Polanyi conference is Friday, 22nd to Saturday, 23rd March, 2002 at Hugh Stewart Hall, The University of Nottingham. UK. The special theme for the conference is "The Person in the 21st Century." The conference, like previous conferences, will be organized like a seminar, with a round-table discussion of the papers which will have been issued in advance. General information regarding transportation and conference registration is available on the www at <http://homepage.ntlworld.com/rt.allen/conf.htm>. Direct any questions about the conference to R. T. Allen ([rt.allen@ntlworld.com](mailto:rt.allen@ntlworld.com)).

### Polanyi Society Membership

*Tradition and Discovery* is distributed to members of the Polanyi Society. This periodical supercedes a newsletter and an earlier mini-journal published (with some gaps) by the Polanyi Society since the mid seventies. The Polanyi Society has members in thirteen different countries though most live in North America and the United Kingdom. The Society includes those formerly affiliated with the Polanyi group centered in the United Kingdom which published *Convivium: The United Kingdom Review of Post-critical Thought*. There are normally three issues of *TAD* each year.

Annual membership in the Polanyi Society is \$20 (\$10 for students). The membership cycle follows the academic year; subscriptions are due September 1 to Phil Mullins, Missouri Western State College, St. Joseph, MO 64507 (fax: 816-271-5680, e-mail: [mullins@griffon.mwsc.edu](mailto:mullins@griffon.mwsc.edu)) Please make checks payable to the Polanyi Society. Dues can be paid by credit card by providing the card holder's name as it appears on the card, the card number and expiration date. Changes of address and inquiries should be sent to Mullins. New members should provide the following subscription information: complete mailing address, telephone (work and home), e-mail address and/or fax number. Institutional members should identify a department to contact for billing. The Polanyi Society attempts to maintain a database identifying persons interested in or working with Polanyi's philosophical writing. New members can contribute to this effort by writing a short description of their particular interests in Polanyi's work and any publications and /or theses/dissertations related to Polanyi's thought. Please provide complete bibliographic information. Those renewing membership are invited to include information on recent work.

**NOVEMBER 2001 POLANYI SOCIETY MEETING  
CO-SPONSORED BY  
RELIGION AND SCIENCE GROUP**

**SPECIAL SESSION ON THE WORK OF PHILIP CLAYTON  
Visiting Professor, Harvard University**

The Polanyi Society annual meeting is to be held on November 16 and 17, 2001 in Denver. The program is printed below. As in past years, this annual meeting is to be held in conjunction with the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion and Society for Biblical Literature. Because of pressure for space, it is necessary to register for the AAR//SBL annual meeting to be eligible for hotel accommodations in one of the primary hotels near where meetings are held. However, anyone who is interested is welcome to attend the Polanyi Society sessions, whether or not he or she is attending the AAR/SBL meetings. For information about registration for the AAR/SBL meetings, phone 1-888-447-2321 (U.S. and Canada) or 1-972-349-7434 (outside U. S. and Canada) or visit <http://www.aarweb.org>. Philip Clayton's book, *God and Contemporary Science*, is to be the focus of the November 16 session. Clayton's paper for the November 17 session will be posted on the Polanyi Society web site (<http://www.mwsc.edu/~polanyi>) when available in the fall.

*Friday, November 16, 9:00 p.m. - 11:00 p.m.--Adam's Mark Hotel, Savoy Room*

A Critical Engagement of Philip Clayton, *God and Contemporary Science*

Presiding: Ernest Simmons, Concordia College

Moderator: Philip A. Rolnick, Greensboro College

Theological Response: Andy F. Sanders, University of Groningen, Netherlands

Scientific Response: William Newsome, Professor of Neuroscience, Stanford University

Open Discussion

*Saturday, November 17, 9:00 a.m. – 11:30 p.m.--Colorado Convention Center, Room C3-A208*

“Emergence and Supervenience”

Presiding: Ernest Simmons, Concordia College

Moderator: Walter B. Gulick, Montana State University, Billings

Philip Clayton, “Emergence, Supervenience, and Personal Knowledge”

Responses:

Biology: Martinez Hewlett, Professor of Molecular and Cellular Biology, University of Arizona

Theology: Gregory Peterson, Thiel College

Philosophical Theology and Polanyi: Philip A. Rolnick, Greensboro College

# Polanyi's Post-Critical Thought and The Rebirth of Meaning

Loyola University of Chicago

June 8-10, 2001

## Conference Program

### Friday, June 8

9 a.m. – 3 p.m. Trip to Regenstein Library, University of Chicago to visit the Polanyi Archives.

#### 4:30 p.m.–5:45 p.m. **Plenary Session I**

Martin X. Moleski, SJ, Presiding

Dale Cannon, Introduction

Eugene T. Gendlin: "The Tacit/Implicit Actually Employed in a New Kind of Thinking"

#### 7:30 p.m.–9:00 p.m. **Plenary Session II**

Walter Gulick, Presiding

Conference Business

Andy Sanders: "Polanyi, Metaphysical Theism, And Wittgenstein"

### Saturday June 9

#### 9 a.m. **Concurrent Papers**

##### **Section 1**

Chair: Dale Cannon

Chris Goodman, "Polanyian Epistemology: A Critical Summary"

Don Cruse, "Post-Cartesian Dualism"

##### **Section 2**

Chair: John Apczynski

Mark R. Discher, "Michael Polanyi's Epistemology of Science and Its Implications for a Problem in Moral Philosophy"

Walter Mead, "Michael Oakeshott's Contributions to a Polanyian Understanding of Truth and Value"

##### **Section 3**

Chair: Bruce Haddox

Bruce L. Gordon, "Polanyi's Antireductionism and the Teleology of Emergence"

Lothar Schäfer, "Implications of Quantum Physics for Polanyi's Philosophy"

#### 11 a.m.–12:30 p.m. **Plenary Session III**

Richard Gelwick, Presiding

Christopher Fuchs: "My Learning a Trade, Manual Art, Intuition and Michael Polanyi"

1:45–3:15 **Concurrent Papers**

**Section 4**

Chair: Aaron Milavec

Barbara Baumgarten, “Aesthetics of Suffering”

Trevor Bechtel, “Performance as a Rubric for the Christian Life”

**Section 5**

Chair: Michael Babcock

Richard Gelwick, “Polanyi and Artificial Intelligence”

Sheldon Richmond, “What We Can Learn from Polanyi about the Computational Theory of Mind or Consciousness”

**Section 6**

Chair: Jere Moorman

Derek Coursen, “Navigating the Strata: Toward a General Model of Intuition”

Craig E. Mattson, “A Polanyian Critique of I. A. Richards’ Philosophy of Rhetoric”

3:30–4:45 **Concurrent Papers**

**Section 7**

Chair: Sheldon Richmond

Michael A. Babcock, “Minds, Machines, and Meaning: Michael Polanyi and Cognitive Science”

Dale Cannon, “Tacit Knowing as Knowing by Acquaintance Rather Than Knowing by Representation: Some Implications”

**Section 8**

Chair: Mark Discher

Dick Moodey, “Judgment in Polanyi’s Post-Critical Thought and Lonergan’s Critical Realism”

John Apczynski, “The Meaning of ‘Meaning’”

**Section 9**

Chair: Barbara Baumgarten

Phil Mullins, “The Comprehensive Entity as a Key Idea in Polanyi’s Thought”

David Rutledge, “On the Possibility of Rational Negotiation Between Apparently Incommensurable Intellectual Systems”

5 p.m.–6 p.m. **Plenary Session IV**

Esther Meek, Presiding

Michael Parmenter: “Dancer From the Dance”

6: 15 p.m. **Banquet and Plenary Session V**

David Rutledge, Presiding

John F. Haught, “Why Do Gods Persist? A Polanyian Reflection”

## **Sunday, June 10**

### **9 a.m. Concurrent Papers**

#### **Section 10**

Chair: Richard Gelwick

Louis Gordon, “Michael Polanyi and Arthur Koestler”

Jere Moorman, “The New Art of Leadership and Polanyi’s Theory of Tacit Knowing”

#### **Section 11**

Chair: Phil Mullins

Klaus Allerbeck, “The Republic of Science - Revisited”

Richard Henry Schmitt, “Thought Shaped by Experience: Polanyi’s Impact and the Way Ahead”

#### **Section 12**

Chair: Charles McCoy

Walter Gulick, “A Trinitarian Theology in Polyanian Guise”

Aron Milavec, “An Analysis of the Christian Expectation of God’s Coming at the End of Time Based Upon Polanyi’s Epistemology of Knowing in the Physical Sciences”

### **10:45 a.m.–12:15 p.m. Plenary V**

Phil Mullins, Presiding

“Michael Polanyi Remembered”—Panel Discussion

Charles McCoy—Professor Emeritus, Pacific School of Religion

Richard Gelwick—Professor Emeritus, University of New England

Martin X. Moleski, S.J.—Polanyi biographer, with William Scott

## **Electronic Discussion List**

The Polanyi Society supports an electronic discussion group exploring implications of the thought of Michael Polanyi. Anyone interested can subscribe; send a query to [owner-polanyi@lists.sbu.edu](mailto:owner-polanyi@lists.sbu.edu) Communications about the electronic discussion group may also be directed to John V. Apczynski, Department of Theology, St. Bonaventure University, St. Bonaventure, NY 14778-0012 E-MAIL: [apczynsk@sbu.edu](mailto:apczynsk@sbu.edu) PHONE: (716) 375-2298 FAX: (716) 375-2389.

## CONFERENCE PROGRAM

# JUBILEE CONFERENCE OF THE MICHAEL POLANYI LIBERAL PHILOSOPHICAL ASSOCIATION AND THE DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY AND HISTORY OF SCIENCES BUDAPEST UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY AND ECONOMIC SCIENCES

to Commemorate the 110th Anniversary of Michael Polanyi's Birth

Professors' Club of the Budapest University of  
Technology and Economic Sciences  
Building K., I. 66  
1111 Budapest, Múgyetcm rakpart 3.

(Thursday) May 31, 2001

Márta FEHÉR Professor, Deputy Chair of the Department of Philosophy and History of Science, Budapest University of Technology and Economic Sciences

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### Program

9.30-9.50 György LITVÁN, Professor, Honorary Member of the MPLPhA inaugurates the conference and salutes the participants.

Morning Plenary sessions:  
Moderator: György LITVÁN

10.00-10.25 Mihály BECK, Professor, Member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (HAS)  
"Polanyi's Start as a Chemist"

10.25-10.50 Vera BÉKÉS, Senior Researcher, Institute of Philosophy of the HAS  
"Examples and Analogies in Polanyi's Philosophy of Science"

10.50-11.15 Éva GÁBOR, Emerita Associate Professor, President of the MPLPhA  
“Michael Polanyi’s ‘Two Wars’”

11.15-Coffee

11.35-12.00 Szilárd KMECZKÓ, PhD Student  
“The Continuity and Interruption of the Tradition in Michael Polanyi’s Thinking”

12.00-12.25 Endre NAGY, Professor, Chair of Department of Sociology, Socialpolitic, University of Janus Pannonius, Pécs  
“Dwelling-in and Breaking Out. The Conversion of the Members of the Polanyi Family”

12.25-12.50 Mihály SZIVÓS, Senior Research Fellow, HAS  
“Tacit Knowledge in the View of the Historian of Philosophy”

13.00-15.00-Lunch

Afternoon Plenary sessions:

Moderator: Marta FEHÉR

15.00-15.25 Phil MULLINS, Editor of *Tradition and Discovery: The Polanyi Society Periodical*,  
Missouri Western State College  
“The ‘Post-Critical’ Symbol and The ‘Post-Critical’ Elements in Polanyi’s Thought”

15.25-15.50 Stefania JHA, Research Associate, Philosophy of Education, Research Centre,  
Harvard University  
“Neo-Polanyian Epistemology and Ethics”

15.50-16.15 Tihamér MARGITAY, Professor, Chair of Department of Philosophy and History of Science,  
Budapest University of Technology and Economic Science  
“The Freedom of Knowing”

16.15- Coffee

16.35-17.00 Tibor FRANK, Professor, Director of Institute of the English and American Studies,  
Eötvös Lorand University  
“Cohorting, Networking, Friendship: Michael Polanyi in Exile”

17.00-17.25 Students of Ágoston Trefort Teachers’ Training High School,  
“Michael Polanyi and the Alma Mater”

18.30 Dinner for the speakers of the morning and afternoon sessions of the conference.

Other programs connected to the conference

**(Friday) June 1, 2001**

Jubilee Exposition in the Main Library of Budapest University of Technology and Economic Sciences  
in Honour of the 110<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Michael Polanyi's Birth

9:00 Dr. Pál VÁSÁRHELYI, Director General of the Main Library salutes the participants

9:10 Éva GÁBOR, Associate Professor, President of the MPLPhA opens the exposition

11.00 Visit to Michael Polanyi's high school (Ágoston Trefort Teachers' Training High School)

Organizers:

Iván BERTÉNYI Jr., History Teacher and Tamás MENDIK, 11<sup>th</sup> class student

Sponsor list of the Polanyi Conference and of the other jubilee programs:

Soros Foundation

Friedrich Naumann Foundation

Hungarian Academy of Sciences

## **Submissions for Publication**

Articles, meeting notices and notes likely to be of interest to persons interested in the thought of Michael Polanyi are welcomed. Review suggestions and book reviews should be sent to Walter Gulick (see addresses listed below). Manuscripts, notices and notes should be sent to Phil Mullins. Manuscripts should be double-spaced type with notes at the end; writers are encouraged to employ simple citations within the text when possible. MLA or APA style are preferred; because the journal serves English writers across the world, we do not require anybody's "standard English." Abbreviate frequently cited book titles, particularly books by Polanyi (e.g., *Personal Knowledge* becomes *PK*). Shorter articles (10-15 pages) are preferred, although longer manuscripts (20-24 pages) will be considered. Consistency and clear writing are expected.

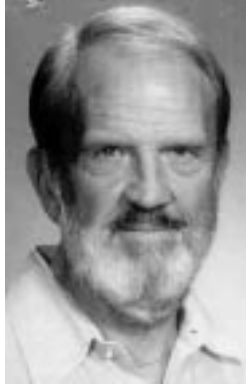
Manuscripts normally will be sent out for blind review. Authors are expected to provide a hard copy and a disk or an electronic copy as an e-mail attachment. Be sure that electronic materials include all relevant information which may help converting files. Persons with questions or problems associated with producing an electronic copy of manuscripts should phone or write Phil Mullins (816-271-4386). Insofar as possible, *TAD* is willing to work with authors who have special problems producing electronic materials.

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# Remembering Bill Poteat<sup>1</sup>

Ronald L. Hall



## William Hardman Poteat

April 19, 1919 - May 17, 2000

**ABSTRACT** Key Words: William H. Poteat, elements of William Poteat 's philosophical vision

*This brief essay remembers the late William H. Poteat and outlines his intellectual perspective and its roots.*

It has been just over a year now since Bill Poteat died. Many in the Polanyi Society were Bill's students, including me. Others members knew him by virtue of having read his book *Polanyian Meditations*. Some are even of the opinion that there is a sort of "Poteasian" school of Polanyi interpretation. I doubt this. But I don't doubt Bill's influence in Polanyi studies, or that his influence is still a rather substantial force within the Polanyi Society. Given these facts, there is reason to think that *TAD* readers would be interested in knowing more about Bill's intellectual perspective. I offer the following sketch of that perspective—from my own perspective of course—in the hope that it will be a fitting tribute to him on the anniversary of his death and in the hope that it may shed light on why Bill was, as we all are, so attracted to and so indebted to Polanyi's work.

Many years ago when I was a senior undergraduate philosophy major wondering what to do next: Will I go to graduate school, or divinity school, or—horrible thought—get a job? I came across, quite by chance a copy of *The Duke Divinity School Review*. Inside, I found an article entitled "Anxiety, Courage and Truth," by one William H. Poteat (Autumn, 1966). The article was a printed version of a sermon that he had presented to the Divinity School Chapel. I was stunned.

The article knocked me off my horse—for a little while at least. As a philosophy major, I was Platonist enough to be convinced that knowledge was power and freedom, and nothing other but positive; Plato had me convinced that it was ignorance that was the source of all of our ills. It turns out that I must also have

been Christian enough to recognize the wisdom of Bill's outrageous claim to the contrary: coming to terms with truth, he was arguing, and urging, is a deeply equivocal process.

This is especially so when it comes to coming to terms with the truth about ourselves, with our finitude, our fragility, our condition of anxiety, our mortality, our liability to choose unwisely, our general vulnerability. In the shadow of *these* truths, we may wonder whether, after all, ignorance is not bliss. Surely without courage, and in the end without faith, this bliss may well be preferable to knowing these disturbing truths about our world and ourselves.

At the same time, this bliss of ignorance misses something, or, more precisely, it misses everything, everything wonderful and rich, precious and excellent in our human existence. The fact is we can open our eyes to these riches only if we also open them and see the other, darker side. Eyes open to beauty must also be open to ugliness; eyes open to freedom must also be open to mortality. If we lose one side, we lose the other.

In short, my first lesson from Bill Poteat was a simple yet profound one: the human pursuit of knowledge, of truth, is a risky business. In some sense I knew this, but my education had kept it from me, or kept me from acknowledging it. Bill was inviting this acknowledgment. I had to hear more. I headed for Duke.

In my first year, I locked horns with Bill in "CC16," a beginning course in Christianity and Culture. It was a wrestling match I lost; and though I am all the better for the loss, I came away from that fight, perhaps a bit like Jacob, wounded, or at least afflicted, for life. What Bill managed to wrestle from me was my own deep-seated philosophical positivism. But I did try to ride that horse a little further, and, believe me, it was tough going, trying to stay on during Bill's dialectical and relentless questioning. And I must say I think he loved having me as his target, for I was giving articulation to just what he wanted us all to rethink. (How I love to this day to see students in my own classes that serve this function that I served so eagerly in Bill's.)

In Bill's class, we read Skinner, Darwin, Marx, and others, trying to get a grasp of what he liked to call modern sensibility—or what he had called in his Ph.D. dissertation, modernity's exteriorization of sensibility. For me, it was a critical moment in the class when Bill made what I took then—and still take—to be an enormously important distinction for him. That distinction is the one between what I might call a cosmological and a historical consciousness. He made this distinction in terms of the differences between the Greeks and the Hebrews. Of course, such distinctions between Athens and Jerusalem can be oversimplified and overdrawn, but he thought, and I think never stopped thinking, that there was something absolutely pivotal in this divide. If you look carefully, it is this distinction that plays a central role in *Polanyian Meditations*.

The deepest thesis of *PM*, as I see it, is this: Polanyi's logic, the logic of tacit knowing, a logic that Polanyi himself adopted without explicitly knowing it—a kind of testimony itself to tacit knowledge—is a dynamic, person-centered logic. This logic is deeply akin, we might say, to the logic of the Yawhist of the biblical narratives—call this the logic of *historical* contingency—and distinctly different from the reigning scientific logic—call this the static, objectivistic model of Greek *cosmological* metaphysics (or if you prefer, "Logocentrism").

You might be surprised to know it, but I think that Bill got much of his thinking on these matters from Soren Kierkegaard. I think he began reading SK when he was at Yale Divinity School. In this regard, he used to tell the story about an encounter with Paul Holmer at Yale: Bill was clutching SK's *Either/Or I* close to his heart, and, while walking up the stairs at Yale's library, he ran into Holmer, who told Bill that there was really

“nothing” in that work. I think, as a matter of fact, Bill found in it a lifetime of inspiration. And SK was on his mind at the very end of his life also. On his deathbed, he asked me to find a certain prayer of Kierkegaard that he was fond of; he wanted this prayer read at his memorial service that he and his wife Pat were planning. The service took place at Duke Chapel on May 24,<sup>th</sup> 2000.

I first saw how deep the influence of Kierkegaard was on Bill when I sat in on an undergraduate course he taught in Existentialist Thought. Although we read other works in that course, the primary text was Kierkegaard’s *Either/Or I*, and even more precisely, the first section of that book entitled, “The Immediate Stages of the Musical Erotic.” If you look at this section of *Either/Or I*, I am sure that you will see connections between it and the sections in *PM* where Bill made so much of the contrasts between hearing and seeing, and between music and speech.

Indeed, given his interest in speech, it was not strange for Bill to turn with such interest, as he did in the late fifties, to the work of Wittgenstein. While he was teaching philosophy at Chapel Hill, the department held a faculty colloquium on Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*. One of my mentors, Maynard Adams (Professor of Philosophy, Emeritus, Chapel Hill who is presently in the final stages of his last illness) was involved in that colloquium. A long-time friend of Bill’s, Maynard was fond of telling me that it was in this department colloquium that Bill Poteat blossomed as a philosopher. In general, these were heady days in philosophy. Bill was caught up in the invasion of British ordinary language philosophy that Wittgenstein had inspired. He read J.L. Austin and wrote one of his finest articles of this period in which he took on Gilbert Ryle’s *Concept of Mind* (“God and the Private I,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 1960). Bill never completely left the orbit of influence that ordinary language philosophy exerted over him.

Unlike the reputation that analytic philosophy has had, and despite Bill’s interest in it, especially in its insistence on precision of language and thought, his interests were far from narrow. He had an ongoing interest in philosophy and literature, especially so when he encountered the southern novelist, Walker Percy—himself explicitly influenced by Kierkegaard. He found much in the poet Elizabeth Sewell’s book *The Orphic Voice*, and much comfort and insight in the poetry of W.H. Auden. But of the authors of this sort, the one that had the firmest place in the so-called “Poteat canon” was Hannah Arendt, especially her work, *The Human Condition*.

When Taylor Scott and I invited him to come to Francis Marion University as a guest lecturer, he chose to talk on “The Banality of Evil,” a deep theme in Arendt’s thinking about the thoughtlessness of Adolph Eichmann—a kind of emblem of the thoughtlessness of modernity. In that talk he made it clear that he thought that modernity had destroyed “the world” in Arendt’s sense of this term, that is, what she called “the space of appearance.” Taking off from Arendt’s insights, Bill made it clear that he thought that the worldless would-be self in modernity, the self in despair, the spiritless self, had become nothing less than the vile and inhuman creature that Gregor Samsa had become in Kafka’s *Metamorphosis*.

With this interest in Arendt, and hence in the political, it surprised some of us that Bill’s “most productive time” as a scholar, if we measure this in publications, came with a more inward turn. This may come back to the influence of Kierkegaard, but it definitely was affected by the influence that Bill felt from Phenomenology, especially in the work of Merleau-Ponty. I think indeed that Bill’s final thinking on the matter is that this phenomenological approach, emphasizing embodiment as it does, provided the best lens through which to interpret Polanyi. Or put differently, I think that Bill came to think that the greatest

contribution of Polanyi's thought was to be found in his emphasis on the tacit ground of all knowledge and that this emphasis had its closest parallel in the emphasis of phenomenology on the body-as-subject, something Bill would later dub the "mindbody."

Recall that Bill often characterized modernity in terms of its exteriorized sensibility. Ever since Descartes, the body and the world had been abandoned by the mind. Bill thought that the reduction of the human being to a discarnate, bodiless, worldless, mind was madness. The therapy for this madness, he thought, was to find a way back into our embodiment and into our world. He saw Polanyi, with the help of Merleau-Ponty, and vice versa, as offering such a path to recovering our most primordial ground, our mindbodies.

It was at the behest of his students that Bill took this turn. They wanted him to write down for them what was only mysteriously present in the master's cryptic words—present only in the fleeting moments of one brilliant insight after another in the classroom discussions. But this was not enough. Students needed something to put their hands on, a book. So began the writing of *Polanyian Meditations: In Search of a Post-Critical Logic* (1985). And then followed on its heels, *A Philosophical Daybook: Post-Critical Investigations* (1990) and *Recovering the Ground: Critical Exercises in Recollection* (1994).

In these works, it was as though Bill had finally found the idea he had always been searching for, that silver bullet that would be modernity's *coup de grace*. That concept—that reality—of course, was the "mindbody." I am sure he thought, for he said as much, that his discovery—that the mindbody is at the very center of reality—was going to set "forth an ontological Copernican revolution." He had, to put it in Wittgenstein's famous phrase, finally hit "bedrock." Having found the tacit, deep, unmediated ground of reality, I think Bill must have thought, now at last we can recover the ground of our human existence, our bodies-in-the world, at last we will be able to recover from the madness of disembodiment. As he put it so eloquently: "From this seamless, ontological bedrock [our mindbodies], all of our dualisms have been brought forth by reflection. They never cease to be founded there; in action they disappear there."

I was not at the time, but I am now, equivocal about this tenacious turn towards the mindbody in Bill's thinking. As I have reflected on it, it seems to me that he moved altogether too far away from his earlier interest in speaking, and hence in human forms of being together in the world, in what Arendt called the space of appearance. Indeed, there was even a certain irony in this turn, for the writer of these works on the mindbody seems much more solitary than Bill was in his real life. His real life, then and indeed always, was among others; his real life was in conversation, in lively speech. Yet after *PM*—and I don't mean after sunset, for this is just as true in the "Daybook"—I sensed a certain darkness overtaking Bill's reflections. In his retirement, he was often alone, alone with his writing, with his thoughts; but there was something more: there seemed to me a certain grief in him, a grief perhaps over what he was inclined to call our modern loss of the world. Like the hands in Escher's drawing on *PM's* dust jacket, this grief seemed to turn him more and more toward himself, more and more toward the mindbody.

My reservations about Bill's turn toward, indeed his obsession with, the mindbody are not easy to express. Perhaps I can do it best by simply summarizing some of the thoughts about this matter that I wrote to Bill when he and Pat were in Greece. At the time, Bill had taken up anew his long-standing interest in the work of Cézanne. The result was an essay on Cézanne that was never published. But Bill did share the essay with me. Let me distill some of my comments that I made to him at the time regarding this essay. I think this

expression of my reservations about Bill's idea of the mindbody may be the best I can do. What I said to him was something like the following:

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. If you are correct, then words can only be an expression of a prior, immediate, tacit access to reality. On this view, words could not be essentially constitutive of the Real. But I thought you might agree with me on this, for a favorite quotation of yours is Auden's wonderful expression: "A sentence uttered makes a world appear." But doesn't a sentence also make the Real appear? As Wittgenstein might have asked: "Isn't what a thing is, deeply connected to what it is called? If not, then pre-linguistic children or animals are closer to the Real than we speakers are. Does language corrupt our immediate rapport with reality, or does it provide us with our unique access to it? I am not sure we get closer to reality the deeper we go. Perhaps it is true that every good house has a strong foundation. But that is not where we live, even though all of our living is supported by it. There is a difference between 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. And I am afraid that we are losing the confidence in words that must be there if they are to carry our existence.

These reservations about Bill's turn toward the mindbody, however, need not—and certainly do not for me—obviate the enormous contribution that Bill's work has provided. With each day the madness of modernity seems a little closer to a full take-over of ordinary good sense. Bill could not have been more accurate in his analysis of modernity. He knew that our unique modern madness is not simply the madness of having lost our minds—it is much worse. He knew also that we in modernity have lost our bodies. But I cannot help but add to this, that we in modernity have also lost our world, and this because we have lost confidence in our most precious gift, our words. These losses threaten our very existence as human beings. In the climate of these losses, heeding Bill's voice, ever urging us toward a recovery of the Ground, is perhaps our only hope.

## **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Many thanks to Diane Yeager and David Rutledge for reading an earlier draft of this essay and making helpful suggestions and criticisms.

# On Reuniting Poetry and Science: A Memoir of Elizabeth Sewell, 1919-2001

David Schenck and Phil Mullins

ABSTRACT Key Words: Elizabeth Sewell and Michael Polanyi

*This essay is an obituary notice for Elizabeth Sewell, a long-time friend of Michael Polanyi and a well-know poet, novelist and critic.*

Elizabeth Sewell, internationally known poet, critic, novelist, and friend of Michael Polanyi died January 12, 2001, in Greensboro NC. She was 81.

Sewell was born in India in 1919 of English parents and educated in England, taking her B.A. in Modern Languages from Cambridge University in 1942. She performed war service in the Ministry of Education in London from 1942-45, and then returned to Cambridge to complete her M.A. and Ph.D. degrees, also in Modern Languages. Sewell received from her family background and classical education a familiarity with English literature, history, liturgy, and style that marked her entire life's work. She came to the United States in 1949, just after completing her graduate work. After many years of trans-Atlantic commuting, she became an American citizen in 1973.

Some readers will recall that Sewell was a participant in the 1991 Kent State Polanyi Centennial Conference where she enchanted the audience by reading a lengthy poem. She was delighted by the Kent State meeting where she renewed old friendships (some other earlier Polanyi-related conferences at Bowdoin and Dayton that she attended she reported were not so pleasant). After this 1991 gathering, she prepared and deposited in the University of Chicago Polanyi archives a 44 page memoir that comments on the ways in which Michael Polanyi's friendship contributed to her work as a poet.

Becoming acquainted with Polanyi was altogether serendipity: Sewell met Magda Polanyi in the summer of 1954 at an international conference at Alpbach in Austria, where she was running a seminar on the modern European novel. Magda and John Polanyi showed up the first day in her seminar; although Mrs. Polanyi did not take the seminar, she one day invited Sewell to join her for conversation in a local cafe. Sewell described herself to Mrs. Polanyi as a poet who had woven together mathematics, logic, physics and poetry; she was now beginning to explore the connection between poetry and natural history and was soon to depart for a year at Fordham University. By chance, Sewell reports that she made a comment that ultimately led to her coming to Manchester University on a fellowship from 1955-57 and to her friendship with Michael Polanyi:

But as I look back I have a funny sense that I uttered a key word somewhere along the line, and that word was crystallography. Magda in response uttered two key words, keys to my life though neither of us knew that at the time. She said, "You must meet my husband," and "You must apply for a Simon Fellowship at Manchester University."<sup>1</sup> (3)

Sewell applied for the Simon Fellowship after her year in New York and, with strong support from Michael Polanyi, received the award, although a poet had never previously been awarded this fellowship. She came to Manchester, a city that she grew to love, in 1955, and eventually became a frequent guest at the Polanyi household. She was formally attached to the Philosophy Department and this was an uneasy marriage that contributed to her link to the Polanyi family. In Manchester, Sewell began work on *The Orphic Voice*, a work that was dedicated to Michael Polanyi and her most popular book in North America. Clearly, Sewell found in Polanyi's interests and his writing a kindred spirit. She describes her joy in first reading *Science, Faith and Society*:

at finding an unimpeachable scientific voice so friendly, as it seemed to me, to what I was groping after in this second attempt on my part to reunite the disciplines of science and poetry as I had tried to do with my first book, *The Structure of Poetry*, originally my dissertation which had aroused so much antagonism, at college and university level, at Cambridge, that amnesiac place since poetry and science are its two great glories which it now determines to keep in total separation each from each. (8).

Sewell was in Manchester in the years just prior to the publication of *Personal Knowledge*. She is identified in the "Acknowledgments" (*PK*, xv) as one of four people who read the whole manuscript and suggested improvements. In her memoir, she describes the process of reading and responding to several chapters of the manuscript. She was particularly appreciative of "Intellectual Passions," which she found aptly described her work as a poet:

Intellectual Passion was Michael's subject-matter but also that which he embodied superbly and communicated to us, and when my own work suddenly and decisively found its own method and metaphor, that kind of passion, known to me since my first such experience at Cambridge and then resting awhile as one pursued other paths, returned with vehemence, indeed almost one might say, obsession. (13)

Sewell was a visiting writer or professor at many colleges and universities in the United States including, in addition to Fordham, Vassar, Princeton, Bennett, California State, Tugaloo, Central Washington State, Hunter, California at Irvine, Trent, Notre Dame, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Lehigh University, Converse College, and University of North Carolina at Greensboro. She received honorary degrees from many colleges and universities including Fordham University (1968) and the University of Notre Dame (1984). In addition to the Simon Fellowship at Manchester University (1955-57), Sewell also held the Howard Research Fellowship at Ohio State University (1949-50), and was an Ashley Fellow at Trent University (1979), and a Presidential Scholar at Mercer University (1982).

Sewell's major works include criticism—*The Structure of Poetry* (1951, 1963), *Paul Valéry: The Mind in the Mirror* (1952), *The Field of Nonsense* (1952), *The Orphic Voice: Poetry and Natural History* (1960, 1972), and *The Human Metaphor* (1964); novels—*The Dividing of Time* (1952), *The Singular Hope* (1955), *Now Bless Thyself* (1962), and *The Unlooked-For* (1995); poetry—*Poems, 1947-1961* (1962), *Signs and Cities* (1968), and *Acquist* (1984); essays—*To Be a True Poem* (1979); and a memoir—*An Idea* (1983).

In addition to these volumes, Sewell published dozens of short stories, essays, articles and poems in periodicals in the United States, Canada, England, France, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Austria and Russia. At her death, she left completed manuscripts on William Blake, and on the French reception of Lewis Carroll. Left incomplete was a translation and commentary project on Giordano Bruno and the Renaissance tradition of high magic. Her papers are on deposit with the Department of Special Collections of the Mugar Memorial Library at Boston University.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> This and following direct quotations are from “Memoir of Michael Polanyi by Elizabeth Sewell”, which is in Box 46, Folder 12 of the Papers of Michael Polanyi in the Department of Special Collections of the University of Chicago Library. Quotations from the “Memoir” are noted simply in parenthesis by the typescript page number. This and succeeding quotations from and references to the Papers of Michael Polanyi are used with permission of the University of Chicago Library’s Department of Special Collections.

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**George R. Hunsberger** (georgeh@westernsem.org) is Professor of Missiology at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan, and the Coordinator of the Gospel and Our Culture Network in North America (www.gocn.org). His Ph.D. work at Princeton Theological Seminary in the 1980s focused on the work of Lesslie Newbigin. His revised dissertation is published by Eerdmans under the title *Bearing the Witness of the Spirit: Lesslie Newbigin's Theology of Cultural Plurality*. Together with Thomas Foust, he has compiled a comprehensive bibliography of Newbigin's works that is soon to be published in a volume of essays which they have edited with J. Andrew Kirk and Werner Ustorf under the title, *A Scandalous Prophet: The Way of Mission After Newbigin*.

**Phil Mullins** (mullins@mwsc.edu) has been the editor of *Tradition and Discovery* since 1991. He tried on more than one occasion to get Elizabeth Sewell to publish something in *TAD*.

**David Schenck** was a friend of Elizabeth Sewell. He studied with Ruel Tyson and did a dissertation directed by Bill Poteat.

# Faith and Pluralism: A Response to Richard Gelwick

George R. Hunsberger

**[Editor's Note:** This article is an invited response to Richard Gelwick's review essay "Christian Faith In A Pluralist Society" which treats both George Hunsberger's *Bearing The Witness of the Spirit: Lesslie Newbigin's Theology of Cultural Pluralism* and Lesslie Newbigin's *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*. Gelwick's essay was included in TAD 27:2 (2000-2001): 39-45.]

**ABSTRACT Key Words:** Richard Gelwick, Lesslie Newbigin, Michael Polanyi, epistemology, plurality and pluralism, objectivity and objectivism, public truth, Christian theology, gospel, knowing and believing *Richard Gelwick has made an important contribution by exploring Lesslie Newbigin's appropriation of Michael Polanyi's epistemology. When certain aspects of Newbigin's epistemological project are understood more clearly and fully, many of Gelwick's criticisms and concerns are answered. His brief challenges regarding Newbigin's theological responses to pluralism, seen against the work of Charles McCoy, signal another important area for consideration. This initial work holds great promise for future dialogue between Polanyi scholars and emerging circles of Newbigin scholarship.*

By exploring the thought of Lesslie Newbigin in light of the self-conscious way he drew upon the insights of Michael Polanyi, Richard Gelwick has done an important service. Any serious reader of Newbigin's work of the last twenty years will know how deeply indebted he was to Polanyi's epistemology and how explicitly and extensively he made use of Polanyi's framework. It served to play out, for Christians of the West, a way to recover a "proper confidence" over against the numbing effects of a culture that had relegated Christian (or any other religious) faith to the realm of private opinion. As one observer, I have found myself calling Newbigin's contribution on this front a "postmodern apologetic"<sup>1</sup> (although more recently I am more tempted to call it a "missional epistemology" or even an "eschatological epistemology"!) and Newbigin himself an "apostle of faith."<sup>2</sup>

For Gelwick to take up this initial foray into Newbigin's work from the point of view of Polanyi scholarship opens up a fertile area of investigation—fertile, I believe, for the Polanyi Society, for the widening circle of Newbigin scholarship, and for what could be a fascinating point of dialogue between them. I hope such a dialogue occurs, and in that hope I offer these responses to Gelwick's article which appeared in the last issue of this periodical.<sup>3</sup>

This initial reconnaissance by Gelwick focuses upon one of Newbigin's books, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, in which Newbigin acknowledges that he has relied heavily on Polanyi, "especially in the first five chapters."<sup>4</sup> Gelwick has set this in the broader context of Newbigin's thought by exploring also my own book *Bearing the Witness of the Spirit: Lesslie Newbigin's Theology of Cultural Plurality*.<sup>5</sup> The choices have their advantages and their disadvantages. While Newbigin's book elaborates extensively his Polanyian apologetic and is highly representative of the use he makes of it elsewhere, there are other places where he has extended the argument that would give a much more complete picture. Among those are his earliest uses of Polanyi in *Honest Religion for Secular Man* (1966; pp. 188ff.) and *Christ Our Eternal*

*Contemporary* (1968; pp. 8-23), and important books written in the 1990s that represent his most matured epistemological work: *Truth to Tell: The Gospel as Public Truth* (1991; especially pp. 15-64); *Proper Confidence: Faith, Doubt and Certainty in Christian Discipleship* (1995; especially pp. 39-64); and *Truth and Authority in Modernity* (1996).<sup>6</sup>

Another caveat centers on the choice of my book for the exploration. It has the advantage of bringing into view a wider range of Newbigin's work. And it traces themes that are the wider frame of reference for the way Newbigin deals with pluralism in *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*. The drawback may be that other elements of his thought may not be as thoroughly represented. More particularly, it must be recognized that it was not the intent of the book to play out Newbigin's epistemology in any comprehensive way. All it can promise is that it may serve to build bridges to that epistemology from his "theology of cultural plurality."<sup>7</sup>

In his summary of Newbigin's perspective as it comes to light in these sources, Gelwick has captured many of its essential lines. He has located Newbigin in the contexts of India and the West, and in the ecclesial worlds of the Church of South India and the World Council of Churches. He has shown his critique of both objectivism and relativism. He has noted the importance of Newbigin's theological responses to cultural plurality and the central role of the biblical doctrine of election in those responses. He has pointed out the distinction in Newbigin's thinking between *plurality* and *pluralism*. (It can further be noted that the difference shows up in the titles of the two books in view. *Plurality* is a quality of the world's life to be theologically valued as inherent in the gospel. *Pluralist* describes the reigning ideology of contemporary Western culture which the gospel encounters.) Further, Gelwick has noted the triangular relationship of gospel, culture, and church, in terms of which Newbigin worked.

In all these depictions, there is much that Gelwick gets right. But, if I may be allowed to quibble a bit, there are a number of points at which his treatment does not seem to have it quite right. At times, the right terms and notions are gathered together, but the relationships between them end up somehow transposed so that it does not sound quite like Newbigin. Perhaps this was due to too quick a pass in a less familiar field of discourse, or a sense of Newbigin's epistemological project too quickly formed. Perhaps it was due to the limitation of materials (although Newbigin's appropriation of Polanyi is more nuanced in the early chapters of *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*—especially chapters 2, 3 and 4—than is evident here).

It may be useful to share a few examples that illustrate my concern. This is not done with any intent to justify a dismissal of Gelwick's challenges or to discredit in any way the important questions he asks. Rather, it is to invite further, careful work, believing that a well-nuanced appreciation of Newbigin best serves an exploration of the relationship of his work to Polanyi's thought. I also believe that a closer read of Newbigin, and a more complete acquaintance with his epistemological work, will not only answer some of the questions Gelwick has about Newbigin but allow for a deeper level of dialogue among theologies drawing nourishment from Polanyi.

1. "What Newbigin is doing, however, is developing a theology about cultural plurality and how a Christian missionary church should address the universality of the gospel to plurality."<sup>8</sup>

Technically, this gets it out there. But interestingly, in my book I said something of Newbigin that had the same terms but in a reversed order and flow. Newbigin, I said, is "a theologian driven by the personal experience of plurality and the challenge it brings to the universality of the gospel of a missionary Christian

church.”<sup>9</sup> There’s a nuance difference here. I believe it is more fundamentally true to Newbigin’s approach to recognize in plurality the experiential context that challenges the faith and message of the church, rather than focussing on it as a description of the audience of the church’s address. Newbigin speaks less about how other persons are to *be addressed* and more about how the church should *indwell* the gospel, and *embody* it, and *publish* it. His attention is not so much on the form of the message addressed to others as on the form of the community that believes it and addresses it to their companions. While this may sound like a slight difference, it makes a big difference in the attitude structure Newbigin is assumed to have.

Two other notes: I think Newbigin would not want to say that the “universality of the gospel” is what the church should address to its hearers. That is too sharp a way to put it. “Universality” is not the noun of which “gospel” is the modifier, but the other way around. The “gospel” is what the church must speak, free of judgment calls which belong only to God. It must speak it “with universal intent” to be sure (as opposed to a “true for me” relativism). And the gospel is a narrative that makes claims about the life of the world, universally. But he would think it odd to talk of “addressing the universality of the gospel” to our hearers. Rather, I think, he would prefer to say, “address the gospel universally.”

Further, I am not quite sure what “...to plurality” would mean in the statement. Is it “to the plurality of human cultures”? Or is “pluralism” as a cultural ideology what is meant? For Newbigin, the gospel is not to be preached to an abstraction of a culture but to persons. This way of speaking he would find odd.

2. “The grand biblical story of creation, fall, election of a covenant people and then a savior to redeem humankind is one of the principal facts to be shared in the Christian mission to the plurality of cultures.”<sup>10</sup>

This Gelwick says in recognition that in Newbigin’s thought the biblical doctrine of election holds a central place. Several terms have potential to trip us up here: “facts,” “principal facts,” “one (which one?) of the principal facts.” It is not “facts” that it is the Christian mission to share. It is the gospel, the news report of that set of events, witnessed by communities that experienced them and communities that have believed their report, which have Jesus Christ as their center.

It is true that in many places Newbigin will call this gospel, this narrative centered in Christ, “the fact of Christ,” or “the total fact of Christ” (though never, as the Indian theologian Pandipeddi Chenchiah called it, “the raw fact of Christ”!). It is important to note that he draws this language from Carnegie Simpson, one of his Cambridge mentors in the 1930s who characteristically spoke of “the fact of Christ.” Whatever Simpson may have meant, Newbigin does not use the word “fact” in this phrase to assert some set of historical events made certain by scientific verification or historical critical methodology. (And note: it is never “the facts [plural] of Christ,” always singular.) For him, “the fact of Christ” is simply shorthand for the whole complex of events leading to and from the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, seen as the center of the story of God’s self-revealing actions. This “fact of Christ” he takes to be the “clue” that is to be inhabited by the Christian community in mission and told to its neighbors.

3. “Newbigin found in his experience in India that trying to make his faith fit the reasonableness of timeless truths available to all people in all times led to a domestication of Jesus into the Hindu worldview. For

pluralism, Hinduism would be the model religion for all, since it includes all faiths.”<sup>11</sup>

Here I believe Gelwick simply misreads Newbigin. He draws the comment from what Newbigin says on page 3 of *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*. But his statement misrepresents the point Newbigin is making there, and in fact overturns his meaning.

The order is wrong. Newbigin does *not* say that it was his missionary approach in India to try to “make his faith fit the reasonableness of timeless truths available to all people in all times” and that this “led to domestication of Jesus into the Hindu worldview.” Rather, it was the other way around. In the course of his weekly meetings with monks in the Hindu monastery, he noticed in the great hall a gallery of portraits of the great religious leaders, and among them the portrait of Jesus. “To me,” he says, “it was obvious that this was not a step toward the conversion of India. It was the co-option of Jesus into the Hindu worldview. Jesus had become just one figure in the endless cycle of *karma* and *samsara*, the wheel of being in which we are all caught up. He had been domesticated into the Hindu worldview.” It was that and similar experiences that eventually caused him to reflect back upon his own Western Christian faith and see in it the same kind of co-option, domestication. “I too had been more ready to seek a ‘reasonable Christianity,’ a Christianity that could be defended on the terms of my whole intellectual formation as a twentieth-century Englishman, rather than something which placed my whole intellectual formation under a new and critical light.” This was training for how he would approach his next large mission field: the West!

It is interesting to note how much of the language Gelwick uses in his comment is not present in any way in Newbigin’s account: “timeless truths,” “available to all people in all times,” “model religion for all,” “it includes all faiths.” It is hard to know what has spun this version of Newbigin’s story, but the impressions given at the end about Newbigin’s view of Hinduism do not match what he says here or anywhere else. Quite the contrary. He does not acknowledge Hinduism as a model religion for pluralism. Pluralist may claim it to be so, his point is the opposite. The Hinduism of that monastery does not give place to the faith of Christians that in the Jesus Christ of history the purposes of God have been revealed and effected. Rather, it co-opts the figure of Jesus into its own version of meaning and reality. In this sense, Hinduism does not “include all faiths” but domesticates them to its own faith. Hinduism, while on the face of it a tolerant, religiously inclusive vision, *is* after all a particular faith that claims to have a universal truth. It assumes that within its religious vision the true meaning of the other faiths is to be found. Its particular form of pluralism is as particular as any other faith, and it has to stand the test of that particularity just as any other must.

4. “Agreeing with Polanyi, Newbigin sees the need for a new epistemological outlook that will allow people to have a new ‘plausibility structure’ through which they can hear and receive the gospel. When this new understanding occurs, conversion also can happen.”<sup>12</sup>

Here the meaning is closer to Newbigin’s, but again the movement is reversed and that tends to obscure things. The comment suggests a progression: a “new epistemological outlook” will allow people to have a “new ‘plausibility structure’” through which they can “hear and receive the gospel” based on which “conversion also can happen.” For Newbigin, the paradigm shift to a new plausibility structure is what conversion *is*, and hearing and receiving the gospel is its form. These things are not separate psychological or existential moves, nor do they follow in some succession upon one another. These are all themes in Newbigin’s thought, but the way they are crafted and related here is not representative of his way of seeing

them.

In addition, Newbigin would not, I think, want to speak of “the need for a new epistemological outlook” as a necessary precursor that would “allow” the paradigm shift that is conversion. To be sure, Newbigin is concerned to forge—Polanyi being his companion—a new epistemological outlook, but he plays that out as the way the Christians should understand what is true of their faith, not as a preparation stage in evangelism.

5. “New converts and renewing understanding of the gospel join other Christians in their dialogue within the church and the outward dialogue with all others and their cultures.”<sup>13</sup>

This is a smaller matter. But it makes it sound as though Newbigin’s notion of the “inward” or “inner” dialogue of the church refers to an inter-personal dialogue of prior Christians with newly converted Christians. He certainly expects such a dialogue, and expects it to be lively and crucial. But this misses his main point about the inner dialogue, that it is a dialogue that is *inner-personal*, both in the sense that it goes on within each person and within each Christian community. It is a dialogue between the faith Christians have come to embrace, however strongly or weakly, and the cultural perceptions, preferences, practices, and dispositions which are the givens of their cultural identity. This is a continuous, on-going dialogue from which the church should never see itself free. It is this dialogue of the gospel with “our culture” within the Christian community that is logically if not chronologically antecedent to the outward dialogue with other companions who share that same culture or some other.

## **Gelwick's Challenges**

We come now to what is most at the heart of the matter for Gelwick: (1) his challenges regarding Newbigin’s epistemology (and mine) and (2) his critique that our theological formulations lack a “revisiting or renewal of Christian theology” in the face of today’s pluralisms and pluralities. These two lines of critique correspond to two distinct strands of concern that are not entirely sorted out along the way: epistemology in the wake of modernity, and theology in the context of plurality. Running intertwined throughout Gelwick’s treatment, the twin concerns cause a certain amount of crossfire that may account for some of the difficulty in gaining handles on Newbigin’s position. It is not always clear which is Gelwick’s primary concern. Is he measuring Newbigin and my exposition of him against Polanyi’s epistemology? Or is he measuring our theological formulations against those of his own mentor Charles McCoy?

The shift in foils at the end—from Polanyi to McCoy—is the clue that Gelwick’s article is working on two fronts simultaneously. He is carrying forward two separate and distinct discourses, with two agendas, each presenting its own dialogue partner. The confusing element is that the relationship between these two sets of issues is not made clear, nor is the reason why they are both being taken up together. The connections are not immediately apparent, nor are they argued or demonstrated.

## **The First Challenge: Epistemology**

Gelwick turns toward his critique of Newbigin by affirming that he “would seem to be correct in saying that Christians following Polanyi’s theory of knowledge ought to dare to assert the truth claims of their faith. Polanyi, however, did not equate science and theology in the way they bear upon experience.”<sup>14</sup> Further,

he adds that “[t]hroughout, Polanyi sees both science and religion as bearing on reality, involving our personal commitment, but art, myth, and religion have a more comprehensive integration of experience and of meanings. This difference has to correct theology as Newbigin is doing it.” What is meant by “theology as Newbigin is doing it” remains unclear to me, as does exactly what correction to it is required. But presumably that is defined by what follows: “Polanyi would object to ‘the fact’ of Christ if it were equated with the kind of facts that science uses for verification.”<sup>15</sup>

Clearly, Gelwick believes that Newbigin has equated science and theology in the way they bear upon experience. He believes Newbigin does not properly distinguish between science and religion, particularly in the way religion “takes us to a sacred level of experience that is beyond the verifiable facts of science.”<sup>16</sup> He sees Newbigin’s failure to lie in a false use of verification for non-scientific (historical and religious) knowing. He finds this to be a fundamental problem in Newbigin’s epistemology.

Were this failure to be true of Newbigin, I would concur. But it is not. Here is where a more adequate and complete read of Newbigin’s epistemology would help.

For one thing, there are clues in Gelwick’s language that he is taking Newbigin’s whole project in a way I believe is not true of him. Just before the critique begins, the affirmation of Newbigin’s commonality with Polanyi casts his view as encouraging Christians to “assert their truth claims.” (“Tell the witness for which they have been laid hold of by God,” Newbigin would prefer to say.) The choice of language sharpens a sense, lingering from earlier comments characterizing Newbigin’s approach, that Gelwick thinks of Newbigin as moving in an objectifying direction. In the article’s abstract, he asserts that Newbigin and I “see Polanyi’s epistemology giving a basis for the objectivity of the Christian message in a pluralistic world.”<sup>17</sup> A basis for some “objectivity of the message” is certainly not what I would say I find through Polanyi’s epistemology, and I am not sure what in Newbigin’s discourse would lead one to that conclusion in his case either. This seems to be casting Newbigin in terms not his own, construing him in directions other than the ones he takes. The same effect follows when Gelwick says that “Newbigin finds in Polanyi’s redefining objectivity the basis of Christian faith, ‘the total fact of Christ,’ a claim to objectivity in the public square.”<sup>18</sup> I am not sure Newbigin can be found anywhere saying that “objectivity in the public square” is what he seeks or proposes. Proper confidence and public witness of what is believed with universal intent, yes. But “objectivity,” I think not.

What is most telling is to note the bottom line in the critique: Polanyi would object to ‘the fact’ of Christ if it were equated with the kind of facts that science uses for verification. The interesting point is that Newbigin objects to that as well, if that is what is meant! As noted above, Newbigin is not well enough understood on this point and there is a tendency to understand his phrase, “the total fact of Christ,” as an assertion of some verifiable scientific or historical certitude when it is explicitly not his intent. Perhaps this is the stumbling point that suggests to Gelwick that Newbigin’s is an objectifying project.

Newbigin is very clear about taking another direction than some assertion of “objective truths.” He steers a course to avoid what he calls “...the falling apart of the objective and the subjective poles of knowing.”

There are on the one hand those who seek to identify God’s revelation as a series of objectively true propositions, propositions which are simply to be accepted by those who wish to be Christians. And on the other hand there are those who see the essence of Christianity in an inward spiritual experience, personal to each believer, and who see the Christian doctrines as formulated during

church history as symbolic representations of these essentially inward and private experiences.<sup>19</sup>

Newbigin very clearly rejects “a conception of ‘objective truth’ that seeks it in a series of timeless propositions in the affirmation of which we are not personally involved, for which we do not have to commit our whole lives; it means that we affirm that truth is to be found only in the personal commitment to a life of discipleship with Him who is himself the truth.”<sup>20</sup> On that ground he affirms that “the only way in which we can affirm the truth and therefore the authority of the gospel is by preaching it, by telling the story, and by our corporate living of the story in the life and worship of the church.”<sup>21</sup>

A clearer sense of what Newbigin’s project *is* will help in all this. That may be discerned by first teasing out the threads of the argument in chapters 2 through 4 in *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* where the features of Polanyi’s epistemology are used to show a certain kind of commensurability between scientific knowing and Christian believing. What he finds so helpful in Polanyi, at the bare bones of it, is the demonstration that science is not so objective as the cultural attitude takes it to be, and religious believing not so absolutely different from it. Science is more historically conditioned, and Christian faith more epistemologically valid, than the common take on things.

He shows this in the elements of Polanyi’s view: “...the whole work of modern science rests on faith-commitments which cannot themselves be demonstrated by the methods of science” (20); “The authority of science is essentially traditional” (43, quoting Polanyi, *Knowing and Being*, 66); “The authority of this tradition is maintained by the community of scientists as a whole” (46); “Like the scientist, the Christian believer has to learn to indwell the tradition” (49); “there is a close parallel between the ways in which the authority of tradition works within the scientific community and within the Christian community.” (50)

Thus Newbigin demonstrates a companionship of scientific and religious knowing and faith-companionship, not identity—by which contemporary Christians can recognize in such faith as theirs not mere subjective opinion but a faith which may be held with confidence and which can be publically attested, with humility, by action and speech.

Newbigin’s concern is to help Christians nuance and critique the general public attitude to which they themselves are also susceptible, namely, that science is objective and factual and religion cannot be more than a personally chosen opinion. He wants to show that such an easy dichotomy does not hold true. There is more commonality than is popularly supposed between the dynamics of knowing in scientific investigation and in seeking God. Differences in the way knowing comes about in each are due to other factors than simply, “science is about facts and religion is about faith.”

“The parallel, however, is by no means complete,” Newbigin goes on. “In the case of the scientific community, the tradition is one of human learning, writing, and speaking. In the case of the Christian community the tradition is that of witness to the action of God in history, action which reveals and effects the purpose of the Creator.”<sup>22</sup> In other words, Newbigin understands that while commensurate at some points, a scientific knowing of the natural world and a Christian knowing of God’s purposes are not the same. This is demonstrated by the fact that invariably, having once laid the groundwork of Polanyi’s epistemology, he then makes two kinds of moves in his argument.

The first is the move toward dealing with what is of necessity involved in “knowing” a “personal God.” This means extending beyond “personal knowledge” as a recognition that persons are subjectively involved in knowing, and reckoning with what happens whenever that which is to be known is another person. “Interpersonal knowledge,” as we might call it, is what must be engaged if in fact the God to be known in Christian faith is a personal God. The affirmation of the “personhood of God” (cf. John Oman) is for Newbigin a most fundamental presupposition and axiom, one, however, which he would assert is everywhere present in the Christian scriptures and lies at the heart of historic Christian affirmations regarding “revelation.” Persons are known by other persons as they reveal themselves. Inherent in the notion that God is personal, Newbigin says, is that God—as personal—can and does choose the time and place of actions (including speech acts) by which God’s character and purposes become known to “other” persons. This lies beneath the characteristic way that Newbigin puts his understanding of the Bible. At their most basic level, Newbigin takes the Christian scriptures to be that “body of literature which—primarily but not only in narrative form—renders accessible to us the character and actions and purposes of God,”<sup>23</sup> a source of knowing appropriate to a personal God.

The second move Newbigin invariably makes is toward what is involved in “knowing” the meaning of the world’s history. This is very different ground from scientific knowledge. That it becomes a prominent feature in his apologetic derives from what he takes to be the essential historicity of the Christian faith (over against, for example, advaitic Hinduism) and from the eclipse of teleology in the post-Enlightenment, modern scientific worldview. The meaning of the world, he asserts, is to found in its purpose, its end. The meaning of a story is known by the way it ends. This, he believes, is what the Biblical narrative brings to light.<sup>24</sup>

But in this turn to history, Newbigin does not (as some might suppose) revert to some objectifying, scientific-like proofing (or, *verification*, to use Polanyi’s term). He is not on a project to prove the factuality of events by some modern critical method. He rather draws attention to the communities that have *indwelt* and *embodied* the meaning of the world which is revealed and effected by God’s actions and told in the narrative which renders them. The biblical narrative which has at its center the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus are understood by Newbigin to be the “clue” to the meaning of the world.<sup>25</sup>

The suggestion, then, that Newbigin does not distinguish science and religion (and history!) is not well-grounded. Newbigin sees science and theology as quite distinct.

[U]nlike science, [the Christian tradition] concerns questions about the ultimate meaning and purpose of things and of human life—questions which modern science eliminates as a matter of methodology. The models, concepts, and paradigms through which the Christian tradition seeks to understand the world embrace these larger questions. They have the same presupposition about the rationality of the cosmos as the natural sciences do, but it is a more comprehensive rationality based on the faith that the author and sustainer of the cosmos has personally revealed his purpose.<sup>26</sup>

And for history and theology alike, scientific verification is not appropriate.

What, then, of the objectivity of our knowledge? It is obvious, for example, that when conservative Christians insist that their Christian faith refers to objective realities, they are (rightly) seeking to deny the opinion that these Christian beliefs are simply expressions of subjective feelings or experiences and to affirm that they make contact with a reality beyond the self. But it is also clear

that it is futile to deny the subjective elements in the Christian's confession.<sup>27</sup>

Noting next that Polanyi answers the charge of an ultimate subjectivism first by his notion of speaking with universal intent, he goes on to indicate that "Polanyi says that the truth of the claim either will or will not be validated depending on whether or not it leads to further truth. A valid truth claim will lead to new discovery...."<sup>28</sup>

## **The Second Challenge: Theology**

Gelwick's second area of challenge to Newbigin and me lies in the area of our theological responses to plurality, or as he prefers, pluralism. "Despite Newbigin's major encounter with both the non-Western Christian communities and with non-Christian religions, there does not seem to be a revisioning or renewal of Christian theology." He goes on to say that in his view, "The book [which I take to mean *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*] does not embody the dialogue and vitality of the triadic formulation of gospel, church, and cultures that Hunsberger formalizes...."<sup>29</sup>

This is intriguing, but to respond I would need much more to go on. It may well be that Newbigin in this book fails to embody the dynamic and vitality of his own theological and missionary method. But Gelwick has not demonstrated how Newbigin's book constitutes such a failure. Unless he simply means that Newbigin failed in his book, and Newbigin and I have failed to respond to pluralism with "a revisioning or renewal of Christian theology," because we have not come to the same theological place that Gelwick's mentor, Charles McCoy, (and perhaps Gelwick himself) has espoused. Gelwick's comment that "[o]ne could wish that Newbigin, or Hunsberger as his exponent, had tried to advance the encounter as Charles McCoy did...." is the best clue I have about the "revisioning or renewal of Christian theology" Gelwick believes Newbigin and I should have achieved.

But it also begs the most questions. On what basis does Gelwick wish this of us? Is there only one way to respond to pluralism? (Yes, a bit of irony is intended!) What is it about McCoy's theology that would compel us to "advance the encounter" as *he* did? Who defines, after all, what is advance and what is retreat, what is defection and what is faithfulness? And if McCoy sees in pluralism an opportunity for theology "to reflect and grow in understanding"<sup>30</sup>, can there be now no going beyond where he was? And cannot the going beyond incorporate the retrieval of the tradition in new and fresh ways?

If the suggestion is that because McCoy worked along the lines of Polanyi so thoroughly, other theologians who claim to do so should follow a similar path, more particular questions arise. Is Gelwick claiming that consistency with Polanyi's epistemology leads inexorably to a singular theological result? Did Polanyi claim that? Is this even consistent with Polanyi's thought? Or would he say it represents a static approach that can find no new discovery?

And is there anything in Polanyi that would indicate one theological direction rather than another? Are the theological proposals of Newbigin and McCoy equally commensurate with Polanyi's epistemology? What does each do that builds beyond or contradicts Polanyi? Is that warranted in each case?

There is obviously too little said by Gelwick in these scant final paragraphs of his article to answer these questions or even to know which ones of them are relevant. Further dialogue would be fun. Two final comments are in order, and are offered because Gelwick sincerely notes with appreciation a great deal

of what he reads Newbigin and me to be saying.

Gelwick asserts that “Besides upholding the validity of the gospel in a pluralist context, there is much need for discussing how Christians relate to the Spirit’s leading in the global search for peace and justice.”<sup>31</sup> What is striking to me is that “the gospel” seems here to be understood as something which is not itself concerned with “peace and justice.” If that is how “gospel” is to be understood in Newbigin’s rhetoric, I can understand his concern. But if the gospel that is publically attested by the church is the gospel of the New Testament, it is (Newbigin believes) the announcement of the reign of God in Jesus Christ, and that constitutes a fundamental political and economic challenge to the powers-that-be. It cannot be other than a gospel about peace and justice in the public life of the world, which is the world’s true end in the intentions of God. This is what Newbigin means—when rightly understood—by his assertions of “public truth.” The gospel’s truth-telling is about the public life of the world.

Secondly, Gelwick says that “it is important for Christian mission to have not only integrity and confidence in the gospel, but also the openness to the acts of God through those outside its community.”<sup>32</sup> With this, Newbigin and I heartily concur. I hope that can be heard in what we have written. This is not without its problems, however. The matters of discernment and criteria are not easy ones. Gelwick recommends that Christians “relate to the Spirit’s leading in the global search for peace and justice” and respond to “the Spirit’s calling of humankind to deal pluralistically with the global problems.” Alisdair MacIntyre might be tempted to respond, “Whose Spirit? Which leading and calling?” How do we discern which among human activities are the Spirit’s doings? Which signs are the signs of the Spirit? How do we adjudicate between our different conclusions about what the Spirit is calling and leading us to do? Here there is not one singular way, and no clear singular way to move toward discerning what it might be. The ground is tricky, and I suppose that is what makes me want to invite Gelwick to more exploration in comparison of Newbigin’s and McCoy’s evidently different theological proposals.

## Conclusion

My work with Newbigin’s thought convinces me that his use of Polanyi is extensive, his positive appropriation of the main lines of Polanyi’s proposals is pervasive, and the effect of all that on his articulation of a number of theological points is great. How fully that satisfies scholars of Polanyi will be one important testing ground for the integrity and consistency of Newbigin’s epistemology. I for one would welcome continuing dialogue along those lines.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> George R. Hunsberger, “The Newbigin Gauntlet: Developing a Domestic Missiology for North America,” in *The Church Between Gospel and Culture*, eds. George R. Hunsberger and Craig Van Gelder (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1996), 12-13.

<sup>2</sup> George R. Hunsberger, “Apostle of Faith and Witness,” *The Gospel and Our Culture: A Network for Encouraging the Encounter in North America*, Special Edition, April, 1998, 1-2.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Gelwick, “Christian Faith in a Pluralist Society,” *Tradition & Discovery*, Volume XXVII, Number 2 (2000-2001), 39-45.

<sup>4</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1989). See p. x .and pages 1-65.

<sup>5</sup> George R. Hunsberger, *Bearing the Witness of the Spirit: Lesslie Newbigin’s Theology of Cultural*

*Plurality* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998).

<sup>6</sup> All by Lesslie Newbigin: *Honest Religion for Secular Man* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press and London: SCM Press, 1966); *Christ Our Eternal Contemporary* (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1968); *Truth to Tell: The Gospel as Public Truth* (London: SPCK and Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1991); *Proper Confidence: Faith, Doubt and Certainty in Christian Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1995); and *Truth and Authority in Modernity* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1996).

<sup>7</sup> Jukka Keskitalo, a Finnish scholar, completed a Th.D. thesis (in Finnish) at the University of Helsinki in 1999 which gives special attention to Newbigin's epistemology. The English translation of the title is "The Christian Faith and Modern Culture: Lesslie Newbigin's View of the Church's Mission in Modern Western Culture."

<sup>8</sup> Gelwick, 40.

<sup>9</sup> Hunsberger, *Bearing the Witness*, 9.

<sup>10</sup> Gelwick, 41.

<sup>11</sup> Gelwick, 41.

<sup>12</sup> Gelwick, 41.

<sup>13</sup> Gelwick, 42.

<sup>14</sup> Gelwick, 42-43.

<sup>15</sup> Gelwick, 43.

<sup>16</sup> Gelwick, 43.

<sup>17</sup> Gelwick, 39.

<sup>18</sup> Gelwick, 40.

<sup>19</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 24.

<sup>20</sup> Newbigin, *Truth and Authority in Modernity*, 81.

<sup>21</sup> Newbigin, *Truth and Authority in Modernity*, 80-81.

<sup>22</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 50.

<sup>23</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1986), 59.

<sup>24</sup> Newbigin notes in *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (p. x) that he depends on Polanyi especially in the first five chapters, where he lays out his fundamental epistemological approach. But it is a mistake to stop there. It is important to note that epistemology remains in view for the next four chapters, but now with history, not science, at center stage. Those chapters are entitled: "Revelation in History," "The Logic of Election," "The Bible as Universal History," and "Christ, the Clue to History."

<sup>25</sup> As my book points out, "Newbigin views a 'clue' as a potential 'model' by which the mind may be able to grasp and understand a particular field of inquiry.... The word 'clue,' therefore, does not mean 'evidence' or 'proof' in Newbigin's usage." *Bearing the Witness of the Spirit*, 322, note 4.

<sup>26</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 49.

<sup>27</sup> Newbigin, *Proper Confidence*, 43.

<sup>28</sup> Newbigin, *Proper Confidence*, 43.

<sup>29</sup> Gelwick, 43-44.

<sup>30</sup> Gelwick, 44.

<sup>31</sup> Gelwick, 44.

<sup>32</sup> Gelwick, 44.

# Jerry Gill on Polanyi, Modern and Postmodern Thought: A Review Essay

Ronald L. Hall

**ABSTRACT:** Key Words: Jerry Gill, Michael Polanyi, modern and postmodern philosophy  
*This review essay discusses elements of the interpretation of Polanyi and of Polanyi's place in modern and postmodern philosophy in Jerry Gill's **The Tacit Mode: Michael Polanyi's Postmodern Philosophy**. Criticisms focus on Gill's account of modern philosophy, his construal of the relation of tacit and explicit knowing, his claims about the body and the person and his idealist-inclined reading of Polanyi.*

Jerry H. Gill, *The Tacit Mode: Michael Polanyi's Postmodern Philosophy* (SUNY Series in Constructive Postmodern Thought, David Ray Griffin, editor). Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000. 192 pages. \$17.95 paper. ISBN: 0791444309.

## Introductory Overview

After giving a brief introductory overview and ending with a summary conclusion, Jerry Gill proceeds with the following four-part agenda: 1. He gives an exposition of the major philosophical problems that have plagued modernity. 2. He then presents his interpretation of Polanyi's epistemology of tacit knowing with the explicit aim of showing how it solves these major problems. 3. Next, he discusses some major themes in postmodernism and presents a Polyanian brief regarding these matters. 4. Finally, he shows how Polanyi's thought can be used to solve various modern philosophical problems in the areas of language, education, art, and religion. I will confine my criticism to issues that are raised in the first two parts. And although there is much to criticize in the last two sections and in the conclusion, I will simply say a word or two about the issues discussed in these sections in case a reader should want to consult Gill's remarks on them.

## Modern Problems

If you like the historical gloss, you may well love the first chapter of Gill's book, which he entitles: "The Basis of Modern Thought." As I see it, there is nothing wrong per se with using this technique, so long as it is helpful. What makes the historical gloss helpful is that it gives us a concise and accurate picture of a period, movement, ideology, or what have you. For example, it is often helpful to be able to say such things as, "This is modern philosophy in a nutshell." Unfortunately, the gloss often confuses more than it clarifies. I am afraid that this is the case in Gill's gloss of modern philosophy.

After settling on when modern philosophy began, namely with Descartes, and after claiming that "modern philosophy" is what Polanyi means by "critical philosophy," Gill opens his own (and Polanyi's?) "critique" of it. I suspect that, along with the irony of Gill's project of criticizing modern critical philosophy, there is some question as to what Polanyi himself meant by "critical" and hence some question as to what he might have had in mind by this notion of "post-critical." This question is made more urgent by the usual

identification of the beginning of the era of critical philosophy with Kant's various "Critiques." In addition, given the title of Gill's book, we might wonder about whether the term "post-critical" can be assimilated, if appropriately qualified, to the term "postmodern." And there are other historical questions, for example, was Plato's philosophical critique of Athenian sensibility a form of critical philosophy? That is, was pre-modern philosophy also critical philosophy? In what sense?

According to Gill, modern philosophy is founded on, and founders on, a search for a foundation for knowledge. Descartes started the search and landed on the indubitability of the existence of consciousness (the mind) in contrast to the dubitability of matter (the world). Hard to believe perhaps, but Descartes thought that the mind was a more solid epistemological/ontological foundation than matter. But whether we agree with him or not, he set the agenda for modern philosophy—call this the struggle between idealism and materialism. The struggle, however, turns out, in Gill's version of it, to be a family squabble. While the two sides in this debate can't decide which foundation is the more secure, there seems to be no doubt that the house of knowledge needs a solid one. Hume, as much as Descartes, thought so and became a skeptic precisely because he discovered that the foundations of knowledge were, if not crumbling, at least definitely not solid enough. Kant, on the other hand, tried to rebuild the house of knowledge and reality by providing them with a "new" foundation. But how new was Kant's suggestion? To quote from Gill: "Unlike Descartes, Kant did not maintain that this bedrock is provided by abstract reason alone, and unlike Hume he did not expect to find it amidst the data of sensory experience. Rather, Kant placed the pivotal ground of knowing in the structure of the mind itself, in the way that it serves as the condition of the possibility of knowledge per se." (27)

As Gill sees it, Kant was on to something. He says: "There is something extremely right-headed about this move on Kant's part..." (27) So does Gill think that the critical philosopher par excellence was really an incipient "post-critical" philosopher? Well not quite. Where Kant failed, he goes on to say, is in not recognizing the crucial place the body plays in knowing; this is precisely where Polanyi excelled. So, we might ask: "Is the problem with modern philosophy that it looks for a foundation, or that it looks in the wrong place? There is reason to think that Gill thinks both, which makes his analysis of modern philosophy less than helpful. So is Kant's right-headed move to be found in the fact that he was nosing around in the right direction for the right ground but just overlooked the role of his nose, that is, of his body in this process? I thought that what Gill wanted to say is that what is wrong-headed in modern philosophy (which I think must include Kant) is its insistence on searching for a ground, not in its failure to find the right one. So is Polanyi post-modern insofar as he abandons the search for a ground, or insofar as he found a ground that modern philosophy had overlooked? There seem to be, dare I say it, grounds for thinking that Gill thinks the latter. He says: "Polanyi introduces an understanding of knowing as grounded in the body, the society of knowing agents, and the affirmation of our cognitive powers of judgment." (30) Taking *this ground* "...enables us to act with both confidence and humility in the quest for knowledge." (30, italics added)

So where does this leave us? It seemed at first that Gill wanted to say that modern philosophy could be characterized (in a nutshell) as an illegitimate search for a secure foundation for knowledge. As the gloss unfolds, however, it seems that Gill would have us see that modern philosophy's mistake (in a nutshell) was not in seeking a foundation (ground) for knowledge but in seeking a certain sort of foundation (ground), namely, a certain one. Gill implies that Polanyi's solution to all of the philosophical problems attendant to this search was not in abandoning the search but in finding and hence in founding the right sort of ground for knowledge. And what is this? Well, I would have thought he would have said that persons constitute this ground—that is, the foundation of knowledge is in persons, and this is what makes all knowledge personal

knowledge. Gill, however, thinks that the ground that Polanyi adds to Kant's search for a ground is the body. (And amazingly to me, Gill thinks Polanyi "draws quite heavily" from Merleau-Ponty (49) to make this point, which, as I see it, is just historically inaccurate and misleading.)

It turns out that for Gill this new ground—the body—is an *axis* not a *foundation*. But is this helpful? What images come to mind in this replacement? I am inclined to think of the earth spinning on its axis in space with nothing holding it up. Or is gravity holding it up? Or more generally is our concept of an axis here itself grounded in something like the laws of physics? Do we want to say, like one of Gill's mentors, namely Wittgenstein, that because knowledge has an axis but not a foundation that it is groundless? Or does it have a bedrock foundation/ground? Or is the claim simply that the bedrock foundation has no further ground/foundation? Despite his talk of groundlessness, even Wittgenstein's spade is turned when it digs deep enough. Do we want to say that knowledge is grounded in the body and yet the body is not itself grounded in the world or at least the earth? Is this axis-talk just another way of flirting with idealism? And Kant, of course, did more than just flirt with idealism; he went all the way, Platonically speaking, of course.

So again where does this leave us? One thing is clear to me, Gill's gloss of these matters, which includes his introduction of the idea of an axis, or as we might say, the body-as-axis, doesn't get us very far toward Gill's avowed goal of telling us what the "basis" of modern thought is.

## Tacit Solutions

I suspect that the next section of the book will be more important for many TAD readers than the first, since it is designed to provide a concise introduction to Polanyi's thought. Indeed, this book, and especially this section promises to be of great help, as one of the book's back cover reviewers has put it, "...to the uninitiated in navigating Polanyi's writing." I am not sure that this is true. But I think that what this same writer subsequently claims is true: "Gill is not afraid to develop his own framework for interpreting Polanyi..." But just as surely, I think that what the reviewer follows with is again not true: "...but he [Gill] is always faithful to the content and import of Polanyi's writings."

Of course, if the last claim is false, then the first one must also be false. And it may be the case that it is because the middle claim is true that the other two are not. But lest this review run on too long (is it already too late for this?), allow me to try to substantiate my claim that the reviewer's last claim above is false.

Is Gill always faithful to the content and import of Polanyi's writing? Let me make two points, one general, one very specific.

First, Gill represents the structure of tacit knowing as a continuum. He even presents us with a quite elaborate drawing of the structure of tacit knowing (fig.2.1). I take this to be misleading insofar as it suggests that the more one moves toward the explicit, the more one moves away from the tacit and vice versa. As I see it, such a reading fails to be dialectical enough to be faithful to Polanyi's conception of the relation between the tacit and the explicit. I would say that the more explicit one's knowledge, the greater its tacit component, though not vice versa. Indeed, it is possible to have one's knowledge almost completely tacit, but never possible for one's knowledge to be wholly explicit. And yet it is our explicit knowledge, knowledge that we can say, that makes human knowledge distinctively human, that is, different than animal knowledge. The

problem with modernity (in a nutshell) as I see it, is not that it seeks explicit knowledge, but rather that it does not acknowledge that all explicit knowledge is rooted in the tacit. I think it is a major concern of Polanyi to show this, especially in his chapter on articulation in *PK*. The ground of human (personal) knowledge, as I would put it, is not the body, but the concrete speech-act. And of course, we must not lose sight of the fact that the tendrils of speech extend into the body, but not only into the body. The roots of speech also extend into the world tying us to others and to the earth. Such are the tacit resources of speaking. We can say what we say, only because we know more than we can say. But precisely because of these tacit resources, we are not spinning on the free-floating axis of our body; rather, we are enmeshed in a fabric of deep, tacit, connections to others and to the world.

Or to put this in a slightly different way, personal knowledge is not simply knowledge in “*the tacit mode*.” Rather Polanyi’s insight is that all explicit knowledge includes a dialectically excluded tacit component. In my judgment, this conception of personal knowledge as a dialectic of the tacit and the explicit is more faithful to Polanyi’s project than thinking of it exclusively as knowledge in the tacit mode.

But let me provide a very specific instance in which I think that Gill is not faithful to Polanyi’s writings. On the last pages of this section, Gill takes on the well worn idea that knowledge is true, justified belief. Quite amazingly to me, he questions the truth component in this definition. If a person believes *x* and has justification for this belief, that is, has evidence for it, then why say it also has to be true? His reasons for this turn on his confusion of a theory of truth and a theory of verification. As well, he seems to be assuming a “critical,” that is, a Kantian, view of human knowing as limited, that is, as falling short of the God’s eye. He says: “To require that an assertion actually be the case in order to be counted as knowledge entails that someone can be in a position to judge whether or not this is so. But, of course, this can never happen since human knowers cannot transcend their cognitive context to see reality from the ‘God’s eye’ perspective” (68). This leads him to a position that stands in direct contradiction to Polanyi. He says: “...the idea that something could be true totally independently of our knowledge that this is so is essentially circular...what could it mean for truth to be independent of our knowledge of it? (69). Does Gill think that if we do not have enough evidence to determine whether a particular claim is true or false that it is neither? But isn’t it true that some state of “affairs” may not obtain (for example, that Clinton had sex with Paula Jones) even if we believe it and even if we have good evidence for believing it? But justified belief is not enough to count as knowing it; it must be true. Does Gill think that believing with justification that *x* is true makes *x* true? He seems to. But surely this would make no sense if what is claimed to be true is a reality that exists independently of our knowing it. Does Gill think that there is no reality that exists independently of our knowing it? He seems to. But if so, this is in direct contradiction to Polanyi. So to make my point that Gill is not faithful to the content and import of Polanyi’s writing on this point, let me simply quote Polanyi: “By trying to say something that is true about a reality believed to be existing independently of our knowing it, all assertions of fact carry *universal intent*. *Our claim to speak of reality serves thus as the external anchoring of our commitment in making a factual statement*” (PK 311). Perhaps Gill’s rotating axis needs just such an anchor (ground) in reality.

## **Deconstructing Deconstruction?**

Even though this book is supposed to be about Polanyi’s postmodern philosophy, it does not have much to say about it. The section on postmodernism turns out to be more about the usual postmodernists, Derrida et. al., than about Polanyi. But there is one last section that is called “A Polyanian Critique.” It is all

of 5½ pages. In this, Gill spends a good deal of time finding common ground between Polanyi and Postmodernism: both are, well, post-modern. The difference is that Polanyi is not content with deconstruction alone: he also wants to be reconstructive, as the postmodernists generally do not want to be. Unfortunately, not much light is shed on the issues in this section.

## Applications

In this section, which seems to be an afterthought, Gill takes on a brief discussion of language. The first part of this discussion is basically a reprise of Polanyi's "Sense-Giving and Sense-Reading." Gill then goes on to discuss some hackneyed parallels with Wittgenstein. He moves then to a brief discussion of language acquisition, making the doubtful claim that Polanyi's ideas square with Chomsky's. Finally, he ends with some remarks on why human beings are not "thinking machines."

Next Gill turns to education. Some remarks are made about the *Meno* and some comparisons are made between Polanyi and Whitehead, and between Polanyi and Skinner, Carl Rogers, and finally, Dewey.

In the final chapter, Gill discusses art and religion. TAD readers might find this section helpful since it focuses on the issues that Polanyi discusses in *Meaning*. Gill ends up thinking that Prosch is wrong to think that Polanyi radically separated scientific knowledge from knowing in the arts and in religion.

## Conclusion

The book tries to end with a summary. But, as if not quite satisfied with what has gone before, Gill won't stop. He closes with some further remarks. He turns to the relevance of Polanyi's thought for thinking about how human chess-players are different from "Deep Blue," the chess-playing computer.

## Postscript

But let me end this review. I am puzzled: is it Gill's claim that Polanyi's denial that human thinking is mechanistic is a mark of his post-modernism? If so, would we say that the romantic reaction to mechanism is also post-modern? As I see it, subjectivism is as much a part of the modern as is objectivism. If anything, post-modernists are just modern subjectivists. Surely, Polanyi offers an alternative to these two alternatives. Whether or not we call his alternative modern or post-modern matters less than what the alternative amounts to. Fleshing this out is certainly a worthy project, something that I would be happy to see Jerry Gill take on.

## WWW Polanyi Resources

**The Polanyi Society has a World Wide Web site at <http://www.mwsc.edu/~polanyi/>. In addition to information about Polanyi Society membership and meetings, the site contains the following: (1) the history of Polanyi Society publications, including a listing of issues by date and volume with a table of contents for recent issues of *Tradition and Discovery*; (2) a comprehensive listing of *Tradition and Discovery* authors, reviews and reviewers; (3) information on locating early publications; (4) information on *Appraisal* and *Polanyiana*, two sister journals with special interest in Polanyi's thought; (5) the "Guide to the Papers of Michael Polanyi" which provides an orientation to archival material housed in the Department of Special Collections of the University of Chicago Library; (6) photographs of Michael Polanyi.**

# Reply to Ron Hall's Review

Jerry H. Gill

ABSTRACT Key Words: Michael Polanyi, modern and postmodern philosophy

*This brief comment is a point-by-point response to some elements of Ron Hall's review of my recent book, **The Tacit Mode: Michael Polanyi's Postmodern Philosophy.***

I shall pass over the trivializing and anti-convivial tone of Ron Hall's review and speak directly to several of the substantive issues he raises.

First, with regard to the distinction between "ground" or "foundation" and "axis", I think my presentation of the role of the body in Polanyi's thought (pp.45-50) makes it quite clear that we are talking about persons as embodied agents. About Merleau-Ponty's influence, see *Knowing and Being*, pp.148-155 and pp.221-222. Further, my introduction of the "axis" image as a helpful way to understand Polanyi's insights concerning the place of tacit knowing in human cognition carefully avoids Hall's worries about "objectivism" and "subjectivism" (see p.57).

Second, with respect to the relationship between tacit and explicit knowing, my diagram on p.39, which Polanyi himself saw and commended, is, like all such devices, incomplete. Nevertheless, my discussion of this diagram and its dynamic (pp.54-56), as well as the following sentence, make it quite clear that Hall has misread me: "This account would suggest a symbiotic, bipolar relationship in which cognitivity is understood as a field or dimension within which neither pole can be said to exist or function apart from the other" (p.61).

Third, about knowledge as "justified true belief", Hall is correct that my critique of the third criterion in the standard definition of "knowledge," namely that one's belief must be "true," seems out of harmony with certain emphases in Polanyi's writings. However, I developed this critique in the context of explaining Polanyi's notion of the cognitive enterprise as that of a "society of explorers." My point is that, as nice as it is to speak as if truth can be known in addition to and independently of human social interaction and justification processes, in the end, truth can only be defined as what humans agree that it is as members of the society of explorers seeking universal intent.

Lastly, concerning Polanyi's relation to postmodernism, I am amazed that Hall has failed to appreciate my frequent efforts throughout the book to distinguish Polanyi, as a reconstructive postmodernist, from the more well-known deconstructivist postmodernists. The introductory chapter (pp.5-9), along with the final section of Chapter Four (pp.83-88), clearly distinguish Polanyi's thought from that of Derrida and Foucault, especially by means of the notion of universal intent. Moreover, the opening pages of my concluding chapter (pp.177-179) spell this distinction out quite pointedly.

One final note: it is a pity that Hall makes no mention of Chapter Eight in which the interpretations of Polanyi's thought offered by well over a dozen other thinkers are presented and discussed in some detail. I can only hope that the readers of Hall's review will read my book as well and thus be able to judge for themselves concerning its reliability and usefulness.

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## REVIEWS

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William A. Dembski, *The Design Inference*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. pp. 243. \$64.95/£37.50 hardback. ISBN:0-5216-2387-1.

William A. Dembski, *Intelligent Design*, Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1999. pp. 302. \$15.99 paper. ISBN: 0-8308-1581-3.

William Dembski's books have caused rather more than a ripple of excitement in the world of evolutionary biology, and the establishment and subsequent dissolution of the 'Michael Polanyi Centre' on the campus of Baylor University, ostensibly to explore the relationship between religion and science, allegedly without consultation with the faculties of religion, science or philosophy, caused an uproar. Readers of *Tradition and Discovery* may wonder why Polanyi's name has been associated with it, too. Having read Dembski's two books, the best explanation I can offer from the other side of the Atlantic for this supposed association is that Dembski sees himself as performing an extremely extensive exegesis of Polanyi's remark, '... if we are to identify – as I am about to suggest – the presence of significant order with the operation of an ordering principle, no highly significant order can ever be said to be solely due to an accidental collocation of atoms, and we must conclude therefore that the assumption of an accidental formation of the living species is a logical muddle' (*Personal Knowledge*, 35).

This article review will be concerned with the justification for 'Design Theory' only insofar as it will ask whether it is an academically defensible science, whether Dembski's books are academically reputable, and whether the resulting brouhaha is therefore no more than an example of scientific prejudice against anything that is not mainstream Darwinism. Since two books are involved, I shall refer to the first

as *TDI* and to the second as *ID* throughout.

*TDI* presents itself as a serious scientific analysis of probability theory. The first two or three chapters are not very technical – in fact they are verbose and rather unfocused – and the later chapters contain the meat of the mathematics. Dembski's central thesis is easily stated and unremarkable: two equally probable but unlikely events can be distinguished by virtue of the predesignation (a term borrowed from C.S. Peirce) of a specification of what is to count as significant. Thus, on tossing a fair coin, HHHHHHHHHH is as probable as HTTTHHTHTH (although most people do not think so), but the first strikes us as remarkable whereas the second does not because of our predisposition to think that ten consecutive heads is 'remarkable'. Dembski quite rightly observes that *mere* improbability is useless as a measure of significance because *any* ten consecutive tosses of a fair coin will produce outcomes whose individual probabilities are both very small and all equal to one another. So if I toss a coin repeatedly and obtain a particular sequence of outcomes, nobody would or should be impressed by any such sequence unless it happened to correspond to a sequence that had already drawn itself to our attention as in some sense 'significant'. On the other hand, were I to be in possession of a coin known to be fair, and were I to say 'I will now toss the coin ten times and produce HHTHTTTTHT' and proceed to do so, *that* would be remarkable (although you would doubtless first of all question the fairness of the coin or the tossing process, which is essentially the design hypothesis in a nutshell: something like this cannot just happen by chance). It is this element of *predesignated* significance that is at the heart of Dembski's work. In *ID* he calls it 'specified complexity'. That said, nothing that I have said so far will surprise or excite even a moderately well-educated high school student. So, if

Dembski's work is to be credited as genuinely groundbreaking, we need something more.

Dembski's most interesting early allusion to something significant comes with the reference to Kolmogorov's 1965 specification of *compressibility* as a further criterion that enables us to distinguish such sequences as HHHHHHHHHH from HTTTHHTH. Kolmogorov noted that the first sequence can be compressed to 'repeat H ten times' whereas the second probably cannot be compressed – apparently (and this 'apparently' is important in what follows) – to less than its actual length. Gregory Chaitin later introduced *algorithmic compressibility* in the same context. Dembski wants to introduce his own notion of *detachability* further to clarify and elaborate this point. Detachability is intended to be a measure of the extent to which chance and design can be distinguished in any given event, certain conditions obtaining. It is here that my problems with Dembski's thesis begin, although at first they consist of complaints about the difficulty of – or at least *my* difficulty in – understanding him.

The concept of detachability is central and essential to the argument, but when he describes it Dembski's difficulty in expressing himself clearly in ordinary language – a difficulty that recurs in his clumsy description of the nature of statistics as contrasted with probability – makes it far from easy to be sure what he means. The following is therefore my best attempt to interpret what he means and to assess what he argues.

Dembski is right to say that improbable events assume their significance by their agreement with some kind of expectation. He points out that many events – such as sequences from 41 tosses of a fair coin – generate probability spaces all of whose members we could not list in a lifetime. The number of possible sequences,  $2^{41}$ , is about  $10^{12}$ , and there are only about  $10^{10}$  seconds in a lifetime. In other words, in order to distinguish significant from insignificant sequences we have to restrict the sequences that we are ready to grant as significant, and the most natural

are those that are most easily recognised by some species with a particular genetic code and evolutionary history. It is not necessary here to speculate about whether 'recognisability' is genetic or learned, but it is nonetheless an interesting question. So, says Dembski, HHHHHHHHHH will be treated as significant, where HTTTHHTH will almost certainly not be so treated. I would want to add 'by a species constituted and acculturated as we are'; Dembski would agree.

A pattern is *detachable* in just the case that it can be specified without reference to the actual event that defines it. Dembski – unwisely and misleadingly, in my view – decides to say 'Detachability distinguishes specifications from fabrications' (TDI 15) when what he wants to say is that an event that can be specified in advance – plucked, so to speak, from the possibility space as potentially significant – is independent of that event, and so detachable from that particular event. To my mind a 'specification' does not differ from a 'fabrication' in this way, for a fabrication can as easily be specified and understood as a 'making' probably has to be. In fact, that we can repeatedly 'fabricate', say, houses, is exactly what Dembski is trying to say detachability entails: we can give an efficient description of how to make something without just having to wait for it to happen. But I, at least, regard our ability to do this as depending upon our ability to formulate a specification. It does not help – at least, it does not help *me* – that Dembski says 'Specifications are the good patterns, the ones that legitimately warrant eliminating chance, whereas fabrications are the bad patterns, the one that are ad hoc and do not warrant eliminating chance' (TDI 137f). It seems elsewhere that the distinction Dembski is attempting to make is between a fabrication according to some pattern-generator and a specification that simply gives the sequence we are interested in because there is no shorter way of arriving at it, but these two ways of drawing the distinction are not equivalent. And the second seems to make the whole matter isomorphic to Chaitin's distinction between compressible and incompressible sequences. And it is a serious defect of Dembski's books that 'specifi-

cation' is both a central concept and one that seems to be confused in his own usage, for specification as 'independently identifiable pattern' is exactly what we need for a fabrication, and our identification of something as a fabrication depends upon the identification of a specification that seems hopelessly unlikely to have arisen by chance. So how does detachability distinguish specifications from fabrications? I am mystified.

In theory, then, any event can be specified, but, in practice, choosing from among the  $2^{41}$  possible sequences that might result from 41 tosses of a fair coin, we are more likely to choose – and in a strong sense absolutely bound to choose – easily recognisable sequences – to creatures constituted as we are – than others because the *entire* range of outcomes, including those that are incompressible in Chaitin's sense, cannot be listed other than by exhaustively running through them all. (This is of course false if taken literally: a computer could do it if it had enough memory, but we just couldn't read them all in a lifetime. The point stands even if the example doesn't. To make the point literally true, just increase the 41 to, say, 189, when the number of sequences considerably exceeds the number of particles in the universe – generally given as around  $10^{82}$  – so long before your computer has enough memory, you run out of particles to make it from.)

The example of the exhaustive list nonetheless throws up another difficulty. If I can program a computer to produce the list, the important point is not the program that produces the *entire* list, but the impossibility of specifying some members of that list otherwise than by going through it and pointing them out (or just writing one of them down at random).

There is an apparent paradox here that is worth noting. If you tell me to produce a finite sequence of any length, it is an easy task to program a computer to produce all conceivable sequences of that length that use a finite set of symbols. But unless you specify the length, it is *not* true that a computer

– or the fabled infinite set of monkeys sitting at typewriters – will necessarily produce every such finite sequence as a subset of what they type (not even the complete works of Shakespeare, which is the usual example in question). So you cannot write a computer program that will be *guaranteed* to produce this review; to do that you need – heaven help you – a complete specification of my brain. To see this, consider this utterly persuasive example, which I owe to one of my pupils, Andrew Fisher, who produced it to persuade another pupil of the falsehood of the monkey case when I had not had much success:

Monkey one could type: a b a b a b a b a b ...  
Monkey two could type: aa bb aa bb aa bb aa bb ...  
Monkey three could type: aaa bbb aaa bbb aaa bbb ...

And so on. No monkey ever types *anything* intelligible, however many monkeys there are. *A fortiori*, no program can be guaranteed to generate any particular sequence unless that sequence is specified (that ambiguous word again) in advance (by, for example, knowing my brain and how it is going to churn out these words, or telling the computer the works of Shakespeare in their entirety).

So, granted this unlistable number of sequences, we need to be able to fabricate the ones we are interested in using a pattern-generator. Dembski later calls this 'side information'. Thus, as Dembski also says, while it is possible to show that a pattern is detachable from an event – one can specify the HHHHHHHHHH and so make that pattern detachable – it is not possible to prove non-detachability because you cannot prove that there is no conceivable pattern that will generate a sequence: the detachability may be demonstrated later by the discovery of an underlying pattern-generator. In particular – and this is where we start to see where the argument is leading, and the connection with the quote from Polanyi at the start of this piece – what seems like a non-detachable sequence or event to which we are led to attribute random emergence, could become detachable under a suitably ambitious and imaginative pattern-generating conceptual scheme. This is a *design*.

I feel drawn to ‘cut a long story short’. Dembski wants to try to argue that it is possible to say ‘after the event’ whether an event was significant by ascertaining its [prior] detachability. This requires him to be able to ‘get in front of the event from behind it’ and state what the prior probabilities were. Much of his argument, for all the mathematical dressing, therefore boils down to an argument about whether, say, the evolution of life was specifiable as significant in advance – a highly improbable event in a sea of possibilities that could only be picked out because of its intrinsic order, akin to the differences between our two sequences of tosses, but much more so – and whether therefore the patterns that constitute life are detachable. If he can achieve this, then he can say that the patterns constituting life were predesignated and so designed. He can then move from design to intelligent agency.

I am not at all sure that I have understood ‘detachability’ properly, and it is a pity that so central a concept does not receive a clearer treatment. But let me try once again to say what I think Dembski means by it. Looking forward from a universe before life had emerged, I think he would say, the number of possible futures is so vast that it is impossible to pick out any particular future as significant unless that significance can be predesignated by appealing to some recognisable distinguishing features, features such as life exhibits. The trouble is, I just don’t know what one can do with this point, true as it is. And the analogy with coin-tossing is misleading in a way that is philosophically *deep*: just because each sequence is equally probable, each sequence is equally dull; but life as contrasted with non-life is *not* dull, so the analogy isn’t that successful. Dembski more or less makes this point in *TDI* 56f discussing the question whether ‘LIFE’ is ‘specified’ (that word again) in Richard Dawkins’ treatment. One ends up by saying ‘life evolved; how remarkable’ and then throwing up one’s hands when asked ‘Why?’ I do not think that Dembski has a better explanation – scientifically and mathematically speaking – than the age-old suggestion that perhaps the hand of God was involved. But so what? We could make that suggestion anyway. What

he does do, with some success, is to isolate the kinds of argument that are employed by evolutionists and others to block ‘the design inference’ (*TDI* pp61ff), including Stuart Kauffman’s attribution of *regularity* to explain life, i.e., the argument that life is a natural and abundant emergent property of the way the universe is. ‘Whereas creationists accept all six premises of the design inference, evolutionary biologists, to block the conclusion of the design inference, block premises 3 and 5’ (*TDI*, 61). One wonders whether this tells us where Dembski is coming from (*pace* all his denials). I hope not, because creationism is not the only way to read or see the good points of the design inference.

*ID* is essentially a reworking of *TDI*, seems on occasion to quote it verbatim, and in some respects is clearer to the layman because less mathematical. The detachability condition (*ID* 135ff) can now be stated in terms of two other conditions: the *conditional independence* of a pattern of the information needed to generate that pattern – what Dembski calls the ‘side information’ – and the *tractability* of that side information, its capacity to generate the required pattern at all. The conditional independence of two events *A* and *B* simply means that the probability of some other event *C* depending on *A* and *B* is the same as the probability of *C* depending on *A*.

The structure of Dembski’s argument seems to be as follows. First he argues according to the following sequence of points:

1. The space of all possibilities is very large.
2. Something has to happen.
3. The probability of any given event happening is vanishingly small.
4. Whatever happens therefore looks unlikely ‘after the event’.

Second he says something a little different:

1. It is possible, notwithstanding the size of the space of possibilities, to

'detach' certain possibilities as having unusual significance. (This is essentially the point that I just made about life being more interesting than non-life in a way that is quite different from two equally improbable sequences of 41 tosses of a coin.)

2. It may be possible to calculate the prior probabilities of such events, in other words to say that they were of unusual significance even before they occurred.

3. If something of vanishingly small probability is identifiable as having had unusual significance prior to its occurrence, and yet nevertheless occurs ...

4. ... then we may say that it arose by design rather than by chance.

If this is the substance of Dembski's argument, then it is either vacuous or fallacious, depending upon how one construes it. Everything hinges upon our ability after the event to identify the prior significance of something that has occurred as it would have appeared before it occurred. But this is an argument of the following form:

- Something unlikely has happened
- If I had predicted that it would happen before it happened, and it still happened ...
- That would be remarkable, and not attributable solely to chance
- But the something that has happened was quite obviously of significance before it happened because it seems significant now after it has happened
- Therefore it was or could have been the result of design rather than a chance event

This is so obviously a fallacy that it is hard to believe that it can be what Dembski means, but it does seem to be what he means, so I must be the stupid one here. And I acknowledge that Dembski is himself very

generous in noting fallacious examples of his own argument and showing that they are fallacious. I am just less convinced than he is about the remnant arguments that he does not think fallacious.

Where Dembski is obviously right is in saying that rejection of design by an *ex cathedra* pronouncement that everything that has happened can be explained by chance is also unwarranted. That something significantly ordered occurred from 41 tosses of a coin conceived to have operated independently is remarkable, that it occurred on the one and only occasion on which the experiment was performed, and that its prior probability was low compared with the space of disordered outcomes is certainly *accounted for* by chance because it is *possible* that it occurred by chance, but it is scarcely *explained* by it. To think otherwise is just a *petitio principii*. So evolutionary biologists who want to argue that life was improbable but that nonetheless 'something had to happen and it was lucky for us that it did' are essentially like those who, playing a game where you have to throw six consecutive sixes to win a car, do so on the first go, and then say 'Hey that was lucky'. It was certainly always *possible* that would happen, but, other than by an appeal to brute chance, the evolution of life probably requires more by way of *explanation*. In short, that something that was always highly improbable nonetheless occurs does seem remarkable to any reasonable human being, and does seem to require more by way of explanation than current mainstream neo-Darwinian evolutionary biology offers.

However, we did not really need Dembski to tell us this, and we certainly did not need the paraphernalia of detachability and so forth to obscure the basic argument. Moreover, Dembski's argument presupposes that the prior probabilities can be calculated, and this is just what is in dispute. Some have argued, with some force, although controversially, that the outcomes we think significant were not as unlikely as Dembski supposes, and that the events involved were not random or independent. Some such as Stuart Kauffman, as Dembski acknowledges, even go so far

as to say that the emergence of life was virtually inevitable. But that in its turn only leaves us with explaining why it was inevitable, which reduces us to the question of the fundamental constants of physics – the ‘Anthropic Principle’ – and why they and the underlying structures governing atomic behaviour are as they are. Which leaves us more or less where we started.

In sum, we are left in this position. If life emerged as one among a huge number of low-probability outcomes of the structure of the universe, then it could have done so by pure chance, but that seems scarcely to be a satisfactory explanation even if it is plausible given life’s significance. If, on the other hand, the emergence of life was virtually inevitable (Kauffman), then the universe seems to have been predisposed to its emergence, and that needs explanation too. In both cases the design hypothesis can be invoked if we imagine that it is more satisfactory than an argument from chance. That is a choice many make. So do I. But I do not see that Dembski has obviously advanced the argument by clothing it in a lot of mathematical sophistication, although I do think (with Michael Behe, *ID* 10) that the terminology he introduces – if made sharper, clearer, and used more scrupulously – does offer opportunities to clarify the issues. In the end, however, despite the fact that I am broadly sympathetic to the attempt to find some middle ground between creationism and evolutionary totalitarianism, I am suspicious of the motives that drive these books. It is well known that the US constitution forbids the use of the educational system to pursue religious objectives. Could this be why Dembski spends considerable time trying to dissociate intelligent design theory from any religious presuppositions, presenting it as a competitor in a purely scientific arena (*ID* 247-252, from Inter-Varsity Press)?

Design theory is a slippery beast. When he addresses directly the question of its religious and scientific significance, Dembski makes a strong case for its completely value-free status vis-à-vis religion (*ID* 247ff *et al.*), but this is at variance with some of

the earlier rhetoric. For example, ‘Naturalism is the *disease*. Intelligent design is the *cure*. Intelligent design is a two-pronged approach for *eradicating* naturalism. ... Virtually every discipline and endeavour is presently under a naturalistic pall. To lift that pall will require a new generation of scholars and professionals who *explicitly reject* naturalism and consciously seek to understand the design that *God* has placed in the world. ... Intelligent design is a golden opportunity for a new generation of *theistic* scholars’ (*ID*, 120-121, my emphasis). But when someone can think, let alone write down and then publish an assertion such as, ‘Of course cells don’t have “Made by Yahweh” inscribed on them, but that’s not the point. The point is that we wouldn’t know this unless we actually looked at cells under the microscope’ (*ID* 125), am I completely crazy to wonder quite where on the spectrum of intellectual achievement these books should be located?

In sum: there is merit in reopening the design debate; Dembski introduces some conceptual distinctions that may prove important in doing so; but I am not sure that I know what Dembski really means by what he says, or that I would endorse it if I did.

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John E. Gedo, *The Evolution of Psychoanalysis: Contemporary Theory and Practice*. New York: The Other Press, 1999. pp. xvi, 246. \$25.00 paper. ISBN: 1-892746-27-1.

[*Reviewer’s note: I must disclose that I have known John Gedo and his work for about thirty years. I should perhaps add that Polanyi, Gedo, and I are each of Hungarian ancestry, though reports of an actual Hungarian “mafia” are much exaggerated.*]

John Gedo has produced a concise review of sixty major monographs on psychoanalysis written in the twenty-five years after 1973. This book will interest members of the Polanyi Society for three reasons: First, it begins its discussion with Polanyi’s

*Scientific Thought and Social Reality*, a book that Gedo credits with breaking an epistemological “log-jam,” an imperviousness to new evidence defended by exclusive reliance on inductivism for the legitimacy of scientific inquiry. Second, he provides an insider’s guide to the recent history of a clinical and intellectual discipline, in part showing how it responded to the invalidation of Freud’s century-old metapsychology (contrary to Popper’s view that psychoanalysis is a pseudo-science because its discoveries could not be falsified!). Finally, he suggests the outline of a growing consensus within psychoanalysis around the idea of self-organization, based in the natural sciences (e.g. cognitive science, developmental psychology, neurophysiology, systems theory) but aware of the full repertoire of human capabilities including the highest creativity. He shows how this model is supported by a confluence of theory and evidence from clinical and therapeutic practice, infant observation, creativity studies, and neurobiological research.

The book is organized into two parts: topical and historical. The larger, topical part contains reviews of individual monographs, discussing first the conceptual background, then the turning point produced by new evidence and new theoretical insights, the cognate disciplines, the individual schools, and finally the emergence of a new therapeutic, technical, and theoretical consensus. The historical summaries consider theoretical innovation and recent discourse about clinical practice. In his conclusion Gedo argues for his own view of the future of psychoanalysis as a natural science, based on the need for a rationale for deciding between competing explanations, in a sense affirming a faith in science much like Polanyi’s.

Gedo’s own contributions during the period are not included, except in the bibliography. His psychoanalytic books propose and elaborate a hierarchical model of mental functioning. In this schema there are five distinguishable modes within the human repertoire, ranging from inborn motivations to learned requirements of adequate adaptation. The same model is used to classify various psychoanalytic explana-

tions and various developmental phases, since each applies to, or corresponds to, a particular mode. Further this model suggests therapeutic innovations (“beyond interpretation”) focused on overcoming the patient’s cognitive deficits and maladaptations, “apraxias” and “dyspraxias”. Outside psychoanalysis proper, Gedo has also written extensively on creativity; in his *The Artist and the Emotional World* (1996) he discusses the importance of enduring predispositions of personality for creative endeavor. In both areas, his contributions investigate what Polanyi called the tacit dimension, first in the sense that the investigator uses his self-understanding to attend to the subject, but also in the sense that we gain new knowledge about human capabilities that lie beyond what we articulate. Gedo has produced a rich and diverse chart of this territory, applying it here in a guide to the recent literature.

John Gedo is a man who holds to standards having their source in ancient Roman virtues. He practiced the greatest possible empathy for patients, but he could also make other professionals uncomfortable – as one can see from his memoir *Spleen and Nostalgia, A Life and Work in Psychoanalysis* (1997). By reviewing monographs of the past quarter century in his retirement, he has taken pains to explicate and teach, repairing the inattention of many of us to the transformative efforts of the vanguard in his profession, while at the same time suggesting that we can read the current fragmentation of psychoanalysis positively as leading to the emergence of a new model for the scientific investigation of human self-organization. In these efforts, he exhibits introspective adaptation, renunciation, and creativity, the hallmarks of the highest mode of functioning in his own hierarchical model.

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# Personal catholicism

*The Theological Epistemologies of  
John Henry Newman and  
Michael Polanyi*

**Martin X. Moleski, S.J.**

In *Personal Catholicism*, Fr. Martin X. Moleski argues that Catholic doctrine rests on the foundation of personal knowledge. The first part of the book maintains that there is a very striking similarity in the epistemologies of John Henry Newman, a convert to Catholicism from the nineteenth century, and Michael Polanyi, a scientist-turned-philosopher from the twentieth. By mapping each man's work in turn, the author shows that both men recognized the same key features of the life of the mind, although they used different terminology to develop similar insights. Newman spoke of the illative sense, by which the mind guides itself in all concrete reasoning, while Polanyi focused on the tacit dimension of personal knowledge.

The second part of the book explores some of the theological implications of the epistemology of personal knowledge. Because "all knowledge is tacit or rooted in tacit knowledge" (Polanyi), all of Catholicism, to the extent that it may be construed as a body of knowledge, is "tacit or rooted in tacit knowledge."

The book is intended to serve as a foundation for post-critical theology. Newman and Polanyi provide an antidote to the skepticism generated by empiricism, positivism, objectivism, and rationalism. The ground which Newman and Polanyi have in common should prove a fruitful resource for doing systematic theology less systematically and for defending dogma non-dogmatically.

**Martin X. Moleski, S.J.**, is associate professor of religious studies at Canisius College.

Martin X. Moleski, S.J.

## Personal Catholicism

The Theological Epistemologies of  
John Henry Newman and Michael Polanyi

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**"Both Newman and Polanyi rank high among the pioneers in the history of the post-critical movement in epistemology. . . . The systems of these two authors are exceptionally useful for dealing with the major issues that trouble the theological climate today."**

*AVERY DULLES, S.J.*

Publication October 2000  
Hardcover only, \$54.95  
222 pages ISBN 0-8132-0964-1

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P.O. Box 4852, Baltimore, MD 21211  
410-516-6953  
[www.cuapress.cua.edu](http://www.cuapress.cua.edu)