APPRAISAL

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Editor: **Dr R.T. Allen**
20 Ulverscroft Rd, Loughborough, LE11 3PU, England
Tel. and fax: **01509 552743;** ***E-mail:*** **rt.allen@ntlworld.com**
www.spcps.org.uk

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This issue's contributors:

Dr Bob Brownhill is a frequent contributor of papers on Polanyi to *Appraisal* and our conferences.

Tony Clarke is working on a Ph.D., on the doctrine of the revelation of God, in the Divinity School at the University of St Andrews. He is considering how Michael Polanyi's epistemology can be of assistance in identifying the kinds of way in which we may speak of 'participation in revelation'.

Dr Chris Goodman is about to publish a book on the philosophy of Michael Polanyi.

David Britton has a life-long interest in philosophy, mysticism, and mythology, and a particular interest in Berdyaev. He writes poetry, paints, and is a member of the Society of Friends (Quakers) and has contributed papers to the Quaker Theology Group since 1994.

Dr Wendy Hamblet is currently teaching Philosophy (Moral Issues, Ancient Philosophy, Ethics and Politics) at Adelphi University, New York; and **Dr Giorgio Baruchello** is now Lecturer in Philosophy at the University of Akureyri, Iceland. They are co-operating on a study of cruelty.

EDITORIAL

1 The new society

As individual subscribers have already been notified, at the Appraisal/Polanyi Conference in April, those present, agreed to form a new society, later named 'The Society for Post-Critical and Personalist Studies' or 'SPCPS', to take over the publication of *Appraisal* and the organisation of conferences. All individual subscribers had been circulated in advance: some sent messages of support and none dissented.

The policy will not change, nor, at present, the personnel. But additional help is needed. Can you assist us in any way: by joining the Committee, helping at the conference, reviewing articles, reviewing books, suggesting persons to be invited to contribute articles or to give papers at the conference, recruiting more subscribers, publicising *Appraisal* and the SPCPS, promoting links with other journals and societies, and anything else that you can suggest?

Please do not hesitate to volunteer. In these days of e-mail, distance (and cost) is no hindrance to many of these.

2 Other journals and societies

On p. 105 are listed details of journals received since the previous issue. Individual subscribers (members of SPCPS) can borrow these for the cost of postage both ways. And on the following page are notices of our own conference next year plus two others, the JMF conference this month and that of the International Forum for the Study of Persons next August.

Our conference has settled down to an attendance of a dozen or so, with some 'regulars' leavened by new faces. If you have not attended so far, why not come if you can? We are a friendly group, welcome newcomers, and you do not have to be an expert on anything: all you need is what you already have from reading *Appraisal*, viz. an interest in the matters discussed in these pages.

I would also like to encourage members to borrow the other journals and attend the other conferences, and in that way to promote the SPCPS and *Appraisal* there and in other contexts. We have already benefited greatly from contributions to these pages and to our conferences from contacts made elsewhere. Conversely, we can extend our especial interests by offering articles and papers to these, and other, journals and conferences, some of which have extensive contacts themselves. Please send me details of other journals and conferences that we could contact.

3 New collection of essays on Michael Polanyi

In the Ashgate advertisement on p. 107 are details of *Emotion, Reason and Tradition*, the first collection of essays on the very important but somewhat neglected social, political and economic aspects of Polanyi's work.

Those of you who subscribe to the printed version of *Appraisal* will find enclosed a form for ordering pre-publication copies at discount. Likewise, those who receive the e-mail version, or for whom I have e-mail addresses, should have already received the same form as an e-mail attachment. If you have not received the form, or have misplaced it, please send me a message and I shall send you the form.

4 Discussion of cruelty and other topics

In this issue Wendy Hamblet and Giorgio Baruchello continue their discussion of cruelty. They will agree that they have no monopoly of the topic, and would welcome other participants. Discussions of any other topics raised by articles in *Appraisal* are also welcome. So, please, if you are stirred or provoked by something in our pages, why not set down your thoughts and submit them for sympathetic consideration?

THE ORGANIZATION OF EXPERIENCE AND MAKING JUDGMENTS.

Bob Brownhill

A feature of being human is our desire to organise the world around us and this, in effect, means how we experience it. We even create our own self identity by developing plausible story lines to explain our actions in the past and in the future. We organise our life experiences into an autobiography (Harré, 1998, O'Neill, 2003). Our experiences becomes partly unconscious or tacit, and lie behind all our thinking and judgments. Michael Polanyi (PK) calls this tacit knowledge, and the rapid reorganisation of our experience as we meet new problems, tacit integration.

Paul Hager (Hager, 2000) criticises Polanyi and argues that he uses the term tacit knowledge as a blanket for the features of practical knowledge that contrast with technical knowledge, and that it is, 'unformulatable, unteachable, and unlearnable'.

Hager also argues that what Polanyi really needs is a concept of judgment which he then attempts to provide. Hager's criticisms are in fact misguided because it is clear that from Polanyi's point of view some of our tacit knowledge can be revealed, although not all, and that Polanyi does have a theory of judgment.

1 Points of view

It is often possible for disputes to emerge between people even when there is an agreement about all the facts which occur in a situation. Disputes on rational grounds and not merely based on prejudice. The disputes may emerge because the participants in the disagreements have organised their experience and the way they look at the facts in different ways (Brennan, 1977) I will give three examples to demonstrate this phenomena.

An obvious example arises when we are in disagreement about a particular text, say a piece of literature or philosophy. In this example we will assume that the texts are freely available and there is no disagreement about their content. In other words there is a complete agreement on the facts. Our dispute is about an understanding of part of a text which can have a considerable influence on our understanding of the text as a whole. We are actually arguing on different interpretations of the text. It is being argued that it is possible for us to look at the text in different ways that may provide a deeper understanding of the meaning of the text. It should be possible to show to others the basis for a particular interpretation. This can be done on rational grounds, demonstrating that disputes can emerge on non prejudicial grounds, one of different interpretation, even though there is an agreement on all the facts, the text itself.

The idea of looking at the facts in a different and perhaps new way also occurs in the second example. Suppose we desire to hang a particular picture on the wall in our new flat. Unfortunately we cannot find a hammer to bang a nail into the wall. We then search the room for something we can use as a hammer. We notice a suitable shoe with a strong heel which we think will do the job but our partner scoffs at this arguing it is far too soft. We, in fact, have recognised the particular properties required by a hammer to be effective that also exist in the heel of the shoe. What has happened is that the shoe is seen as only a potential hammer when we look around the flat in the context of 'hammer-ability'. In a more general sense we are looking at the shoe in the framework of a useful performance for the specific task of hammering the nail into the wall. We are going beyond the simple fact that a shoe is a shoe by suggesting there is a new use for it.

The third example is the case of a medical doctor who makes a diagnosis. The doctor will not be concerned with every mental and physical attribute of the patient but only with the facts which will be relevant for the diagnosis. The doctor is looking for symptoms which seem to be relevant for the diagnosis, and tries to fit them in to a pattern which will suit his task. That is the symptoms will be recognised as the symptoms of a certain disease. The doctor is then able to make a diagnosis and provide treatment for the patient. But another doctor may come to an entirely different decision as he considers other symptoms as relevant to his own judgment about the nature of the disease, even though they agree on the symptoms that do exist.

The three examples have been given in order to show that disputes can arise on rational grounds even though there is an agreement on the facts, and rational discourse can continue, and so can disputes. In the first example, in spite of textual agreement, the dispute continues, and is about differing interpretations of the text. In the second example the dispute is about whether or not a particular object is suitable for a useful task in a practical activity. In the third example whether a particular pattern of symptoms can form the basis for a correct diagnosis. Notice that it is not being argued that the actual facts are irrelevant. In the textual example the new interpretation, in order to have any chance of being acceptable, must explain the actual text (the facts) in a new light, that is, it cannot ignore the text. The

facts have to be consistent with the new interpretation. In the hammer's case, the shoe must be seen to have the properties of a hammer, so a soft heeled shoe will not do. It must be seen to have the properties which will successfully bring about the practical activity of hammering a nail into a wall. The dispute is resolved when the shoe chosen successfully knocks the nail into the wall. In the third example the symptoms as facts must fit into a range of symptoms usually associated with a particular diagnosis but there may be a continued dispute about the actual range of symptoms, and the particular weighting to be given to them.

It is also the case that in the hammer example and the medical example, that we can look at the same facts from an entirely different point of view. For instance, we could admire a small statue or shoe from an aesthetic point of view and be concerned with their beauty or we might look at them from a utilitarian point of view and consider whether we can use them for the practical activity of banging a nail into a wall. In the medical example we may admire the beauty of the human body or be concerned with the diagnosis of a disease. Certain features of an object are given their significance by the way we consider them. If we look at an object from a different point of view we will consider them in a different way and make different judgments about them than if we looked at them from another point of view.

When we look at something from a particular viewpoint we are making judgments in accordance with the standards appropriate to that point of view. It is a recognition of this which leads us to understand that certain facts are important from one point of view but may not be from another. Many facts will have no meaning until we give them meaning by looking at them from a particular viewpoint. An example which demonstrates this (Brownhill and Smart, 1989) is the case of an old women walking down the street with a leather strap over her shoulder attached to a bag. A car draws up beside her and a man jumps out, gives her a shove, and the bag is snatched from her, the thief then proceeds to leap back into the car, which then disappears into the distance. We can look at this situation from a technical point of view and state how swift and efficient the robbery was, or we might look at it from a moral point of view and consider its iniquity. From the technical point of view its iniquity is irrelevant but from a moral point of view its swiftness and efficiency has nothing to do with the case. What is happening is that we are making an appraisal from different points of view and therefore taking into account different standards. It follows that different features of the happening will be relevant and have meaning according to the point of view we adopt and in accordance with the appropriate standards from the different points of view. A number of philosophers have looked at the world in a similar way to that given in our examples. It is suggested that we create a system of ideas in order that we are able to give meaning to the world around us. That we, in fact, can only understand the world after we have begun to organise our experience. It is an attempt to create some stability out of chaos so that the world now organised becomes more understandable to us. It is an attempt to give coherence to the world of experience in the collection of ideas we produce.

If we organise our experience in order to understand the world, where does the truth lie? It is related to the concept of coherence but nevertheless as shown in our examples, it is also related to neutral facts. The argument is that it is not absolutely possible to separate the real world from our experience of it. Our experience is shown in a world of ideas which we have organised and then communicate to other people. It is through this communication that we are able to understand the world and give it meaning, make it appear rational and ourselves objective. When we state that something has meaning we are stating that we understand it and that this enables us to communicate the meaning to other people. It is by putting our understanding into the public arena that we open it to debate and criticism and declare its objectivity. Of course, through the organisation of our ideas it is not possible or at least very difficult to give a complete understanding of the world, which can appear rational and coherent and attempt to explain everything. Oakeshott argues (Oakeshott, 1933) that this is why, in practice, we try and understand the world in more restricted ways, and under less ambitious constructs of ideas.

2 Modes of experience and forms of knowledge.

Oakeshott calls these restricted ways 'modes of experience'. They are developed as homogeneous and specific pictures of experience from different points of view. As we have seen they are restricted attempts to give coherence to our experience in order for us to understand the meaning of what we perceive. As they are from differing viewpoints, they are independent of each other. He gives four obvious examples: practice, science, poetry, and history.

As each mode is independent, we can consider it to be autonomous, with no direct relationship with another, for it looks at the world in a different way, having developed its own language, ways of expressing its reasoning, and own standards appropriate to the mode. This means that it is not really possible to have disagreements between the different modes, although a particular mode can be

rejected, e.g. Henry Ford's statement that history is bunk. Polanyi, making a similar point, also argued that although science and technology seemed similar they in fact were very different. The former was concerned with the furtherance of knowledge for its own sake and truth, but the latter was concerned with utility, practice, efficiency and profit, and was therefore tied to the market place (Brownhill and Merricks, 2002). Oakeshott argued that science examined the world under the category of quantity and is therefore mainly concerned with measurement. It develops systematic and coherent ideas that are related to this task, and also the specialised language needed to exchange ideas between the cognoscenti. The mode is autonomous in the sense that truth claims will be related to its coherence and that other ways of looking at the world will be irrelevant to it.

Paul Hirst (Hirst, 1974) made a similar analysis to Oakeshott's when he developed his concept of 'forms of knowledge', although O'Hear (O'Hear, 1981) argues that these are really forms of experience. Hirst argued how teachers had to take note of the different language and forms of argument appropriate to each subject when teaching it. He looked at how truth claims are assessed within the group who control the discourse. He calls this 'linguistic inter-subjectivity'. The group will need to have developed a framework of understanding which is compatible with each other. They also need to talk in a language and deal with concepts they all understand. Judgments and understandings come about within the specialised discourses (Shotter, 1993).

2 Interpretative frameworks

We have been looking at the organisation of experience in a highly specialised way by developing a general theory about how the world is experienced. Polanyi develops a more dynamic theory to explain the process, He does this by developing his concepts of an interpretative framework and tacit knowledge.

An interpretative framework provides a systematic way of looking at the world in a way that will give it some order and create stability. He argues that we look at things from the point of view of an interpretative framework so that we can understand and make judgments about them. A good example of an interpretative framework can be seen in a Marxist sociological approach (Brownhill and Smart, 1989). We can characterise such a framework in the following way. Each society will be a class society, the ruling class will control the means of production, and the state will be used by the ruling classes to maintain their power. The state will also have a parasitic but bureaucratic element in it, this will tend to formulate policies and actions in its own interests. The ruling class will initially be on the side of progress but when it has gained power it will hold back further progress to a liberal society. An attempt is being made to create a framework that is systematic, coherent, consistent. and importantly flexible so that it can manoeuvre or adapt to criticism. When an actual situation arises it will be investigated from the point of view of the framework. The framework tells the investigator what to look for, and will indicate what is relevant and what is not. The process of research will tend to confirm the validity of the approach, and contradictory evidence will tend to be interpreted a way, ignored or considered irrelevant. It may also be considered as a challenge to the framework but as an incentive to improve it, and make it better able to respond to criticism.

In practice conflict will be judged as class conflict, evidence will be found to indicate that the ruling class rule in their own interests, etc. Even language will be chosen to avoid challenging the framework. For instance, Marx (Marx, 1958), when examining the rule of Louis Phillipe, King of the French, finds that the bourgeoisie, the ruling class as a whole, are not ruling as they should be in the orthodox theory. In order to cope with this discrepancy, he calls the competing groups from the same class 'factions of the ruling class' and does not designate them as different classes. Lenin, at a more fundamental level, copes with the problem that capitalism has not collapsed in the world as a whole by developing a theory of imperialism, and at a later stage this develops into a theory of economic imperialism. In other words, ad hoc additions are made in order to preserve the framework and make it more flexible. The coherence and integrity of the framework is maintained in order to explain away the anomalies that have arisen in practice. This strategy to avoid successful criticism is the basis for Karl Popper's criticism of Marx as unscientific, and the basis for his criticism of interpretative frameworks *per se* (Popper, 1961). Polanyi argues that the very process of thinking involves making judgments, and that these can be understood only by looking at them from the framework from which they are produced (PK). He states that there are four possibilities when making a judgment:

1. A correct judgment in a correct interpretative framework.
2. A incorrect judgment in a correct interpretative framework.
3. A correct judgment within an incorrect interpretative framework.
4. A incorrect judgment within in an incorrect interpretative framework.

The argument is that judgments must take place within an interpretative framework and can only be understood within its context. We fit things into our

framework in order to make sense of them and therefore make judgments about them. Polanyi points out that theoretically there is another possibility and that is no judgment and no interpretative framework but this would apply to non thinking animals who have had parts of their brain removed, e.g., rats. However, this would be introducing new criteria, which would distinguish this possibility from the four others. Symbolically, then, we show the four possibilities as '++, -±, ±-, --' (Brownhill, 1968).

3 The social dimension

Harré (Harré, 1979) argues that when a social scientist develops theory it becomes obvious that the conceptual apparatus of the researcher is important and is used to identify relevant items from the complexity of human experience. A theory functions in two ways, it is involved in the creation and experiencing of facts but also strives to anticipate reality by moving beyond immediate experience and developing new concepts about what reality may be like.

All science has two related tactics. It has an analytic scheme required to reveal, identify, partition, and classify the items which make up an area of study. Then there is an explanatory scheme required to formulate theories descriptive of the mechanism productive of the items which are being analysed (Harré, 1979). The analytic schema helps us to find order, pattern, and meaning in the chaotic flow of human activity, for instance concepts like 'woman', 'driving', 'chatting', etc. Nevertheless, much activity is not taken into account, so more analytic concepts need to be generated to give a better understanding of the nature of reality. Concepts like 'barrier signals', relic gestures', 'tie signs', and 'status displays' enable us to improve our empirical study of social life. What is happening is that ordered patterns emerge and improve our explanations of phenomena. But how are these ordered patterns produced? In the natural sciences scientists try to discover the mechanism which produces the pattern. However, as the generative pattern is hidden from view the scientist will try to find a 'simulacrum' of the real but unknown pattern generator.

The imagined generative mechanism has to conform to some general description of how scientists think the real world is. This general description can be called a 'source model' (Harré, 1970). An explanatory method must be based on a source model or interpretative framework that makes our concepts coherent and credible to other researchers. These source models and interpretative frameworks are personal but need to become social constructs accepted by others if they are to be used within a research community and a discipline. This, of course, is really a rejection of the realist concept that the world is 'out there' to be understood. In fact, both Popper and Polanyi have argued that there is an inquirer, the subject to understand, and a reality, the object to be understood. Popper argued that our knowledge was 'theory laden', and Polanyi that our knowledge could only be classed as personal rather than strictly speaking objective and, that could only approximate to the real world. Why stick to the concept of the real world 'out there'? Why not look at them as purely personal constructs (Kelly, 1955)? This challenged and indeed destroyed the notion that we could remain objective in testing our concepts against the real world, although Popper with his notion of falsification hung on to it (Popper, 1972). Polanyi argued that, although we claimed objectivity for them, personal knowledge (personal constructs) provided differing notions of reality which were developed in specialist communities, who within the communities looked at the world in a special way with their own language, rules, principles, standards and methodological to explain the world. They provided interpersonal constructs to explain the world and participate in their own 'game'. It is the case, however, that as Polanyi was concerned with pure science, the interpersonal knowledge was always grounded in the tangible facts of the case, although he argued that what was the most tangible was the least real, and that higher levels of theorising gave greater levels of objectivity (PK). In the case of much of social science this is not always the case. For instance, the notion of the social construction of reality is expressed in discourse psychology in the work of Harré and Gillett (Harré and Gillett, 1994), and their development of Wittgenstein's study of meaning in his *Philosophical Investigations* (Wittgenstein. 1953).

The question arises as to what is the criteria of truth for these personal and social constructs which generate theories? For a traditional scientist the answer would be, 'Are the facts in accordance with reality?' That would be an expression of the correspondence theory as a justification of truth claims. However, there can be no proper criterion of truth for construct theories. The only basis for any claim to be objective and rational is that they hang together, they are coherent, and that they are not internally contradictory, as they are consistent and follow the rules of logic. (This would be Oakeshott's position but not Polanyi's as he claimed to be a realist. This led him to argue that simulacra or models were intended to be revelations of reality. This was also related to his idea of heuristic passion and the researcher's commitment to his theory.) These have to be the criteria of truth. Researchers try to gain social agreement for a way of looking at phenomena under review. In practice this means that they have to make public their reflections and allow

them to be critically examined by other practitioners in the hope of arriving at some consensual agreement. This is the attempt to be as objective as possible, as the public dialogue is a form of objectivity. where a theory has to stand on its own feet, and meet most of the criticisms made against it, if it is to be acceptable and become part of the consensus. An objection could be made that this is not really objectivity but a subjective or inter-subjective approach, and in fact relies entirely on the passions and commitments of the theory-constructors with the possibility that they could be entirely wrong. In order to understand phenomena both researchers, in this sense of theory-constructors, and practitioners need to attempt to gain an 'in depth understanding of a situation'. Harré and Gillett state:

> This requires the kind of understanding Weber calls verstehen. It is based on emphatic identification with the other which helps the observer make sense of what the other is doing. Such an approach to the understanding of behaviour can be sensitive to the subtleties of the situation of the other in a way that attempts to identify and isolate a surveyable number of objective independent variables cannot be. (Harré and Gillett, 1994, p.20)

They go on to argue that:

> We should say that we need to know what a situation means to a person and not just what the situations is (say, according to a description in terms of physical characteristics as these are seen by an observer.) if we are to understand what a person is doing. (Harré and Gillett. 1994, pp. 20-21)

This brings us to another dimension of the inter-subjective approach. If they are personal or social constructs they are fighting for their mental existence. This internal struggle of communities for theory dominance can be seen in Polanyi's 'Republic of Science' (Polanyi, 1962), where there is a potential conflict between the claims of the discovering scientist and the decision of the scientific community. He euphemistically calls the decision of the scientific community consensus based on the network of knowledge possessed by scientists in general but, in fact, it is really a power struggle between members of the community for theory dominance, and an attempt to gain allies, and supporters by argument and persuasion. (Brownhill, 1983) Like all communities the community of scientists has an internal power structure with top professors, grant distributors, editors of journals, referees, etc. In a sense the criterion of 'truth' is acceptance by the decision of the community.

There is another power dimension, for internally an intellectual community is bound together by a particular way of looking at the world, but it can come into conflict with other communities looking at the world in a different way but nevertheless claiming the same ground, e.g., Aristotelian and Newtownian science, Lamarckian and Darwinian evolutionary theories, Freudian and Adlerian psychology, etc. All are ultimately based on a faith in their own source model or interpretative framework, and the passions and commitments to the content of their framework.

4 Conclusion

The discussion we have made about points of view, modes of experience, forms of knowledge, interpretative frameworks, and source models is of the utmost importance for education and training. When we look at something through a mode of experience or form of knowledge we will also use interpretative frameworks to give us even greater control over phenomena. Indeed, Charles Taylor (Taylor, 1989) gives us a much wider attempt at classification through 'world pictures', for instance, the Aristotelian view of the world, the Cartesian view, the Newtownian view, etc. As we have seen, students need to develop the ability to recognise and distinguish the differing ways that experience is organised. They also need to develop the appropriate language in the right way within the modes, interpretative frameworks, etc. A major aim of education and training must be to develop skills akin to a connoisseur, so that eventually they will have developed the skills to make independent judgments. There is of course, an alternative view that moves the concept of learning within the social dimension to a much more individualist approach (Brownhill, 2002).

This way of thinking about education and training relates to the concept of power. This is recognised by Polanyi who states:

> Education is latent knowledge, of which we are aware subsidiarily in our sense of intellectual power based on this knowledge. (PK p. 103)

He means by this that we cannot be certain of the extent of our knowledge, as it is not something we automatically recognise. However, the knowledge is something we know we possess, and we recognise its power to give us mastery over a subject. In the intellectual field it would mean we had developed the conceptual power and ability to recognise instances of our knowledge, and the ability to go beyond this and recognise new instances, and fit them in their turn into or framework of knowledge. We would have developed the ability to bring stability to these new instances by rejecting their randomness and controlling them by fitting them into the framework we already possessed. We therefore would have developed the ability to make them understandable to ourselves and others. This is a dynamic concept of education and training as it is a method not just of assimilating information, but of taking it in, understanding it and making use of it. It

is also not a passive concept of just developing abilities and then waiting for problems and questions to emerge. It is achievement oriented, where we look for questions and problems, and attempt to solve and resolve them, and in this way attempt to extend our control of things previously unknown to us.

We have also looked at the concept of knowledge. Polanyi would argue that all our explicit knowledge exists eventually within a tacit framework. It is surrounded by a whole range of known and unknown assumptions that give rise to the explicit knowledge and give it context and meaning. These assumptions provide the framework for our judgments. It is, of course possible to make some of this tacit knowledge known, i.e., explicit but we probably cannot make it all explicit as it is based on a regression of assumptions.

This means that we can never be absolutely certain that we are correct in our knowledge claims since they are fuzzy edged (Brennan, 1971), as our explicit knowledge fades into its partially tacit framework. To say that we know is a matter of judgment on our part, and because of this, even if we are firmly committed to it, it will still be open to criticism and argument. It has been argued that knowledge exists within a social context and within public debate. Truth claims are assessed, and it is the public (consisting of other experts) in the debate that gives, or fails to give, the claims the status of truth. The public can also be wrong in their assessment because the knowledge by which they judge the truth claims is also fuzzy edged. The public will compare new claims with knowledge they already possess, accepted knowledge but this can be wrong, so the debate in this sense is never ending.

As the experts know more they can tell, they realise that they can pass on more they can make explicit. They can do this by showing the students how to look at the world in a certain way, for instance, how to look at their experience from the point of view of an art expert (Brown and Brownhill, 1998), how to develop the knowledge, skills and abilities of the expert, not only the ability to make judgments in a way appropriate to the subject matter but how to engage in public debate with other experts. As teachers and trainers they will instruct the students in explicit knowledge, they can give them chunks of information but they are also able to impart abilities, including the ability to make judgments. Abilities and the ability to make judgments are picked up by the students, and by their own attempt to make judgments, and by watching and copying their teacher, and also some of the teacher's style and ability to give a performance. Brown and Brownhill point out discussing art education that:

> Each artist provides a critique. So by watching the teacher/trainer and practising what is perceived in an intelligent manner the student is delving into the tacit knowledge of the teacher. This teacher student relationship mimics, for instance, the master/apprenticeship relationship found in art. It is a feeding on the skills of the master until the student's own mastery is sometimes realised, and the student's own originality can begin to assert itself The students may become themselves experts with their own ability to perform and make judgments. (Brown and Brownhill, 1998)

Jarvis (Jarvis, 1987) argues that throughout our lives we are learning, that it is personal and made up of our experience of the world around us. In a sense we are organising the world to give it meaning, and it therefore becomes part of ourselves and our own autobiography, 'At the heart of life is the process of learning'. He goes on to argue that 'Learning is the transformation of experience into knowledge, skills and attitudes ...' We are then continually trying to understand the world, organising this understanding, and attempting to make use of it, in order to increase our knowledge and improve our skills. This continual process of learning effects our whole being and makes us what we are.

Haselmere

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POLANYI AMONG THE THEOLOGIANS

Tony Clark

1 Introduction

On 21st February 1963 Michael Polanyi and Paul Tillich came together in conversation. Tillich asked Polanyi whether Christianity had any relevance for his project. Polanyi's response, as it is recorded in the notes that he made, is worth quoting in full:

> You have said that the irrelevance of Christianity can be overcome only by passing through the darkness of existential despair. You have said that the faith which rises from this depth will embrace its own doubt. It will live as a perennial, unresolvable tension in us. My theory of knowledge takes this as its paradigm. It is shaped by the image of what I understand to be the Pauline scheme of redemption. Having to face the fact that no knowledge can be set free of conceivable doubt, and that an idea created by scientific originality is a solitary conviction, ready to face universal doubt, I conclude that it is of the essence of knowledge that it can be held to be true only by an unceasing mental effort.
>
> Such is the nature of that active indwelling by which we make sense of the world. To know is a personal striving. It is a striving that responds to an obligation, imposed on us by intimations of a hidden reality that demands of us to grasp it. Knowledge is alive so long as it knows itself to be incomplete, by pointing indefinitely beyond its manifest content. [1]

This response to Tillich offers us an important insight into Polanyi's relationship with Christianity. Against a culture which has not yet fully emerged from an objectivist view of science, Polanyi insists that the knowledge of science is the product of human skill and endeavour. It is an achievement which can be sustained only by the belief through which it came to light. In order to establish this Polanyi finds it useful to adopt some of the language of the Christian church in his discussion of scientific knowledge. This is the scandal of Polanyi's philosophy in the context of modernity: the language of 'belief and 'faith' is utilised in both religious and scientific knowledge. The significance of Christianity for Polanyi's project, in his own mature estimation, is the capacity of its fiduciary language to correct the distorting, depersonalising, objectivist concepts which were dominant in the natural sciences.[2]

The fiduciary theme in Polanyi's epistemology is a substantial element in his work and it is established early in his career as a philosopher. Already evident in *Science, Faith and Society*,[3] Polanyi works out this theme most thoroughly in *Personal Knowledge*.[4] Polanyi sees himself as a 'post-critical' thinker emerging out of a period of Enlightenment rationalism and he is fond enlisting the support of St Augustine — a 'post-critical' thinker who emerged out of an era of Greek rationalist thought. Polanyi always cites Augustine with approval: 'He taught that all knowledge was a gift of grace, for which we must strive under the guidance of antecedent belief: *nisi credideritis, non intelligitis*.'[5] In this way we see Polanyi drawing upon what he discerned as the wisdom of the Christian tradition and it is clear that he is profoundly impressed by this epistemological insight integral to the Christian faith as it is understood by Augustine. However, Polanyi's embrace of the Christian faith was far from unqualified and both his understanding of it and participation in it were truncated to a considerable degree. Polanyi's enthusiastic employment of certain Christian insights is matched by his resistance to others. The Jesuit scholar Martin Moleski points to an illuminating example of this when he comments, 'It seems ironic that Polanyi used religious imagery to depict a self-revealing universe, but denied the same kind of power to a self-revealing God.'[6] This ambiguity in Polanyi's relationship with the Christian tradition is a factor which must be taken into account as we consider the place of Polanyi among the theologians.

2 Polanyi's writings on religion

The task which Polanyi explicitly sets himself in *Personal Knowledge* is to enquire into, 'the nature and justification of scientific knowledge.'[7] But he goes on to add, 'my reconsideration of scientific knowledge leads on to a wide range of questions outside science.'[8] This work was his *magnum opus* and the scope of his concerns in it is an indication of the scope of his concerns more generally as a philosopher. Polanyi starts with science and epistemological questions in science and then moves on to consider other matters. One of the 'questions outside science' to which Polanyi is led is that of religion. But how does Polanyi pose this question? A brief survey of Polanyi's work as it relates to religion will serve to illuminate the nature of his engagement.

Polanyi's scope of scholarship is often breathtaking and he has the ability to weave together diverse and complex themes within relatively small compass. It would be impossible to give an exhaustive account of everything Polanyi has written on religion but it is possible to point to the

works which exhibit a concentration upon the theme. It is to this task which I shall now turn.

1 *Personal Knowledge*

In *Personal Knowledge* there are two passages in which we find exposition of religious themes. They are found between pages 195-202 and 279-286 under the headings, 'Dwelling In and Breaking Out' and 'Religious Doubt'.[9] Here the theme of religion is conceived in terms of 'articulate systems'. Such systems do not lend themselves to exhaustive description; rather they are what Polanyi calls 'happy dwelling places of the mind'.[10] Our choice to indwell an articulate system[11] is a matter of faith: one cannot demonstrate, in an explicit and exhaustive way, the truth or falsity of any particular articulate system taken as a whole. This is so for any articulate system and it is true for religion. It ought also to be noted that every articulate system is an elaboration of anterior experience. The anterior experience which the articulate system of religion elaborates is, according to Polanyi, the supernatural.

As may be the case with other articulate systems there is, in addition to our indwelling of it, a 'breaking out' of this system or 'frame' by which we apprehend the world. In contemplation our participation is, at least for a moment, changed and instead of 'handling' the things we experience we are 'immersed' in them. This may be a moment in which we come to see things differently and our conceptual grasp of that which we comprehend both modified and strengthened. It is in this context of this discussion that Polanyi speaks of the experience of the religious mystic. The path to God is found in the sustained effort at detachment from *all* frames of knowledge:

> The whole framework of intelligent understanding ... sinks into abeyance and uncovers a world of experience uncomprehendingly as divine miracle. The process is known in Christian mysticism as the *via negativa* and the tradition which prescribes it as the only perfect path to God stems from the *Mystic Theology* of Pseudo-Dionysius. It invites us, through a succession of 'detachments', to seek in absolute ignorance union with Him who is beyond all being and all knowledge. We see things not focally, but as part of a cosmos, as features of God.[12]

Polanyi comprehends this state in salvific terms. The mystic's detached contemplation is his surrender to the love of God made in the hope of receiving forgiveness and being received into God's presence. But there is no resolution: 'The ritual worship is expressly designed to induce and sustain this state of anguish, surrender and hope. The moment a man were to claim that he had arrived and could now happily contemplate his own perfection, he would be thrown back into spiritual emptiness.'[13] This is a striking feature of Polanyi's understanding of religion and one to which he gives considerable emphasis in *Personal Knowledge*.[14] The believer's indwelling of the articulate system which is the Christian faith is perpetually uncomfortable and unresolved. Unlike the problems of the scientist, for whom a discovery resolves the tension, 'Christian worship sustains, as it were, an eternal, never to be consummated hunch: a heuristic vision which is accepted for the sake of its unresolved tension'.[15] Polanyi suggests that the Christian worshipper may be comforted by the image (though only the image) of 'a crucified God'[16].

2 *Meaning*

In Polanyi's last published book, *Meaning*[17], the subject of religion is revisited. On this occasion the situation is complicated by the fact that, due to Polanyi's advancing years[18] and his waning powers of concentration, the work was co-authored by philosopher Harry Prosch. In the preface Prosch insists that, 'Substantively ... this is Michael Polanyi's work. These are his ideas, expressed for the greater part in his own language. In the work I have done on his lectures I have not consciously altered any of the ideas he has expressed in his numerous published and unpublished works'.[19] Chapter 10 of *Meaning*, is entitled 'Acceptance of Religion'. It is apparent that the material in this chapter is drawn from an unpublished lecture by Polanyi which has the same title.[20] It is striking that, despite the title, the material of Polanyi's lecture contains only six paragraphs at the end of the piece which deal directly with religious matters. In *Meaning*, however, we find a large amount of material about the Holy Communion, praise, prayer, ritual and worship.[21]

The scope of Polanyi's concerns expressed in *Meaning* is very broad. Its approach is substantially distinct from that found in *Personal Knowledge* in that that the dominant conceptuality shifts from the fiduciary component of knowledge and the indwelling of articulate systems to that of tacit integration and the integration of incompatibles in particular. At the heart of this work is Polanyi's identification and description of the integrating processes involved in all knowing. We read, 'all meaningful integrations (including those achieved in science) exhibit a triadic structure consisting of the subsidiary, the focal, and the person'.[22] In *Meaning* it is in the imaginative process of integration that the personal nature of knowledge (always central to Polanyi's project) is emphasised. Polanyi explores the nature of this integrating process in metaphor, art and myth and, indeed, religion[23]. Here, as in the other realms of thought, Polanyi tries to show that the meanings established are attained through what he calls the 'integration of incompatibles'.

There is strong evidence to suggest that in chapter ten of *Meaning* Prosch has substantially fleshed-out the material Polanyi himself wrote.[24] Prosch may well have felt justified in applying Polanyi's concepts of integration to a variety of Christian-religious themes but, in my opinion, this creates an impression that Polanyi's interest in these themes was far deeper that was the case in this particular period of Polanyi's life.

3. Other Significant Articles

I would like to make brief mention of three articles penned by Polanyi: 'Faith and Reason'[25], 'Science and Religion'[26] and an unpublished paper, 'About Religious Faith'.[27] These articles are significant, but not in the way that one might suspect. Despite their titles none of the three pieces deal with religious or theological themes except in as far as they illuminate the epistemological theme which is their main concern.

'Faith and Reason' contains an exposition of Polanyi's distinction between focal and subsidiary knowledge. He looks at medical diagnostics, scientific discovery and goes on to challenge the traditional division which is made between faith and reason (scientific knowledge being associated with the latter) in which it is supposed that reason proceeds by logical deduction or inductive generalisation. Polanyi insists that our reasoning powers are void of meaning without a context of informal or tacit assumptions which we cannot fully articulate. Polanyi comments, 'Once this is recognised, the contrast between faith and reason dissolves, and the close similarity of this structure emerges in its place'.[28] Polanyi's task in this article is to draw attention to the harmony between faith and reason and illuminate the continuities between scientific and religious knowing.

The scope of 'Science and Religion' is somewhat broader. Here Polanyi rehearses the familiar themes of tacit and focal knowledge, indwelling, and the insights of Gestalt. However, he goes on to reiterate the themes of hierarchy and dual control, found in the latter part of Personal Knowledge and elsewhere, on the basis that, 'an adequate theory of knowledge must involve a true conception of man and the universe and be supported by it'.[29] Polanyi's hierarchical ontology leads on, he believes, to a cosmic vision which may resonate with some of the basic teachings of Christianity. Polanyi suggests, 'If this project succeeds, it would achieve a more satisfactory reconciliation of human convictions, than would the acknowledgement of strictly separate dimensions for science and religion'.[30] Here, as in 'Faith and Reason', Polanyi wishes to demonstrate, 'the close neighbourhood of science and religion to which a [i.e., Polanyi's] revised theory of knowledge leads us'.[31]

The final piece of the three is 'About Religious Faith'. This was written at a time when Polanyi's mental powers were waning. Nevertheless, many familiar themes are present. In this paper he reflects on the disasters of European history, the phenomenon of moral inversion, the dangers of reductionism and the processes of tacit integration. However, in spite of the title, Polanyi barely touches on the matter of religion. We reach the final paragraph of the paper before Polanyi tells us:

> This is briefly what I wanted to say; namely that the progress of science is less significant for our fates and ways, as we are immersed in a system of emotional powers by which—or against and beyond which—lies all that we can do for the sake of men and their religious existence.[32]

I am not entirely clear what Polanyi means, here, but he is clearly suggesting that religion has a weightier bearing than science on the meaning of human existence.

3 Evaluation of Polanyi's writings on religion

1. Working from science to religion

Polanyi, as philosopher, is tireless in his efforts to establish epistemological themes and seeking to establish their significance across a broad range of concern. He is a systematiser. We see this in the 'articulate systems' of *Personal Knowledge* and the 'integration of incompatibles' of *Meaning*. In the first passage of *Personal Knowledge* in which Polanyi deals with religious themes,[33] he is considering mystical contemplation as a particular case of the general phenomenon of 'breaking out' of an articulate system. He has already considered the significance of this scheme for scientific discovery, now he is looking to apply it in other spheres. In the second passage,[34] he considers the nature of doubt and indwelling in relation to Christian worship, having reflected more generally on the theme of belief and doubt and upon its significance in scientific progress. In *Meaning*[35] the theme of integration of in compatibles—as a particular form of tacit integration—is applied to religious practice having been expounded in relation to art, metaphor and myth. I have also offered a very brief exposition of three articles which purport to be on the theme of faith and religion and I would submit that one striking feature common to all three pieces of work is their failure to deal in any substantial way with their theme as it is indicated in the title.

Polanyi is a systematiser: he comes to religion with his systematising scheme in hand having already considered the scheme's significance for scientific enquiry. He never starts with 'religion', 'religious belief, or 'Christianity' as a phenomenon, and nor does he appear to derive his systematising

schemes from an indwelling of the religious life. Polanyi starts with the nature of scientific knowledge and it is here (and from within his own deep indwelling in the life of science) that his ideas emerge. We do well to remind ourselves that for the first half of his working life Polanyi was a physical chemist—a scientific researcher and, indeed, a researcher of international repute. Polanyi knows about science from his deep engagement with it and when he raises epistemological questions in relation to science it must be said, emphatically, that he knows what he is talking about.

2 Polanyi's failure to do justice to the phenomenon of religion

Polanyi gives the appearance of being either unwilling or unable to deal in a direct way with the phenomena of religious faith, practice and tradition.[36] When Polanyi refers to religious themes it is nearly always when he is engaged in one of two tasks: either he is considering religion in terms of an epistemological scheme (formulated in the context of science) or he is demonstrating degrees of continuity across religious and scientific knowledge; of faith and reason. In both endeavours the phenomenon of religious belief and practice is either truncated or completely ignored.

There is no space, and, indeed, I do not think it is of great importance, to make detailed criticisms of what Polanyi does say about religion. However, I do wish to make some summary remarks.

A central and surprising weakness in Polanyi's treatment of religion is his failure to recognise the corporate nature of its life and dissemination. This is a surprising failing because Polanyi's understanding of the communal aspects of science is acute. Indeed, his appreciation of the dynamics of the inculcation of skills, connoisseurship and his ideas about conviviality cry out for consideration in his treatment of religion, but Polanyi fails to make the connections. I would suggest that this is because of the great emphasis which he places on the mystical tradition within the Christian faith.[37]

If we are to take Polanyi's comments on religion to refer primarily to the Christian faith, a further set of issues come into focus. Where, in Polanyi's exposition, do we hear of Christ, the eternal Logos, the incarnate One, who is of one substance with the Father? Where is an acknowledgement of the God of revelation? Where is recognition of the Holy Spirit? Where does Polanyi explore the authority of Holy Scripture, the creeds and confessions of the church? He may touch on such matters in passing, but they play no formative part in his analysis of religion.

It has been debated at some length whether Polanyi's God exists independently of our thought about him,[38] and I doubt whether Polanyi sustains a consistent position on the question. But, to the extent to which a positive response can be given, Polanyi's God is one who may allow us to search for him but is hardly a God who takes the initiative —a God who searches for us: a God of prevenient grace.

3 An emerging theme

Despite the serious inadequacies of Polanyi's treatment of religion one is often left with a sense that Polanyi has a positive disposition towards religion and to Christianity in particular. For periods of his life he attended Christian worship; he was part of J. H. Oldham's group, 'the Moot'—which was largely attended by Christians. He had many Christian friends and acquaintances—Oldham among them—and in later life he developed a friendship with T. F. Torrance who became his literary executor after his death. As we have seen, Polanyi had associations with Paul Tillich and worked closely with theologian Richard Gelwick towards the end of his life.

I would suggest that one theme which emerges in a careful reading of Polanyi's comments on religion is an attitude of goodwill. I suspect that he may also have felt a degree of sadness and disappointment as one who perhaps never felt a sense of belonging in the context of a religious or Christian community, but his writings do reveal a concern for, if not a vigorous participation in, the Christian faith and its institutions. One gains the impression that, as Polanyi sees things, religion in general, and Christianity particular, have been dealt a 'bad hand' by Enlightenment rationalism. It is in the correcting of some of the distortions of this tradition that Polanyi believes that the possibilities for a vibrant religion—and a vibrant Christianity—may re-emerge.

I think that Polanyi's positive disposition towards religion and Christianity is discernible both in the general trajectory of some of his arguments and in certain specific comments. As I have already noted, the thrust of both 'Faith and Reason' and 'Science and Religion' is to challenge the belief of modernity that the ways of knowing in faith and reason, and science and religion, are fundamentally distinct. Polanyi's epistemology illuminates the role of belief in scientific knowledge and offers a damning critique of science conceived as an impersonal, value-free and objective endeavour. Polanyi shows that there is a greater degree of continuity between religious and scientific knowledge than has generally been acknowledged. Their subject matter is to be distinguished, of course, and, indeed, Polanyi's concept of hierarchy and understanding of the nature of 'reality'[39] lead him to acknowledge religion as the pre-eminent locus in which human meaning is to be found. As such the meanings of religion are to be acknowledged as of greater

importance to humanity than the meanings found in science.

In *The Tacit Dimension*,[40] in the context of an affirmation of a traditionalism which requires belief as a precondition of knowledge, Polanyi reminds us that his purpose in making this move is not primarily to support religious dogma. However, he does think it may be of value to the claims of religion:

> I admit that my reaffirmation of traditionalism might have a bearing on religious thought, but I want to set this aside here. Modern man's critical incisiveness must be reconciled with his unlimited moral demands, first of all, on secular grounds. The enfeebled authority of revealed religion cannot achieve this reconciliation; it may rather hope to be revived by its achievement.[41]

Polanyi sees religion as disempowered, but entertains the thought that if the distortions of modernity are corrected it may once more emerge as a force. This view is underlined in the last paragraph of the book. Polanyi, reflecting upon humanity's need for a purpose bearing on eternity, writes:

> Perhaps this problem cannot be resolved on secular grounds alone. But its religious solution should become more feasible once religious faith is released from pressure by an absurd vision of the universe, and so there will open up instead a meaningful world which could resound to religion.[42]

This theme of reconstituted epistemology *paving the way for religion* finds as strong echo in *Meaning*. Polanyi concludes his consideration of the theme of religion in this book by commenting,

> this present work is not directed toward effecting conversions to any religion. At the most, it is directed toward unstopping our ears so that we may hear the liturgical summons should one ever come our way.[43]

Polanyi's post-critical philosophy is an impassioned attempt to correct the depersonalising and reductionistic traits of Enlightenment thought. It is as a scientist he discerned the disjuncture between the way in which scientific knowledge is gained and the representation of this process in the philosophy of his day. The significance of religion in this, for Polanyi, is to be noted at two points: one is his anticipation that an epistemology freed from some of its fundamental errors will be more conducive to religious belief, and the other is his insight that the introduction of elements of religious language and conceptuality into the language of epistemology is part of the corrective process. In the latter Polanyi is indebted to religion and in the former it seems that he believes that (in an indeterminate and indirect way) he is working in the service of the emancipation of religion.

4 Polanyi's place among the theologians

Having offered a brief summary and evaluation of Polanyi's comments on religion we must proceed to assess Polanyi's place among the theologians. On the one hand it is clear why Polanyi has had such a significant influence among the theologians.[44] In both his employment of religious language in his general epistemology and his attack on the dualisms of 'faith and reason' and 'science and religion' his contribution is a congenial one in theological work. On the other hand, because of his failure to deal, in any adequate way, with the phenomena of religious life and thought, and his tendency to approach religious themes in the light of *a priori* conceptualities forged in the crucible of his engagement with scientific thought, his work can disappoint the theological reader of his work especially when writing on theological or religious topics.

It is not surprising that there has been a contentious debate about what Polanyi believed about religion. As we have noted above, there have been disagreements about whether or not Polanyi held a realist understanding of the existence of God. Close collaborators came to quite different conclusions about Polanyi's personal Christian convictions and this is illustrated by the comments of T. F. Torrance and Harry Prosch.[45] On the one hand Torrance writes of Polanyi's, 'deep Christian commitment influenced particularly by St Paul's teaching about redemption and Augustine's stress upon faith as the door to understanding'.[46] On the other hand Prosch comments: 'At one point Polanyi did seem to think of himself as a fully practising Christian. When I knew him he obviously was not one'.[47]

Martin Moleski is surely correct when he writes, 'Because of Polanyi's lack of formal training in theology and because of his independence from any particular Christian tradition, it may be somewhat unfair to expect precision and clarity from him in his reflection on religious issues'.[48] If this is so, as I believe it is, the kind of enquiry which seek to get to the consistent heart of Polanyi's position, or to establish Polanyi's position in relation to one strand or other of the Christian faith, is fundamentally flawed. While Polanyi sees the significance of religion for his work and, conversely, sees significance in his work for religion, these possibilities are not explored in relation to any explicit understanding of religion or (and more significantly) from any deep commitment to any particular religious tradition.

The great strength of Polanyi as a philosopher of science was his profound knowledge of practical science. Marjorie Grene, a philosopher who

collaborated with Polanyi for several years, believes that this is one of the things which set him apart:

> [H]e came to the problem, raised it and grappled with it from within the life of science. It was knowledge in the concrete context of existence, the existence of science and scientists, that he was concerned to vindicate. What resulted was often obscure, sometimes mistaken, and couched in a rhetoric that most professional philosophers find hard to tolerate; but it was a philosophy rooted in reality, neither the clever gymnastics of analysis, nor the prophylactic debate of a philosophy of science based on a grave misconception of, and almost entirely out of contact with its alleged subject matter.[49]

This rich engagement in science must be contrasted with Polanyi's comparatively sparse involvement in the Christian church and theological traditions. He did have some knowledge of Christian worship and was aware of the work of a small number of theologians—notably Paul Tillich. But Polanyi's participation in and knowledge of these was extremely limited.

It is my opinion that Polanyi's comments on religion and theology have little to offer the theologian but this does not lead me to conclude that his work, as a whole, is to be disregarded by the theologian. Moleski makes the point that, 'one may have an epistemology like Polanyi's but not share his theology'.[50] This is because, 'The theological implications of epistemology derive from additional *assumptions* about the nature of divine reality and the possibility and content of divine revelation'.[51]

I think Polanyi's work has a great deal to offer to the theological task. However, the way in which Polanyi is taken up in theology must, in my estimation, be subjected to careful methodological scrutiny.

Any science must allow its methods to be formed and to develop in response to the object of its concern. Theology, too, must adopt a methodology wherein it is faithful to its object and to the extent to which theology does this it might be regarded as a 'science'. Indeed, according to Karl Barth:

> The only way which theology has of proving its scientific character is to devote itself to the task of knowledge as determined by its actual theme and thus to show what it means by true science.[52]

As such theology does not forsake its theme by subjugating or correlating it to the concerns of the natural sciences but ascribes the epithet of 'science' to theology precisely because it is faithful to its 'object'—the revelation of God in Christ—and is so in a rigorous and systematic way.

Much more could be said about the 'object' of theology. I would certainly want to point the importance of the church as the community of believers established by God's revelation and the significance of participation in that community with its biblical, credal and doxological heritage. Christian theology is reflection upon, and a humble attempt to purify and clarify, the church's language about God which it ventures in response to God's revelation.

Polanyi's religious and theological views, even if they can be understood as a coherent whole, cannot, in my opinion, be received uncritically by the church. Indeed, if my evaluation of his contribution in this sphere is correct, it would be better if they were put quietly to one side and forgotten. But Polanyi's epistemological insights are of a different order. It may be that many of them were established in consideration of issues rooted in the scientific community but they illuminate philosophical distortions deeply rooted in the contours of Western thought. Such distortions do not cease at the doors of the church or the desk of the theologian.

The task of theology is a human one and although it must contend with God's self-revelation it cannot hold God in its hand as capital. It must deal with revelation as the recollection of an event and it must utilise language, concepts and philosophies which are ready to hand. Of course there is nothing absolute about any of these things: they are always imperfect and inadequate for the task and they must be adapted, transformed and developed under pressure from the object of theology. Theology's task is, inevitably, an ongoing one. If Polanyi has identified errors, into which Western patterns of thought have fallen, his corrective will be of importance for theology to the degree to which it has itself fallen into the same errors.

Polanyi did believe that in taking up Augustine's motto, '*nisi credideritis, non intelligitis*', that he was returning to something that had been lost. He also realised that he was drawing from the wisdom of the Christian tradition even if he knew relatively little about its context. Trevor Hart makes the point that in drawing on Polanyi's thought, 'we are reclaiming insights and emphases once borrowed from Christian theology, but which in the climate of modernity, theologians themselves have too often been afraid to own'.[53]

Polanyi's work, drawing on his experience in science, returned to science a clarity and integrity which was palpably absent in its efforts to articulate its own processes. He recognised that in his endeavour to establish and justify the nature of scientific knowledge he would be lead into many fields outside of science. We might wish that when Polanyi came to consider theology he might have brought the same depth of insight to this discipline as he had brought to the natural sciences. However, we must frankly acknowledge that Polanyi was not sufficiently equipped for such a task and was unable to do it.

Nevertheless, I see no reason why Polanyi's project, conceived primarily as one of epistemological correction,[54] cannot be applied in theological studies. This can be achieved by one who shares the insight which Polanyi established and who is immersed in theological discourse. As we have already indicated, there are many theologians who have utilised Polanyi's work. In the final section I will expound some aspects of the work of just one theologian who has taken up the ideas of Michael Polanyi in this way—Colin Gunton.

5 The adoption of Polanyi's in the theology of Colin Gunton

I turn to the work of Colin Gunton to provide an example of how Polanyi's work has been harnessed by a theologian. I make no attempt at a comprehensive account of Gunton's use of Polanyi, nor do I imply that he is representative of other theologians who have adopted Polanyi's insights. Nevertheless, it is my view that Gunton is a theologian who has shown how Polanyi's insights can be taken up in ways which are faithful to theology's own distinctive task.

Gunton indicates his own relationship to Polanyi in the following comment:

> There has developed in recent years something of a Polanyi cult, accompanied, as is often the case with cults, by an equally disdainful refusal on the part of those do not share in it to take him seriously. I do not wish to share in that cult, but rather to draw from him certain aids to reflection, and in particular ... a broad contrast between two fundamentally different approaches to knowledge, which can be called the critical and the postcritical.[55]

1 Individualism

Following Polanyi, Gunton highlights the inadequacies of the individualism of the critical approach associated with our Enlightenment heritage. Gunton asks, 'What alternative [to individualism] does the post-critical thesis have to offer?'[56] He answers, bluntly, 'It is the doctrine that without a community—its traditions, its language, its structures of authority—there can be no knowledge'.[57]

Gunton sees the potential in Polanyi's work for theology but he is aware of his failure to discern the communal dimensions of religious knowing. Following comments on the communal and relational aspects of knowledge in Polanyi's epistemology Gunton writes, 'The implications of this for theology are immense if we conceive it as taking shape in personal relations or sets of relations'.[58] But it is precisely here that Polanyi is so weak because 'he failed to extend to theological knowing the insights he had developed elsewhere'.[59]

But there are connections to be made, even if Polanyi did not make them. Gunton remarks on the kinship between Polanyi's idea of indwelling and the place of humankind in the Genesis creation stories. Following an exposition of Polanyi's understanding of indwelling in relation to community, Gunton writes:

> If it is not to leap too quickly to theological conclusions, we can note already how similar this is to the kind of things said of the creation of the human world in the opening chapters of Genesis. Created from the dust (Genesis 2), man is not God omnipotent or omniscient—but part of that which is created ... Polanyi's theory of knowledge and its understanding of the relation of person and world runs parallel to the most straightforward interpretation of the creation narratives.[60]

Gunton hints at the possible biblical origins of the metaphor of indwelling.

> It is tempting to speculate that the origin of the metaphor and it must be remembered that it is a metaphor, so that the limits of its explanatory power are recognised—is ultimately in the Fourth Gospel, where we find an extended use of the notion of knowledge by indwelling.[61]

But regardless of whether or not this was so, Gunton is interested in discerning more specific connections between Polanyi's concept of indwelling and theological articulation and he does at some length in his study of *Christology, Yesterday and Today.*[62] Gunton says that he wants to test the fruitfulness of the connection in the light of two theses. The first thesis is that the metaphor helps us to see Christology in a way that admits much greater continuity with other forms of culture than is generally allowed. The second thesis is that if Christology is to be an expression of indwelt knowledge it must be true to its theme: the revelation of God in Christ. As such the continuity with other disciplines does not imply identity.

Gunton begins with the claim that all language is indirect. 'The view that there can be a direct fit between abstract concept and thing [sic] 'out there' is false'.[63] However, in the successful use of language we are enabled, Gunton claims, to indwell what is really there.

> If ... the claim of the New Testament writers is true that Jesus Christ exists now as the object of present knowledge, it may justifiably be claimed that by our personal indwelling of his reality our words may come to express, successfully but indirectly, something of the truth about him'.[64]

This claim will remind us of the form of mutual indwelling in John's Gospel, which we have just

mentioned but also the frequently used phrase of the apostle Paul, 'in Christ'.

Gunton makes the further point that the language of Paul and John is seen to be true *in community*. This is, 'another way in which Polanyi, with his central category of conviviality.., echoes Christian language'.[65] Of course, for Paul and for John the agency of the Holy Spirit is indispensable while this is neither explored nor mentioned by Polanyi. Gunton goes on to say, 'Language about Christ becomes possible for those who are related to him by virtue of their being placed in a community of confession and worship'.[66] It is through the Holy Spirit that the worshipper indwells the reality of God present in the risen Christ and this has implications for theological method. Gunton explains, 'The personal relation of worship gives rise to doxological language; and as this language is, in its turn, indwelt, a more systematic account becomes possible of the one through whom indwelling becomes actual'.[67]

Gunton correctly identifies the direct parallel between such an account of theological language and the language of the natural sciences as it emerges from a 'primitive indwelling in reality' (with the distinction that in science the mediation is not through worship but rather senses, tools and instrumentation).

In relation to his two theses, outlined above, Gunton now concludes, regarding the first, that 'the language of indwelling enables us to conceive Christology as the same kind of enterprise as that engaged in by exponents of other disciplines'.[68] And regarding the second, 'The language of rational Christology is that which attempts to give a true though indirect account of what is the case if human beings are indeed brought to God through Jesus Christ'.[69] Gunton points out that the 'reality' of being 'in Christ' is one which the contemporary believer shares with the apostles and the Fathers. This leads him to consider the importance of an aspect of tradition:

> The writers of the New Testament and the Fathers indwelt the same human and divine reality as we do. The words that resulted from their indwelling developed within a culture different from, but in many ways continuous with ours. Unless we indwell these words, or, better, indwell the tradition in order to converse with it, it is unlikely that we shall understand it, and certainly not well enough to be 'critical' about it. If we are to find an authentically modern christological language it must be that which reality gives us as we orient ourselves to it through the language of worship and tradition.[70]

In Christology there is a reality with which we have to contend. It is a reality in which generations of Christian believers have participated and this participation is formed in a community. The traditions of the community of the church do not, of course, transcend the divine reality (which constitutes it and to which the community offers its worship) but knowledge of the divine reality is mediated through the community (primarily in its worship) and it is through our indwelling of the community that our knowledge is derived. It must be appreciated that propositional theological knowledge arises from our indwelling of this community and its traditions.

The Polanyian shift in the concept of knowledge, embraced by Gunton, is a radical one. Over against the critical emphasis upon the individual and the detachment of the knower the post-critical position places emphasis upon the community and the indwelling of the knower. And there is more: in post-critical perspective the critical pursuit, of indubitable knowledge is challenged. In post-critical perspective it is acknowledged that we grapple with realities and that in drawing upon the riches of the traditions we indwell we can reach conclusions and state our beliefs. However, there is no Archimedean point from which to measure the distance between the concepts, theories or doctrines we hold from the reality they seeks to represent. Gunton welcomes this recognition:

> [I]f we are fallible human beings, should we not rather seek for a concept of truth that is appropriate to our limits, both in capacity and in time and space? For something that can be believed short of absolute certainty? It is worth our while perpetually to remind ourselves of what Michael Polanyi said in his great book on the nature of human scientific and other knowing [*Personal Knowledge*]. 'The principle purpose of this book is to achieve a frame of mind in which I may hold firmly to what I believe to be true, even though I know that it might conceivably be false'.[71]

Our knowledge has an eschatological aspect. We know only in part, and Gunton expands on this theme when he writes:

> The Holy Spirit is God as he grants anticipations in time of what strictly speaking belongs to eternity. Thus when we are enabled to grasp the order that is in creation, whether in simple perception or in the higher flights of scientific discovery, it is because something is given to us, not simply because we grasp it.[72]

Gunton affirms Polanyi's view that in epistemology we must contend with the propensity of being to reveal itself. The knowledge of God may be a special case, but the language of revelation has a place outside its use in theology. Indeed, Gunton writes: 'there can be no recovery of a doctrine of theological revelation—revelation of God in the absence of what I would call a general theology of revelation'.[73] This is, of course, quite against the

intentions of Enlightenment thought and the critical mind:

> [T]he main intellectual trends of our era have replaced a concept of revelation with a concept of truth as something lying within the control of the human rational agent. In the modern world, the whole concept of revelation is essentially problematic. We appear to be required to make a choice between revelation and autonomous reason. Because it is believed that revelation takes away our autonomy and leaves us in thrall to the authority of others or of the impersonal other, it becomes necessary to replace it with pure untrammelled reason. On the other hand, if reason is autonomous and self-sufficient, we do not need revelation. We need only to find things out for ourselves.[74]

It is with approval that Gunton quotes Polanyi from *Personal Knowledge*:

> In the fourth century AD, St Augustine brought the history of Greek philosophy to a close by inaugurating for the first time a post-critical philosophy. He taught that all knowledge was a gift of grace, for which we must strive under the guidance of antecedent belief: *nisi credideritis, non intelligitis*.[75]

Gunton, in his taking up and applying this theme, suggests that the Christian doctrine of the trinity illuminates the processes of human knowing. He makes the bold claim: 'the triune God is the one who as creator and sustainer of a real world of which we are part, makes it possible for us to know our world'.[76] As such Gunton is, essentially, reversing the approach of natural theology. This approach

> is an attempt to see nature an aspect of our relation with the world—in the light of an understanding of God in such a way that there is mutual illumination, from God to the world and, in direct correspondence, from the world to God.[77]

On the basis of this Gunton offers three summary points:

> The first is that belief in the Fatherhood of God enables us to see that he has created us within the world and yet in a relationship that also transcends it. This means that the enterprise of knowing the world, beginning with the perception of it by our sight and touch, our hearing, taste and smell, is part of what it means to be created in the image of God, with a kind of dominion over the rest of creation.
>
> Because, second, the world was created through the Son, we can understand that the world is other than God, and therefore we exist as separate and free beings, able to use both body and mind, sense, reason and imagination to understand the world according to its own proper reality.
>
> But, third, this knowledge and the dominion it gives have their limits. They are the gift of God the Holy Spirit, so that we understand both that our knowledge is necessarily partial and that its limitedness is not a defect.[78]

For all its sketchiness, this account of a few strands in the theology of Colin Gunton illustrates the way in which Polanyi's epistemological insights can be taken up by a theologian. Gunton is certainly drawing on Polanyi's philosophical insights—and he is aware of the debt that he owes to Polanyi—but he does this from his own indwelling of a Christian theological tradition. As such it is possible to make the claim that an approach to theology such as we find in Gunton's work is more 'Polanyian' than Polanyi's own contribution to theology and religion.

University of St Andrews

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Notes:

1. Polanyi Collection Regenstein Library, University of Chicago. Box 25, Folder 4.
2. Polanyi also thinks that kind of epistemology he wants to establish mill he more congenial to religions beliefs than the objectivist and reductionist epistemologies of modernity. This will be mentioned later in the paper.
3. Hereafter SFS.
4. Hereafter PK.
5. ibid. p. 26n.
6. Moleski, M. X. (2000). *Personal Catholicism: The Theological Epistemologies of John Henry Newman and Michael Polanyi* p. 148.
7. PK p. vii.
8. ibid. p. vii.
9. For a detailed treatment of these passages see Allen, R. T. (1992), pp. 31-44 and Mullins, P (1992), pp. 75-83.
10. PK p. 280.
11. It may that in some cases our indwelling of an articulate system is less a choice and more to do with accidents of birth—the age, location and family into which we are born. Polanyi offers a bewildering range of examples of articulate systems which include works of art, morality, religions worship, theories, mathematical discovery and a symphony. The degree of choice involved in our participation in these systems varies.
12. PK pp. 197f.
13. ibid. p. 198.
14. cf. ibid. p. 324.
15. ibid. p. 199.
16. ibid. p. 199.
17. Polanyi, M. and H. Prosch (1975), *Meaning*. Hereafter M.
18. Polanyi was 84 years old when *Meaning* was published.
19. M p. x.
20. 'Acceptance of Religion' (dated 1969): Polanyi Collection: Regenstein Library, University of Chicago. Box 40, Folder 1.
21. It is my opinion that much of this material is of poor quality and reflects a lack of knowledge of the subject matters upon which it touches. However, this is of only marginal significance for the point which I wish to make.
22. M p. 64.
23. For a detailed treatment of the theme of religion in *Meaning* see Allen, R. T (1992), pp. 64-74.
24. The extended comments on Holy Communion to he found in chapter 10 of M are not in the lecture manuscript nor am I aware of anything like them in any of Polanyi's published or unpublished work.
25. First published in 'Faith and Reason'.
26. Polanyi, M. (1963). 'Science and Religion: Separate Dimensions or Common Ground?'
27. Polanyi Collection. Regenstein Library, University of Chicago. Box 42, Folder II. Dated July 1972
28. Polanyi, M. (1974), p. 126
29. Polanyi, M. (1963). 'Science and Religion: Separate Dimensions or Common Ground?' p.8.
30. ibid. p. 11.
31. ibid. p. 14.
32. Polanyi, M. (1972) 'About Religious Faith', Polanyi Collection: Regenstein Library, University of Chicago. Box 42, Folder 11 p. 6.
33. See PK pp. 195-202
34. ibid. pp 279-286
35. See PK pp. 149-160
36. When Polanyi speaks of religion he seems, more often than not, to he referring to the Christian religion. This is typically implicit—particularly in his later writings—as there are occasions when he makes explicit reference to Christianity. He does, very occasionally, refer to Zen Buddhism but it may he assumed that a reference to religion is a reference to Christianity unless he states otherwise.
37. It ought to he noted that Polanyi has a highly individualistic interpretation of this tradition.
38. See, for example, the articles in *Zygon* 17, pp. 3-87.
39. For Polanyi 'reality' is not equated with 'tangibility'. The reality of an entity is equated with its potential to reveal itself in new and unsuspected ways in the future.
40. Hereafter TD.
41. ibid. p.62.
42. ibid. p. 92.
43. M p. 180.
44. One list of theologians influenced by the work of Polanyi is found in Ontles, A. (1984). 'Faith, Church, and God: Insights from Michael Polanyi', *Theological Studies* 45: 537-50 See the first two footnotes of this article.
45. Both writing of Polanyi when he was living in Oxford in his 70s.
46. Torrance, T. P. (2000-2001), p.28.
47. Prosch, H (1982), pp. 4ff.
48. Moleski, M. X. (2000), p 142.
49. Grene, M (1977), pp. 166f.
50. Moleski, M. X. (2000) p. 142 Although Polanyi deals with certain theological themes I would question whether Polanyi has a theology. Nevertheless, Moleski's point on epistemology is well made.
51. ibid. p. 143, Molenki's emphasis. I would add that he cautions about using the term 'assumptions' in this context since it might imply an *a priori* conceptuality.
52. Barth, K, G W Bromiley, et al. (1975), p. 10.
53. Hart, T (1995) p. 48.
54. We shall see, in the final section, that Polanyi's understanding of hierarchy and ontology may also have a bearing on theology.
55. Gunton, C E (1998), p. 53
56. ibid. p. 57.
57. ibid. p. 57.
58. ibid. p. 58.
59. ibid. p. 58.

Continued on p. 109

HUMAN EXCELLENCE

C. P. Goodman

'Why should I be moral, they will lay me out in the end. Why shouldn't I be moral, they will lay me out in the end.' Jozsef Attila[1]

Summary

While ancient Greek philosophers sought to describe what a good life is for a human being, modern philosophers have attempted to isolate rules that determine when an action is moral. Polanyi, anticipating the contemporary revival of an ethics that seeks to describe what it is good to be (i.e. virtue ethics) rather than what rules we ought to follow, views moral progress as analogous to progress in science. Polanyi however does not seek to derive moral values from the order of nature. When we try to live in accordance with that which we believe to be morally good, we live in accordance with the demands that are made upon us by an ideal. Whereas science is an attempt to describe a reality that exists independently of us, morality is orientated by the self-set ideal of being a morally good person. In both cases however we make judgements about realities whose truths are independent of our preferences. Once we formulate ideals such as truth or justice, they make demands upon that may conflict with our preferences. As embodied beings we function within the constraints that are supplied by lower level realities. Inspired by moral passion, reformers seek to change existing realities, on the grounds that they are imperfect. The thought that it is we who bring morality into the world, rather than morality being a consequence of the order of nature, leads some to become nihilists. Polanyi asserts that when the moral passions that accompany our desire to live in accordance with moral obligations are left homeless, they can return in the form of moral inversions i.e. nihilism advocated with moral passion.

1 Introduction

Living organisms have purposes. These purposes are normative. For example the right amount of sunlight is good for an oak tree. It enables it to flourish. Too much or too little sunlight is bad for an oak tree. Ancient Greek philosophers sought to describe what is a good life for a human being.[2] Aristotle claims that to function as a human being it is necessary to live in communities. To be self-sufficient is to be either a beast or a god.[3] As a result of becoming a member of a language using community we can reflect upon what is just and unjust.[4] A moral excellence is cultivated within a social practice, and is a mean between two vices.[5] Whereas ancient Greeks philosophers identify what is required in order to flourish in this life, Christians focus upon our duties in this life and our reward in next. A good life for a Christian is a life that is lived in accordance with divine laws.[6] Only a life that satisfies our higher needs can make us truly happy.[7] In the modern period attempts were made to define moral duties independently of any reference to God. Bentham suggests we ought to act in accordance with what calculation tells us are the actions that maximise desired consequences.[8] For Kant an action is moral if it accords with one of three equivalent formulas:

1 Act as if the maxim of your action were to become through your will a universal law;

2 Act so that you treat humans beings not as means but as ends;

3 Act as if your maxims are laws in a kingdom of ends.[9]

Both Bentham and Kant suppose that actions are moral if they are in accordance with what they take to be an appropriate rule.

Anscombe declares that modern moral philosophy depends upon a context that has been abandoned, and therefore it is useless, even harmful.[10] The term 'ought' relates to good and bad e.g. to function well this machine ought to be oiled. If actions are moral when they are in accordance with the requirements of a divine law, and we then take away the divine legislator, the concept of acting in accordance with a rule no longer has any context. It is like retaining the concept of criminality while abandoning the legal system. Anscombe suggests that the modern attempt to give a new content to moral law has been a failure. A calculus justified by utility can be used to justify immoral actions, while the principle that an action is moral if we will that it should become a universal law is empty. She recommends a return to an account in which virtues and vices are derived from facts about what human beings require in order to flourish.[11] MacIntyre claims that it is Nietzsche, for whom moral valuations are expressions of subjective will, who best describes the ethics of our time.[12] Like Anscombe he traces the state of contemporary morality back to the failure of Enlightenment philosophers to locate a satisfactory ground for moral virtues once they were separated from an ontological ground. This failure derives from the rejection of teleology.[13] MacIntyre supplies an account in which a virtue is an acquired quality whose possession enables us to achieve goods that are internal to practices.[14] When we apply a rule, including rules that define moral conduct, we rely

upon interpretative practices.[15]

The transition from an axiological to a deontological conception of how we ought to behave: i.e. from a theory that attempts to portray what characterises a good life for a human being to an account which seeks to supply rules which define what it is to act morally – is part of a change from a view of the universe in which good or bad derive from the order of the universe, to an account in which we choose how we ought to behave. In opposition to those who condemned Socrates to death on the grounds that by questioning their moral claims he corrupted young men by undermining their respect for traditional practices,[16] Plato argues that reflection enables us to comprehend the nature of a good life. What it is to be a good life for a human being is determined by the order of the cosmos. As thinking beings we are capable of understanding the nature of the universe, and are thus able to know how we ought to behave. The absolute standard against which moral claims are judged is supplied by the cosmos.[17] Theologians attempted to integrate his conclusions about the order of the universe, and our place within it, with religious traditions. In the Late Middle Ages however Nominalists philosophers concluded that the sovereignty of God is incompatible with the assumption that it is the cosmos that determines what is good and bad. Moral values are not derived from the order of the cosmos; they derive from our freedom to act in accordance with the will of God.[18] But once our actions are no longer justified with reference to that which is taken to be the will of God why act morally?

2 Value objectivity

Because ends structure the functioning of living organisms, life is characterised by success and failure.[19] Polanyi suggests that our branch of the primate family became human beings as a result of our capacity to indwell within language. Language enables us to formulate new ends—and have new sorts of success and failure.[20] Our ability to generalise enables us to formulate abstract concepts. Plato seeks to draw our attention to the demands that concepts such as truth, goodness, and beauty make upon us as a consequence of the fact that we possess minds. Polanyi describes these concepts as **transcendent ideals**. Because thinking can transcend particulars it becomes orientated by the pursuit of ideals. Aristotle points out that the particular nature of moral judgements means that they cannot be wholly captured by general rules.[21] What it is to be a moral good transcends our capacity to describe it. This is not to reject generalisation. A moral judgement is not reducible to context. They emerge as a consequence of our ability to formulate general descriptions. Whereas MacIntyre defends the claim that shifts in cultural context can render moral claims incommensurable, Polanyi argues that the demands that transcendent ideals make upon us override the justification that is supplied by a local practice. In order for us to justify a practice it is not enough for us to assert that this is the way in which we do things in our neighbourhood. As thinking animals we judge the validity of specific actions by relating them to general ideals. But why seek to act in accordance with moral demands?

MacIntyre notes that in *Either-Or* Kierkegaard[22] offers us two incommensurable ways of life—1) An aesthetic life lived in accordance with the pursuit of pleasure 2) An ethical life lived in accordance with duty—with the choice between them effectively arbitrary.[23] Nietzsche endorses the analysis supplied by those Sophists who declared that moral claims are merely expressions of will disguised as descriptions of objective truths.[24] Polanyi agrees that a moral claim is not simply a reference of the order of the universe, but he denies that they are arbitrary preferences. Just as truth is a concept that makes demands upon us in ways that go beyond that which is useful, so the pursuit of that which is morally good makes demands upon us that go beyond the expedient. To identify something as a fact is a value judgement. When we believe something to be true, we commit ourselves to its validity. Our claim may be false, but it is not arbitrary. It is made in accordance with what we believe to be the case. Just as truth claims are not arbitrary, neither are our moral claims. When we make a judgement about how we ought to behave, we submit to the demands that are made upon us by the concept of the morally good. Those who deny that values have any objective reality respond that a good is simply that which we desire i.e. that what is good is wholly reducible to subjective preference. But are our desires arbitrary? Is it not more plausible to assert that the reason why we desire something is because we believe it to be good i.e. the reason why we desire it is because we recognise its value?[25]

According to Polanyi not only is the description of something as a fact an evaluation, a description of these evaluations is also an evaluation. When a historian for example seeks to assess the part that Napoleon Bonaparte played in the history of France, this involves making decisions about his judgements. This includes moral judgements. A moral evaluation occurs when we seek to evaluate actions relative to moral goods. Polanyi suggests that validating a moral claim requires greater personal commitment than verifying a scientific claim, because it involves us in claims about how we ought to live, but he takes both to be commitments to a reality that transcends the subjective.[26] To assert that historians ought to avoid

making moral judgements about past events is to presume that we can comprehend human actions without making any reference to moral realities.[27] Polanyi derives values from purposes. By this Polanyi does not mean final causes e.g. cosmological purposes. What Polanyi is talking about are intrinsic purposes i.e. when active centres integrate particulars in the pursuit of ends.[28] In order to distinguish intrinsic from extrinsic purposes the latter sort of purposes are sometimes called 'telic'.[29] A pair of lungs, for example, serves the telic end of exchanging gases. Gelwick suggests that a final cause doctrine is inconsistent with a Polanyian account of emergence because Polanyi emphasises openness rather than finality.[30] The reason why Polanyi criticises Darwinian theory is not because it undermines an external teleology, but because it ignores the emergence of new realities.

Polanyi makes an analogy between the emergence of life and the emergence of intellectual principles. In both cases there is a novel ordering principle that is not specifiable in terms of lower levels.[31] A new level of reality emerges when an emergent sets the boundary conditions of lower levels. Each level of reality leaves open possibilities that can be directed by higher level principles. While physicists attempt to describe one level of reality, and biologists seek to describe the emergent higher level of living organisms, intellectual principles are rules of rightness at a yet higher level of reality.[32] Polanyi describes this level as being determined by *self-set* ideals.[33] By this he does not mean that they are subjective, he simply means that their emergence is reliant upon the existence of active centres that are capable of making judgements in accordance with abstract ideals. Our emergence as human beings is a consequence of subjecting ourselves to the demands that are made upon us by a *firmament of values*.[34] As we strive to realise these values our deliberations are guided by our conscience, which is another way of saying that we are guided by what our thoughts tell us we ought to do if we are to act in accordance with what we believe. Ancient Greek philosophers assumed that for us to do a good action it is enough that we know what is good. Christian philosophers however contend that morally good actions are choices. In order to be a good person it is not enough to know how we ought to behave, we also have to decide to live in accordance with that which we believe to be morally good.

3 In pursuit of the good.

One source of the dynamism of the Western tradition has been the tension between two of its founding elements i.e. the Graeco-Roman and the Judaeo-Christian. Jonas notes that while Greek philosophers argue that the universe is eternal, biblical texts seek to make it clear that the universe was created. Whereas ancient Greek theology places individuals within a comprehensible whole, the order of which is a necessary consequence of the nature of God, in the Bible God is shown making local, and sometimes quite puzzling, interventions in accordance with his will. This leads to quite different views:

> To put it as briefly as possible, the biblical doctrine pitted contingency against necessity, particularity against universality, will against intellect. It secured a place for the 'contingent' within philosophy, against the latter's original bias. If we add to this the divorce of mind and nature which followed from the Jewish-Christian separation of God and the world and eventually led to the specifically modern division of philosophy into human and natural philosophy, we need not fear we are exaggerating, when we say that the consequences of the encounter between the biblical and the classical views were immense.[35]

In one morality is derived from the universe, in the other morality is imposed upon the universe.

The Neo-Platonists, for whom the absolute is mediated by a hierarchy of spiritual beings, endorsed the possibility of ascending to the ecstasy of contemplating the ultimate ground of Being.[36] Many Christians view the church, via the sacraments, as mediating our contact with God. Augustine claims that God not only reveals himself in the world but also in our person. Taylor suggests that Augustine was the first to emphasize the first–person standpoint in the search for truth.[37] By relying upon divine grace we can discover the concept of the most perfect in our thoughts. In the absence of divine grace however our fallen nature is such that we are not only trapped within scepticism but also mired in sin.[38] In the medieval universities Christian Scholastics were inspired by the example set by Islamic philosophers such as Avicenna and Averroes to seek to reconcile Christian doctrine with Greek, and in particular Aristotelian, metaphysics. But in a revival of Augustine by Franciscan thinkers such as Scotus and Ockham, personal agency took on a new importance. In the Protestant Reformation theologians such as Luther and Calvin rejected the mediating authority of the church in our relationship with God. Instead of attempting to link the visible with the invisible by situating ourselves within a hierarchical order, the world began to be seen as raw material upon which we impose our ends. Bacon suggests that we ought to reject appeals to authority and establish scientific bodies in which experimenters can increase our knowledge of the universe, and apply it to the task of increasing worldly happiness.[39]

Descartes, like Augustine, looks inwards for knowledge, and takes clearness and distinctness as his signal that a belief is true. Locke identifies an Idea not as an external order but as a private mental

content, and rejecting innate ideas, he suggested that we ought to seek to give reason the task of elucidating the knowledge that is supplied to us by our senses. Rejecting the legal system that Blackstone outlined in his lectures on English law, Bentham takes the Common Law to be an irrational collection of precedents, the authority of which justified by historical pedigree. Bentham describes human beings as centres of pleasure and pain, and suggests that we ought to give reason the task of codifying a set of laws that will generate a society that will maximise the happiness of the greatest number.[40] Kant declares that if it is the sum of our pleasures that determines the value of our life, we must reckon its value as less than nothing.[41] According to Kant seeking to live in accordance with the dictates of reason is our highest end. A community of rational beings ought not to treat each other as means to an end but as ends in themselves.[42] Kant takes this to be a defence of individual rights. But it is not our reason that renders us distinctive.[43] This is especially true if you believe that reason will lead us to agree upon everything.[44] Despite what he says, asserting that a rational society ought not treat people as a means does not imply that they are ends in themselves, because he takes reason to be the end and we its vehicles. Take the State to be rational, and the authoritarian implications become apparent.

4 Moral passions

Although the Enlightenment is sometimes taken to be a revival of paganism, it is evident that Christian *moral passions*, minus the Augustinian emphasis upon original sin, inspire many of its beliefs.[45] The assumption that moral choices ought to be autonomous for example relies upon the doctrine that we have free will. The concept of brotherhood invokes the idea of equality in the sight of God the Father. The assumption that we can create heaven on Earth relies upon the conviction that we can create a kingdom of saints.[46] Polanyi declares that once we understand that pursuing the morally good does not lead to serenity but to moral passion, we can understand how it can lead to coercion and violence.[47] Resentful of the existing order, many intellectuals asserted that we ought to liberate ourselves from the authority of the church, which conspires to keep men in ignorance, and seek instead to create a society that is directed in accordance with rational principles. Helvetius, arguing that we are conditioned by our environment, rejected the notion that there is conflict between our animal nature and our reason. It is our universal nature to seek pleasure and avoid pain. An enlightened ruler will therefore construct a social order that maximises total happiness.[48] According to Rousseau human beings are born good, but grow up in societies that corrupt us. If we were to become members of a society that was directed in accordance with a General Will, the conflict between self-interest and general interest would disappear, because each of us would seek to give each other equal recognition.[49]

In was on the grounds of an appeal to the General Will that Robespierre justified his ‘reign of terror’ i.e. those who oppose a General Will are by definition selfish and immoral:

> There is no government which can preserve the rights of citizens without a policy of severity, but the difference between a free system and a tyrannical regime is that in the former that policy is employed against the minority opposed to the general good…while in the latter the severity of State power is directed against the unfortunates delivered to the injustice and impunity of the powers.[50]

Hegel suggests that it was the pursuit of abstract principles that turned the French Revolution into a bloodbath. Morality is not grounded in abstract thought but in the rationality that is embodied in public institutions, which are the incarnation and actualisation of reason in history.[51] On the grounds that human society is necessarily evolving towards equality, plenty, and freedom, Marx asserts that an appeal to moral principles fail to comprehend the logic of history.[52] A moral claim is simply an expression of class interest, and can therefore be ignored. Polanyi notes that Marxism allowed those whose devotion to a materialist metaphysics gave them no place for objective moral claims to give vent to their utopian moral passions via a theory of history.[53]

In what he describes as a trans-valuation of all values, Nietzsche asserts that Socratic/Christian morality is based upon hostility towards life, and should therefore be replaced by a Dionysian affirmation of will to power. On the grounds that a moral judgement is rooted in nothing more than will, he recommends that ethics be transformed into a genealogical study of the origins of valuations. He derives Socratic/Christian moral demands from the resentment of the weak against the strong.[54] Both Marx and Nietzsche had a profound influence upon political thought in the Twentieth century. In the Thirties of the last century Polanyi had first hand experience of both the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany.[55] The Nazi Party replaced class conflict with race conflict, but both sought to expose morality as a fraud. Polanyi asserts that it was not lack of moral passion but excess of moral passion that led to moral claims being rejected as irrelevant. One of the reasons for the popularity of the Nazi Party amongst German university students was because it combined a rejection of morality, with the belief that we ought to repudiate our selfishness and live in accordance with communal purposes. At this point you might feel that since both Nazi Germany

and the Soviet Union have been consigned to the dustbin of history, their nihilism is only of historical interest. Polanyi claims however that the free societies that eventually defeated these political systems do not seek to repudiate their assumption that moral claims have no objective reality; they merely refuse to take it to its logical conclusion.[56]

5 Nihilism

Polanyi claims that nihilism first manifests itself as the desire to live without any restrictions, beliefs, or obligations. The bohemian professes contempt for moral demands, on the grounds that seeking to live in accordance with derived values is intellectually dishonest.[57] Private nihilism however was eventually transformed into a public nihilism. In *Crime and Punishment* Dostoevsky has Raskolnikov asking whether or not he should not murder an old women for her money, but Dostoevsky in *The Devils* has Nechaev ordering the murder of one of his supporters for the sake of party discipline:

> The nihilist now appears as an ice-cold businesslike conspirator, closely prefiguring the ideal Bolshevik as I have seen him represented on the Moscow stage in the didactic plays of the early Stalinist period. Nor is the similarity accidental. The whole conspiratorial action—the cells, the secrecy, the discipline and ruthlessness—known today as the Communist method, was taken over by Lenin from the Populists.[58]

Rousseau, according to Polanyi, not only anticipates the way in which unrestrained individualism becomes unrestrained political power, he also foreshadowed the way in which creative artists begin to view themselves as in opposition to the bourgeois.[59] The purpose of a work of art, for the Romantics, is not to imitate, but to express our feelings.

When Romanticism became Modernism, which is to say when in 1848 the 'Age of Raptures' became the 'Age of Progress',[60] the denial of the objectivity of values led artists to increasingly focus upon the absence of value in the world, or with creating works of art that are concerned with a wholly subjective realm of meaning. Rimbaud tries to derange the senses. The Surrealists evoke irrational dream states by juxtaposing incongruous elements. Polanyi claims that many in England and America are perplexed why so many European intellectuals became committed followers of political movements dedicated to violence and destruction, when the doctrines that are advocated by the nihilists have long been a part of these cultures without it turning people into revolutionary terrorists.[61] Bloom suggests that professors in an American university take it for granted that most of their students will assert that values are relative:

'The study of history and of culture teaches us that all the world was mad in the past; men always thought they were right, and that led to wars, persecutions, slavery, xenophobia, racism, and chauvinism. The point is not to correct the mistakes and really be right; rather it is not to think you are right at all.'[62]

This anti-moral assumption is in fact a moral postulate; it is used to justify a free society.

For Polanyi a morally neutral society is a vacuous society, because it has no reason for existing.[63] He seeks to defend a free society not by assuming that values are relative, and therefore we ought to be able to do what we want, but by endorsing liberty on the grounds that it facilitates the pursuit of transcendent ideals. This pursuit requires us to submit to disciplines. It is desirable for value seekers, at least initially, to apprentice themselves to those accredited as having knowledge. The superior knowledge of an articulate culture is the sum total of what its classics have uttered, and its heroes and saints have achieved.[64] Nobody can be familiar with every aspect of this legacy. Nor is it desirable. Progress is reliant upon a division of labour. Most scientists for example know little more than the names of most branches of science.[65] Our lives can however be orientated by the pursuit of general ideals. It may be the case that we are the only centres of reflective thought in the entire universe, but Polanyi suggests that the pursuit of truth, goodness, and beauty serve to give our life sufficient meaning.[66] Which returns us to his support for a free society. He endorses it as the political arrangement that is best able to move human beings in the direction of continually richer and fuller meanings, rendering our existence meaningful to ourselves via the pursuit of that which bears upon eternity.[67] He thus seeks to trace the origins of the nihilistic repudiation of higher levels of existence, and supplies an analysis that justifies our obligation to the firmament of values in whose service being human is formed.[68]

8 Moral inversion

In his writings on the practice of science, Polanyi notes that it is under attack from two different directions. One line of attack denies that the human intellect can operate independently of its own grounds, declaring that if you strip away the propaganda what you discover is that science is an ideology created to serve practical needs. The other line of attack insists that instead of seeking to understand the universe we ought to direct our attention to relieving suffering i.e. scientists are reproached for pursuing mere love of knowledge. Polanyi traces the first line of criticism back to ancient Greek scepticism. What justifies our knowledge claims about the world? He traces the other line of criticism back to the Judaeo-Christian

passion for righteousness. How ought a scientist to act in the world? Polanyi notes that although these positions are contradictory, it is a move that is typical of the modern mind.[69] A destructive scepticism is linked with a passionate social conscience. Inspired by the way in which Copernicus and Galileo, in the face of opposition from the church, had made discoveries that had advanced our understanding, intellectuals declared that instead of merely living in accordance with accepted beliefs we ought to subject them to critical inquiry. In his *A Treatise of Human Nature: Being an Attempt to Introduce the Experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects* Hume seeks to comprehend human nature.[70] Truth, he asserts, is delivered by science, which is nothing more than an ordering of experience.[71]

Polanyi notes that on the grounds of an appeal to scientific method some began to assert that moral claims have no verifiable meaning.[72] This was hardly the first outbreak of moral scepticism in human history. In ancient Athens during the reign of the Thirty Tyrants, Charmides and Critias sought to put into practice a political philosophy derived from the notion that might is right. During the Renaissance Machiavelli argued that it was legitimate for a prince to override all moral constraints in the pursuit of power. The decisive step in the formation of the modern mind took place when moral scepticism was combined with moral indignation.73 It is the fusion of these incompatible attitudes that generates a **moral inversion**. You would think that moral scepticism would leave no ground for moral obligations, but Polanyi observes that these passions can be satisfied by turning this scepticism against society, and denouncing its morality as hypocritical. Although combining moral scepticism with moral indignation is inconsistent, the two are fused together by their joint attack upon the same target. The moral fervour that was rendered homeless by scientific scepticism returns to imbue immorality with moral fervour. The result is moral hatred of existing society. It is a fervour that validates itself in acts of destruction. For a modern revolutionary it is the evil that the revolutionary is prepared to condone or commit that becomes a measure of their righteousness.[74] The more effective the desecration, the more profound the enthusiasm for nihilism, the higher the pile of corpses, the greater the moral triumph.

This moral passion for nihilism, Polanyi suggests, may be incurable, and come to an end only when it has finally destroyed our civilization.[75] He notes that during the Middle Ages special kilns were used on the site of the Forum and the Campus Martius to reduce ancient works of art to lime.[76] Polanyi declares however that by having a more accurate conception of science, we can restore the reality of the firmament of values. He suggests that in the exact sciences the false of ideal of scientific detachment is perhaps harmless, for it is ignored. But in the life sciences, and above all in the humanities, it exercises a destructive influence, because it falsifies our whole outlook beyond science.[77] It undermines our emergent humanity. Polanyi thus seeks to supply a more adequate philosophy, one that recognises the personal participation of the knower in every acts of understanding. Once we reject the assumption that science is impersonal, and seek to incorporate into our conception of scientific knowledge the part that we ourselves necessarily contribute to such knowledge, it is possible to reconcile it with our understanding of ourselves as responsible sentient beings. In a post-critical analysis all that is required of us is that we should seek the universal in the light of such guidance as we possess. It is not required of us that we ought to decide our problems on the supposition we were born in no particular place, in no particular time, endowed with no personal judgement of our own. The fellow in the old joke who tells you when you ask your way that “he would not start from here” is talking logical nonsense.[78]

7 Conclusion

It has been the effect upon our values that has been the most catastrophic effect of viewing science as a body of impersonal truths. It leads to the supposition that there is a third-person, value free, objective science of the universe, and a first-person, value generating, subjective consciousness. Undermining this dichotomy Polanyi—seeking to return us back to the reality of the way in which we live our lives—reminds us that every factual claim is an evaluation. A science that exists without valuations is a science without scientists i.e. non-existent. Even the act of pointing at an object an identifying it as a rose is an evaluation. If, in a determined effort to endorse our claims as objective knowledge, we restrict ourselves to asserting that I am having an experience of red in my visual field, this still requires us to make an evaluation i.e. it requires us to apply the concept red.[79] According Polanyi it is living organisms that introduced meanings into our world, and the ways in which living organisms interact with their environment are structured by ends. These ends are normative i.e. we can achieve them or fail to achieve them. Our ability to differentiate between types of berry for example may have implications for our survival. These discriminative capacities developed prior to language, but language enables us to re-present experiences in ways which enrich our meanings. At this point you might respond that although it may be correct to assert that although it is we who formulate

the concept, truth has a normative relationship with objective realities, it does not follow that moral norms are grounded in objective realities.

It is we who introduce moral goodness into the world. It is this insight that drives the moral passions of the modern period: thought creating a new order. But the child of this Age of Reason is the alienated Romantic, disinherited from values.[80] Polanyi claims that it was the destructive consequences of a conception of knowledge that undermined meanings that prepared the way for the inhumanity of the 20th C. In his philosophy he thus seeks to secure the foundations of a restoration of meaning via the development of the concept of personal knowledge, as structured by the distinction between subsidiary and focal awareness.[81] Polanyi seeks to validate the cultural values in which we dwell by acknowledging the inherently situated character of all understanding.[82] By this he does not mean that there are no grounds for choices except the grounds that we supply.[83] Our humanity is called into being via our attempt to realise transcendent values. Responding to the 1956 uprising in Hungary Polanyi asserts that:

> Its typical utterances manifest the deep emotional upheaval cause by recognising once more that truth, justice, and morality have an intrinsic reality.[84]

Polanyi declares that we must learn to accept the anguish of imperfect fulfilments because it is these limitations that render possible whatever moral accomplishments we may achieve.[85]

Hathersage, nr Sheffield.

Key Terms:

Firmament of Values—Everything about which we may be totally mistaken but believe to be true and right.

Moral Inversion—A destructive combination of reductive scepticism and moral passion.

Moral Passions—To be moved to act in ways that are consistent with our moral convictions.

Self-Set—The formulation of a criterion of judgement that imposes obligations upon ourselves.

Transcendent Ideals—The norms that are the external pole of our intellectual commitments.

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Notes:

1. 'Two Hexameters' Atilla (1984) p.321.
2. Ancient Greek ethics seeks to describe a good life not right action i.e. an action is right if it is the action that would be done by a good agent. It is not that the ancient Greeks were unaware of moral disagreement, or that they refused to appeal to principles 'But these issues do not determine the structure of ancient ethics; it is never felt that the point of ethical theory is to help is to solve hard moral problems or to determine our rules of everyday duty. These are seen as tasks to be fulfilled once the outline structure of ethics has to be got right, not the tasks which form the structure itself.' Annas (1993) p.28.
3. Aristotle (1981) 1:2
4 ibid. 1:2
5 Aristotle (1955) 2:2
6 Augustine (1955) 1:12.
7 Augustine (1961) Book One.
8 Bentham (1960).
9 Kant (1873)
10 Anscombe (1958).
11 Because most of what we are is outside our control, the ancient Greeks, until the Stoics, viewed goodness as contingent upon circumstance.
12 MacIntyre (1981) p.114.
13 ibid. p.56.
14 ibid. p.91.
15 MacIntyre claims for example that we cannot adequately account for the dispositions of character that heroic societies deem to be virtuous independently of the social arrangements within which they occur, because the social structure, and what is deemed top be good, are one and the same in such communities. MacIntyre (1981) p.123.
16 'Apology' Plato (1954)
17 Aristotle identifies a number of different goods, and human conduct as exhibiting a number of different virtues 'We can speak of a single "complete good" (*teleion agathin*) because our condition is such that the disparate goods we seek have to be coherently combined in a single life, and in their right proportions.' Taylor (1989) pp. 76-77.
18 Hence the key role that appeals to freedom plays in the modern period i.e. the freedom to pursue your purposes.
19 TD p. 51.
20 Polanyi (1966b) p. xi.
21 Aristotle (1955) 10:8.
22 Kierkegaard (1972).
23 MacIntyre (1981) p.40.
24 See Thucydides (1910) 5:17.
25 Long (1994-6).
26 (1958) p.202.
27 KB p.33.
28 See Mullins (2003-4) pp.23-5.
30 Gelwick (2003).
31 ibid. p.17.
32 PK p.389.
33 ibid. p.334.
34 KB p.216.
35 Jonas (1974) p.29
36 We seek the One because it is the Good. Plotinus (1991) 2:9.
37 Taylor (1989) pp. 127-42.
38 For Augustine whenever we use our will our corrupt nature will use it against God 'When we choose good, we do not really choose: rather, we renounce choice in favour of divine will, which operates in us in the form of Grace.' Kolakowski (2001) p.91.

39 'If we compare the chief trumpeter of the new era (Bacon) with Marlowe's Faustus, the similarity is striking. You will read in some critics that Faustus has a thirst for knowledge. In reality, he hardly mentions it. It is not truth he wants from the devils, but gold and guns and girls…Bacon condemns those who value knowledge as an end in itself: this, for him, is to use a mistress for pleasure what ought to be a spouse for fruit.' Lewis (1943) pp. 47-48.

40 Halevy (1928) identifies a tension in Bentham between his support for laissez-faire, as advocated by thinkers such as Smith, and his support for State intervention, as advocated by thinkers such as Helvetius.

41 Kant (1951) p.280

42 According to Kant acting in accordance with the principles of reason is enough for us to reach moral agreements. Polanyi reminds us however that all rule following relies upon an interpretative context.

43 Allen (1993) pp. 146-7.

44 A contrast is sometimes made between Kant, who views the self as constituting its world through its acts and choices, and Hegel, for whom the aims and purposes of the self are constituted by its place within a particular order. Both however view freedom as the freedom to submit to that which is rational.

45 Becker (1932).

46 See Cohen (1957).

47 KB p.3

48 See Smith (1965).

49 Kant describes him as the 'Newton of the moral world' Cassirer (1954) p.39.

50 Talmon (1952) p.112.

51 As Hegel seeks to explain in his *Phenomenology of Mind* [Hegel (1977) 599-601] moral consciousness takes duty to be its essential reality, but it learns that nature is not concerned with giving it a sense of unity with nature. It therefore bewails a situation where there is no correspondence between itself and existence 'One of the principle is of Hegel's theodicy is to do away with such idle lamentations. According to him they follow from a deep misunderstanding of what the ethical reality is and means. We cannot find the true ethical order…in a mere formal law. It is expressed in a much higher sense, in the actual concrete reality, in the life of the state. "The State" says Hegel in his *System der Sittlichkeit*, in which he first introduces his sharp distinction between Moralitat and Sittlichkeit, is "the self-certain absolute mind which acknowledges no abstract rules of good and bad, shameful and mean, craft and deception." Here is, in a sense, a complete transvaluation of values, a reversal of all previous standards. According to this revaluation there is no longer any moral obligation for the State.' Cassirer (1946) pp. 264-5.

52 'Christianity is based on a concept of individual merit and guilt; the New Faith on historical merit and guilt.' Milosz (1953) p. 208.

53 PK p.228.

54 Nietzsche (1968).

55 Between 1928 and 1935 he made four extended visits to the Soviet Union.

56 'The views of Bentham, whose paramount influence should in strict logic have resulted in the establishment of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, were reduced in practice to a corrective against rigid traditionalism…Remember David Hume's game of backgammon, to which he turned in disgust over the consequences of his scepticism—it has remained the paradigm of British life.' KB p.12.

57 ibid. p. 115.

58 ibid. p. 15.

59 KB p.10.

60 Milosz (1951) pp. 104.

61 LL p.104

62 Bloom (1987) p. 25.

63 KB p. 184.

64 PK p. 376.

65 KB p. 41.

66 PK p. 405.

67 ibid. p. 216.

68 Polanyi, relying upon the Christian scheme of fall and redemption [Polanyi 1958 p.324] suggests that our fallen condition is the historically given and subjective condition of our mind, from which we may be saved by the grace of the spirit. Man is noble so long as he fears the voices of the firmament of values 'but he dissolves their power over himself and his own powers gained through obeying them, if he turns back and examines what he respects in a detached manner. Then law is no more than what the courts will decide, art but an emollient of nerves, morality but a convention, tradition but an inertia, God but a psychological necessity. Then man dominates a world in which he himself does not exist. For with his obligations he has lost his voice and his hope, and been left meaningless to himself'. PK p. 380.

69 LL p. 4.

70 Hume (1978).

71 Polanyi (1970) p.82.

72 ibid. p. 84.

73 KB ibid. p. 9.

74 ibid. p. 44.

75 ibid. p. 3.

76 PK p. 201.

77 ibid. p. vii.

78 Polanyi (1970) p. 78.

79 Grene (1966) p. 165.

80 Milosz (2001) p. 82.

81 KB p. x.

82 ibid. p. 214.

83 ibid. p. 4.

84 KB pp. 35-6. As George Orwell points out in his novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 'belief in reality is a subversive principle under totalitarianism.' Orwell (1949) p.250 [Quoted by PK p.243.

85 KB p. 215.

POETIC INSPIRATION AND METAPHYSICAL KNOWLEDGE

David Britton

1 Introduction

The poet and critic Kathleen Raine once said that most genuine poets have been Neoplatonists, even when they have known nothing about Neoplatonism. As a practising poet who believes in poetic inspiration, and as one who has been interested in Plotinus for over 30 years, I immediately felt in agreement with her. But the question facing me in this paper is whether, when I really look into it, such a statement can be sustained, and, of course, whether it tells us useful things about both poetry and the metaphysics of Plotinus, and, more particularly, about what truth-claims can be made in either case.

Such an essay will necessarily be very personal, and I hope I will be forgiven for producing such a personal piece before knowing you, my audience, on a personal basis. I realise I am taking a risk, and that it will perhaps be difficult for you too, especially as I shall be claiming for myself experience of poetic inspiration, and the kind of mystical experience described by Plotinus (which was the major source of his metaphysics). However, I promise I will not cause further embarrassment by using any of my own poems in illustration of my thesis.

I am using Plotinus as representative of metaphysics generally, partly because of his universality and huge influence on the three religious traditions of Judaic mysticism, Christian theology and mysticism, and some important currents in Islamic philosophy and mysticism. I am using him also because his metaphysics is based on personal experience, mystical and other, and though he was a system-builder, he was not guilty of the rather sterile system-building of later times. I am thinking of the systems of Descartes, Leibniz and Spinoza, which Kant rightly reacted against.

First let me say that I do not believe we should create a great divide between special experiences, such as poetic inspiration and mystical states, and the rest of our human experience. I am not presenting a disembodied mysticism. This is not because I believe there is nothing really special about these states after all. On the contrary, they are extraordinary states, with an intensity and fullness of content that can go on echoing in a person for years to come, and often for a whole lifetime. There may have been only one major experience, in the one mode or the other. Plotinus is reported by his younger disciple and pupil, Porphyry, to have had four experiences of mystical states in his lifetime, the later ones in the actual presence of Porphyry. This is not a great number of occasions, but because these states radiate and ramify and are tremendously fertile, in spite of their appearance of voidness, they have implications and workings-out in the rest of our human experience, resonating down the years.

But mystical experiences have these workings-out only if they are allowed to. There is unfortunately a rather decadent culture of mysticism, by which the experience of the Void is sought to be preserved at all costs. The mystical Void, and its 'unknowing' type of knowing, is severed from all lower modes of knowing, and the lower modes are cast to the flames forever. That is the 'hubris' of mysticism, its betrayal by human conceit, and is not my understanding of either mysticism or poetic inspiration. Nor was it that of Plotinus, nor the great mystics Eckhart and Boehme, nor indeed any of the classic mystics working within a philosophical or theological tradition. In the classical understandings, the mystical experience is made to do some work. It has a special energy and penetratingness which gives it relevance to the whole of the human framework and to other modes of knowledge. The great mystical theologian, the Pseudo-Dionysus, puts mysticism to work in this way, he never rests on the laurels of his inexpressible and uncategorizable experiences.

2 Poetic inspiration

Let me now turn to poetic inspiration, by considering the opening lines of a very fine poem by Edwin Muir, called 'The Transfiguration'. This poem is not only inspired, but it also explicitly records a visionary experience of a mystical kind, with a certain amount of actual theological comment. To be so philosophically explicit in poetry is often a mistake, but not so, I believe, in this instance. That being so, it relates to both aspects of my thesis, and should help to bring out, as we go on, significant similarities and differences.

> So from the ground we felt that virtue branch
> Through all our veins till we were whole, our wrists
> As fresh and pure as water from a well,
> Our hands made new to handle holy things,
> The source of all our seeing rinsed and cleansed
> Till earth and light and water entering there
> Gave back to us the clear unfallen world.

Muir goes on to describe what he and his wife 'saw' in their visionary experience, how the world before their eyes was transfigured, and how the Christian hope of the restoration of all things was

part of the experience. It was an unusual experience in being a joint one – he and his wife were travelling together, tired, but experiencing jointly this transforming, and knowing that they were both undergoing it at the same time. He goes on to say:

> We could have thrown our clothes away for lightness,
> But that even they, though sour and travel stained,
> Seemed, like our flesh, made of immortal substance.

Later in the poem the jointness of the experience is re-affirmed, with Christ also as a companion, through a kind of unsought reality-testing, their effect on others, which also tested its authenticity.

> And when we went into the town, he with us,
> The lurkers under doorways, murderers,
> With rags tied round their feet for silence, came
> Out of themselves to us and were with us,
> And those who hide within the labyrinth
> Of their own loneliness and greatness came,
> And those entangled in their own devices,
> The silent and the garrulous liars, all
> Stepped out of their dungeons and were free.

Clearly, a charismatic light shone through and around this couple for a while. People sensed something extraordinary about them, and were drawn to them, and sensed the possibility of a blessing from them. Equally clearly, it is not all to be taken literally—not every 'murderer' and 'lurker under doorways' in Vienna or wherever, 'came out to them'! The experience enabled the couple to have a vision of restoration, in which what is literally a possibility for the future has become a present reality. Strange things happen to time and tense in mystical states. But also people are indeed drawn to those who are in a state of vision of this kind. These things do happen from time to time, to quite ordinary people. Edwin Muir, unlike most poets, was also a good man and a modest one, and a good Christian, and he is not here boasting about his and his wife's charisma, but simply recording a moment of grace that was as extraordinary and surprising to himself and his wife as it was to the people around them.

The great founder of Quakerism, George Fox, records many such experiences in his *Journal*, of his own palpable transformation before people's eyes while he was speaking to them, and usually arguing with them, and even hectoring them. These powerful physical accompaniments of visionary states strongly affected Fox's thinking. Without at all denigrating the Soul, Fox came to think that a spiritual body, in St. Paul's sense, was even now operative in him and in others similarly inspired, and that such an experience would soon spread throughout England and transform society. This is one basis for the early social millenarianism of the Society of Friends.

William Blake in a state of poetic inspiration was apparently an awesome sight, a seemingly enlarged being, radiant, and almost frightening, given the actual content of some of his inspirations.

I want to quote the last few lines of Muir's poem before coming back later on to these physical concomitants of some states of inspiration. Muir is writing again about the hope of restoration. He considers the cross.

> ………………..and the tormented wood
> Will cure its hurt and grow into a tree
> In a green springing corner of young Eden,
> And Judas damned take his long journey backward
> From darkness into light and be a child
> Beside his mother's knee, and the betrayal
> Be quite undone and never more be done.

These lines are really grand, and so moving that it is difficult to read them aloud without the voice breaking, but it needs the context and the momentum of the whole poem for the greatness of these lines to be felt, and I can only recommend, if you love and value poetry, that you read the poem in its entirety. Muir is putting on record his experience of what is often called the Eden-state (in Jungian terms, the Eden-archetype), but which I prefer to call the Sabbath vision, a future state of fulfilment which is both present and also out of Time altogether. Time and tense once again undergo strange transformations.

3 The connection between poetic and metaphysical-mystical

Leaving Muir's poem for a while, let me expound my general thesis. I believe that there is a congruence between poetic inspiration and the kind of metaphysical-mystical experience which leads to the metaphysical claims of Neoplatonism and allied schools. I am emphatically not seeking to validate the claims of metaphysical systems such as those of Spinoza, Leibniz, or Descartes, nor even those of Hegel and the Neo-Hegelians, though the Hegelian system comes close in certain respects to the Neoplatonic. If one reads Hegel's account of Platonists and Neoplatonists in his own *History of Philosophy*, one will find his debt to them gratefully acknowledged. But, in the final analysis, his is a secularised version of Neoplatonism, and therefore a considerable deviation from it, even a betrayal.

In pursuance of my thesis I'd like to return to the opening lines of Muir's poem. It is unusual for even a poet of mystical experience to give, in the poem, the physical concomitants of the experience. It is good to have it expressed, and Muir is amazingly specific. Apart from sensations of lightness and radiance, there is the very specific reference to a something coursing through the veins, other than blood, and an even more specific and telling reference to a sensation in *the wrists*, 'as fresh and

pure as water from a well.' The following line, 'Our hands made new to handle holy things', thereby gains its true context and its force. It is concrete, sensuous, even while leading us to contemplate a most grand and heavenly vision.

It is my contention that the reason that inspired poets have been Neoplatonists, even without knowing it, is that the metaphysical experiences of Plotinus at least, as the greatest of the Neoplatonists, are like the inspirational experiences of real poets. Those poets of the past who actually knew Plotinus' work, such as Spenser, and Sir John Davies and many of the Elizabethan poets in England, and Giordano Bruno and many others on the Continent, and later on Shelley and Coleridge, almost certainly gave their assent to it because they found that its actual structures, both at the mystical level of 'the One', and on levels below that, Plotinus' 'Nous' or Intelligible World, and below that the World-Soul or Anima Mundi, in the Great Chain of Being corresponded to their own states of inspiration. Why else would a poet or an artist bother his head with philosophy, unless he could feel it spoke to him and was relevant to his craft and art? But many did.

It may well have been the reading of the plentiful vividly experiential passages in Plotinus which convinced poets he was a fellow-soul. But it is impossible really to separate Plotinus' account of his raw experiences from the mystical and other structures that he elicits from them. There is a more or less seamless transition from experience to the structure of interpretation. The experience radiates and ramifies naturally. Poets reading Plotinus might well have found that their own expressions, in the words and concepts and inner breathings of their poems, proceeded in much the same way from their original inspiration. Certainly I myself have found this to be so, in my own practice as a poet, and in my reading of Plotinus. He is a friend and an ally, one who really understands, and one who validates, in all sorts of ways, from his capacious sensitive beauty-seeing Spirit, and from his considerable analytic mind, the poetic insights that are vitally important to inspired poets.

4 Metaphysics and speculation

Metaphysics are usually thought of these days as 'mere speculation'. Kant has given metaphysics a bad name, though I am not convinced that he understood or had even read the Neoplatonists, completely forgotten by his time. But even if he had read Plotinus, he would probably not have been much impressed. Kant did not believe we have a transcendent faculty for the immediate apprehension of transcendent truth, and Plotinus' demonstration of his own exercise of this faculty, in passage after passage of exhilarating insight and experience, would probably have left the later philosopher cold. He did not have ears to hear, and probably he had no ear for poetry either. And it is part of my thesis that if we have an ear for poetry, we will also have ears for what is called 'speculative metaphysics'.

The dominant meaning for the word 'speculation' has significantly changed in modern times, and Kant himself has played a major role in this change. Speculation now means guess-work, uncertainty, with a strong suggestion of self-indulgence and time-wasting. But for hundreds of years it meant direct insight, direct grasp of truth at a high level. Its literal basis was in a 'specula' or watch-tower, from which one could see very far, and see many things at once, and therefore see things in their true relation. It was not that the rational mind put many rational things together through seeing so many things at once. It was rather that being in a watch-tower state of mind, like gazing at a brilliant starry sky, can bring one into the presence of the spiritual realities which are above the rational. The experience of the spiritual level shows that spiritual reality is not to be determined by the criteria of a lower order. It also shows that the lower levels are in fact dependent orders of being, dependent on what is above them, while having at the same time their own autonomy and dignity.

5 Some of my own experiences

This again is not 'mere speculation', but can be actual experience. One can experience, not only something of the spiritual order itself, but the way in which it orders the other levels, the priorities of being. And I believe that both metaphysicians and inspired poets have this experience, for it is the foundation of much that they do. I know as a poet that the best work I have done has been accompanied by an experience in which my whole being is re-shaped. A re-structuring takes place, a 'something' that an ancient Greek would have called a god, a muse, a 'daimon', actually can take hold of the body and physically shake it into a fresh orientation. I then feel enfolded in one layer after another of the forces of being in what feels true ordering, like those Russian dolls, one within another. The lowest is not denigrated, but is in its place, and ready to do its work creatively in that place. The work of composition then proceeds with ease, and at an amazing pace, and with sureness of execution. Very little needs to be altered later, when my usual state of mind has supervened.

From my own experience too, I can say that exactly the same thing has happened a few times while reading mystical theologians. That is to say, the sense of re-ordering and a powerful re-shaping has taken place, even though on these occasions it

was not given to me to be inspired to write a poem. Some 30 years ago I had decided to read Meister Eckhart properly instead of in snippets. I treated myself to the solid Pfeiffer edition in its English translation, and sat down to read the first of his Sermons, with the flamboyant title, 'This is Meister Eckhart, from whom God nothing hid'. This, and the next two that I read, are at the heart of his mysticism, and begin with the assertion of the need to gather up one's scattered being, to gather all one's faculties, senses, and mind, and feelings, and will, and to put them to rest in a silent place, and let the silence do its work.

I found that a rare energy was evoked in me, and this energy found its way to every part of my body, unlocking stiff joints, straightening my back, easing my head into a good position, and displaying itself in a curious fine sensitivity in my hands and fingers, and feet and toes. I even felt that the hair on my head was lifted up. (Those were the days when I had hair to be lifted up!)

At this point the door bell rang and I went downstairs to answer. A woman friend was there, and she immediately said 'You look extraordinary'. I said, 'Well, I feel extraordinary, and I'm afraid I need to go back to my work right now.' I hope I am not boasting, any more than Edwin Muir was. I was far less deserving of this special grace than he had been. However, these things happen, and one can only be grateful for them, and hope to be faithful and make proper use of them. I have only once spoken of this experience before now.

As I have said already, it is when I feel enfolded in these layers, in what seems like a true ordering, that at other times, when a poetic inspiration occurs, the poem energetically writes itself, almost merely making use of my hand and brain to put itself on the page. I then know, and other inspired poets know, that they inhabit the same universe as those mystics who do not disappear into the mystical void, but whose mysticism includes an energetic descent into the dependent orders of being. It is as though the energy of these creative mystics irradiates the dependent orders. Plotinus and Eckhart were precisely such mystics, being both mystics and constructive philosophers, using the sacred energy of the experience to do philosophical work in the lower orders. And I believe that that is the way philosophy in general should be done, a top-down approach complementing today's more common bottom-up method. If the top-down system takes too much control, it will try to dictate the realities of the empirical levels, and metaphysics in the past has often made this mistake. But there is still a use for the insights and energies of the higher order mind even in the empirical realm.

6 The Sabbath vision in poetry and metaphysics

There is a body of poetry which gives expression to what I am calling the Sabbath-vision. This Sabbath-vision, though of course in different terminology, is found in Plotinus, in his descriptions of his experiences of 'the One', the highest of his three hypostases. (The others are the One-Many, or Nous, and the World Soul) It is a state of sublime restfulness, and in speculative mysticism and in poetry alike one is enjoying the aspect of God as He is beyond His creation. I agree with Nicholas Berdyaev that we have a spiritual need of the non-creator God as well as of God as creator, and the creation itself, and ourselves as created beings. All these levels need to be honoured.

From the angle of the story, as myth of Creation, just as God rested on the seventh day, after the labours of Creation, so we envisage our rest after our business with all the levels of the universe is over, (which includes more than our struggles in this world, and takes in our developments and struggles in the next worlds, according to both Plotinus and the Christian Origen in the 3rd century.) And such rest can be had now, we can penetrate to that reality. There is nothing boring or monotonous about this Sabbath. So long as it is not taken literally, or as an unvarying experience, it is inspiring. The Church's 'They rest from their labours' is an intensely moving statement in its appropriate context.

The value of its gift to poets is that others who have an ear for poetry can share in the experience, for it is usually mediated through the concrete occasions which are the ostensible material and content of the poetry. These concrete occasions are common currency, whereas many purely mystical writings are expressed in language and concepts which are often too remote from such occasions to communicate to many people. Usually only fellow mystics will understand, whereas the mystical in poetry can communicate beyond these. Great poetry comes closer to the world, and can lift up many others to the realm from which it has come.

Edwin Muir's poem was one of those that actually used some theological language in evoking the experience. Henry Vaughan and Traherne and Herbert will also do so, quite often. It does not necessarily spoil the poem or inhibit the experience. But it is usually better if an indirect approach is used, and of course nowadays it allays secular suspicion! Here is Wordswoth's sonnet 'Westminster Bridge':

Earth has not anything to show more fair:
Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
A sight so touching in its majesty:
This City now doth, like a garment, wear
The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,

Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
Open unto the fields, and to the sky;
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.
Never did sun more beautifully steep
In his first splendour, valley, rock, or hill;
Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!
The river glideth at his own sweet will:
Dear God! the very houses seem asleep;
And all that mighty heart is lying still!

Wordsworth does not directly tell us but he conveys us to something higher and grander than London, the ostensible matter of the poem. It is not a trick: the poet himself may not fully know why he is feeling so strongly about his ostensible subject. He does not necessarily know that it *is* an ostensible subject, and more truly a symbol of a higher level. He is moved to give attention to it, perhaps quite naively, as the place where his vision will take its station, and he may be unwittingly, just as the reader is, conveyed to a mystical realm.

With Wordsworth this is especially true. He was an amazing visionary, sensing a mystical unity transcending the world, yet was at the same time dogged by a literal mind which insisted on pulling him down again and again. Some might think that his opening three lines are an example of this prosiness in Wordsworth, yet I would defend them strongly. They work, because they are full of the sense of the sublime something-or-other that at first absolutely overwhelms the poet as he stands on the bridge on a peaceful day, almost certainly a Sabbath. The poet is first *smitten* into silence and inarticulacy by the power of the sight and his feelings, and then gradually the shaping powers give him his rhythm and his words and images, and the form and meter for the poem.

The first stumbling lines are a tribute to his having been overwhelmed by a vision, dumbness and a sense of wonder which, becoming articulate, is present throughout the poem. This higher vision is no denigration of London. There are bonds between great London at rest and the vision of high heaven. The glory of poetry is that both things are shown.

These Sabbath-visions of poets, insofar as they are genuine inspirations, and not simply willed cerebral constructions, are of immense value. They take the poet and his or her audience beyond the reach of suffering, for the while. They are a palpable experience of a beyond-suffering state, of a unity and peace beyond creation. What we call hope is a pale image of the state they can sometimes communicate. Hope is what we practise when we can no longer directly dwell in this state, when the gate of this Eden has once again closed. There is a lesser poetry of hope, but the poetry of the Sabbath-vision is sublime, is the pearl of great price. It can be occasioned by the most common things of our earthly experience, with the light of that Sabbath shining through them. Dylan Thomas wrote in 'Fern Hill', talking of his childhood experiences on a farm:

And as I was green and carefree, famous among the barns
About the happy yard and singing as the farm was home,
In the sun that is young once only,
Time let me play and be
Golden in the mercy of his means,
And green and golden I was huntsman and herdsman, the calves
Sang to my horn, the foxes on the hills barked clear and cold,
And the Sabbath rang slowly
In the pebbles of the holy streams.

Here we have that conjunction between the mystical realm and the ordinary things of earthly life that I was speaking of. It is a weekend on the farm, it is actually a Sunday, a Sabbath. 'The Sabbath rang slowly In the pebbles of the holy streams' is a good description of the slow time of a Welsh Sunday in the old days, of a child's slow experience of time on any day, but especially when playing in clear streams on a quiet Sunday. And at one and the same time it manages to convey that the whole scene is suffused with the light of that mystical Sabbath, beyond all pain and conflict, which is in our hearts, and which we are moved to tears by, when it is given inspired poetic expression. The child himself only half-knew it, even though he was in that special state of child-bliss. It is ourselves as adults in the retrospective experience who can come to know it in full, even while it is snatched from us a few moments later by the relentless and rapid movement of time, clock-time, adult-time.

Another of the virtues of great poetry is the slowing of time, the slowing down, so that we enter the child's experience of time, while having the adult capacity to see the vision through to its source, its transcendent ground. As adults we also know more fully the pains and the evils that the Sabbath-vision offers refuge from. Yet we know, if it is fine poetry, and if we can respond to it, that it is not mere escapism. There is such a thing as pure escapism, and sometimes it is necessary for us. But escapism in literature does not move us to tears. Poetry can do so, because it offers consolation, and because it does not lie, (even when poets are saying that they themselves are the greatest liars!) If it were a lie, we would soon know it. A false sound, a false rhythm, would soon tell us. But the true sound, the true unerring rhythm, tell us that the poem has indeed come from the land of the heart's desire. The poet has merely listened to what is being said there, and recorded it.

7 Poetry as judgment

Sometimes we are aware, as the poet is, that we fail the vision even while experiencing it. When this feeling is dominant, the great vision is felt as a judgment on us, and a special sound and rhythm is in the poem. His poem, if it is a true one, is being shaped by the shaping forces from beyond him, but as his state is not itself mystical, there is not a Sabbath-peace in the poem, but a certain bitterness, with its special clang and rhythm. But this itself can be bracing, and can convey to the reader more than is said. This is the level of Soul-struggle, and corresponds to Plotinus' third hypostasis, World Soul, in its relation to individual souls.

The poet is in a state of conflict, knowing his response to a situation is spiritually inadequate. Yet in inspiration, the spiritual healing forces are there, sounding through the conflict and bitterness. This happens in the Elizabethan Thomas Nashe's great poem at the time of a devastating and frightening plague, 'In Plague Time'. The third stanza goes

> Beauty is but a flower
> Which wrinkles will devour;
> Brightness falls from the air,
> Queens have died young and fair,
> Dust hath closed Helen's eye.
> I am sick, I must die.
> Lord, have mercy upon us.

There is also Thomas Campion's powerful 'Follow thy fair sun, unhappy shadow', and Shakespeare's bitter sonnet on lust, 'The expense of spirit in a waste of shame'. There is the bitterness of Blake's great lines from his 'Vala, Night the Third', with a great echoing of a higher something behind and above what is being stated.

> What is the price of experience ? do men buy it for a song ?
> Or wisdom for a dance in the street ? No, it is bought with the price
> Of all that a man hath, his wife, his children.
> Wisdom is sold in the desolate market where none come to buy,
> And in the withered field where the farmer plows for bread in vain.
> It is an easy thing to triumph in the summer's sun
> And in the vintage and to sing on the waggon loaded with corn.
> It is an easy thing to talk of patience to the afflicted,
> To speak the laws of prudence to the houseless wanderer,
> To listen to the hungry raven's cry in wintry season
> When the red blood is filled with wine and with the marrow of lambs….

There are the dark sonnets of Hopkins, recording an intense struggle in a dark night of the spirit. These move us, because even in this extreme darkness the poet in his poem is being shaped by the forces of inspiration that belong to the realm of mystical peace. And less well-known, there is a remarkable wartime poem by Louis MacNeice, 'Prayer in Mid-passage', with that special emotional charge that war situations often generate, a prayer for help together with a penitence for sins and weaknesses. However, there is not room to quote this, as only in full does it show its qualities.

8 Another level of poetry and metaphysics

Apart from the many categories of genuine poetry below these levels I've been speaking of there is another major category. It is a reflection of activity and struggle within vastness. There is a sense of huge places, great 'halls'. I do not want to push too hard a point-by-point correspondence between the different levels of poetic inspiration and those in Plotinus' system. I am only too aware of the follies that are committed when system-making takes over.

Nevertheless, I do think that a correspondence exists between this poetry and Plotinus' occasional experiential descriptions of the realm of Nous, the One-Many, our true home as active beings. Blake said that 'Energy is eternal delight', and this level I am speaking of is the right context for the expression of that kind of energy. Blake at his best in the prophetic books gives the sense of it, a vast field for the exercise of enormous powers. It is the locus of active enjoyment, and is where most visionary poets will want to operate. Indeed it is sometimes said that Blake was not a mystic at all, but a visionary at this other level. Certainly there is very little Sabbath peace in Blake's work. One will also find this particular energy in much of Victor Hugo's work, and of course in the cosmic Walt Whitman, who at his best is genius, and at his worst a platitudinous fool! We will also find it in several places in Shelley. Blake's long line, and Whitman's, and Hugo's, and Shelley's vertiginous sweep and speed, are all very appropriate for this level of reality. It is exhilarating to read inspired poetry of this sort.

9 Conclusion

To conclude, I would like to return to the tragic mode, in poetry and poetic drama, and to ask the question, why are these things not ultimately depressing. The answer to this question will give perhaps the most telling demonstration of how both poetry and metaphysics are truthful at a sublime level, and not mere subjectivism. If I say, because they are great poetry, that sounds both circular, and also a very glib answer. But if we try to identify what are the elements in the making of great poetry, the answer is not a glibness in the face of the world's suffering. When great tragic poetry is written, the poet is not only in the presence of the

bitter feelings and tragic events, he is in the grip of the transcendent shaping forces, 'the gods', that have to be there if the poem is to be given its true shape and expression.

The presence of these higher forces, in the poet himself, and in his poem or drama, creates a resistance and a counter-reality that can qualify tragedy. The poetic communication of human dignity in the face of persecution and death qualifies tragedy, and such dignity only receives expression from a real source, the transcendent world in which it will be realised, and in which it is in a sense realised even now, if 'the gods' give the poet the sounds which convey it. So long as these forces, and these sounds and meanings are present, no tragic event can be felt as the absolute last word. The *beauty* of tragedy in art is precisely in the apposition of the eternal creative and healing forces against the actual tragic events and feelings recorded. If the poet is not inspired, he will not have access to the healing forces in his work. It will not do to name them, or to be consciously concerned with them, or to be passionate about them.. Sincerity does not in itself make poetry. It is a gift to be granted access to these powers for the expression of poetry. It is a rare gift. Our own culture is now more or less poetry-deaf, even more in its poets than in their audiences, but in cultures where poetry is still a force and widely appreciated, these uses of poetry are well understood, and the gift of inspiration is honoured.

In that fascinating play by Flecker called 'Hassan', written nearly 100 years ago, we are given an insight into a poetry-culture. The Caliph asks Hassan, 'When did you learn poetry, Hassan of my heart?' Hassan replies, 'In that great school, the Market of Bagdad. For thee, Master of the World, poetry is a princely diversion: but for us it was a deliverance from hell. Allah made poetry a cheap thing to buy and a simple thing to understand. He gave men dreams by night that they might learn to dream by day. Men who work hard have special need of these dreams. All the town of Bagdad is passionate for poetry, O Master. Dost thou not know what great crowds gather to hear the epic of Antari sung in the streets at evening. I have seen cobblers weep and butchers bury their great faces in their hands!' The Caliph comments, 'Ah, if there shall ever arise a nation whose people have forgotten poetry, or whose poets have forgotten the people, though they send their ships round Taprobane and their armies across the hills of Hindustan, though their city be greater than Babylon of old, though they mine a league into the earth or mount to the stars on wings – what of them?' Hassan comments, 'They will be a dark patch upon the world'.

Yet one might reasonably object that we trivialise real suffering and desperate situations when we say that terrible things in great poetry are not ultimately depressing. What does it matter whether they are or whether they are not? The question is, what is the fate of the desperate people, who are not likely to be reading poetry at the time?

Yet the really extraordinary thing is that desperate situations have stimulated numbers of people to remember poetry, or to try to get hold again of poems that have moved them, in the knowledge that it will help them. Others have even, under these pressures, written poetry, usually for the first and the last time in their lives, and often enough of surprising quality. Such was the case in the front line, in both world wars.

Even in the concentration camps people have witnessed to the healing power of poetry, to its capacity to inspire hope and endurance. Of course strong religious faith, with or without the adjunct of fine poetry, has been even more notable in its effect, but I mention poetry in these contexts because it has sometimes done what we would hardly expect it to do. Some who have not been able to make use of traditional religion, have nevertheless found its healing equivalent in poetry. Great poetry is for real situations, as it has in it the echo of a saving reality which people know as truth, not mere refuge.

Many, of course, are not helped or assuaged. A whole people can be conscious of a tragedy that has engulfed thousands, even millions, without consolation, without beauty, without hope. The world is more and more like that today. I do not wish to claim more for poetry, or for any power in this world, even religion itself, than it can deliver. There are many things that are not healed here, ever. Another world, and even some experience of oblivion, is needed. (The last line of Wilfred Owen's great poem 'Strange Meeting', set in another world, says 'Let us sleep now.') But still a real poet can speak for a people, a culture, as it tries to renew itself. The poet can have the power of speaking for all the voiceless ones who have gone down into 'death's dateless night' without help from the world. A people hears the voice of true poetry, and learns to grieve for the lost ones all over again, and learns perhaps that the dignity of those lost ones has not after all been lost. A tall order for poetry, but if there *is* a saving truth, a redeeming power, a preserving and healing power, anywhere beyond this astronomical universe, poetry makes only the claim to record it, and to communicate it truly.

Leiston

DISCUSSION

IS VIOLENCE ALWAYS CRUEL?

Wendy C. Hamblet and Giorgio Baruchello

1 An answer: Wendy C. Hamblet

In Aristotle's distinguishing 'calculated acts of outrage' as examples of cruelty (over against 'acts committed in anger'), he gives us a classic definition of cruelty that is clearly with us yet today in the West.[1] Here, cruelty is located as a subset of violent actions where cold calculation sets the agent apart (as morally worse) from those committing violent acts when merely blinded by passion. Calculation speaks to the (perhaps prior) intention to commit the outrage, rather than the less culpable violent act resulting from the momentary loss of clarifying practical reason.

However, as indicated in Professor Baruchello's conclusion to our first investigation into cruelty, many philosophers have insisted that more than cold calculation is at work when cruelty happens.[2] For action to be named truly cruel, there must be, beyond cruelty as embedded in the intent, a certain pleasure in the suffering of the other, or at the very least indifference to that suffering. Thus the question 'Is violence always cruel?' could be answered with a clear negative; violence is not always cruel. Only that violence where evil intention causes a compassionless or delighted response to the suffering of the undeserving innocent, or to an exaggerated, immoderate degree or form of suffering applied to those deserving punishment.

Empirical evidence testifies to the fact that certainly violence happens, and often, where these distinguishing characteristics are not to be found. If we hold to this narrow definition of cruelty, then many everyday actions that involve the violation of the rights and bodies of others begin to look like little more than well-intended 'corrective measures' or, at their most extreme, thoughtless accidents. Parents regularly violate the rights and bodies of their children, but, having the child's moral education and sometimes the child's safety as the intent, the parent cannot be named cruel, according to our narrow definition. However, as long as we define cruelty in terms of the intent and (compassionless) response *in the agent*, we run the risk of missing some of the most subtle and painful cruelties quite evident from the perspective *of the victim*. As long as the intent remains pure, and the agent of the violence remains caring in regard of the victim, we seem condemned to exonerate our perpetrator as merely accidentally or inappropriately violent, instead of outright cruel. However, gut reaction tells us this exoneration is misplaced.

An example might help to clarify my concern here. When teaching an ethics class centred about discussions of Home and Violence in a fundamentalist Christian pocket of the Central Valley of California, I was approached by a troubled and nervous, often incoherent young female student of mine. She stayed after class one day to confide to me that her religious convictions were somewhat ambiguous. On the one hand, she understood the God of Christianity in the image of a loving and just father, ready to forgive his children their sins. On the other, at a young age, she had been taught by her earthly father to beware the 'just deserts' of sin, when he held a flaming lighter under her forearm and explained through her screams, 'If you think this hurts, imagine what hell feels like.'

Assuming that the father in question considered this method of behaviour modification to serve the best interests of his daughter's moral progress, our working definition of cruelty requires that we name this treatment of the child's body (and her sense of security and well-being) mere violence, unintended as harm. What I am suggesting by raising this counterexample to our definition of cruelty is that the breadth of our abstract definitions may have a direct bearing upon the actions that agents undertake. Acts of violence happen as a matter of course in the world. We frighten our children into safe conduct around roads, strangers, and Halloween candy. Police violate our rights when they pull us over and check our licenses on a whim. Security agents at the airport are paid to routinely dehumanise travellers, rummaging through their personal effects, having them stand in lines bereft of their footwear and warm outer clothes. But these 'violences' are far from those of my student's father, though his intentions may have been more pure than any of these other 'perpetrators'. Since broader definitions of violational behaviours may serve to limit those very behaviours, it is crucial that cruel behaviours be named as such, and with widest breadth that reasonably fits.

This concern explains why some philosophers, especially those thinking in the post-Holocaust world, have chosen to hyperbolize their characterizations of violence to radicalise our moral sensitivity, even in the case of inadvertent violations of others. For example, Emmanuel Levinas broadens the definition of violence to include all acts of

representation; 'knowing' is a kind of appropriation where the subject takes up a one-sided view of the object and re-presents that single aspect or 'side' as the whole of the object. For Levinas, others are radically other, their differences from my 'known' extending into the depth of infinity beyond the 'side' that is appropriated as 'known by me.'[3] This means that we must understand even our most loving relationships to be appropriative in structure, grounded in 'my use' or 'my pleasure' of the loved one. The relationship is, at the very least, *potentially* violent, if not necessarily so.

Levinas' broadening of the definition of violence almost *ad absurdum* is meant to alert the agent to the ease with which the best intentions can permit, and perhaps even cause us to slip away, conscience-free, into violent behaviours. Levinas may disappoint many careful etymologists by going too far with his definition of violence. However, in another regard, Levinas goes not far enough in naming the spade a spade. In an essay entitled 'The Ego and the Totality,' Levinas attributes all violent behaviour to egos that are merely 'unthinking.'[4] The violation of others cannot be remedied, in this essay, but at least the violator can learn to be aware of the harm that she effects in the world by becoming a 'thinking being,' aware and taking care, and acting 'under apology' with regard to the others around her. And elsewhere, in a shocking exoneration, Levinas insists that an agent of violence is to be understood as merely an 'innocent egoist and alone … not against the Others, not 'as for me. . .' but entirely deaf to the Other, like a stomach that has no ears.'[5] Levinas wants us, in *Totality and Infinity*, to take responsibility for the host that fails in generosity, but in *Otherwise Than Being*, he wants us to take responsibility even for the irresponsibility of the S.S. Guard who fails morally.

We must admit, then, that, while Levinas has a keen sense of the potential for violence embodied in every relationship, he is far too generous in regard of the agents of violence. No agent, in his account, comes off as outright cruel. The worst culprit is simply morally impaired, not yet a 'thinking being.' While his account of the violence of loving relations may offend our sense of intimate connection, his insistence that all egos are merely as innocent as hungry stomachs flies in the face of what we witness to be empirically evident in the world, with each new war of aggression, each new Mau, Pol Pot, Hitler, and Stalin. Many people—even parents, husbands and children, idealistic leaders and religious icons, even where driven by the best intentions, even where compassionate for the objects of their acts in the world—are simply cruel.

In our everyday parlance, we condemn as 'cruel' those agents or events that involve intent to harm and compassionless response to the harm that is caused. By this definition, some of the most wanton acts of violence slip by as merely unintentional or well-intended errors. On the other hand, if we take very seriously our own accepted criteria for cruelty, it can be argued that we must name cruel all well-fed, well-sheltered citizens of the first world. In a world where each and every day between 25,000 and 36,000 innocent children die of hunger and hunger-related diseases while grain rots in our fields, where we in the West enjoy an ecological footprint that grants us forty times our fair share of the world's resources, where wars of political and economic aggression are celebrated as acts of heroism when levied by the richest of nations upon the poorest and most defenceless of third world countries, where the victims of those wars are no longer just its soldiery but seven out of eight of their victims are now innocent civilians, it is difficult to deny that cruelty can come in many guises, including the 'innocent' acts of violence of omission that permit us good conscience in the midst of such a world. We are culpable because we are comfortably dispassionate about the overwhelming vastness of global misery.

Philosophy Department
Adelphi University
Garden City, New York. 11530.

NOTES:

1. Aristotle quoted in A. Caputo et al., 'Understanding and Experiences of Cruelty: An Exploratory Report' in *The Journal of Social Psychology* 140(5), 649-660, 1.
2. Giorgio Baruchello and Wendy C. Hamblet, 'What is Cruelty?' in *Appraisal* Vol. 4, no. 4.
3. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, Alfonso Lingis, translation, Pittsburg: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 131-132.
4. *Collected Philosophical Papers*, Alfonso Lingis, translation, (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Press, 1993), 25-46.
5. *Totality and Infinity*, 134.

2 A reply to Wendy C. Hamblet: Giorgio Baruchello

Once again, Professor Hamblet grasps the ethical core of the interrogative at issue and tackles it most dramatically. With her reply, Professor Hamblet argues that, even by defining 'cruelty' in the very loose way suggested in our first joint essay (i.e. on the basis of actual suffering brought about by an agent who displays delight in or indifference to the victim's suffering), we may not have enough semantic 'substance' to cover all the existing cases of cruel behaviour. Whenever the agent's intentions are pure, as in her example of the harassing Christian fundamentalist father, cruelty may turn most perplexingly into something far less reproachable, such as well-intended 'corrective

measures,' or, to use John Kekes' terminology, 'benevolent impositions of pain.'

My reply to this problem, as anticipated in our previous essay, is to connect our semantic/ cognitive analysis with the pragmatic/ethical background that motivates it. Specifically, another element has to be kept in mind firmly, in order to be able to understand why speaking of cruelty can result pragmatically/ethically problematical and how any unsatisfactory, partial account of potentially cruel behaviour can be properly integrated from a semantic/cognitive point of view: the perspective from which the action is being evaluated.

Insofar as the agent's intentions are assessed from the agent's perspective, the alleged purity of the agent's intentions may cause 'cruelty' to leave the scene *in lieu* of some slightly more acceptable 'violence.' Professor Hamblet considers this eventuality counterintuitive and morally irresponsible. I agree with her on the moral dangers of an agent-based approach, which is, however, semantically/cognitively viable, insofar as it portrays the event(s) to be assessed from a plausible angle of observation. Equally plausible, but pragmatically/ethically more revealing, is the victim's evaluative perspective. This perspective makes 'cruelty' much more resilient and much more unlikely to leave the scene. More than intention-guided, in fact, the assessment of the possible cruelty at stake is suffering-guided. The fact alone that the victim is suffering leads, so to speak, to the suspicion that cruelty is actually there. Prudential considerations require that the victim's accusations, rather than the agent's declared aims, be the starting point for the assessment of cruelty. As long as our ethical/pragmatic aim is the reduction and/or avoidance of cruelty, the cognitive/semantic integration and/or substitution of the agent-based approach with the victim-based one, is of fundamental importance.[1]

Still, even when the victim's evaluative perspective is taken, the intentions of the agent will not and cannot be relegated to some inferior level of consideration or excluded altogether. They pertain to the assessment of cruelty. Not to do so implies that any action bringing about suffering turns into a cruel action, including my involuntary dropping a heavy hammer on your toes, or the dentist's unwelcome pulling of the wrong tooth of mine.[2] Not to consider the agent's intentions is at least as counterintuitive as not to condemn the harassing Christian fundamentalist father as cruel.

Moreover, by combining the consideration of the agent's intentions with the victim's evaluative perspective, it becomes more likely for the assessing party to realise whether the agent is actually:

[A] deriving hidden delight from the suffering caused by his/her action, or
[B] being de facto indifferent to the suffering caused by his/her action.

One could sensibly argue that, to get back to Professor Hamblet's example, were the father really caring and love-guided, he would look for less gruesome, alternative forms of soul-saving assistance for the daughter, at least and especially after hearing the daughter's screams of pain and discomfort.[3] Most people would probably take into account the intentions of the father also in order to determine at least the degree of cruelty of the action that he performs, i.e. burning his daughter's forearm with the flame of a lighter, so as to remind her of the dangers of eternal damnation.

I cannot deny, however, that other people, and not necessarily only Christian fundamentalists, may want to insist in taking those very same intentions into account in order to determine whether the father was *really* cruel or not; that is to say, whether he was not cruel but, presumably, overzealous, stupid, unimaginative. Sadly enough, they would say, terrible things often follow from people's lack of understanding: of themselves, of other people, and of the consequences of their own actions.

Levinas' justification of the SS guard's criminal behaviour on grounds of moral underdevelopment, which Hamblet discusses in her reply, points exactly in this direction, and forces us to wonder: can shallowness, ignorance and stupidity disqualify a claim of cruelty? Can any detriment due to mere causal responsibility (and not also to moral responsibility) be seen as cruelty? Are perhaps shallowness, ignorance and stupidity morally laden causal factors that we tend not to recognise as such? Both State courts and Divine Justice (according to Aquinas) tend to distinguish not only the suffering caused voluntarily from the suffering caused involuntarily, but also the suffering caused voluntarily in the name of self-interest from the suffering caused voluntarily in the name of altruism. Are they right in doing so? And if they are right, are they tracing a dividing line between 'violence' and 'cruelty,' or just between more and less severe forms of cruelty?[4]

Shifting evaluative perspective, thus individuating hidden sadistic streaks and actual brutality, may not solve all problems. Even when the victim's evaluative perspective is considered regularly before the perpetrator's, dilemmas may not cease to exist, and it may be still difficult to determine whether an action is actually cruel or not. After all, shallowness, ignorance and stupidity could be much stronger and much more pervasive than hidden sadism and actual brutality. Furthermore, the detriment itself of cruelty may be difficult to assess,

as short-term detriments may produce long-term benefits, and short-term benefits, instead, long-term detriments.[5] Being cruel *hinc et nunc* may prove good *a posteriori*. Using physically painful means *hinc et nunc* may strengthen the moral character of the individual and maximise his/her chances to be a good citizen, or a good Christian.

In conclusion, to wonder seriously about the nature and most basic features of cruelty involves reflecting upon the deepest ontological and axiological assumptions of ours: can the concern for spiritual salvation, for instance, override the concern for physical well-being? When can we justify any intervention into another's personal sphere of freedom? And what kind of detriment is needed for cruelty to subsist? Our analysis must then move further, broadening and deepening its scrutiny, and I wish to suggest a series of interrogatives about 'cruelty' to be tackled:

1. Can cruelty follow from shallowness, ignorance, and stupidity?
2. What kind of detriment must cruelty entail in order to be real cruelty?
3. Can cruelty be good, at least instrumentally?
4. Can there be a universal notion of cruelty, in spite of differing ontologies?
5. Can existence (nature, life, the universe) be cruel?

I invite Professor Hamblet and the readers of *Appraisal* to try to find answers to these questions, insofar as they can help the moral agent and/or the assessing individual to determine when and whether cruelty is the case. Probably, no all-catching definition of 'cruelty' will be produced thereby, and no all-revealing 'gut reaction' magically present within our souls will be discovered either. After all, people have kept and keep disagreeing about all sorts of claims of cruelty. Still, the assessment of cruelty is a most important issue, at least in terms of practical wisdom, which requires the development and the cultivation of one's own *esprit de finesse*.[6] As such, a reasoned understanding of 'cruelty' is needed in addition to our *immoralia*-disclosing 'gut reaction,' which Hamblet rightly recalls in her reply, as well as to the insights accumulated by philosophers and by intellectuals in the history of our civilisation, which we have outlined in our previous essay. Reason, intuition and tradition, as I derive from Blaise Pascal, form our imperfect yet sole weaponry in the struggle against the evils of cruelty.[7]

Faculty of Law and Social Science
University of Akureyri
IS-600 Akureyri
ICELAND
E-MAIL: giorgio@unak.is

NOTES:

1. As it was already recommended, the victim's perspective should be taken as often as possible, for it is the one that is more likely to minimise the probabilities for cruelty to arise and persist. This evaluative choice is contingent upon a prior commitment to the minimisation of cruelty, which is something that many agents may regard (though not declare openly) as secondary to other commitments, such as the maintenance of public order, the maximisation of money-returns, or the protection of personal freedom for self-realisation.
2. Levinas' broadening of the notion of 'violence,' so as to include claims of knowledge themselves, hint to this possibility, which I consider metaphysically plausible, but ethically perplexing, for it defuses the concern for violence by 'spraying' it onto all aspects of existence. It is not casual, perhaps, that Levinas ends up justifying the SS' criminal behaviour, for whoever lives appears to be bound to commit violence by living as such.
3. As for the claim that only the agent can be the judge of his/her intentions, allow me to remark *en passant* that God, the juror, the therapist, and the insightful partner may often have a better sense of what the agent meant to do when he/she did it, and be required to use it.
4. In effect, I believe the less gruesome cruelties of the State mentioned by Hamblet to be far less excusable than those of the ignorant Christian fundamentalist. Unlike the latter, the former had time and resources, both material and intellectual, to conceive of alternative paths of action devoid or quasi-devoid of detriment.
5. Rather often, one feels forced to choose between cruelties of different degree, rather than between cruel and non-cruel paths of action. Such choices, as many of us have experienced in life, are never easy: perhaps, life itself can be cruel. How this 'natural' cruelty relates to 'man-made' cruelty, or the vice of cruelty, it is something I do not assess hereby.
6. It should be noted that our 'sense' for cruelty can be nurtured as well as suffocated, and it is most important for personal and interpersonal well-being that individuals are educated to recognise and act upon cruelty, with the same passion and efficacy with which ancient Icelanders were trained not to regard pillage and rape in the Hebrides as nothing worth reproaching.
7. Did we really believe that we could know always and for sure when and why cruelty is the case, we would probably put ourselves very quickly in the position of the Christian fundamentalist, who seems to be very confident about his intuition about what is cruel (i.e. eternal damnation) and what is not cruel (i.e. the use of physical force for the sake of another's salvation). He 'knows' violently, in the sense that Hamblet's discussion of Levinas explains.

CRITICAL NOTICE

TOWARDS CHIRO-PHILOSOPHY

R. T. Allen

Raymond Tallis
The Hand: A Philosophical Inquiry into Human Being
Edinburgh, Edinburgh U.P., 2003; ISBN 07486 1738 8 (pbk); £19.99; pp. 364.

I would like to thank Dr John Preston for suggesting to me the works of Raymond Tallis, who is Professor of Geriatric Medicine at the University of Manchester.

The work under review is the first volume of a trilogy which builds upon and extends further the philosophical works that Prof. Tallis has already published. The other volumes (which I look forward to reading and reviewing) will be *I Am: A Philosophical Inquiry into First-Person Being*, and *The Knowing Animal: A Philosophical Inquiry into Truth and Knowledge.*

In the meantime I shall try to catch up with his previously published philosophical books which include:

Fathers and Sons, Iron Press, 1993;
Not Saussure, 2nd. ed. Macmillan, 1995;
Enemies of Hope, 2nd ed., Macmillan 1999;
The Explicit Animal, 2nd ed., Macmillan 1999;
On the Edge of Certainty, Macmillan 1999;
A Raymond Tallis Reader, Palgrave, 2000;
A Conversation with Martin Heidegger, Palgrave, 2001.

In *The Hand* the author offers the reader both a 'celebration' of what the hand can do (how *handy* it is) and a philosophical argument about its central role in the emergence of the distinctively human form of self-consciousness and all that is involved in it.

For the former he draws upon specialised studies and everyday experience. He does not intend to tell us all that the human hand can do nor in detail how it does it. His aim is to remind us just how versatile our hands are and the wide range of things they have enabled us to do. In particular he makes full use of all the expressions in which 'hand' is used. And he keeps the reader aware of his general aims and thesis, by giving a summary of the whole book in the first chapter and then by constantly referring to what has already been said and to what will be said, not only in the present work also but in the two volumes yet to come.

1 The biological basis and 'biologism'

What is distinctive of the human hand is its versatility, and the anatomical and physiological bases of this versatility are the complete opposability of the thumb, which can move in all directions, to each of the other digits, and especially with the index figure, and the high degree of sensitivity of the pads at the ends of all our digits. I shall pass over the anatomical and physiological details, for what is important is what they enable us to do.

And this is where Tallis first, and rightly, sets himself against 'biologism', that our distinctively human nature can be explained in biological terms. The small, but crucial, differences between human and non-human hands (of which more in a moment) do not, by themselves account for, the human mode of existence, creating and using technology, self-awareness and self-responsibility, culture and history. It is our ability to make use of them which is decisive (p. 33). Biology provides the foundation and the opportunity but does not determine nor explain what is done with them.

Moreover, he claims, and again rightly so, that the parallels drawn between animal and human hands are frequently exaggerated. At best chimpanzees (the most frequently cited parallel) can employ only two of eight basic grips: the hook, as when hold a rope or handing from a branch, and the squeeze (a power grip) as when holding a hammer or a stone to crack a shell. Nor are the tools of any animal properly so-called, for, apart from the fishing sticks and nut-cracking stones used by chimpanzees, they are objects merely picked up and used the once. And 'chimps are chumps' for it takes them five years to learn the art of nut-cracking (pp. 224-5), and this is the acme of their tool-using, which, at the most, culminates in some degree of modification of the object used as a tool, and never rises to tool-making, using one tool, such as a stone, to make another by chipping flakes off a flint. As for counting and the apparent performance of sums by rats and chimpanzees, it is more plausible to interpret what they can do as an ability to recognise differences in global amounts: for one thing, at best they recognise 1, 2 and 3 but never get further, become increasingly mistaken as quantities increase, and have no sense of ordinality ('smaller', 'in between' and 'greater' do not come in set order) (pp. 197-200).

Again, in arguing for the role of the hand, as distinct from the paw, in 'the widening gap between animal nature and human culture', Tallis reminds us that:

> The human escape from biology cannot be entirely explained in biological terms or in terms that biology can capture. The seeming paradox we have to face is that, while the jump from higher primates to human may be a product of nature, it cannot be itself a part of nature: when, as has happened, our organic bodies have to some degree . . . . become liberated from organic constraint, this cannot be analysed as a purely organic process. More generally, to confine ourselves to the biology of organisms—even if that organism contains a magic organ such as 'the brain'—when we are trying to answer an essentially philosophical question is to move beyond biology into biologism (p. 273).

Finally on this theme, I commend his brief and telling refutation of 'evolutionary epistemology', which purports to explain and justify our knowledge on the grounds that it helps us to survive and adapt:

> We cannot explain the fact that there is knowledge (of all sorts) on the basis of a theory—the theory of evolution—that is itself an advanced piece of human knowledge. When we are trying to get at the fundamental basis of human knowledge, we cannot take Darwinism for granted. The suggestion that we are accurately aware of the world because we are adapted to have such knowledge (on pain otherwise of not being at all) rather puts the cart before the horse: the theory of evolution lies at the end of a very long chain of reason based upon a huge mass of knowledge and cannot be assumed when we are trying to found, or justify or explain, that knowledge. (p. 298)

Again, though only in a footnote (n. 64, p. 310), sociobiology is rightly criticised for refusing to acknowledge the fundamental gap between organisms driven by instincts and human beings who choose and invoke reasons: 'Adaptive determinism as applied to organisms cannot encompass individual judgements and cultural choices'. I would add that, even within the proper realm of biology, Darwinianism and Neo-Darwianism account only for survival and extinction and not for emergence—the coming into being of new variations within a species, new patterns of behaviour, new organs, new forms of life, let alone life itself—because its purported explanation by *random* mutation of genes is an explicit confession of ignorance.

2 An introduction to the handy hands of 'manukind'

So what can the hand do? Or, rather as Tallis reminds, us what can we do with our hands?

As a starter (in Chap. 1) he reproduces pictures of eight basic grips. In addition to the two already mentioned, we can deploy six others: the scissors grip, as when holding a cigarette between two fingers; the 3 precision grips—5-jaw chuck with all digits around a ring (the wrist-spinner's usual grip with the digits around the seam of the ball), the 2-jaw chuck pad-to-pad of thumb against the tip of the index-finger as when sewing, and the 2-jaw chuck of pad to side as when turning a key; and the two other power grips of disc (unscrewing the lid on a pot) and spherical (holding a ball) (p.26). He notes that he finds himself using variations and combinations of these grips.[1]

These introduce us to the philosophical arguments, the primary themes, of the book. This array of grips gives us a *choice* of which to use. It therefore indicates and occasions the rise of *self-consciousness* and with it *freedom.* This variety of grips also reveals that our hands mediate between us and what we manipulate with them, and thus that our hands themselves are *tools*, the primary tools, and that we regard our bodies generally as *instruments* in dealing with the world.[2] This is another way in which an inner distance is opened within us and thus self-consciousness. The instrumentality of our hands and then our bodies in general opens up a distance between ourselves as the users and them as what we use.

The variety of grips shows that we can manipulate objects in many ways. Moreover, manipulation can be undertaken for different purposes. Hence the *exploring* and *knowing* hand, that explores surfaces and so not only acquires knowledge of them but in and for so doing of its own location and disposition. Furthermore the hand acquires knowledge, not only for its manipulation of objects, but to determine what they are and whether it is worth acting upon them. The hand is thus the source of our first knowledge of things as they are in themselves, and not simply as related to our immediate desires.

With our hands we touch not only other things but also ourselves. In touching other parts of the body with our hands, each is felt as both toucher and touched, though the hand as primarily toucher and the other part as touched, we also bring about another differentiation within ourselves, and thus another mode of self-consciousness.

The hand also *communicates*: it gestures, beckons, points, and waves farewell. The language of the hand was probably prior to the articulate language of the voice, and still today expresses and communicates what cannot be said, the comforting arm around the shoulder, the affectionate or reassuring clasp of the other's hand.

Hence Tallis' overall argument is that it is the distinctive powers of the human hand that permit,

and are further extended by, the emergence of our distinctive mental and personal powers.

To sustain that thesis, he has to show:

(a) what we can do with our hands;

(b) what *we* can do with our hands that animals can't do with theirs;

(c) what we can do with our hands that we either cannot or first did not do with other parts of our bodies—why the hand has a hand in all of this.

Most of the book is naturally devoted to (a). We have already noted some references to (b). I shall now work through the book and elaborate points that I found especially interesting.

3 Brachio-chiral

(a) Agency and mechanism

Pt I of the book is entitled 'Brachio-Chiral', and its chapters deal with the hand as part of the arm and the whole body.

The author begins by revealing the complexities involved in reaching, such locating the object in relation to oneself and how the hand opens to form the requisite grip before it reaches its object. These complexities raise the questions of the roles of mechanism and agency. Tallis rejects both mechanism and explicit agency. The notion of a programme, of a pre-set group of instructions for sequence (of sequences) of muscle movements for co-ordinate action, which will complete the task when initiated, cannot accommodate, even in such a stereotyped activity as walking, all the infinitely variable adjustments that have to be made. At this point recourse made be made to talk of the brain performing calculations and even executing 'if-even' operations. But this is the error of 'misplaced explicitness', and to credit the brain with being able to do what we can't. Moreover, smaller scale actions are usually phases of, and shaped by, larger ones, and yet larger ones in turn (reaching for the ball is part of stopping it, and one can always override any higher-level and, for example, reach for a cup in any way one likes:

> We have no means of understanding how we might requisition mechanisms to enable our voluntary actions; by what mechanisms such mechanisms are requisitioned; how our agency is carved out of preprogrammed components; how freedom acts itself through automaticity. (p. 68)

So how does voluntary doing differ from and relate to involuntary 'it happens' and automatism? Here I find Tallis' argument no so much faulty as absent. He refers to his general argument that our self-awareness and with it agency arises from the hand, the other side of the wrist.

> While reaching in animals is largely 'happening', human fingering and manipulation are 'doing'. Much of what is proximal to the wrist is shared with animals; distal to the wrist we have no peers'. *And it is what happens distal to the wrist that, in the first instance, imports true 'doing' into the world*. Agency (and the agentive self) grows from the tips of our 'meta-fingering' fingers. This, then, retroacts upon what is proximal to the wrist, importing doing into more and more of the body, and, via tools, into what happens beyond the wrist, making the world increasingly the product of doing rather than happening. (p. 69)

Yet this still leaves the relation of agency to mechanism unexplained, and, I suggest, wrongly assumes that there is no counterpart of 'doing' in animals.

As for the latter, consider learning. If this were a matter of 'mechanism', of the conditioning of unconditioned reflexes, why does it not always happen the first time? Why are several encounters, indeed sometimes many, often necessary for the animal to learn that after *A* comes *B*? It can be only because the animal itself, no matter to how small a degree, is an agent in its own learning. In some very distant and faint echo of what we do, the humble earthworm, on its 60th wriggle along a branching tube, has to judge that something nasty lies up the one fork and to decide to take the other.

And as for the former, we can only appeal to the fact, against, all reductionism, that another level of being, agency, does supervene upon, and increasingly in us, come to control what begins as 'mechanism', which, as Tallis has shown, cannot itself be wholly 'mechanistic'.

But there is something else that is distinctive of us as well as the hand, and Tallis has not taken it into account: our lack of 'instincts'. We have, I understand, only two, or at least only two motor instincts: to suck what touches the lips and to grasp what touches the palm of the hand. Everything else we learn, even blinking which now we cannot inhibit. In the case of gross bodily movement, the human infant is already free, and learns that the things waving randomly in front of him are part of him as and when he learns that he can control them. Later on he learns that he can control some internal bodily processes. Had we more instincts, learning would be less important and agency less engaged. This is the only significant qualification that I have to make to the thesis of this book and the arguments and evidence adduced for it.

(b) Self, world and another

Chap. 3, 'The Talking Hand', is more celebration than argument, except to remind us of how the human hand, in contrast to the animal paw, allows us to a thousand things that animals cannot, including making signs out of actions so as to signify the actions themselves, as when opening an umbrella to show that it is raining.

So too with clasping another's hand (Chap. 4), but the clasping of one's own hand opens up a new dimension in human existence. Our hands, as well as interacting with and touching each other, tend the rest of the body, and thus we become both subject and object in reflexive action.[3] The hands are the same but different: the one is the mirror-image of the other. And with this difference goes 'handedness', the preference for and dominance of the one over the other.[4] Hence we divide the world, with ourselves at the its centre, into what is on the right and what is on the left. And, argues Tallis, from this dissimilarity in similarity, arises a sense of oneself as the Boss who uses, differentially, these two hands. Again, the one hand can warm the other, and thus heighten, in this contrast of giver and recipient, our awareness of ourselves. The hand itself, as the most active part of the body, handling and exploring, and at the end of its arm mediating between the rest of the person and the world, yields 'an inchoate selfness that is ambiguously both *in* and *of* the hand' (p. 125). The hand, in manipulation, has to report its own location, implicitly or explicitly, in order to initiate, execute and complete an action:

> It is through our hands that we expropriate our own bodies, get a first-person grip on the organism that we live, and, through this, get a grip on the world (p. 130).

With our hands we explore our own bodies, as when locating and then scratching an itch. The itch is mine yet also at a distance to be crossed by the hand. An inner distance opens up within me. In touching we are also touched. Hence also the significance of the caress which seeks to localise the other's self at that point on the body where the other is touched and so to take hold of the other's self.

4 Chiro-Digital

From the hand at the end of the arm, Tallis turns in Pt II to the hand and its digits, their differentiation of structure and tasks, team-work and versatility. Among the 'celebrations', the more philosophical moments include the complexities of the uniquely human practice of pointing and grasping the point of pointing [i.e. of attending *from* instead of *to* the pointing finger and hand]. It reveals a burgeoning awareness of oneself as distinct from and surrounded by the world, an ability to carve it up into regions, to distinguish *here* from *there*, a step from lived space to abstract space. It requires a sense of a shared world with different locations and points of view in which others may not yet see what I see. It has, in these ways, many of the same foundations as [verbal] language (p. 164).

Another more philosophical moment is the reflection upon 'practising'. How is it that repetition improves performance especially when the practising is standardised and the performances are not? Again, any explanation in terms of available programmes is inadequate because something other than a preformed programme would be required to select, assemble and execute them. Similar problems arise with attempts to explain the co-ordination of the hands and of the whole body.

> One is tempted to conclude that we are able to accomplish most of the ordinary manual and bimanual things we do only because *we know what we are doing and are not stupid or in coma* (pp. 186-91).

I would add that focally we know what we are doing, and subsidiarily how to do it.

The real digits of the hands, because they are more than merely two, are roughly equivalent, can be bent and so 'taken away', and can be opposed and thus counted by each other, provide us with the base for the abstract digits of numbers and thus for all the achievements of mathematics and natural science. But they can be employed as such only because we already have a sense of agency and choice because of the freedom within limits that the physiology of the hand gives us and thus also a sense of our hands as instruments, and in turn of the hand and fingers as standing out from our bodies. In addition, Tallis, argues, we already experience a fusion of the general and the particular in the choice of a particular grip for a general task, a fusion that is fundamental to the intuition of number, of reducing one sheep to 'one'. The fingers also have an order, which, because most people are right-hand goes from left to right (the index finger of the right counting on the digits of the left), and thus yielding that grasp of ordinality, the relations of 3 to 4 and 5 to 6 which are not the same as those of 6 to 5 and 4 to 3, which animals lack. And in counting our fingers with our fingers, we are aware of the counting itself, which in turn is a step towards naming and then symbolically representing the numbers. Likewise other parts of the body, also as our *instruments*, provide the units that measurement requires, while the hand is a ready (handy) example of many-in-one, one folded into a fist, many digits when opened out, as any distance or size is a one of many units.

This chapter (Chap. 9) ends with some brief reflections on the long passage from enumeration to measurement and then to objective (i.e. standardised) quantitative knowledge and science. Trade (cows are not the same size; flour is not a self-defining object but a mass) and the need to predict seasonal changes and other events promoted these developments. But, Tallis rightly observes against economic and evolutionary explanations of our knowledge, mathematics then develops by its

own logic and not by magical anticipation of what will be needed decades and centuries in the future.

The hand is 'the tool of tools' (Chap. 10). We have already noted the difference between animal tool-use (in a limited way) and human tool-making. Tallis sketches how this has developed from flint-knapping and then, after 2.4 million years, to hafts for hand-axes and thus composite tools, then tools (e.g. needle and thread) for making or modifying other tools or artefacts, to machines (to relieve and increase effort) and then precision tools. What Tallis finds significant in these developments is the raising of human consciousness: the use of imagination and foresight, detaching processes in nature from their occurrences (as in heating raw materials to make them flake more easily), tools as signs of their making and their purposes and thus as standing out from the natural world, the social and co-operative dimensions of a tool which has meaning only as playing a role in a technique, the liberation of tools from the hand and then the body, and finally the knowledge of the user, who now has no idea what goes on inside the precision machines that he uses.

Moreover tool-using and tool-making, not only preceded the use of language by two million years at least, but, Tallis, argues provide a foundation for it. In several ways, tools are like language: for example, they are signs, akin to linguistic ones: they signify the actions to be performed with them; they too have a private and a public aspect; and they show their status as signs: they are intended to be perceived as signs. Tools and language have common requirements, catered for in the same parts of the brain. Hence the suggestion that tool-use, and thus the hand, helped 'to foster the emergence of the appropriate neural substrate' for language (p. 242). Tool-use, brain development and sociality appear to have promoted each other, by means of:

> a complex mixture of conventional Darwinian genetic selection of the most adapted individuals; of Lamarckian transmission of collective or community (procedural and declarative) knowledge; and of Darwinian-Lamarckian selection of those individuals most able (practically, cognitive, emotionally) able [*sic*] to take most advantage of the collective knowledge (p. 244).

These interactions are further specified, and again the following chapter, where Tallis makes clear that there is no simple, one-way sequence of 'causation', but that each promotes and is promoted by the others. This, again, raises the question of biologism, which, among other faults, cannot explain our exception nature because it denies the operation of exceptional events and forces in our evolution. The anatomical differences of the human hand do not determine but permit the emergence of our distinctive powers.

5 Towards chiro-philosophy

Pt III (Chap. 10 'Getting a Grip on the Conscious Human Agent'), after recapitulation of the route so far with special emphasis upon human distinctiveness, takes the argument into philosophical anthropology, to be pursued in the other two volumes. The summary culminates in our sense of agency and of the body as our instrument, and thus our self-awareness. With Macmurray, and before him Pringle-Pattison, Tallis prefers 'I act (deliberately) therefore I am' to Descartes' *cogito, sum.* But could this sense of agency be an illusion? A *sense* of agency does not entail the fact of agency. Against this 'common-sense argument' Tallis offers the

> bold (and just about thinkable) thought: that the sense that one is an agent . . . . is intrinsically true , that its truth is built into its existence, that it is precisely the kind of thing about which one could not be wrong (p. 289)

Yet what I find astonishing is that supposedly intelligent persons should profess to deny it: to think, to speak, are themselves actions, and no one in fact applies determinism, behaviourism and the like to himself. Moreover, Tallis expands his 'just about thinkable thought' and shows that it is a corollary of the *cogito*. As for conditions, constraints and circumstances, freedom requires them, both the unchosen situation and (in effect, *contra* Sartre) the unchosen self that I am, something to chose from and something to chose with.[5] Nor are agency and mechanism incompatible, for there are degrees of freedom and agency, growing in infancy, variable throughout life, and declining in age. Moreover, agency and self emerge together: there is no 'I' prior to its freedom, and freedom remains, even in dementia until the self, the sense that 'I am this thing' has shrunk to nothing.

Yet, valid and important as the author's arguments are, I would suggest that there is more to be said. For they do not account for the re-emergence of the self and agency when those in deep coma, do awake from it. In such cases, self and agency have been suspended and were not annihilated. This, and other facts, such as hypnosis, require, despite everything that has been argued against it, a 'substantive' conception of the self (as a hypostasis): activity requires an actor. Moreover, is not Tallis confusing selfhood with a sense of self? True, self-awareness raises self-hood to a higher degree, makes it what it really is. But surely there must be an already existing 'me' for 'I' to come into being as and when I become aware of myself. Perhaps there will be more about these matters in the subsequent volumes.

6 Coda

It is time that we, with the author, waved farewell to the hand (Chap. 11). Tallis raises again the question of how, originating in nature, we can yet escape from it. The human hand has given us the means to manipulate nature and so to pull us up by our bootstraps. Yet, though his account of what the hand has enabled us to do has narrowed the gap between what we now are and non-human nature, the author admits that there is still a mystery as to how selfhood and agency arise: no matter how small each step may be, it is the first that counts. (As Chesterton somewhere said: it is no explanation to say that it happened slowly.) And this is the problem that encountered by all attempts (as in the final chapter of *Personal Knowledge*) to explain emergence. Tallis rightly refuses to dismiss or fudge it.

Another philosophical question is raised again: the status of human knowledge. Ordinary pragmatism, with its Marxist variant, and social relativism are duly set aside. Yet a deeper question remains: what is the difference between human knowledge and that, say, of a skilful predator? It lies in the movement from prehension to apprehension and then comprehension—the chosen and customised grip of the human hand to fit what it is to hold resulting in a (mental) grasp what things are in themselves and not just as they are affect our existing desires: 'the prehended object is explicitly there in itself' (p. 329). Here mere adaptive fit begins to give way to explicit awareness and truth emerges, and with it correctable error.

Has Tallis made his case? I think he has, without exaggerating the role of the hand over those of other parts of our anatomy and physiology. He has made it with a wealth of illustration, depth of argument, clarity of writing, and humour. It is an enjoyable as well as an illuminating book, and I look forward to the subsequent volumes.

Notes:

1. And I would add one other power grip: that of index finger and thumb curled around a disc or ball, with the wrist cocked for maximum torque, as when unscrewing a tight lid and in the wrist-spinner's 'flipper' with thumb and index finger around the seam.
2. Readers of *Appraisal* will be reminded of what Polanyi likewise says about attending *from*, rather than *to*, our bodies, and thus as using them as instruments.
3. Here the author refers to the Greek middle voice as reflexive, 'I do *to* myself', but its usual meaning is 'I do *for* myself' or 'get done to or for myself'. It is the French, and other Latins, who are always doing things to themselves: 'On se raze'.
4. Another quibble: Tallis warns us that he is by-passing a vast literature on this subject. But one point deserves greater mention: the difference between handedness proper (as shown in writing and other operations of the hand alone, or of the hand with its arm) and the sidedness of the whole body as a result of the dominance of the *opposite* eye. Many cricketers are cross-handed, bat right but bowl and throw left, and vice-versa, and few both bat left and also bowl and throw with their left hands. (There is yet more to this: my son bats and bowls right, yet writes with his left.) Hence in side-on actions right-sided people lead with the left because that stance gives the right eye dominance: it is more difficult for the right-eyed to look to the right and vice-versa (try it and see, or, rather, feel). In side-on actions the roles of the hands are usually reversed: in boxing the left is the more active for it probes and defends while the right is held in reserve to deliver the power punches (vice-versa for the southpaw); in golf and batting, the left guides and the right provides power, too much in the case of beginners.
5. In a footnote at this point he wrongly suggests that disincarnate persons (angels) would have nothing to chose from or with. On the contrary: activity is not limited to physical action nor do situations have to be composed of physical objects: e.g. of the solving mathematical problems, or the composition of poetry. Angels (would) have the same fundamental scale of values to guide choice, ranges of mental and spiritual activities from which to choose, and each other for company. As for God: freedom does not disappear, as Tallis suggests, but reaches perfection: as Plotinus realised, God freely and eternally wills his own nature. In relation to other beings, in creating them he creates his own situation, the finite world(s), but has an unconstrained choice of whether to create or not and just what to create, as in our own small way do we as 'sub-creators' of imaginary worlds.

BOOK REVIEW

Alexandru Popescu
Petre Tutea: Between Sacrifice and Suicide
Ashgate, 2004; 366 pp.; 0 7546 5006 5 phb; £18.99.

This is an important and timely book, introducing us to one whom Orthodoxy would recognise as a truly authentic theologian.

Petre Tutea (1902-91; 'Tutea' is properly spelt with cedillas under the 't's and pronounced 'Tsutse-a') was the son of an Orthodox priest in Transylvannia. After his father's death, his mother was still able to send him and his brother away to school and then to university, where he graduated in law and then obtained a doctorate in Administrative Law. Despite co-founding a Marxist journal, *Strânga*, in Bucharest (1932), he became a Director in the Ministry of Trade and Industry (1936-9), a Director in the Ministry of Wear Economy (1941-4), and then Director of Studies in the Ministry of National Economy. At the same time he supported the nationalist, mystical and anti-Semitic Legion of the Archangel Michael.

In 1948 he was arrested and imprisoned by the Communist régime; freed in 1953 but unemployed and living with friends; re-arrested in 1956; freed again in 1964 but under surveillance by the Securitate and again unemployed. During this period he concentrated on his writing, and finally in 1990 he became a public figure after the fall of the Communist régime.

In his lifetime he published articles in *Strânga* and other journals. After his death his other works were published including: *The Philosophy of Nuances* (finished 1969), *Treatise on Christian Anthropology* (4 vols., begun 1984 and never finished), *Mircea Eliade*, *Religious Reflections on Human Knowledge*, *Essays on Economic Anthropology*, *The World as Theatre*, *Theatre as Seminar*, *Between God and My People*, *Old Age and Other Philosophical Texts*.

Tutea writes from deep spiritual experience, and with prayer in mind as perhaps the main import of his exhortation to the reader. It is timely because the West needs the inspiration of Orthodoxy at the present time. Currently, through all the Western Churches, passes the spectre of the non-real God, whose worship seems to consist in the idolisation of our own spirituality. Spirituality has come to replace, in many circles, any recognition of a real dependence on a real God, or the need for another world for our full spiritual realisation.

Only Orthodoxy has remained firm against these pressures of the 'Zeitgeist', and on the one hand Tutea is simply representative of this, a massive presence and personality, honouring and preserving all the main lines of the Orthodox faith. On the other hand, throughout his life Tutea has been opened to the multiple currents of the secular world, in the arts, in politics, in science, in psycho-analysis, in existentialist philosophy, and in the once-fashionable Hegelian pantheist immanentism (which has made, indeed, several comebacks, under different guises). While ultimately rejecting most of these, it would seem that Tutea has attempted to make creative use of them where possible, and has opened Orthodoxy out to a wider world. This is recognised in Popescu's book. There is also a remarkable homage to Plato, Tutea becoming aware during his terrible prison experiences of the spiritual reality of the Platonic Ideas.

It is easy to get lost at times, in a considerable complexity, as Tutea tries to graft many contemporary and other currents of thought onto his Orthodoxy. As yet we have no translations of Tutea's work, and have only such passages as Popescu has himself presented to respond to, together with his own commentary. And at times it is as though the reader is in the somewhat overwhelming presence of Tutea, the clever café intellectual, dazzled and sometimes mystified by the inexorable talk, and its pyrotechnic style (most of it monologic, I would imagine), and not at all sure if he has really grasped it. As Emil Cioran has written of his friend:

> Tutea was not a man, he was a universe   One had to recognise that his ego was a sort of absolute, and accept that this led him to speak as if he had just been elected head of state, or head of the entire universe.

And another friend Mircea Eliade wrote of him:

> We have all emerged from Tutea's overcoat, just as the great Russian writers came out of Gogol's 'Overcoat'.

A much greater presence than café intellectualism is conveyed by Popescu, however, and this keeps our interest. There is an aura of greatness, and of heroic saintliness. Tutea, along with many Orthodox colleagues, was tortured both physically and mentally over a period of years by the Romanian Communist authorities. Tutea not only withstood this ordeal, but gave inspired leadership to his fellow-sufferers. In some cases his firm but gentle resistance had the longer term effect of bringing his torturers to a sense of God, and a repentance. He and his fellow-prisoners continued to practise formal worship, as far as prison conditions allowed, and Tutea continued to write sermons, some specifically for his tormentors. Some of the tormentors preserved and re-read these pieces, and not always in a spirit of superiority to the 'deluded Christian' who had written them. In Tutea and his

colleagues there was a refusal of the spirit of vengeance and bitterness. One of these, dying in prison, is reported to have said, 'No revenge must ever be taken for these acts'.

Saintliness, or 'deification', in the language of Orthodoxy, is a calling for everyone. One should say, according to Tutea, that it is in one's vocation that it is to be sought; and one should add that, ultimately, it is granted by divine grace, not achieved by human effort. Faithfulness to vocation, or in many cases to ordinariness, with the many millions who have no specific vocation, is a precondition for grace. Ordinariness, however, is not itself deification. Grace lifts ordinariness out of itself, and transfigures it. What also is beautifully conveyed is that every saint is different, in spite of the generality of the term.

Vocation is the necessary role we play on the stage of this world. It is also one of the masks we wear, 'the human mask' in this case. We must be faithful to it, even if it limits us. Our faith is that it does not ultimately limit us, for grace enlarges us, and another world is the true setting for that expansion.

All this relates to Tutea'a concept of Theatre. Sometimes he is talking about actual Theatre, about the use of Theatre, under Communist rule, as a tool of criticism, resistance and affirmation. He also talks about the need for a liturgical Theatre. But he is also using Theatre as an extended analogy for our life on earth (as Shakespeare often spoke of it), and it is in this connection that our Masks are needed.

It seems to me that the metaphor of the world as a stage is useful against the pantheistic tendency that Tutea was always wary of. Pantheism always puts the cart before the horse, situating the real within a human 'spiritual' experience on a not very high level, a rather facile grasp of what is called 'the Whole', and subsuming God, (or choosing not to do so!), within that grasp and understanding. In that way, we as 'seekers' choose to postulate God, (or, more commonly, *not* to), rather than acknowledging God as Creator 'postulating' us. Such 'seekers', according to Tutea, are those who doom themselves by choice never to find. They are perpetual delayers, and never find their true role, and throw away the purpose of Creation for them, endlessly questioning, never committing themselves, and, as Tutea says, 'under the dialectical sign of non-fulfilment'.

In a dramatic view of reality, God by a free act creates us and the whole natural order, giving it a certain distance and separateness, while we and the natural order literally play our parts, and wear our masks, in the working out of the drama of fulfilment. The divine image in us is one of our Masks, the primordial mask, according to Tutea, which the Fall cannot obliterate, only damage. Another Mask is the divine likeness, which we can grow into by following our vocation, and wearing our human Mask. But we can lose the divine Mask altogether.

The Theatre metaphor doesn't quite work through, for where are the spectators, if God through Christ is really a participator, and the transformer of the actors? However, this doesn't matter too much: no analogy has to be pushed to its limit. What does matter is Tutea saying, in one place, that it is fatal for us to *see* the world as a stage, for then we become seekers again, and soon go astray!

It would seem then that we have to play our role, and wear our Masks, without realising that we are doing so. But who is to *say* this, and at the same time to see and say that the world is a stage? Who has this privileged 'view from nowhere', other than God himself? Only the inspired theologian, it would seem. And how do we get the benefit of a distance from pantheism if we the common people, are not allowed to see the world as a stage?

No, no, this won't do. The truth is, we usually do play our roles in life without for a long time realising that they are limited roles. We can become totally identified with our roles, as lovers, as child-bearers, as important people, as artists, or what-not. It is in moments of detached illumination that we see that these are in fact very limited roles, and that the world is in some sense a theatre and a stage. This doesn't mean that we will cease to play our roles, (though some may find their true role and vocation at this point, and make changes in their lives), but from the moment of illumination we will be able to play them in a different spirit. Also, as someone has said, 'Give me a Mask, and I will tell you the truth'.

If we have sometimes to suffer for the role we are destined to play, do we at the same time have to suffer a *system* to dominate us? Tutea suffered greatly from the Communist system, in the form of its Thought-Police and its torturers. Behind that stands the Hegelian system of ideal necessity unfolding in Nature and History, and subjecting the individual to its requirements, while stifling the individual's need for its own fulfilment through immortality and union with God. And there is the system of atheistic Existentialism which Tutea confronted, 'a perspective bounded absolutely by human birth and death', as Popescu writes on p.244.

> Their concept of movement being limited to this world, they can know nothing of nuance in the liberating, transformative, sacramental sense which Tutea offers.

And there are the systems of 'secular anthropologies', which 'conceive of existence as an experience of transition from birth to death' (Popescu p.129), while 'Christian anthropology

understands existence in terms of eternal life in God'.

It is the limited frame of reference of modern systems which is clearly the trouble, and the self-satisfaction and indeed conceit with which these are presented. They lack 'the fear of the Lord', and 'the beginning of wisdom', as Tutea writes, and Popescu quotes, on p.137, 'Tutea saw information acquired without 'fear of the Lord', as relative, having no bearing on the theophanic, theandric and trinitarian object of knowledge, or on Christian wisdom'. Popescu goes on:

> In contrast to mystical knowledge, which is theocentric and relational, Tutea sees systematic knowledge as anthropocentric, non-relational, and merely acquired. It is the labour of humanity banished from paradise. Ignoring God through reliance upon systems, people stay ever further from the divine, arrogating to themselves the authority of the Creator.

Popescu develops this further on p.138:

> The Real (always equated by Tutea with God), is not composed of the sum of different systems, as logic assumes it to be. The Real is the source of all-embracing unity. Creation is 'ab origine' a sacred ontic whole. Yet that wholeness has been shattered by original sin. Human experience of wholeness and unity in this fallen world is at best a union juxtaposing the world's various sacred and desacralized elements.

All this is true, and needs saying again and again. However, I would insist that system and order have an important place, so long as they are founded on 'the Real' in Tutea's sense, and not on a purely secular understanding. Tutea himself is quoted on p.241 as saying that Chaos can only be perceived in relation to some underlying order. But more importantly, any religion in its philosophical expression, and any historical religion such as Christianity is, seems bound to have a strongly systematic character, as well as a mystical element. Theological and credal statements about Creation, Fall, Redemption and Fulfilment articulate Time for us into a system or order we can live by, while also going beyond Time at crucial points. Similarly, the hierarchy of God, the Heavens and the Earth articulate Space for us, while once again transcending our kind of Space as we rise in the hierarchy. That is to say, the Space and Time world we live in at present, is made meaningful by reference to a larger sacred structure which subsumes them, and is able to express spiritual realities through them.

On pages 182-3 Tutea through Popescu recognizes a sacred system in Christianity, and in fact validates what I have just been saying. The section is called 'Sacred Space and Time' , and Popescu expounds:

> God communicates through the sacred liturgy, while people offer themselves to God in their whole life. Space and Time, the Divine Liturgy in the temple of the Church, and our lived discipleship in the place and age in which human beings are called to show forth the divine image in the world, are both alike creatures of the holy.

And he quotes Tutea here:

> The Real is to be found in the sacred space of the Church, and in the sacred time of the religious festivals, which enable humans to escape the emptiness of the infinite.

It would seem that Tutea here is positively embracing order and articulation and finite forms, for there is indeed a mystical way of becoming lost, of floating around, of failing to be earthed.

Tutea again writes:

> Sacred space — the Church, and sacred time — the Christian festivals, are defined by the presence of Deity. The symbols of mystical thought are manifestations of the Real, and their form and content coincide; this is not the case with profane dialectic or aporetic symbolism, which only indicate what is accidentally useful, conveniently formal or pleasing.

System is elevated therefore through its truly symbolic nature, which is not, however, symbolism as understood in the secular world. That is the crux of the matter, and the great Berdyaev could have written all that (and in fact did!).

I wish I understood the relation of this, and of much else, to Tutea's 'Philosophy of Nuances', for it certainly sounds creative and fruitful, and seemed to be the locus for Tutea' s everyday experiences of joyful living. It would appear to be a joyfulness on the far side of his soul-struggle, a creativity available only to those who can delight in the flux and the multiple gradations of this world, because they are deeply aware of 'the hidden harmony' behind the flux (something which Heraclitus himself believed, according to Tutea). Perhaps one has to be a saint to enjoy fully the nuances of existence. But this may not at all be Tutea's or Popescu's meaning. It seems to be the area where his thought is most open to the jostle of secular influences, and the complexities that ensue are not, to my mind, very clearly presented in the chapter called 'Nuances'. I don't know what 'a nuanced politics' is, nor 'nuanced being', nor several other 'nuanced' entities that are mentioned.

I would like to think of the enjoyment of 'nuances' as the creative and creation-leaning use of the energy that comes from repeated mystical experience, an energy that needs expression on lower planes. That is an idea dear to my heart and practice, but again I don't really know if it is applicable here.

There are one or two criticisms one could make of Tutea himself. His appreciation of the merits of liberal democracy was both belated and perhaps

half-hearted even then. After a Socialist youth, in middle age he belonged to a mystical nationalist party, based around absolute monarchy and the Orthodox Church, and including anti-Semitism within its attitudes. If one were wanting to be a bit fierce, one could call it spiritual fascism. These dangers do seem to lurk within Orthodoxy, as recent Serb ethnic cleansing in Bosnia has shown. I am not aware of the Orthodox Church there having taken a stand against its cruelty and inhumanity.

I don't sense much feeling for natural law and natural rights in Tutea. These, for Tutea, smack too much of a benighted natural autonomy which, for him, would undermine man's need to address himself to sacred reality, and its tasks and duties. Separation of Church and State seems to him like a concession to late Protestant weakness, rather than something positive and beneficial in its own right. It's all very well to criticise a secular society for going seriously astray. Of course that happens, and Russian Bolshevism is an example in which the diabolic was given full rein. But evil and straying are everywhere, and the evils consequent upon unbridled secularism are only equalled by the evils committed by clerics when they have too much temporal power. Sergei Bulgakov, to his credit, in his excellent book *The Orthodox Church*, welcomes the separation of Church and State that was enforced by dire historical circumstances, and looks forward to its beneficial long-term effects.

But in spite of these criticisms, which are those of a westerner defending the good things in the western tradition, the faithfulness of Orthodoxy to sacred realities is a matter of huge importance, and in this faithfulness and witness Tutea can inspire us, and has far more to teach us than to learn from us.

David Britton

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Articles on Polanyi's work in chemistry, in Hungarian except for: J. C. Polanyi: 'Michael Polanyi, the Scientist'; also, C.P. Goodman, 'The Tacit Dimension'; Phil Mullins, 'Polanyi on Science Policy'.

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This collection of essays demonstrates the continuing importance of the work of Michael Polanyi for the understanding, not only of the great events of the 20th century, but also of the problems that face us in the 21st. Polanyi moved liberalism away from a negative, sceptical and rationalist basis towards an acceptance of trust, tradition and faith in transcendent values. His conception of the free society is not one merely of doing as one pleases nor vacuously 'open', but one of individual and communal self-dedication to those values and ideals.

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Contents: *Introduction: The significance of Michael Polanyi, Struan Jacobs* and *R.T. Allen*; The Hungarian context of Michael Polanyi's thought, *Endre Nagy*; Believing unbelievers: Michael Polanyi and Arthur Koestler, *Lee Congdon*; Polanyi and the rehabilitation of emotion, *R.T. Allen*; Beyond nihilism, *C.P. Goodman*; Polanyi on tradition in liberal modernity, *Struan Jacobs*; Polanyi's political theory of science, *Stephen Turner*; Polanyi's analysis of social orders, *Struan Jacobs*; Polanyi's conservatism: the reconciliation of freedom and authority, *R.J. Brownhill*; Polanyi the economist, *Paul Craig Roberts*; Michael Polanyi and the 'Austrian school', *Carlo Vinti*; Observations on Michael Polanyi's Keynesianism, *Monia Manucci*; Bibliography; Index.

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Tibor R. Machan, Chapman University, USA

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