

APPRAISAL

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Monia Manucci

Epistemology and knowledge-management

Phil Mullins, Jere Moorman, David Britton

Responses to Monia Manucci

Dale Cannon

On the modern notion of objectivity

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Lucian Blaga's metaphysics: past and present

Henrieta Yérbán

On the politics of the subject

Norman Wetherick

Comment on Michael Polanyi: Scientist and Philosopher



APPRAISAL

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- P From time to time *Appraisal* will include *Re-Appraisals*, articles or collections of articles upon 20th C. thinkers whose work deserves to be more widely known.
- P *Appraisal* welcomes articles, exploratory 'working papers', discussion notes, and reviews of books.
- P *Appraisal* takes a particular, but by no means exclusive, interest in the work of Michael Polanyi.

Format:

- P The maximum length of articles is 10,000 words, although longer articles can be split into 2 parts for publication in successive issues. Shorter items (discussions, working papers, notes, etc.) are especially welcome.
- P All contributions should be in good, clear English, without jargon, and with end-notes and frequent sub-headings (at approx. every 700 wds).
- P Please see inside rear cover regarding references to the works of Michael Polanyi.
- P All contributions should be sent via e-mail or on disk.
- P **Please ask for the Style Sheet or save or print it from our web site: www.spcps.org.uk.**

In particular, please write or rewrite all end-notes (no footnotes) and their indices (superscript) as **ordinary** text; and please give in Abstract (no more than 100 words), and a list of Key Words.

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Editor: Dr R.T. Allen

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This issue's new and less recent contributors:

Dr Monia Manucci studied philosophy at the University of Perugia and graduated with a thesis on Michael Polanyi entitled *Michael Polanyi: The structure of Tacit Knowledge*. In 2003 she completed her doctorate with a thesis, *Michael Polanyi: the free society*, which argues that Polanyi belongs to the Austrian school. Others publications are: 'The logic of tacit inference' (1998-1999); 'Michael Polanyi: personal knowledge and objectivity' (2002) and 'Epistemologia per l'imprenditore nella società della conoscenza' (Ricerche consorzio Cresci, Morlacchi Editore, to be published in 2007).

Dr Phil Mullins is *Editor of Tradition and Discovery*, the journal of the (American) Polanyi Society.

Jere Moorman, MBA, has his undergraduate and graduate degrees from the University of Arizona, Tucson. He is a Resident Fellow of the Centre for Studies of the Person in La Jolla, California. He encourages an interest in applications of Polanyi to business and Christian theology.

Dr Dale Cannon is Emeritus Professor of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Western Oregon University, retired in 2003. With an undergraduate background in physics and philosophy, he has been involved in Polanyi studies since 1966, where he was introduced to Polanyi's philosophical work under the tutelage of William H. Poteat at Duke University. He has published several articles on Polanyi over the years, most of which have appeared in *Tradition and Discovery*.

Dr Teodor Vadim is a professor in the Dept of Philosophy at the Technical University in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, and is President of the Cluj-Napoca Branch of the Stefan Lupascu Foundation for Science and Culture. His speciality is ethics and moral philosophy, on which he has published several articles in Romania, the USA and Turkey.

PAT SMART

Patricia Betty Smart, known generally as 'Pat', was born in Birmingham in 1933, her father being employed at the Cadbury chocolate factory. Pat was an original member and Secretary of the Convivium committee (founded in 1974), and helped to organise a number of the early conferences for the society. She was also a hands-on operator in the inky task of producing the copies of the *Convivium* newsletter on the old duplicating machines. Pat was a philosophy graduate of the University of Exeter which she attended after completing a teacher training course at the Bishop Otter Training College, Chichester, West Sussex, and teaching in the Birmingham area for a few years. She then became a lecturer at Bishop Stortford Training College, Hertfordshire, and then a Senior Lecturer in Philosophy at the University of Surrey in 1966, transferring to the Department of Educational Studies in 1981 when the Philosophy Department closed. She also obtained an M. Phil. and M.Sc. in the Philosophy of Science from the University of London. Pat wrote *Thinking and Reasoning*, published by Macmillan, and was co-author of *Political Education*, published by Routledge. She also contributed chapters to other books and articles in numerous academic journals. On retirement she was appointed a research fellow at Lampeter University, but was diagnosed as having a brain tumour and had a stroke during the operation, so was unable to take up the post. The last years of her life she spent in Exeter but remained interested in former Convivium members and later on articles in *Appraisal*. She retained an excellent memory to the end, if one of her former students was mentioned, she could say what degree they got and the grade, and she even remembered the names of her pupils from her days of primary-school teaching.

R.J. Brownhill

EDITORIAL

Bob Brownhill's Obituary of Pat Smart reminds me that he and I are now the sole survivors of the original Convivium committee, though happily some other early members of the Convivium Group also remain. The Group owed much to those who had known Michael Polanyi personally, and now that link has been almost completely severed. Today Polanyi is primarily the author of books and articles whose significance has still to be properly appreciated by the wider world.

This issue opens with an article by Dr Monia Manucci on the application of Polanyi's ideas to the ways in which companies manage, or fail to manage, the knowledge that their employees possess. This has become quite a growth area, along with the use of Polanyi in professional training and other aspects of the management of commercial and non-commercial organisations. The impetus for this has largely come from those outside the rather small circles of people already interested in Polanyi, and, as Dr Manucci suggests, Polanyi's account of tacit integration may not always have been fully understood by the former. Jere Moorman, one of our three respondents to Monia Manucia and a frequent contributor to the on-line Polanyi discussion group (go to masini@etsu.edu to subscribe to it), does bridge the gap with his professional experience in business and knowledge of Polanyi (see also his article in Vol. 5 No. 3).

We have tried to further these practical applications of Polanyi via a conference, or part of one, but have not been able to attract the necessary 'big names' from within departments of Business Studies. If anyone has any suggestions or likely contacts, please let me know.

Also on Polanyi in this issue, Dale Cannon reveals the dangerous ambiguities in the use of 'objectivity', and Norman Wetherick adds some comments to Scott's and Moleski's biography. Ionut Isac, this time also with Teodor Vadim, looks again at the metaphysical aspects of the philosophy of Lucian Blaga with a special reference to Pragmatism – readers may note certain overlaps of Blaga and Polanyi. Finally, Henrieta Șerban takes a critical look at 'constructivist-discourse theory' and its politics of the subject, which appears to promise an alternative to impersonalist trends in political studies and sociology.

CONFERENCES

International Conference on Persons

University of North Carolina
Asheville, North Carolina, USA

Tues. July 31 (pm) - Sat. August 4
(noon) 2007

The ICP Registration Cost is \$75.

Hotel reservations are available about a mile from the Conference Center at the Best Western in Asheville (telephone: 1-800-733-3211) for \$307.80 for four nights.

If you stay through Saturday, August 4th, the extra night is \$82.95. There are also more expensive rooms at the Crowne Plaza in downtown Asheville (\$134 per night), and cheaper accommodations at the Day's Inn.

There are many restaurants in close proximity to the hotels, plus cafeteria meals available on campus near the Conference Center.

Asheville is a beautiful mountain city with good air connections to Raleigh and Charlotte, which in turn can be reached directly from many cities in Europe and Britain.

Papers

Papers in any area or discipline are welcome, so long as their theme is of concern to the ideas and concepts of persons, personhood, and personality as a philosophical, theological, psychological, social, political, historical, creative or linguistic concern.

Abstracts of papers should be sent in the body of an e-mail to Dr Richard Prust, rcp@sapc.edu by May 1st and full texts by July 1st.

For further details see

www.personsforum.org

The Department of Philosophy and History of Science at the Budapest University of Technology and Economics (BUTE) and the Michael Polanyi Liberal Philosophical Association cordially invite you to participate in a three-day long international conference:

RECONSIDERING POLANYI June 26-28, 2008 BUTE, Budapest

The conference organizers welcome proposals that examine one of the following aspects of Michael Polanyi's oeuvre:

Personal knowledge in light of social epistemology

Tacit knowledge and the new results of cognitive psychology

Reappraising Polanyi's *Logic and Liberty* in the age of post-academic science (to use Ziman's term)

The cognitive function of emotions

Polanyi on the management of knowledge

The postcritical and postmodern perspectives

Polanyi's liberalism and Enlightenment values

Polanyi and Gestalt psychology.

The list is not exclusive, however, and you are welcome to suggest any further aspects related to the philosophy of Polányi. The conference is open to contextual, historical, and analytical (etc.) approaches.

Practical details:

Conference language: English

Registration fee: 30 EUR

Accommodation:

Accommodation is available at BUTE in the university guesthouse for approximately 55-65 EUR per night including breakfast. Rooms in four-star hotels in 5-15 minutes walking distance from the conference venue are available at 80-120 EUR per night.

Applications may be submitted by e-mail to Benedek Láng, conference@filozofia.bme.hu, by Jan 5th 2007, and Abstracts by Sept., 2007.

EPISTEMOLOGY AND KNOWLEDGE-MANAGEMENT IN BUSINESSES

Monia Manucci

Abstract

Today we are living the age of the 'knowledge society', a society that recognises in knowledge and in the person the true values of the economy and nation, because these values promote the progress, the innovation and, therefore, the growth of welfare communities. In this society business organisations having a strategic role; today the businessman must manage his organisation with methodologies that favour integration, dialogue, and co-operation among the employees, because this 'humanist methodology' can stimulate the creation of new knowledge that is innovative and promotes economic progress. Epistemology is a science which can help the manager to know the way to encourage new knowledge, and thus the transformation of tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge, and personal knowledge to organisational knowledge. This essay gives to manager some ideas for projecting a competitive business strategy.

Key words

Person, knowledge, organisation, learning, competitiveness, business, epistemology, knowledge, economy, responsibility

1 *Motivation of the research: the role of knowledge in contemporary organisational contexts.*

The following paper was inspired by a desire to give an answer to the following questions: Can epistemology have a strategic role in the management of organisations? Is it a science capable of supporting today's *Knowledge-management*? Finally, is it able to clarify for us what logic and what conditions favour the process of the creation of knowledge? These questions, in my opinion, arise spontaneously in today's society, because in every field (economic, cultural, political, etc.) attention is concentrated on the subject of knowledge, which is considered to be an essential element for the growth and existence of any social system.

In the light of this I do not believe it is worthless to try to justify extending epistemology, which is apparently of exclusive interest to philosophy, and apply it to a practical discipline like *Knowledge Management*, which is occupied with studying theories for the correct running of economic and productive organisations.¹

Contemporary society aspires to be more than what Daniel Bell defines as an 'Information Society'² and to become a 'society of knowledge' as

argued by intellectuals like Drucker and pursued by the European Union as demonstrated by documents produced by the European Commission, like the 2000-2006 programme agenda). Those who support the 'society of knowledge' are convinced that the only resources capable of giving our country the necessary instruments to face oriental competition are contained in knowledge, which is the basis for innovation and quality. In the society of knowledge, the *Value* of a product, of a service, or of a Nation is measured by its degree of knowledge and its capacity for innovation, and not by its infrastructure. That is, by what cannot be defined only in material goods. Metaphorically speaking, its value is represented by its Software, that is by an *intangible element*, by knowledge³. For this reason, much is said about how to develop knowledge in organisations, and even how to measure it consider what was proposed by the European Commission in the business document, known as Basilea (2).⁴

It is therefore obvious that in this context, in order to survive competition, an organisation must be able to both innovate itself and to create innovation. An organisation must differentiate itself thanks to the valorisation of knowledge held within it by the people who make up the organisation; people who have unique and irreparable human wealth. This differentiation in the economic society of today is necessary because of: (a) the ever-growing complexity in which one must operate; (b) the speed and ever-growing influence of changes that require a continual process of learning and innovation to avoid being excluded from the market; (c) the ever-more concentrated evolution of knowledge (d) the tendency to reduce organisational structures that are based more and more on knowledge and less on infrastructure; (e) globalisation that demands new knowledge of unknown areas from a cultural and economic point of view in order to cope with competition. The growing strength of new organisational structures, like for example business networks, has made very evident and explicit the problem of knowledge; (f) the growth of highly intensive knowledge goods and services (g) the revolution of *Information Technology* and new technology in general; (h) the ever-growing expectations of all the stakeholders of an organisation. All these elements of the contemporary economic society are summed up by economists themselves in the expression *New Economy*.⁵

Knowledge in the New Economy can give a competitive advantage because it allows change to be

anticipated and the ever-more brief life cycle of a product to be prepared for. This is because the potential to create new ideas within an organisation is practically without limit. Drucker maintains that *'the central activity in the creation of wealth will not be the allocation of capital in productive processes, nor work... value today is created by productivity and by innovation, which are both applications of knowledge at work'*.⁶ Paul Romer similarly affirms that *'In a world that has physical limits, it is the discovery of a few great ideas (for example, how to build high temperature superconductors) and numerous little ideas (for example new sewing processes) that sustain the continuity of economic growth. Ideas are the instructions that make it possible to combine limited material resources in solutions that further increase their value'*.⁷ Potentially, the combination of ideas is infinite.

Today, the only sustainable competitive advantage that a company has to get ahead comes from what an organisation knows collectively, from how effectively it uses what it knows and how quickly new knowledge is gained and put to use. Knowledge has by now strategic importance in every organisation, in whatever field it operates, be it public or private.⁸

The following points will be developed in the next sections:

1. In an organisation *all* knowledge is valuable, therefore also that which cannot be reduced to information on prices,⁹ what the pioneer thinker Polanyi defined as *tacit knowledge*.¹⁰
2. A leader must run an organisation fully applying two theories of management: the *scientific* theory¹¹ and the *humanistic* one.¹² In particular, it is necessary that the *businessman* considers an organisation not simply as an apparatus for the elaboration of information, like a repetitive machine, but rather as a living organism producing knowledge and so innovation.¹³ The leader must (a) consider morale and social factors as elements that can positively influence productivity; (b) give importance to the 'group', and so encourage moments that can strengthen interpersonal relationships and a 'sense of belonging'; (c) recognise the double nature of knowledge, split into the logical component (resulting from reasoning and expressible through language) and the non-logical component (linked to inexpressible mental processes like evaluation, decisions or practical action taken) These processes are not conscious, and give rise to a *behavioural knowledge*. So far as this last point is concerned, the *leader* must create a *vision*, that is a model of values, beliefs and concepts to spread throughout the whole organisation in order to insure the solidity of the internal 'knowledge system' of the organisation itself.¹⁴ This model will also function to help the running of the organisation as a co-operative system.

3. *Innovation is not the consequence of a process of aggregation of heterogenic information, but is an absolutely individual process of personal and organisational innovation.* From an epistemological point of view, this demands going beyond the western Cartesian vision of knowledge. For too long the west has based its choices and its organisations on a vision of knowledge based on the separation of the mind and the body: once again it is necessary to follow the teachings of Polanyi, according to whom it is possible to learn also with the body and not only with the mind.¹⁵ The body is an instrument that allows everyone to take advantage of a patrimony of ineffable knowledge, that can be gathered only by observing, by using ability and gaining experience, and by a process of trial and error which is, in itself, a guarantee of absolutely unimaginable discoveries that would be impossible to reach using only rational knowledge.¹⁶

The priority of ineffable knowledge, or tacit knowledge, in innovative operations implies going beyond rationalism and the reductive nature of classical economic and managerial theories, and coming closer to a humanistic type of managerial/organisational perspective, as well as an epistemology that gives value to the individual. In other words, it is a good thing if contemporary organisations are managed following theories like that of Drucker¹⁷ and Polanyi: the first put a new emphasis on knowledge, saying that it should be considered not as one resource among many, *but the primary resource which from an economic point of view allows an organisation to make the difference*;¹⁸ the second is the pioneer of a model of personal knowledge, which revolutionises the schemes of modern epistemology, centring all knowledge, including explicit knowledge, in the tacit dimension of a conscious subject.¹⁹ While explicit knowledge is the smallest component in a person's knowledge and can be expressed with formulas and axioms, that is, it can be codified by language, tacit knowledge is the richest part of a man's wealth of knowledge. It is directly rooted in operational activities but is difficult to grasp and express because it is typical of the non-conscious and the irrational, coming from the emotional and intuitive sphere of a person. It contains an individual's world of experience, and is linked to intuition and clues that are unique to each person. The tacit knowledge within an organisation cannot be elaborated by computer and cannot be transmitted by electronic means and then kept in a database. It is difficult to process and transmit in systematic, logical ways. To be communicated and shared it must be transformed into any language, into words, numbers or graphics. *The development of innovative knowledge at the basis of an organisation's progress lies in this move from the tacit to the explicit, from the individual to the social, and, in the*

case where this progress is of an economic nature, it makes it possible to imagine products and services that are more and more appropriate to the demands of the consumer, knowledge that allows a business to be dynamic, to anticipate the demands of the market and so to be competitive.

2 The different significance of knowledge in organisations

Having discussed two forms of knowledge, the implicit and the explicit, it is interesting to also discuss other types of knowledge that play a role in the running of contemporary organisations. In the first place, it can be said that tacit knowledge proposed by Polanyi can be developed in two different directions:

1. technical, made up of know-how, including the abilities and capabilities that are not formalised and that it is difficult to gather and describe;
2. cognitive, made up of schemes, mental models and beliefs that have become axiomatic. It reflects the representation of reality (what we are) and a vision of the future (what we want to become), thus influencing our perception of what surrounds us.

In the second place, in order to understand and to manage organisations it is useful to know that there are different types of knowledge, that can be considered:

1. *positive knowledge* and *negative knowledge*: this distinction is closely linked to decisional processes typical of the present age of innovation. Indeed, it is very important today to know that a new discovery, rather than a particular solution to a problem, will have favourable developments, and here positive knowledge is referred to. But it is of equally fundamental importance to know when a new discovery can produce negative results and which situations can lead to negative consequences. This aspect is often neglected, but nevertheless extremely interesting- that of also being aware of what one does not know, or of what may turn out to be negative, an awareness that can be vital for the subsistence of an organisation.

2. *Teachable* and *non-teachable*: this distinction is conditioned by the possibility that certain competencies can be transferred and repeated within an organisation. Compared to the distinction between explicit and tacit knowledge, in this case what characterises the category is not so much the actual nature of knowledge, rather it is an individual's aptitude towards learning and sharing with regard to a particular competence.

3. *Observable in use* and *not observable in use*. This distinction concerns the ease or lack of ease with which, observing a finished product, it is possible to distinguish how much and what knowledge has been used. It depends on the type of product considered,

but also on how good the owner of the particular knowledge is at hiding it.

4. *Individual knowledge* and *organisational knowledge*. This distinction comes from the difference between the knowledge of an individual belonging to an organisation and the knowledge held within the organisation as a whole, and so it indicates the level of diffusion of knowledge within the organisational structure, a diffusion which, as will be seen, occurs throughout a space created by an *epistemological dimension* and an *ontological dimension*. Individual knowledge is that which is possessed by an individual on a personal level, be it directly or indirectly. That is to say, all that a person knows without having to rely on the contribution or support of other people or instruments. On the other hand, organisational knowledge is the total mass of knowledge possessed by an organisation, but which does not however correspond to the sum of all the single individual knowledge put together. An organisation cannot create knowledge, and so innovation occurs leaving aside the initiative of a single individual. Dynamic interaction, which comes about with dialogue, discussion and the sharing of experience assists the conversion of personal knowledge into organisational knowledge. Because every organisation takes on value and differentiates itself from others, thanks to the characteristic contribution offered by each single component, a manager must be strong enough to spread the strategic capacity in order to use, accumulate, share and create new knowledge in a continuous and repeated way in a dynamic spiral process, throughout the work force. This process of conversion and spiral diffusion is illustrated by the two Japanese intellectuals, Nonaka and Takeuchi, in their book *The Knowledge-Creating Company*²⁰ which I shall now analyse in detail.

3 The presuppositions of knowledge-codification processes

If we want to explain the processes that are at the basis of the innovation of organisations it is necessary to share a model of epistemology that is centred on tacit knowledge and thus on the valorisation of the 'human' element. It is clear that within an organisation it is necessary to go beyond what is exclusively personal knowledge, and project it into a community, that is the organisation. To explain the phenomenon of innovation, or the creation of knowledge, I refer to what is known as the 'S.E.C.I' model (the initials stand for Socialisation, Exteriorisation, Combination and Interiorisation) founded on the distinction between tacit and explicit knowledge. The two Japanese intellectuals Nonaka and Takeuchi have used this model to describe the process that gives rise to new knowledge. This model, together with the science of epistemology, allows us to distinguish some important

Management concepts and thus to also understand the dynamics at work in an organisation, that is:

1. An organisation must be seen in a new light, as a living organism composed of many cells (people) who are autonomous and complementary, capable of generating knowledge and of actively interacting with reality. The main principles of an organisation aiming at innovation are those of *public liberty* and *mutual co-ordination*. The first principle, echoing *The Logic of Liberty* by Polanyi, consists in recognising each member of the group as having a certain autonomy of action and of being a pivot point of difference and change, but also of harmony, considering that every action carried out respects the values shared by the entire community and is an action inspired by a sense of responsibility and by the desire to reach the aims that are considered good *by* and *for* everyone. The second principle is implicitly recognised in every organisation in the form of spontaneous polycentric orders, that is, of a small complex society, made up of many spontaneous centres that interact with each other within the system and freely adapt to the changes caused by the actions of each individual centre.²¹ These two principles unite the dynamics of change. It is necessary to state for every manager who finds himself at the head of an organisation that if expansion of new knowledge from every centre in the organisation (line workers, programmers, salesman etc.) is not unified by common values and beliefs, *chaos* and confusion can ensue, and even lead to the end of the organisation. So the task of a leader must be to create a *Vision*, 'macro concepts' of orientation, or rather belief models, to be shared by the entire group. These models should be able to lead to a specific tradition and to mediate and unify all new knowledge in a specific company logic. In this way, strategic value can be obtained, also in the form of new products and services that can be externalised.²²

2. An organisation must be prepared to abandon knowledge that has become obsolete and learn how to create new knowledge. It must be open to change, while always being guided by its particular *vision*, and be continually learning. Continual learning can involve two types of activity: the first consists in gaining Know-how in order to be able to resolve specific problems in line with shared presuppositions; the second type of activity consists in defining new presuppositions (paradigms, schemes, mental models) capable of substituting the previous ones. Learning within an organisation also comes in the form of accumulated and interiorised experience, that is, done by the organisation itself in a specific field, role or process. I would even claim that the degree of experience that can be accumulated by an organisation is directly proportional to how efficiently learning is done, and that the more accumulation there is, the more it will be interiorised at an

organisational level as well as at an individual level. Indeed, an experience that is developed on this basis presupposes that the various pieces of individual knowledge are not simply assimilated by the organisation, but rather that they are 'contextualised' and transformed, in such a way as to be perfectly integrated and keep their own individuality.

An important concept in contemporary organisations is that proposed by Senge, and is known as the *learning organisation*,²³ or rather, an extended organisation where learning is produced, shared and spread. A *learning organisation* promotes knowledge communication at all levels, horizontal and vertical, and it promotes participation and collaboration to allow every part of the organisation to produce new ideas and new knowledge. Senge stresses that every organisation is capable of generative learning (active) and adaptive learning (passive), and that together they make up a sustainable source that can lead to a competitive advantage. Implicit to a *learning organisation* is the responsibility of every manager to do everything possible to activate the growth of culture and knowledge within the organisation, allowing every element of the group to understand the organisation's pledges, to evaluate the consequences of action done, to know how to co-operate, to look for new roads and to activate processes of change. Every component in a *learning organisation* must be gratified and stimulated by the *leader*.

4 The process of creating organisational knowledge

The SECI model teaches every manager that efficiency, effectiveness and the capacity for innovation in an organisation are profoundly connected to the cultural context in which the organisation is rooted. Before beginning the restructuring of an organisation, it is necessary to carry out a careful analysis of its characteristics and of its potential. These are the best possible starting conditions for encouraging a continual process of knowledge creation, which with time can become solid and rooted to the extent that it is transformed into a real and distinctive characteristic of the organisation. Indeed, only under specific environmental conditions is a structure able to be really focussed on knowledge and able to transmit its dynamic innovation at an inter-organisational level, that is to all the subjects that it interacts with that are considered to be strategically relevant. More than anything, the strictly cultural aspect is of primary importance. It has been amply demonstrated, also in the literature, that the most hostile barriers for the birth of a favourable context are the disproportionately small consideration that is given to human beings with respect to technology. This corresponds to undervaluing the degree to which a deeply rooted organisational culture in harmony

with external and internal needs can in the long term positively influence an organisation. Let us proceed then to describe the organisational conditions that can help the tacit/explicit conversion, and at the same time the possible obstacles that, on the contrary, could make this process difficult. To do this it is necessary to recognise two dimensions to knowledge: *epistemological*, which regards the interaction between explicit and implicit knowledge, and *ontological*, which indicates the distribution of possible creating subjects, which, going from small to large are: the individual, the group, the organisation, and finally the widest inter-organisational level. The particular spiral form that distinguishes this model of the creative process appears only when the interaction between tacit and explicit knowledge takes place from an inferior ontological level to a superior one, in a number of successive phases.²⁴

The interaction between tacit knowledge and explicit knowledge makes it possible to postulate four ways in which knowledge is converted, divided as follows:

1. Socialisation

In this first way, there is the conversion of tacit knowledge into similarly tacit knowledge. It is a process of sharing experience and of creating particular forms of tacit knowledge that can be mental models or shared technical abilities. This process, not being based exclusively on technical competence that is visible, but also and above all on emotions connected to the specific moment of production, can take place only when there is social interaction, or rather the sharing of some kind of experience. Some of the most important examples to understand socialisation can be either 'brainstorming camps' used by companies to help with problem solving and the creation of new concepts and the development of new activities, or else the typical learning that takes place at camp. A singular characteristic of this form of conversion is the relative lack of importance that the language used to acquire tacit knowledge has, compared to the other forms of conversion. Evidently, each of these forms of conversion is associated with different cognitive contents. Socialisation produces what Nonaka terms 'sympathetic knowledge', in other words, mental models and shared technical competence, derived from the construction of interaction fields that make it possible to share experience.

2. Exteriorisation

This is when tacit knowledge is converted into explicit knowledge, using explicit forms and concepts. Among these explicit forms, as well as language, which remains the main instrument for this movement, there are other ways to articulate tacit knowledge. Among the most important is the use of metaphor or analogy, the building of concepts,

hypothesis or models. All these alternative 'instruments' become necessary when language is not sufficient to express what one intends to really convey. It is true that a common code for individuals involved will help the understanding of these different forms of expression, but it is equally true that the difference between the image and the language used by people can also be very useful to stimulate reflection and interaction, and also encourage the direct involvement of individuals in a specific creative process. In fact, this type of conversion is very frequent, above all during the ideas phase for new product forms and concepts, where group dialogue and collective reflection are confirmed as being the main characteristic. Exteriorisation can also be seen in relation to two different situations; in the first case there is the articulation of one's own tacit knowledge, while in the second, one picks up and translates the tacit knowledge of others, for example clients or suppliers, using an explicit knowledge that is easily recognised. In any case, exteriorisation produces 'conceptual knowledge' which, as previously stated, originates from a relevant collective dialogue or a reflection, where the use of metaphor and analogies help create explicit knowledge.

3. Combination

Once knowledge is made explicit by way of exteriorisation, it is easily transmittable thanks to combination, which is a process of systemisation of concepts in a single system of knowledge through a conversion of explicit pieces of knowledge that are each distinct from one other. A typical and simple example of this is scholastic learning. It is possible to encounter this form of conversion, for example, when new knowledge is generated following the analysis of a document, or after having taken part in a conference or a meeting, but in substance, every time new forms of knowledge are acquired through the shifting, distribution, categorisation and restructuring of already existing information, one is present at a form of combination. This is an area where the use of information technology seems to be more advantageous and determining, as well as being more employed, simply because explicit knowledge, given its specific nature, is more easily incorporated into documents, e-mail's or databases and from there, successively transmitted, reconverted and recuperated. Combination, as well as allowing the transfer of knowledge within the same organisation, also gives rise to 'systems knowledge', examples of which are prototypes or new technology.

4. Interiorisation

In this last form of knowledge conversion, there is a passage from the explicit form to the tacit form. The development of this process is intimately connected to the so-called 'learning through doing'. It also simplifies explicit knowledge that appears in

documents, manuals, databases and articles and so on by way of direct or indirect narration or story telling. If one accepts the presupposition that knowledge is primarily particular to the individual sphere and that the more complex forms of organisation derive from it, then one must note the greater relative importance that this moment has, compared to the other three previously mentioned forms. It is indeed thanks to interiorisation that an individual creates and learns a 'working knowledge', that is the entire knowledge previously created and then shared, thanks to processes of socialisation, exteriorisation and combination. In fact, as will be seen later, it is in this phase that existent knowledge is gathered and renewed, to then be made available to the organisation and thus laying the basis for another process of creation.

5 Techniques for an ontological dimension aimed at the creation of knowledge

Having explained the characteristics of each of the four possible ways in which knowledge is converted, and so how tacit and explicit knowledge interact, it is possible to widen the model, pointing out what conditions, starting from basic individual activity, help the creation and diffusion of knowledge at a group, organisational and inter-organisational level.

As I wrote earlier, the concept of knowledge is based above all on two dimensions: the epistemological, that is, the distinction between tacit and explicit knowledge, and the ontological, which is the classification of possible subjects that are creators of knowledge.

An organisation must limit itself to making, managing and improving conditions that are considered, within its particular context, to be the most favourable for allowing a continual 'mobilisation' of the tacit knowledge created by single individuals (the reason for which interiorisation is more important compared to the other three forms), helping the circulation, transmission, spreading and crystallisation at higher ontological levels.²⁵ Some techniques for achieving this aim are:

1. Applying a middle-down management model.

Reading the text of Nonaka and Takeuchi it is clear that the two dominant models in the managerial process, that is the *top-down model* and the *bottom up model*, are both incapable of supplying the dynamic interaction necessary for the creation of organisational knowledge.

The *top down model* conceives of creation of knowledge within the limits of the elaboration of information. The top receives simple and selected information from the bottom, which it uses to create plans and orders that are then returned to the base.

Information is elaborated through the division of work that gives top management the task of creating basic concepts, and members in an inferior hierarchical position to put them into action. The concepts elaborated at the top become the working conditions for the middle management, who chooses the instruments for carrying them out. On the shop floor, the carrying out of tasks is mostly routine work. The implied assumption lying behind this traditional organisational model is that only top management is capable and has the right to create knowledge. Knowledge created by the top exists with the single aim of being elaborated and carried out, and so represents the means and not the aim. This management model therefore blocks the socialisation and exteriorisation conversion forms.

In the *bottom up model*, instead of the principles of hierarchy and division of labour there is autonomy. Instead of knowledge that is created and controlled at the top, there is a knowledge that is created and controlled by the bottom. The 'bottom up' organisation is flat and horizontal; the elimination of hierarchy and division of work reduces the distance between the bottom and the top. Top management gives very few orders to the line, who work preferably alone as independent separate workers. The working principle is autonomy and not interaction, and for this reason, this model limits combination and interiorisation. Because of the emphasis it places on autonomy, the diffusion and sharing of knowledge within an organisation becomes complicated. In other words, the top down model allows only partial conversion (combination and interiorisation) allowing only for explicit knowledge. Vice versa, the bottom down model successfully deals with tacit knowledge thanks to the conversion of knowledge centred on socialisation and exteriorisation. Considering the obstacles that the two traditional management styles present for the complete development of the model, the authors consider a third possibility, which does not move from the top or from the bottom, but from the middle of the organisation. The term used to describe this style of management is '*middle-up-down*'. The creator of knowledge is represented by middle management, who acts through a process of spiral conversion, which involves both the top and the line workers; middle managers are at the point where information flowing from the top and from the bottom meet. In the *middle-up-down model*, the top manager creates the company vision, while middle managers develop concepts that are understandable and can be put into action by workers on the line. In doing this, middle management summarise the tacit knowledge stored at the top and at the bottom, and make it explicit, incorporating it in technology, products and programmes. According to Nonaka and Takeuchi, this style of management is the most capable of

supporting the creation of knowledge within companies. As far as an organisational structure is concerned, the two main organisational entities, *bureaucracy*²⁶ and the *task force*,²⁷ show themselves to be insufficient for developing the model. And so it is necessary to imagine a combination or synthesis of the two main organisational structures. A bureaucratic structure works adequately when conditions are stable, because its emphasis is on control and the predictability of specific functions. The bureaucratic structure is highly formalised, specialised, centralised and highly dependent on the standardisation of work processes, and is particularly adapted for the efficient running of routine activities on a vast scale.

Having said that, bureaucratic control can block individual initiative, and furthermore, create a series of other dysfunctions: internal resistance, excessive adherence to the rules, refusal to take responsibility and lack of motivation for the members of the organisation. The task force, on the other hand, is an organisational structure planned with the intention of overcoming the weaknesses of bureaucracy. It is flexible, adaptable, and dynamic and in organisations takes on the form of a team project or an institutionalised work group. Members of a task force work within defined time limits and focus their attention on precise objectives. Because of its temporary nature, new knowledge and the know-how created in these groups is not easily transmitted to other members of the organisation after the conclusion of the project. The task force is thus not a structure capable of using and transmitting knowledge in a continuous and profound way throughout the whole organisation. In recent years many models have been proposed, most of them variations of the task force. New organisational concepts all have certain characteristics in common; less wieldy structures, giving responsibility, giving importance to personal competence in technical terms and in terms of ability and also recognising that intelligence and knowledge are two important factors that the organisation can and must count on. The problem with these models is that each of them are fine in some circumstances, but not in others. The solution proposed by Nonaka and Takeuchi consists in considering bureaucracy and the task force as organisational models that complement each other and should not exclude one another. A productive organisation should provide the strategic ability to exploit, gather, share and continually create new knowledge, using a repeated spiral dynamic. In this context, bureaucracy demonstrates that it can favour processes of combination and interiorisation, while the task force is more effective at stimulating processes of socialisation and exteriorisation. The combination of these two organisational models is called 'hypertextual organisation'²⁸ by Nonaka and Takeuchi. The metaphor used to explain this

organisational model is the concept of 'hypertext' developed in computer science. On the screen of a computer different texts can appear, like paragraphs, sentences, diagrams or graphics. In a hypertext, each textual element can usually be stored separately in a different file. Hypertext allows the operator to have access to different levels of text at the same time.

A hypertextual organisation is made up of series of layers or contexts that are connected to each other: the business system, a project group and the patrimony of knowledge. The specific characteristic of a hypertextual organisation is the coexistence in a single structure of layers, or contexts, that are totally different, and the ability of its members to pass from one context to another. They can move between the various contexts and adapt to the changing situations within and outside the organisation. Furthermore, a hypertextual organisation has the ability to convert knowledge that is external to the organisation, and is an example of an open system in continual interaction with clients, suppliers and the market. A hypertextual organisation would thus seem to be the perfect combination of the efficiency and stability of bureaucracy and the flexibility and dynamism of the task force.

2 Uncertainty.

Uncertainty can be a strength for the process of innovation, and so can be a strategic choice to create a favourable climate for the critical discussion of everything, including what is well established within the company (e.g., products that are a proven success). A climate of uncertainty is the presupposition for looking for new ideas and ways of improving, by observing what happens outside the organisation; it can be a force that will encourage 'change'. Knowledge taken from the outside must be shared at all levels of the organisation, overcoming hierarchical blocks in order to reach an 'organic' and 'dynamic' conception of the company (as previously maintained with reference to Polanyi).

3. Promoting the Polanyian ideal of public liberty

To explain what Polanyi intends by 'public liberty' I quote a sentence from my research thesis:

Public liberty sees the person knowingly employed²⁹ in practices that justify his belonging to a community, so in activities that are objectives for maintaining and developing previously mentioned ideals. Liberty cannot be justified as a supreme good for its own ends, which would mean the freedom to do whatever one wants, but is acknowledged and possible only as a means for pursuing universal ideals through self-imposed activities.³⁰

Public liberty is rooted in responsible action that requires a person to strive to pursue ideals that are at the basis of a determined community or

organisation. To speak of responsibility means trusting a person and giving them autonomy to act. These are presuppositions for the development of a feeling of belonging and group involvement. Public liberty leads to the most satisfying results for an organisation.

4. Rational action with power, tests, tasks and rewards

A polycentric organisation that wants to give a rational cut to the action of each of its components needs to carefully manage the following four concepts: (a.) *power*, in the sense that a clear definition of everyone's responsibilities and powers is important in order to avoid doubts and worry; (b.) *tasks*, because everyone needs to know what their duties are and what is expected of them; (c.) *tests*, given that everyone uses their own personal abilities to carry out a task. Once the task is completed, the quality of the final product needs to be checked using appropriate tests which must not discourage the workers in question; (d.) *rewards*, connected to the existence of tests. Rewards have the important function of giving an incentive for pursuing improvement. There are two types of incentive: moral (connected to the sensation that what one is doing is useful to someone) and material (in the form of wages); (e.) finally *arrival*, which is in itself considered a form of incentive, given that reaching established or given aims can lead to being assumed at a higher level.³¹ It is necessary to recognise and give credit to the different contribution made by each person as a unique individual and to invest in environments that transmit serenity.³² (For the efficiency of the different components of an organisation it is important that the building where the group meets to work is comfortable and safe.)

5. Look after the work environment.

A manager must create an environment and the type of organisational conditions that assist the active and creative role of the individual, for example by encouraging socialisation, team work and the sharing of tacit and explicit knowledge. Some organisational techniques to do this are: (a.) the creation of formal and informal communication networks, and also recreational moments during work hours where dialogue among the different members of the group is facilitated; (b) the 'strategic rotation' of personnel technique, especially between areas that have different technology and functions like research, development and marketing. Rotation helps members of an organisation to understand the business from numerous different points of view, and thus the knowledge within an organisation is more 'fluid' and more easily applied in concrete terms. Strategic rotation also allows every worker to diversify his abilities and sources of information. The added information that each individual has in different functions assists the

company effort to extend its capacity for creating knowledge.

6 Conclusions

In this paper I have tried to point out the role that epistemology has in the running of contemporary organisations, with particular attention to business organisations, which now more than ever are called upon to sustain knowledge creation processes and thus innovation. From the arguments given, it is possible to deduce the following basic concept for innovation: despite the fact that today much is spoken of Information Technology, and the introduction of technology in organisations to help manage information,³³ the activity of creating knowledge is still reliant upon human resources, by a person and his exclusive intuitive, knowledgeable and creative capacity. Organisations that want to distinguish themselves from the others in terms of value must invest in people and in the intangible worth that is within them. I have attempted to explain in a general way the dynamics for the process of creating knowledge, citing the oriental management model, although I am aware that there are no universal laws that guarantee one hundred percent success for an organisation (and whoever is at its head). My intention for the future is to research the relationship between epistemology and the role of the businessman, starting with the following Hayekian presupposition: to be successful, a businessman must proceed along the paths of the market in the company of that special philosopher who is, to be precise, an epistemologist. Obviously, a little epistemology cannot guarantee the businessman success, as it does not guarantee success to the scientist, but it certainly does guarantee a better understanding of a difficult profession.

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Notes:

1. In this paper the term 'organisation' is used to indicate small realities like companies, and also large, complex realities like the marketplace, the scientific community, up to the system of a Country.
2. Bell D., *The coming of Post-Industrial Society- A venture in Social forecasting*, Basic Books, New York 1973.
3. D'Egidio F., *Il bilancio dell'intangibile. Per determinare il valore futuro dell'impresa*, Franco Angeli, Milan 2001.
4. Dell'Aquila L.A., *Basilea 2, creazione di valore e valutazione del patrimonio intangibile nelle imprese cooperative*, in Sediari T., Benelli M., Dell'Aquila L.A. (a cura di), 'Economia della conoscenza e cooperazione', *Rivista della Cooperazione*, Trimestrale di Cultura Cooperativa Europea, N.3, July/September 2004.

5. Technology, globalisation and the dynamism that characterises the economic market and society in general are the boundaries of the field of action of all contemporary organisations, above all business. This situation is defined by the expression 'New Economy'. P. Savona, *Political Economy and the New Economy*, McGraw-Hill, Milan 2002, p. 7.
6. Drucker P.F., *Post-Capitalist Society*, Harper Business, New York 1993, p. 193.
7. Romer P.M., *Two Strategies For Economic Development Economics: Using ideas and Producing Ideas*, Proceedings of the World Bank Annual Conference on Development Economics 1993, p. 64.
8. Guida-Benini, *Ingegneria della conoscenza-strumenti per innovare e per competere*, Egea, Milan 2000, p. 16.
9. It is necessary to go beyond the attitude of classic economists, limited to the study of a single type of knowledge that can be analysed with empirical and numerical methods, and come closer to the theories of neoclassical economists (like Marshall and exponents of the Austrian School - especially Hayek and Schumpeter), as well as the business theory of Penrose and the evolutionary model of Nelson and Winter. For bibliography see: Marshall A., (1965) *Principles of Economics*, Macmillan, London; Danhof C., *Observations on Entrepreneurship in Agriculture*, in AA.VV., *Change and the Entrepreneur*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1949, pp. 20-24; Schumpeter J.A., *Teoria dello sviluppo economico*, Sansoni, Firenze 1971; Penrose, E.T. (1959), *The Theory of the Growth of the firm*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford; Hayek, F.A., *Studies in Philosophy, Politics and Economics*, London, Routledge, 1967.
10. See below, n. 15.
11. See Taylor and Simon.
12. Developed by George Elton Mayo and adopted by Weick to elaborate the present theory of 'organisational culture'.
13. This point goes beyond the rationalist vision of business typical of Taylor and Simon, and consequently also the *Top-down managerial model*, which will be discussed in the following pages.
14. Similarly, Polanyi, when facing the dynamics of an 'economic' organisation maintains that it is a polycentric system regulated by the principle of mutual horizontal co-ordination, of people and organisms united by shared values and beliefs adapting spontaneously and reciprocally and not by a hierarchical authority. See CF and LL.
15. A revolutionary epistemological concept sustained by Polanyi is based on his criticism of the Cartesian system of knowledge, identified by the separation of the subject and the object. For Polanyi, a person 'knows' by interacting with objects, or rather thanks to a deep involvement and personal effort, which he calls 'indwelling'. Knowing means creating an image or a model, uniting the component parts without realising it. For further insight into the term 'indwelling', see 'Logic and psychology', *American Psychologist*, XII, Jan. 1968, pp. 27-43.
16. For Polanyi, the mathematician Poincarè also considers discoveries that are the fruit of an illumination and are the successive phase of a series of not rationally planned operations as extremely innovative. See PK.
17. Drucker P., *Post capitalist society*.
18. The competitiveness of an organisation or of a business lies in its intellectual capability and its services, more than in its Hardware, by which we mean its plant, technology and structures. The value of most of its products and services depends on the way in which the 'intangible know-how, product design, market image, understanding of client needs, personal creativity and innovation can be developed. The future is in the hands of whoever has knowledge.
19. Quoting from memory an affirmation made in TD: all knowledge is tacit, or founded on tacit knowledge. For this reason Polanyi also defines tacit knowledge as 'subsidiary to the focal' that is, functional to expressed knowledge.
20. Nonaka I., Takeuchi H., *The Knowledge-Creating Company*, University Press, Oxford 1995.
21. With regard to the polycentric system and mutual co-ordination, see the following writings by Polanyi: CF pp. 27-53; LL; SEP Pt II.
22. In a company, the middle management (an intermediary figure between the line operators and company directors) carries out a decisive role in the creation of knowledge, uniting the tacit knowledge of the line operators and the managers, making it explicit and giving it shape in the form of new products and services.
23. Senge, P.M. (1990) *The Fifth Discipline: The Age and Practice of the Learning Organisation*, Century Business, London.
24. See *The Knowledge-Creating Company*, figure 3.2, p. 102 and figure 3.4, p. 115.
A continuous exchange between these two dimensions characterises the process of knowledge creation, in that it is founded on the following belief: human knowledge is created and spread by way of the social interaction of tacit and explicit knowledge. This interaction does not take place within the boundaries of a single person, on the contrary it is distinguished as a real social process between individuals.
25. See, *The Knowledge-Creating Company*, figure 3.5, p. 117.
26. Bureaucracy: organisational model characterised by encoded rules and procedures, the specialisation and division of work, hierarchy, formalised communication, impersonal, with the separation of the position and the person who occupies it.
27. Task force: temporary group made up of representatives of every unit involved in a problem.
28. Nonaka I., Takeuchi H., *The Knowledge-Creating Company*, p.228.
29. The concept of employment is so profound and important that it merits a separate study, given that it has implications for the identification of a person with an organisation. A person will always act to obtain what is best for himself, and by consequence, for the group. Each person who is employed will autonomously accept responsibility for spreading newly created or learned knowledge to all levels of the organisation.

Continued on p. 43

RESPONSES TO 'EPISTEMOLOGY AND KNOWLEDGE-MANAGEMENT IN BUSINESSES'

1 Phil Mullins

I have been invited to comment on Monica Manucci's 'Epistemology and Knowledge Management in Business', which I am happy to do, although *Appraisal* readers should be clear at the outset that I have no experience in business and I am not well informed about the field today called 'knowledge management'. Manucci's essay offers a complex set of reflections and she is in dialogue especially with theorists like Nonaka and Takeuchi.¹ I cannot do more here than touch a few points that I find interesting and worth some further consideration.

1. Knowledge management and Polanyi's social vision

The broader domain of Manucci's inquiry is concerned with whether the insights of epistemology might be relevant to effectively managing an organisation. She acknowledges in her notes that 'organisations' are of many types. 'Knowledge management' Manucci rather straightforwardly suggests is a practical endeavour concerned with insights and theories 'for the correct running of economic and productive organisations'. The central interest of her essay seems to be how Michael Polanyi's epistemologically-grounded ideas might stimulate those in business organisations to be creative and generate new ideas that might support the ends for which business organisations exist. Those ends are concerned with making profits and preserving and enhancing the organisation. The issues Manucci has chosen for study are interesting ones; nevertheless, let me begin my comments by emphasising a general point that I hope practical knowledge managers mining Polanyi will bear in mind, a point that I see embedded in Manucci's discussion but whose significance is underplayed.

Polanyi believed that a market economy with its many centers and its competition among organisations was the best way to organize economic life in society. A market system seems for Polanyi to have represented the economic face of Polanyi's ideal liberal society. There were, for Polanyi, all sorts of other organisations or organised enterprises in society that weren't primarily economic in orientation and many of these were at least roughly speaking analogues to the market. Polanyi's important early essay titled 'The Growth of Thought in Society'² focused on similarities and differences among such enterprises. Polanyi suggests that many different kinds of organisations or organised domains in society have special traditions that needed to be respected, preserved and developed, in order to

promote the growth of thought and change in society. This is the kind of broad-based social vision articulated in Polanyi's writing beginning in the thirties and forties and continuing into his late thought. Polanyi did not focus on market competition in a global context in terms of the edge that the creation of new knowledge can give a competing economic organisation. This angle of vision is a peculiar angle of vision that comes to be emphasised in the late twentieth century and the early twenty-first century. Polanyi's interest in organisations and the way in which knowledge is generated by individuals who participate in organisational life is aimed much more generally at understanding how to create the good society, one that is not endangered by the ideas and values that we find in the modern philosophical tradition and in political developments represented by modern historical phenomena like the French Revolution and modern totalitarianism. Polanyi's philosophy does articulate a post-critical epistemology that should be helpful for those managing business organisations in a globally competitive economy, but Polanyi's post-critical vision weaves together epistemology and a *lebensphilosophie* and elements of a cosmology. It is this broader vision of human beings at home in the interesting social-historical and natural world that must not be overlooked by those practically concerned with understanding and stimulating economic organisations. Ideas were important in society according to Polanyi and something of Polanyi's comprehensive vision remains important to provide a depth of meaning and balance in individual and organisational life and this may especially be true for those engaged in contemporary business enterprises in the competitive global economy.

2. New images of the organisation and organisational life

Manucci's discussion emphasizes that managers in business organisations who understand Polanyi's ideas about what a human agent is and particularly the relation between tacit and explicit knowledge are in a position to rethink what an organisation is and the many aspects of life within an organisation. Knowledge is valuable in an organisation but not all knowledge is explicit. Organisations and their leaders must learn to acknowledge and cultivate what Manucci terms the 'patrimony of ineffable knowledge.' An effective leader of an organisation must develop a style of management that attends to many subtle dynamics (i.e., the tacit substructure) of the living social organism and a good leader will create a vision (setting forth values, beliefs and concepts)

that permeates the organisation and promotes co-operation. All of these elements suggested in Manucci's discussion seem to me insightful applications of Polanyi's thought.

Organisations are not merely well oiled machines and human participants are not merely cogs in a machine. Perhaps organisational managers who adopt the humanistic style Manucci promotes need some new metaphors with which to imagine the organisation and personal life in an organisation. Persons in organisation are organisational role players. A Polanyian metaphor for organisations and organisational life (and an alternative to both the machine metaphor and even the living organism with many cells) is that of the unfolding but indeterminate drama that describes a society of explorers at any given time. In a society of explorers the stage is always set and the characters are always aligned. Characters are unique but must become attuned to the traditions and values of their organisation. They are charged to act now in a fashion that is both loyal to their tradition and accepts a calling that respects the challenge of the unknown. Organisational actors indwell order to break out. Organisations and persons who are organisational agents need a certain enthusiasm for inquiry, for exploring the unknown. But many (perhaps most) organisations tend to act routinely and bureaucratically. They reward conformity and make an idol of the status quo. They regard change as a threat rather than an opportunity. Manucci and figures like Drucker, Nonaka, and Takeuchi want to emphasize innovation and the way in which the discovery of new knowledge can be cultivated by attending to elements of organisational culture. What I am suggesting – and I already see hints of in Manucci's discussions – is that in addition to attending to the subtle dynamics of managing an organisation perhaps a richer set of images of organisational actors, organisational life and organisations themselves are available in Polanyi's philosophical corpus. These potentially useful images could be fleshed out and promulgated by knowledge managers interested in exploring the implications of Polanyi's work.

1. Public liberty in business organisations

Particularly interesting is this essay is Manucci's exploration of some early Polanyi themes as the key to a knowledge manager's concern with 'the correct running of economic and productive organisations.' She suggests that public liberty and mutual coordination are the 'main principles of an organisation aiming at innovation' and that these two principles 'unite the dynamics of change'. While I think Manucci is correct in identifying that Polanyi stressed these principles as the key to the operation of a modern liberal society, the 'fit' of these principles to business organisations is not perfect in

either Polanyi's discussions or Manucci's discussion.

Polanyi distinguished in society the types of 'dynamic order,' which he, following and adapting Kohler's term, understood as 'an ordered arrangement resulting by spontaneous mutual adjustment of the elements' (435). What Polanyi wished to do was show both similarities and differences between types of dynamic order. The 'dynamic order of production' is an important type of dynamic order and it involves adjustment through 'internal forces' through which individual producers interact' which Polanyi also described as 'a series of lateral adjustments between individual producers making independent decisions' (436).³ The 'series of continuously repeated mutual interactions' Polanyi says, 'tends to produce a distribution of resources in which each element of resource is used by producers to the greatest satisfaction of the consumers, as expressed by their demand curves' (436). This description seems to be what today might be called simply the operation of market forces bearing on every productive business organisations.

From the system of production and consumption, Polanyi distinguished types of dynamic order operating in 'the mental sphere' and his primary examples were the organisation and operation of science and the law (437). He spoke of the variety of 'systems in the intellectual and moral sphere' as having different mixes of what he calls 'cognitive' and 'normative' elements (437-438). Polanyi regarded the mental types of dynamic order as being of a 'more or less consultative or competitive character' in terms of their relative appropriation of the 'public mental heritage accessible to all' (438).

At least in his 1940 discussion, it is easy enough to see that Polanyi was reaching for a scheme to acknowledge both similarities and differences among the types of dynamic order and, as I have implied above, it is clear that Polanyi thinks of the liberal society as a pluralistic one in which there operate a number of different types of dynamic order. His discussion, in my view illumines similarities between the types of dynamic order better than the differences... All types of dynamic order rely on mutual adjustment but it is the types of dynamic order in 'the mental sphere' that are much more reliant on what Polanyi calls 'public liberty' as the key to adjustment than is the 'dynamic order of production.'

I doubt that Polanyi thought that there was more than a weak analogue of public liberty in the 'dynamic order of production,' which Polanyi describes as an arena in which 'producers are constantly on the look-out for an opening to utilise at a greater profit the resources which they now control, and to gain the control of resources, at present managed by other producers, by finding more profitable

applications for them.’ (435-436). Clearly, producers have a certain autonomy and are motivated to seek profit, but public liberty as a adjunct to the types of mutual adjustment in the mental spheres is more than simple autonomy and profit seeking.. Public liberty, as Manucci notes, ‘consists in recognising each member of the group as having a certain autonomy of action and of being a pivot point of difference and change, but also of harmony, considering that every action carried out respects the values shared by the entire community and is an action inspired by a sense of responsibility and by the desire to reach the aims that are considered good *by* and *for* everyone’. It is the last component of Manucci’s account of public liberty that points to what Polanyi regarded as the transcendent values inherent in mental types of dynamic order. Polanyi’s own description of public liberty is as impassioned and as oriented toward ideals as Manucci’s description:

The freedom with which we are concerned here is not for the sake of the individual at all, but for the benefit of the community in which dynamic systems of order are to be maintained. It is freedom with a responsible purpose; a privilege combined with duties, as exacting as any that are shouldered by man. It may well be called, therefore, Public Liberty – as opposed to Private Freedom (438).

While business organisations (or at least the market system in which they compete) are a type of dynamic order (or a ‘dynamic system’ 439) their objectives are limited and mundane, and Polanyi distinguishes them from what he calls the ‘circles of special interest and professional bodies’ that ‘cultivate one particular section of the social heritage and supervise its development.’ (441). Business organisation aim rather straightforwardly, according to Polanyi, to make a profit.

Manucci’s discussion does not dispute this point, but what she promotes is a humanistic management strategy adapted from Polanyi’s discussion of types of dynamic order in the mental sphere. She suggests that such a strategy will promote innovation and particularly the creation of new knowledge which is a competitive advantage for ‘economic and productive organisations’ in a global knowledge economy.

In the final analysis, the question I have is whether business organisations with rather finite and mundane objectives can promote an ethos in which public liberty is primary. Seeking profit and seeking the truth are not always happy bedfellows.

Twenty years after he first discussed public liberty and mutual adjustment, Polanyi came back to these two principles in his 1962 essay ‘The Republic of Science: Its Political and Economic Theory’.⁴ This essay, of course, focused on the organisation of science but Polanyi does draw into the discussion what earlier he discussed as other types of dynamic order.

He is careful to point out that ‘the co-ordinating function of the market are but a special case of co-ordination by mutual adjustment’ (52). At the end of the essay, Polanyi is clear that the type of dynamic order found in science embodies a ‘higher principle’ than that found in the market:

It appears, at first sight, that I have assimilated the pursuit of science to the market. But the emphasis should be in the opposite direction. The self-coordination of independent scientists embodies a higher principle, a principle which is reduced to the mechanism of the market when applied to the production and distribution of material goods. (69)

The ‘higher principle’ Polanyi notes in the mutual adjustment of the mental sphere of science is ‘higher’ because adjustment in science is bound up with science’s commitment to public liberty in a way this is not present in the operation of the market.

Notes:

1. See also Charles S. McCoy, *Management of Values: The Ethical Difference in Corporate Policy and Performance* (Boston: Pitman, 1985) as an additional source informed by Polanyi’s ideas.
2. Michael Polanyi, ‘The Growth of Thought in Society’, *Economica*, VIII, Nov. 1941, 428-456. Citations hereafter to this essay are noted by page number in parenthesis.
3. It should be noted that Polanyi also discusses the ‘dynamic system of distribution’ (440) which he regards as the other half of the market system.
4. Michael Polanyi, ‘The Republic of Science: Its Political and Economic Theory’, KB, 49-72. Also available at <http://www.missouriwestern.edu/orgs/polanyi/essays.htm>
The next two quotations are from this essay and are noted in parenthesis using page numbers in KB

2 Jere Moorman

I read Monia Mannuci’s paper with the following personal agenda in mind: How can her paper throw light on the following two issues – What are some of the mistaken assumptions, from a Polanyian standpoint, that business people make? How do these mistaken assumption inhibit business success? Dr Manucci makes the succinct point that ‘tacit knowledge is the richest part of a man’s wealth of knowledge’ – capping nicely Polanyi’s critique of Objectivism in a way that the business person can understand in terms of the bottom line. She recognises the difficult in codifying tacit knowledge and poses the need to make the ‘move from the tacit to the explicit and from the individual to the social interiorisation’ – difficult and challenging though this may prove to be. She helps the business person become more of a connoisseur of different types of knowledge. She recognises the importance of the

interpersonal milieu for the development, explication and transfer of tacit knowledge within the organisation, between the organisation and the customer, and within the business climate in general. She then elaborates Nonoka's S.E.C.I. approach to codification: Socialisation, Exteriorisation, Combination, and Interiorisation – a model founded on the distinction between tacit and explicit knowledge.

Monia Manucci, in Polanyian fashion, poses a good problem: Can epistemology have a strategic role in the management of organisations? I follow her in her interest in this issue. Having worked in organisations for the past fifty years, I imagine that the average business person may not have a good definition of the word 'epistemology'; a good question it is, nevertheless. I am quite interested in the relationship dimension of organisational development; and I relate this relationship dimension having much to do with the issue of epistemology, and the necessity of innovation and knowledge-development. Dr Manucci speaks eloquently of 'irreparable human wealth'. All work gets done through relationship; and of much import in the relationship or humanistic dimension is the relationships climate. This relationship climate has at least the important ingredients of epistemology and relationship skills. It seems to me that these two ingredients are complementary: an improvement of one ingredient is likely to lead to an improvement of the other, they can reciprocally work together. I like Manucci's emphasis on the leadership function: I would want to distinguish between motivation and initiative. When she writes about a component in a learning organisation as being 'gratified and stimulated by the leader'.

Interiorisation – I can affirm this better if I see the issues of gratification and stimulation as being within the sovereign leader, versus having to do with external motivation and an external locus of evaluation. Manucci rightly calls us to the disproportionately small consideration that is given to human beings with respect to technology. I would want to emphasise the complicity at all levels of the organisation in supporting this devaluing of the person, and not to lay it at the feet of the leader/manager in the sense of expecting him to change. More primary than a respect for others is a primacy of the interiorisation of radical responsibility – where one knows what to do in the face of disrespect.

Dr Manucci also speaks of a deeply rooted organisational culture, which can contribute either positively or negatively to this undervaluing of the person. I would like to see some clarification of how the author understands the concept of 'culture.' I have seen how culture can be manifested as a massive collusion between persons to avoid responsibility. I see culture as an environment created by agreements between sovereign persons. Sovereign

persons create culture. I reject the notion of a 'cultural determinism.'

Manucci emphasises the importance of the climate for sharing and understanding, even to the point of having a safe and comfortable building. Such a culture as the author envisions has a top priority of valuing of the person. Interiorisation – an especially oft overlooked and undervalued 'intangible worth' that is within them. She also calls us to a valuable appreciation of the leader/manager as epistemologist. I would encourage influencing a climate where there was appreciation for epistemology, developing masters of epistemology and offering opportunities for all to have a familiarisation with the subject, and to have an opportunity to develop more adequate epistemological frameworks.

Here are some characteristics of a 'negative' environment that I would like to see reflected on in more Polanyian terms: i.e. how could an understanding of Polanyi help workers move from the negative conditions to a more positive climate for knowledge development and innovation?

Nine Characteristics of a Negative, Non-participative, Epistemological Climate:

1. Persons are intolerant of open disagreement.
2. Persons are unable to think beyond the tangible.
3. Persons don't appreciate the intuition and the imagination as valid parts of a rational decision making process.
4. Persons don't manifest an appreciation for fore-knowledge, the unknowable and the unforeseeable.
5. Persons see themselves as disinterested spectators.
6. Persons believe that the facts speak for themselves: Seeing is believing.
7. There is an overemphasis on the codification of knowledge.
8. There is a purported attempt to escape from responsibility by representing knowledge as 'impersonal'.
9. There is a belief in the fact/value split.

I applaud Manucci for making a good offering in applying Polanyi to issues of business – and I would like to see more from Manucci and others and myself in this area. Business people are time challenged; so I would like to see Manucci, and others, develop forty minute presentations of Polanyian ideas, developments and applications and present them all over the business and industrial climate.

I find Nonoka's outline interesting but somewhat ponderous; it could be that I haven't given the model an adequate indwelling. His emphasis on the interpersonal climate is significant; I'm not sure how understandable the orientation notion of 'Ba' is; but there are other ways of describing a good

climate, including the principles of Carl Rogers' person-centred approach. I also encourage offering different opportunities for the business person to understand this difference between the explicit and the tacit – for example reading lists, the Polanyi Society web page, etc. This, along with training in interpersonal competency, will go a long way towards appreciating the rich tacit knowledge-resource. With or without Nonoka's model, people will find their own ways to become more effective at explicating their tacit knowledge and of passing it along via apprenticeship.

3 David Britton

Monia Manucci considers 'the role of knowledge in contemporary organisational contexts', and asks whether a *theory* of knowledge – that is to say a sound Polanyian theory, one that recognises tacit knowledge – can help to maximise the creation of the knowledge crucial for competitiveness in a fast-moving global market. She makes a distinction between knowledge and explicit information. The more comprehensive entity, knowledge, can only be gained gradually, and by actual 'doing'. It is diffused throughout the organisation, partly by systems designed for the sharing of knowledge from and to all the levels of the organisation, and partly by the internalisation of the Vision or Mission Statement, or Culture of the organisation, through constant awareness and practice.

It seems to me that it is the recognition that people at all the levels possess knowledge and create fresh knowledge, and that this must be passed on, which are the most important points. Thus both top-down and bottom-up approaches are encouraged, with middle-management playing the role of gathering and circulating the flow of knowledge.

Perhaps a sound theory of knowledge is useful in recognising the difficulties of turning tacit into explicit knowledge, where this is possible and necessary, and also vice versa. Manucci gives some account of the use of metaphor and analogy for the former purpose, and also of the bedding-down of the explicit aims of the company into the tacit realm of practice, for the latter. But it is surely the sharing of knowledge which is the key factor in success.

A sound theory of knowledge in business practice is more a description of what usually goes on than a prescription for what ought to go on. To be sure, many businesses are stupid enough to ignore the potential for knowledge of their workers, especially at shop-floor level, but that does not imply that their whole knowledge-system is deficient. The same is true for science in general. Polanyi's main complaint is not that scientists don't use tacit knowledge, but that they often don't recognise it,

and therefore it is given no status in scientific theory.

However, Manucci would perhaps maintain that the new phenomenon of the mission statement of a company is in fact a proactive attempt to introduce a better theory of knowledge into its practice. A group of executives presumably try to give explicit voice to various tacit principles that they have found from their experience, and probably also from their frustrations at their absence, to be useful tools in the running of business. There is next the problem of how the explicitly stated principles are to be bedded into practice, and to become a 'culture', and eventually to play a part in the generation of fresh knowledge. All this involves an understanding of learning processes, and especially learning by doing, and these in their turn depend on understanding the relation between tacit and explicit.

One can reasonably have one's doubts about the value of mission statements, but mutual knowledge-sharing is something immensely positive, and can hardly be insisted on too much in the business environment and elsewhere – but not *everywhere*, and I shall come back to this. There is an element of the noxious British class-system in the way in which, for instance, shop-floor knowledge is so frequently ignored. I trust that the situation is healthier in Italy, as it seems to be in many other countries. British productivity has stubbornly refused to improve, for all the 'cold blasts of competition' of the EU, the global market, and Thatcher's and Geoffrey Howe's blasts of destruction in the early 80's. In spite, too, of wholesale privatisation, and of so-called 'reforms' of the NHS and other public sector bodies.

However, some Japanese companies operating in Britain, Nissan for example, simply do not erect these false barriers, and by all accounts they do well. In this connection, Manucci's example of 'strategic rotation', the rotating of jobs and roles within a company, is obviously relevant. Nissan train a multi-skilled workforce, and this hugely increases morale and commitment, as well as generating knowledge through seeing the company in action from so many viewpoints.

There have to be caveats, however, even concerning the excellent Nissan system. There is a danger of turning us all into Organisation Men, those who live breathe and sleep the Organisation. We need to be reminded, in the Britain of long hours and too much stress, that we are also family-beings, and recreational beings, and cultural beings, and political beings – that is to say, citizens. Has the global market now found the way to neutralise us as political citizens, through exhaustion at work and the struggle to keep up with the Joneses, whoever they now are, of the world economy? Isn't it actually better to be a little less efficient, and a little poorer, but with more of a rounded life. Of course, it is possible to be

more efficient, in terms of knowledge-sharing at work, without being overworked, so to an extent I've stated a false opposition, but my general point is valid, I believe.

I would enter a strong objection concerning restructuring, and without qualification. Manucci mentions restructuring without a word of caution, and without mentioning the waste and stress that millions have suffered through needless exercises in this practice. Does the global market dictate it, as a necessary evil? Few people who have endured it, time after time, would subscribe to that. What they see is the profligate waste of a company's resources – people, morale, time, and money. Many valuable people take early retirement, rather than have to apply yet again for their own job after another such manic and vain exercise. The National Health Service has had 21 restructurings in as many years. This is management gone mad; management narcissistically self-focussed; management as autistic youth, obsessed with techniques, playing with its new toy, and totally blind to people; management for whom neither arts nor family nor citizenship exist.

The evil of this management culture lies now in its all-pervasiveness, and in the illusion that one size fits all. Even its good knowledge-gathering side can be debauched, as has happened in Britain in the state education system, where, under the rubric of curriculum development, teachers of all subjects have been herded together for the last 20 years, on what are called Baker Days (after the particularly odious and oleaginous minister of that name), in the vain hope that teachers of physics might have something useful to communicate to teachers of physical education, and vice-versa. These endless and futile meetings not only exhaust good staff but have driven many out of the profession. Good teaching requires every ounce of a special creative energy that a teacher can summon up. It is criminal to simply throw these energies away on useless activities. Also, teachers, like artists, are individualists, and work better with their own individual methods and eccentricities. But one of the modern hurrah-words is 'interactive'. Fine in its place, in industry, but absolutely wrong in Education, and in the Arts. Yet it is the buzz-word in the current Arts Council, and

it fills me with rage whenever I see it used in artistic contexts.

The reality of the global market cannot justify what are, without doubt, gross excesses in these particular practices. And in any case, the global market should itself be challenged. No economy in the past has become dominant through the practice of free trade as now enforced on us all by the proponents of global economics. And in recent years, the tiger economies of the East rose to their present healthy position through the practice of strong protectionism for their own industries. The African economies, by contrast, have failed dismally, mainly through accepting, or having forced upon them, the conventional wisdom of the West.

The global market is ruthless in ways that can and probably will, unless it is regulated, destroy even the benefits that Manucci's proposals will bring to companies. For what is to stop the company, with its fund of people-generated knowledge, simply clearing off to Malaysia, where Dyson's vacuum-cleaner business has recently gone? This is a problem now so serious in the USA, for instance, that it is causing despair. There is even some evidence that many of the far-right Christians there, who are looking forward to Armageddon and their own swift salvation, have been provoked into this desperation, with radical left-wing political action ruled out for them by their own mentality, precisely by the flight of plant and capital that I have been alluding to.

It would be reasonable, in this situation, for Governments to legislate for generous compensation for all workers in a knowledge-generating company that suddenly decides to go. There is an issue of intellectual property-rights here. This, together with, in Britain at least, long-overdue reforms of company law, moving towards shared ownership of companies, as well as shared knowledge as advocated by Manucci, would go a long way towards stabilising an extremely unstable world. We need to be reminded that economics, and markets, are tools that man uses and are not gods to be worshipped. Man also lives in a somewhere, a particular culture, and does not become human without this limitation. But the pure unregulated global market is a nowhere, an abstraction, and therefore cannot be the home of man in its present form.

ON THE MODERN NOTION OF OBJECTIVITY

Dale Cannon

Abstract:

This essay aims to clarify Polanyi's revision to our understanding of objectivity, by distinguishing a root notion, the modern notion, and a commonsense notion (namely, Polanyi's notion) of objectivity. The second notion, pretty much taken for granted as the meaning of objectivity in modern culture and identified with scientific method, is analyzed and rejected as an appropriate identification of what is necessary to apprehend reality as it is or as an accurate understanding of objectivity as pursued by natural science in practice. An alternative, commonsense notion is developed which is not only true of natural science in its practice but is appropriately applicable to every area of inquiry including the social sciences, the humanities, and the arts – capturing the way they can be said to aim at and approach objective truth.

Key Words:

Objectivity, subjectivity, evidence, natural science, scientism, primary and secondary qualities, scientific method, reality, truth, Michael Polanyi.

A common source of philosophical confusion for most people is the pretty much taken for granted notion of objectivity associated with the pursuit of modern science and correlative ideas. Indeed, it is a classic case of persons being unwitting consumers of the prepackaged, unexamined notions of what are supposed to be the scientific experts. Even more so, because this notion in particular does more to undermine a person's confidence in his or her own access to what really is than perhaps any competing notion.

What counts as knowledge in any given subject area crucially depends on what qualifies as evidence or good reasons and what does not. Commonly we apply the words 'objective' and 'subjective' as characteristics of proposed evidence and proposed reasons, qualifying them as admissible or acceptable on the one hand and as inadmissible or unacceptable on the other. (Compare the similar oppositions often set up between 'fact' and 'opinion', 'scientific' and 'unscientific', etc.) What we allow to determine our definition of 'objective' as opposed to 'subjective', accordingly, will have important implications for what will be allowed as admissible evidence and acceptable reasons, and what will not.

The Root Notion of Objectivity: In its root meaning, what is 'objective' is what pertains to the object of inquiry, and what is 'subjective' is what pertains to the subject or person conducting the inquiry. 'Objective truth' thus, first of all, refers to what is

true of the object itself, above and beyond the limitations, incompleteness, preconception, bias, and distortion that may be characteristic of a given person's representation of the object. A knowledge which is 'objective' is thus a knowledge which transcends or gets beyond these 'subjective' limitations and biases to grasp the object as what it actually is.

1 The Modern Notion of Objectivity

However, taken in the usual modern sense (the modern notion of objectivity), 'objectivity' is narrower in its meaning. It has come to identify not so much an actual transcendence of ego-centric bias and preconception to grasp the object itself, but instead a particular method or strategy for supposedly achieving it, a method that is identified somewhat misleadingly as an essential characteristic of the method of modern science. Some of the most influential viewpoints which make this identification are variously known as Scientism, Objectivism, and Positivism. Scientism in particular is the position that holds that this method, which it identifies as an essential characteristic of the method of modern science in the strict sense, is the sole method of arriving at truth. When taken in this usual modern sense, the only evidence admissible as 'objective' is evidence that is

1. Invariant from person to person (i.e., evidence that is the same for all);
2. Free of connection with any 'personal' judgment (i.e., evidence which has been 'impersonalised', from which all 'personal' or 'subjective' elements have supposedly been removed);
3. Explicit in an unambiguous, definite manner, not open to variable interpretation; and
4. Exact, especially as quantifiable numerically (i.e., such that numbers can be assigned to it and thereby be manipulated mathematically).

Accordingly, purported evidence that does not meet these criteria is regarded as 'subjective' and therefore as worthless for getting at 'objective truth.' It is assumed that this 'objective' strategy will somehow guarantee a grasp of the object in a way that will lay hold of what is 'objectively true' of it and only what is 'objectively true' of it.

What is identified as 'objectively true' of a thing by this modern construal of the method of modern science was dubbed its 'primary qualities' by Galileo in his philosophical attempt to differentiate modern science at its birth in the 16th century from the older Aristotelian science. According to Galileo, modern science (as distinguished from Aristotelian

science) is concerned to identify the 'primary qualities' of a thing, qualities that are (supposedly) true of nature itself apart from us. Above all, these were size, shape, quantity, and velocity, qualities that could be accurately measured and analyzed numerically (qualities of what Descartes called 'extended substance' – i.e., qualities of physical bodies). These qualities are to be distinguished from a thing's 'secondary qualities': qualities that show up in our ordinary perceptual experience of the object but vary with the conditions of perception, with who is perceiving it, and with the interpretative bias of who is perceiving it. 'Secondary qualities' do not admit of exact measurement. Examples of so called secondary qualities include heat, colour, odour, taste, texture, and also less tangible aspects of things such as essential form (what makes the thing the thing that it is and not another), purpose, beauty, meaning, etc. The older Aristotelian science was primarily concerned with such qualities, with what is sometimes called 'qualitative matters' as distinct from the 'quantitative matters' (with which modern science is supposed to be exclusively concerned). This distinction between primary qualities and secondary qualities came to seem so obvious and unquestionable for the mainstream of subsequent philosophical thinking about science that for many it has been taken for granted without question.

Take note that this strategic differentiation of primary qualities from secondary qualities as the supposed strategy by which modern science gets at the supposedly objective qualities of an object only pertains to what lies within the grasp and control of the subject-knower; the strategy is strictly immanent (within the current grasp of the subject-knower) while the goal remains transcendent. It asks of the inquirer to eliminate all that pertains to her 'subjectivity' and to restrict her attention to what can be precisely measured as if this alone would guarantee 'objectivity.' It does not require of the subject any transcendence, any reaching out beyond herself to the thing itself. Rather it asks the subject to step back, to disinvolve herself, to become as if she were an impersonalised subject-in-general, 'removed from' the objective world wherein the object is supposed to reside and effectively 'removed from' the variability of one person from another. Indeed, it assumes that, in order to be at all in touch with the objective world (thus delineated), one's thinking must become that of an impersonalism subject-in-general – that of 'the objective (scientific) mind' – whose judgments will be the same for all and will have nothing to do with 'human subjectivity.' (Think of Kant here and his account of why it is futile to attempt to attain a knowledge of noumenal reality, the reality of things in themselves as distinct from our knowledge of things as they can immanently be grasped by us.)

In consequence, all that the individual subject experiences of the world – so far as it does not meet the above stipulated criteria of objective evidence – comes to be identified as within the realm of 'subjectivity' (including all experience mediated by or suffused with personal involvement, intuition, emotion, or imagination, including empathetic investigation), having nothing essentially to do with reality objectively 'out there.' The entire subjective realm is thereby excluded from having anything to do with 'the objective world' investigated by science, and is consequently regarded for purposes of knowledge as being out of touch with 'objective reality' and closed off from that world. The 'subjective mind' accordingly is regarded as wholly private (e.g., no one has access to my experience but me), inaccessible from 'the outside', a ghostly sort of thing which behaviourists and now more recently neuro-cognitive scientists (relying solely on 'objective evidence' in the above sense) conclude to be insubstantial and non-existent. On the other hand, thinkers like Descartes, who begin with the indubitable givenness to oneself of one's own mental experience, wonder how it is possible to be assured of anything beyond the immanent contents of one's own mind – whether it be the material world in itself or other minds with their private experiences. In any case, on these terms it becomes inconceivable that a person could possibly have a uniquely personal access to reality itself, that would put her in touch with reality beyond his or her private, inner, 'subjective' experience. On these terms, only modern science (or modern scientific method), following the 'objective strategy' outlined above, affords such access.

What I have covered above is not the whole story about the modern notion of objectivity, for part of its hold over our imagination, especially our imagination about modern science, is buttressed by how scientific evidence under its terms appears to have an 'objective' – that is, object-like – status. For once evidence gets formulated in an invariant, impersonal, fully explicit, quantified form – as facts, data, statistics, etc. – to all appearances it comes to have, as it were, an 'reality' of its own, independent of the persons for whom it is evidence of something, independent of what it is supposed to be evidence, and apparently more substantial than that reality itself: i.e., the 'objectivity' of such evidence pertains here not to the reality it purports to represent but to the representation: the representation appears to have an unambiguous stability about it, an 'object' quality about it, a stable object that can stand on its own – and in this sense be an impersonal surrogate within our grasp for the object of which it is supposedly the evidence lying beyond our grasp (or at least not wholly within that grasp). (As an example, think of how statistics of success

and failure of schoolchildren on standardised tests come to seem to have more reality than the children and schools they are supposed to represent.) That is, the modern strategy for attaining objectivity causes us to lose sight of the transcendence beyond our explicit grasp of the reality we are trying to apprehend, especially once we have some 'objective' evidence about it. Objective science according to the modern notion of objectivity thus aims to identify and determine things behind or beyond immediate appearances (which may be unstable, changing, variable, but in any case *other* than our determinate representation of them) and gives us a surrogate of them (in the form of their scientific representation), a stable 'objective' representation of them, within the space of human appearance. Here objectivity pertains to the map, of course, not to the actual 'objective' territory it represents. The point I am making is an illustration of Marshall McLuhan's claim that 'The medium is the message'.

Anything that is not formulatable *in this way*, anything that is incapable of being rendered explicit in this way, will not be acceptable as 'objective' in accordance with the modern sense of objectivity no matter how faithfully it represents reality. It will be regarded as expressive of individual persons, of human subjectivity, varying with the person and the circumstances. On the contrary, 'objective facts' and 'objective knowledge' are supposed in accordance with the modern notion of objectivity to stand stable and invariant, as it were, on their own – even when they bear little relationship to the reality in question. Indeed, they don't appear to need a 'knowing subject'. Take note that representations of objectivity in the common-sense meaning I will go on to characterise in what follows can never attain this 'objective status' – precisely because they do not have a comparable autonomous, stable tangibility and manipulability. That is why a change in our thinking from the modern notion to the common-sense notion will prove difficult, to say the least.

2 The Common-sense Notion of Objectivity

Contrary to the usual, modern supposition about how to attain objective truth sketched above, we are by no means constrained to accept the modern conception of objectivity. Nor are we constrained to accept the view of scientism that this is the conception on which modern science is founded. There is, I suggest, an older and common-sense conception of reliable evidence for objective truth that does not at all coincide with the modern conception and is more closely linked with the root meaning of objectivity. According to what I shall call 'the common-sense notion of objectivity', reliable evidence includes

whatever merits the confirming recognition (the mutual recognition) of independent, open-minded persons who are committed to getting at the truth that really is (objectively) out there, above and beyond their ego-centric prejudices and biases. This is the notion on which responsible judgment in cognitive inquiry is founded. Such evidence may well

1. Vary (though not in arbitrary ways) from person to person (not all may be in a position to notice it or have a sufficiently developed capacity to notice and take it in);
2. Be inseparable from personal judgment (conscientious, responsible judgment), directly reflecting an intimate first-hand acquaintance with the object and its context;
3. Not be fully specifiable, requiring only that other competent inquirers be able to 'catch on to it' or 'see it for themselves;' and
4. Not be exact at all, and hence not be susceptible to formal or mathematical analysis.

Michael Polanyi, in his essay 'Logic and Psychology', demonstrates, contrary to the contentions of scientism, how the actual evidence relied upon by modern scientists, and judgment concerning such evidence, involves each of these qualifications.¹

On the common-sense conception of objectivity, a grasp of the object itself (i.e., an objective grasp) is attained only in person as one stretches beyond one's egocentric biases and preconceptions to catch hold of what lies out there beyond one's immediate grasp, which others similarly but independently are able to grasp. The objectivity of one's own grasp is confirmed as those independent others come to grasp it as well. An everyday example of the sort of mutual recognition that is involved here is when you notice in the delicious twinkling of an eye that your friend sees precisely what you see and that he sees that you see. Commonsensically, we say that we have grasped objective truth precisely when we realise that we have laid hold of aspects of a thing that are independently recognised by other persons and are independently recognisable (and possibly questionable) by still others. This is part of what Polanyi means when he insists that our judgments cannot claim absolute universality but can only be affirmed with universal *intent*. It also means that each person – so far as she has a developed competence in the matters in question – has her own, irreplaceable point of access to the reality in question.

In this respect, knowledge of objective truth is a matter fundamentally of personal acquaintance, of a relationship of rapport in one's own person with the object known. It is not impersonal, and it is not subjective either. It is a knowing that itself participates in bringing to light the object known for what it is, in making it known to others. Knowledge is something that occurs in the world in relation to the

object known and alongside other knowing subjects. Far from being excluded from the world of the object known in a private mental world, the knowing subject is known by his or her peers, known in his or her knowing. Objective knowledge is a mutual knowing, a knowing that essentially presupposes the presence and knowability of other minds.

Note, however, that this latter knowledge (the knowledge of other minds that is involved in objective knowledge in the common-sense meaning) is not had on the basis of evidence that could strictly pass muster according to the criteria of the modern notion of objective evidence. On the basis of those criteria, knowledge of other minds is limited to sheer external behaviour and physiological structure, both invariantly specified and described. To attempt to operate on those criteria with any strictness would necessarily leave one doubtful as to whether other minds exist at all, let alone provide the confirmation of mutual recognition that could serve as a foundation for objective knowledge.

But on the basis of the commonsense notion of objectivity, evidence may include our recognition of meaningful gestures, tone, and mood, the meaning of words said and left unsaid, insights discovered through empathy and attentive listening, the subtle things by which we recognize sensibility, thoughtfulness, wit, and spirit – and by which, above all, we achieve mutual recognition of the realities constituting our common world. All these, though certainly not ‘objective evidence’ in the modern sense, are nonetheless good evidence despite their apparent ‘subjectivity;’ they are good, commonsense evidence of objective truth. I suggest that it does nothing but add to our confusion to call such evidence ‘subjective’ – which in matters of evidence is almost invariably to dismiss them as counting for nothing. There remain problems, serious problems, with bias, presumption, projection, etc., and these things are rightly to be condemned and countered so far as possible. But the above mentioned types of evidence among others are real evidence; they are not merely matters of ‘subjectivity;’ they count for much. Indeed, they are crucial not just for our knowledge of other minds (i.e., other persons), but also for our knowledge of all sorts of other things – including our recognition of such things as bias, presumption, projections, etc. They play a crucial role throughout the natural sciences too, despite what is said by the advocates of the modern notion of objectivity. I suggest we recognize and accept them for what they are.

What then of the above criteria of the modern notion of objective evidence? Have they no validity? Do they play no role at all in modern science? On the contrary, they do play an important role in enabling modern physical science (especially physics and chemistry) to abstract and identify

certain measurable aspects of things – though even here, the measurements are never absolutely precise and exact. It is indeed an objective knowledge of these abstract measurable aspects of things that modern physics and chemistry give us. But these aspects by no means exhaust all that is objectively true of those things. There is much more that is true of those things, but that more cannot be grasped if we limit ourselves to the modern notion of objective evidence. To come to know the other aspects of things requires different kinds of approach involving a much greater and fuller involvement of our persons.²

3 The two meanings as applied to religion

I recently published a statement on the two meanings of objectivity (the modern and the common-sense meanings) in relation to the academic study of religion. It may help to have the same issue approached from another angle.

Generally, . . . [the modern academic study of religions] aims to promote and carry on an objective study of religious phenomena in the round. By "in the round" I mean a study that attempts to take into account and do justice to all relevant perspectives on the phenomena in question, those of insiders as well as outsiders. In order to take into account perspectives other than one's own, especially insiders' perspectives, *empathy* is required. Thus study of religious phenomena in the round requires a fusion of objectivity and empathy.

A great deal depends on what is understood by ‘objectivity’. It is well worth noting that the word has more than one meaning. One meaning pertains to a *preoccupation with a method of distancing*: of separating the subjectivity of the investigator from influencing conclusions reached about the object of investigation, of submitting all relations with and representations of the object to a rigorous discipline of impersonalisation, explicitness, and strict intellectual control. To be objective in this sense, one's knowledge and understanding of the object must be developed wholly from a single external perspective that has had all that can be done to it to make it (the perspective) objective. Such a perspective is detached, uninvolved, and impersonal toward what is being studied and requires that the results of one's study be presented in a way that could (ideally) be achieved or agreed to by any other, similarly objective scholar. This first meaning of objectivity is widely supposed to be the ideal of modern physical science and consequently the preferred ideal for all other academic disciplines. Nevertheless, it is a gross misconception of the practice of modern physical science and is disastrous when applied to such subject matters as religious phenomena. Given

this meaning of objectivity, objectivity and empathy are incompatible.. Unfortunately, a good many studies of religion are carried out in the conviction that there is no other legitimate notion of objectivity.

Another meaning (a more common sense meaning) of objectivity pertains to *a preoccupation with drawing near to the object of investigation in its transcendence beyond any one perspective*. Where is that? Precisely at the place where multiple perspectives upon it intersect, where all perspectives relevant to grasping and understanding the object in the round come together. Reaching that point is no easy matter, and one can never take for granted that one has achieved it. But it is possible to approach. It involves no simple, linear application of a single method. Rather it involves shifts in viewpoint that are only learned about as one strives progressively to draw near to the object, not away from it, and near to it in a manner appropriate to what it is thereby determined to be. Objective nearness to the object is measured by the extent to which one's developing understanding elicits recognition (recognition that one has indeed drawn near to it, if not fully grasped it) from those who dwell within the intersecting perspectives upon it and know them well. Significantly, so far as these intersecting perspectives involve discriminations of quality and worth, the pursuit of objectivity in this second sense itself will involve progressively more discerning value judgments – judging, for example, whether a ritual is being performed well or poorly, or whether a religious healer is genuinely interested in a patient's well being or is a charlatan. Objectivity in this second sense, then, is fundamentally a matter of doing justice to the object itself (the object as it exists between our several perspectives onto it, or at the point where our several perspectives intersect).

It is this latter sense of objectivity that the modern academic study of religion is about . . . So, contrary to the charge that objectivity is impossible, at least in the study of religion, I hold that, in the second sense just described, it is a meaningful goal toward which we can make significant progress.³

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Notes:

I am interested in receiving constructive feedback on this article, whether appreciative or critical.

1. *The American Psychologist*, 23 (May 1968), 27-43.
2. As well as *Personal Knowledge*, another very good and more accessible, though less carefully argued, source is Parker Palmer, *To Know As We Are Known: Education As A Spiritual Journey* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993). A very different though complementary approach to these issues is Blythe Clinchy's, 'Connected and Separate Knowing: A Marriage of Two Minds', in *Knowledge, Difference and Power: Essays Inspired by 'Women's Ways of Knowing'*, edited by Nancy Rule Goldberger, et al. (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 205-247.
3. Dale Cannon, *Six Ways of Being Religious: A Framework for Comparative Studies of Religion* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1996), pp. 17-18. Emphasis in original.

Two other articles of mine bearing on the meaning of objectivity may be of interest: Dale Cannon, 'The "Primitive"/"Civilized" Opposition and the Modern Notion of Objectivity: A Linkage', *PRE/TEXT: An Inter-Disciplinary Journal of Rhetoric* 2:1-2 (Spring-Fall 1981), 151-172; and Dale Cannon, 'Having Faith, Being Neutral, and Doing Justice: Toward a Paradigm of Responsibility in the Comparative Study of Religions', *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 5:2 (1993), 155-176.

LUCIAN BLAGA'S METAPHYSICS: PAST AND PRESENT

Ionut Isac and Teodor Vidam

Abstract

The present article tries to discuss one of the main sources of Romanian philosopher Lucian Blaga (i.e. *Lebensphilosophie*) as well as to bring into debate an actual interpretation of his metaphysics, from the point of view of pragmatism. The authors consider that Blaga's philosophical works are still less known to foreign readers, therefore it is important to discuss them having in sight the past and the present of this outstanding philosophy. Thus, they hope to open an exchange of opinions on this subject-matter, especially with Anglo-Saxon researchers and philosophers on this subject-matter, since it has become an important preoccupation of the Romanian academic community.

Key Words:

Romanian philosophy, metaphysics, *Lebensphilosophie*, (American) pragmatism.

In the last part of the 20th century, especially since two decades ago, the works of the Romanian poet and philosopher Lucian Blaga (1895-1961) have been, probably, the most discussed within Romanian culture. Furthermore, these works as well as his personality have begun in the recent years to impress also foreign specialists. However, Blaga is still now very little known outside Romania and what we have to do is to pursue the difficult task of translating and commenting his philosophical works into international languages, English being the first priority. An American interpreter of Blaga's philosophy puts the problem this way:

It seems evident that Romania has the obligation to make this striking philosopher available to the rest of the world: for the sake of the understanding and appreciation of differences, for the sake of inter-ideological communication, and for the sake of the other philosophical insights that the world will find in his work.¹

We consider that, from the point of view of making Blaga's thoughts known abroad, it is of utmost importance to come back to his theoretical sources as well to make to the foreign reader an idea of some 'fresh insights' which the philosophy of Blaga could bring to contemporary philosophical issues².

The metaphysics of Lucian Blaga remains the most commented one in Romania (more than 9,000 pages published only during last decade and only in the volumes containing the papers presented at the International Festival bearing his name). It is almost a consensus among Romanian contemporary professors and researchers that Blaga's philosophical

system ranks the first in our country as importance and value.

Nonetheless, there are still a lot of problems to discuss in order to make clearer the sources of inspiration of this metaphysics as well as its way in today's philosophical world. This is the reason for the title of the article; it justifies itself both as a looking over the past and as an exploration through the present.

1. Let us begin with the problem of the sources of Blaga's metaphysics. At a thorough analysis, it becomes obvious that his view about metaphysics as fulfilment or coronation of philosophy in a 'closed' spiritual world aiming at interior perfection and harmony, finds itself under the influence of romanticism and historicism of German school, especially that of W. Dilthey, not neglecting the works of O. Spengler. At this point, Blaga clearly indicates the primordial meaning of philosophy:

In metaphysical creation we see therefore not only the coronation of philosophical thinking... The metaphysician is the author of a world. A philosopher who does not keep becoming the author of a world suspends his vocation; he could be anybody, sometimes even a thinker of genius, but remains a follower of the unfulfilment. A metaphysician's world is in the first place a world of his own...³

What Blaga calls in *Cenzura transcendentă* (*Transcendent censorship*) the 'metaphysical theory of knowledge' could be seen as an argumentation of impossibility of metaphysics as a science (i.e. as knowledge of objective value and universal validity). Or, as Dilthey has said,⁴ philosophy is not – and cannot be – science, but a view of the world (*Weltanschauung*), dependent on historical forms of life and strong creative individualities. All metaphysics elaborated during history of thinking have the antinomic tendency to offer us at once what is beyond knowledge as well as to pretend of being objective and universal-valid knowledge.

In Dilthey's view, metaphysics as science would be a pointless enterprise. In fact, we have an eloquent 'empirical' proof: in history: no metaphysics has been able to impose itself once and for all; no metaphysics is able to do so, i.e. to be *science*.

For both philosophers (Dilthey and Blaga), artistic creation remains at level of feeling and intuition, in a zone of creative imagination of symbols and metaphors, analogies and suggestions, of existential uncertainties. The language of expressing communication with the divine is spiritually sensitive, different from the conceptual one. Philosophy realises a perpetual enrichment of the experience on the limits

of knowledge. Thus, religion is subjective, particular through the determinant emotions and the orientation toward the transcendent. Different from poetry or religion, metaphysics *believes* it is possible to find definite answers to the great questions of mankind through a valid universal knowledge. Thus, it has the intention to disclose the unity and the ultimate meaning of existence, to solve the mystery of life and world.

Thus, metaphysical systems appear to be merely personal attempts of philosophers to represent existence as a whole in its principle; these perspectives will be inevitably limited and centred within the personality of a metaphysician or another, having a certain life experience and cultural atmosphere, within historical and local co-ordinates. Far from being the 'last word' of philosophical thinking, each and every metaphysics aims in fact beyond of what can be said by concepts.

Between all the forerunners of the *Lebensphilosophie* (Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Bergson), as well as its key personalities, Dilthey seems to be the most related to Blaga, if we have in sight the concept of 'philosophy' itself, the human being as well as the cultural system. As much as Dilthey, Blaga does not give up the attempt of discovering valid elements within the *relativity* of metaphysics. They both oppose themselves to Kant's metaphysical criticism by the idea that the concepts have to be got through experience (i.e. along the historical existence of the individuals).

The ontological distinction made by Blaga between human existence in the practical-empirical world with the scope of auto-conservation and 'existence in the horizon of the mystery and for its revelation' has as a result two types of knowledge or cognition ('*paradisiac*' and '*luciferic*'). Kant's epistemology, with *a priori* intuition, categories and principles belongs to the first horizon. The second one contains the theoretical creations which aim at the *transcendent*; these are orientated and modelled through *stylistic categories* and a *stylistic matrix* of local and historic-ethnic characteristics as well as actuated by what Blaga called 'luciferic knowledge'. Beside Kant's categories, stylistic categories shape the science as shown by its historical kinds.

As Prof. Flonta has shown in his *Reflections*,⁵ according to the main ideas of the *historical relativism*, Blaga really questions a metaphysical system's capability of gaining general validity. He debates with empiricism and radical positivism on the problem of cultural-spiritual meaning of metaphysics; in fact, by rejecting '*scientific metaphysics*', Blaga makes a substantial effort in legitimating metaphysics' right to exist on another basis. Here, different from Dilthey whose conviction upon the relativity of metaphysical enterprise relied on the presupposition of impossibility of containing the idea of existence

as totality in concepts made within a historical culture, as well as on the spiritual elements of a creative personality, Blaga founds his arguments on systematic reasons, in as much as metaphysics (ontology) appears as a consequence of the theory of knowledge⁶.

Why, then, cannot *scientific metaphysics* succeed? Blaga develops a very peculiar and long ranging metaphysical explanation, starting with a high-level hypothesis on the nature of existence: the concept of the '*Great Anonym*' with its '*transcendent censorship*'. The concept of the '*Great Anonym*' denotes an entity placed in the core or 'centre of transcendence'. (Blaga said that it is just a possible name for it, one could easily find others; what is essential is not to try to interpret it in an anthropological manner, by assigning attributes to it). The '*Great Anonym*' represents the 'central existential mystery', defending forever 'the derived mysteries' from human knowledge (i.e. the position of self-absolute subject of mystery knowledge once and for all).

In this respects, the *Great Anonym* institutes a barrier between man and mysteries, the '*transcendent censorship*' – the metaphysical axis of knowledge, conceived as a 'safety network' or a 'firewall' (if one would like to employ the language of informatics) between human being as subject and the mysteries of the world as objects of knowledge.⁷ Due to this special kind of censorship, all human efforts toward the revealing of mysteries and obtaining a 'fully adequate knowledge' (i.e. the striving of all metaphysical systems in the history) would be in vain. The mysteries are never 'revealed', but only '*dissimulated*' by transcendent censorship, so people are never aware of this complicated and somehow super-natural, process. In other words, there is possible, in principle, *this* or *that* knowledge, but it never is possible for one to have *the* knowledge as knowledge of 'inside' or of 'itself' of the known object.

Let us give the word to Blaga himself:

There are no adequated revelations. For this conception, 'revelation' is a purely theoretical concept. In fact, no existential mystery does cross the threshold of knowledge remaining what it is. The threshold of knowledge is enchanted and transforms every guest who crosses it. In reality, there are only dissimulative revelations. An existential mystery, which discovers or reveals itself as such to the individuated knowledge, is *dissimulated* by the very structure who has been shaped to individuated knowledge according to the intentions inherent to transcendent censorship... The showing or revealing of an existential mystery, when happens, is always a *censored revelation*; censored by the very structure of the cognitive machine meant to receive the existential mystery.⁸

Very significant is the attitude of Blaga regarding his own metaphysical theory of Great Anonym, transcendent censorship and so on. He does not invoke a logical argument in its favour; moreover, he says that, as for the reason for believing in (the finality of) this structure of existence, there could not possibly be a reasonable answer. It is just beyond our way of understanding. The way how Blaga sees the tissue of metaphysics seems to suggest that his theory is not a *foundation* of nature and a condition of the metaphysical enterprise; it is rather a *perspective*. And, what finally speaks for this theory is its capacity of harmonisation with irreducible particular value options.⁹

In Blaga's metaphysics, human being, values, religion, stylistic matrix, etc., all depend in some way on the 'divine' transcendence. Sometimes his system has been described as an idealistic one, elaborated under a speculative-theological methodology. It could be possible that, for both Blaga and Dilthey, God would be an unconditional value in the flux of being and becoming, of universal settings and meanings.¹⁰

2. The amount and size of the contributions which Blaga's metaphysics could bring to current philosophy is now a wide-opened question. In recent years, among the younger generation of Romanian researchers in philosophy, as well as among foreign professors and interpreters of Blaga's philosophical creation, there seems to be a growing tendency to read his system from the pragmatist point of view. The historical and cultural reason why they are doing such a thing could result from the strong influence of Anglo-Saxon philosophy all over the world, especially in Romania after 1989. The inherent philosophical reason could be located in the fact that no serious comparative analysis of Blaga's metaphysics and pragmatism has been yet performed, but this is what M. S. Jones has begun to do in a recently published article:

... one very American aspect of Blaga's philosophy seems to have escaped notice by most of Blaga's Romanian commentators. This aspect is his epistemological Pragmatism. It is the thesis of this article that Blaga's philosophy contains all of the elements necessary for him to be considered a pragmatist in the American sense of the term.¹¹

Jones' pleads for the pragmatist 'key' of interpreting Blaga's metaphysics stands on several assumptions which could be detailed shortly as following:

(a) Pragmatism is a school of thought particularly approached to the theory of knowledge.¹²

(b) Pragmatism has a 'negative' element, since it goes against the current of epistemological objectivism – which pursued the goal of apodictic certainty

and sought objective criteria of truth; it argues for a more 'modest' epistemology, keeping with human nature and the situation in which one finds him/herself.¹³

(c) Pragmatism has a 'positive' element, a *de facto* criterion of truthfulness; instead of maintaining *correspondence* as a criterion of truthfulness, pragmatism proposes as a more reliable candidate either *coherence* or a *combination of correspondence and coherence* and sometimes even the speaker's *belief* regarding the proposition.¹⁴

(d) Blaga's philosophy seems to be very far from pragmatism, but metaphysics is not an insurmountable obstacle – there have been pragmatists embracing metaphysics, as Peirce, with his 'psycho-physical monism' or other pragmatists who have chosen *metaphysical realism*.¹⁵

(e) Blaga's epistemology has a similar 'negative' element; it is his epistemological thesis of impossibility of human 'positive-adequate' cognition (i.e. the theory of Great Anonym, transcendent censorship and the forms of 'luciferic cognition'), as well as his *constructivism*.¹⁶

(f) Blaga's epistemology has a similar 'positive' element, since he sees coherence and correspondence as complementary elements of truth/fullness' criteria; his epistemological position would go very near to that of pragmatism, since Blaga envisages for the criterion of truth, the effectiveness of a certain proposition when put into practice.¹⁷

(g) Therefore, Blaga could be considered a Pragmatist or, at least, a strong argument for his would-be pragmatist epistemology has been brought hereby.

Of course, here one could mention, besides the criteria held by Blaga as a sign of outstanding or excellence in metaphysics (internal coherence and correspondence with facts of the empirical world), a third kind of condition: the consequences entailed by a metaphysical system. In discussion of Blaga's conception about scientific theory (for instance, Einstein's theory of relativity), Jones puts in bold relief that, when it is to accept a criterion of truth, the Romanian philosopher has in sight the point of a theory that 'works'.¹⁸

But what has Blaga really thought about (American) pragmatism? Was he possibly a pragmatist without knowing it? However, he wrote plainly on this subject-matter in his philosophical works, at least once (see *On the Philosophical Consciousness*¹⁹). We believe that, before giving the word to possible interpretations which turn Blaga into a pragmatist *sui-generis*, it is recommendable to remind ourselves what Blaga has expressly written about American pragmatism, from his particular spiritual perspective. In fact, he was not at all in agreement

with pragmatism; on the contrary, he has criticised it heavily, as he did with other famous philosophies issued during the history of thought.

Firstly, Blaga speaks about pragmatism not in the epistemological context of theory of truth, but when he makes comments on the efficiency or the utility of science. People, he says, like to speak about the efficiency of science, sometimes even to praise or worship it; thus, philosophy is disadvantaged, because it has – or it appears to have – little practical outcome. But there is a specific philosophy which overrates exactly science's practical function: American pragmatism.

Let us give the word to Blaga, again:

This exaggeration, stressing on a single aspect, comes to a mutilation of the meaning which science has to preserve itself further. Pragmatism's one-sidedness has to be exposed ... American pragmatism would define the 'truth' of scientific judgments according to their pragmatic success as such. By the pragmatist conception, a scientific theory is 'true', not for an alleged adequately relationship with real, but for its virtues in relationship with human action in the given world. A judgment is proper not in itself, but for the services which it is able to bring to human action, transformed into a referential centre of existence.²⁰

Secondly, Blaga does not deny that science has a pragmatic function, but this cannot entail the dislocation of science's essence to consequences. He only wants to stop what he believes to be a misinterpretation of science and, especially, of technology. Pragmatism is, for Blaga, an exaggeration of a particular aspect of science. Or, once one accepts this thesis knowing the content of his metaphysics, how could then one take Blaga for 'pragmatist'? It would be as mistaken a principle as its opposite, since the Romanian philosopher precise excludes any approach of his philosophy to pragmatism.

Why is it so? Let us remind the above-mentioned ontological distinction which Blaga has drawn between those two types of existence and their corresponding two types of knowledge ('*paradisiac*' and '*luciferic*'). Within this original demarcation, the technological consequences or applications of science find themselves in the first horizon or type (i.e. '*paradisiac*'), that of human existence in the practical-empirical world in the aim of auto-conservation. A philosophy of this horizon (more likely to the animal world than to real humankind) could be pretty much 'flat', not 'high' – as valuable metaphysics is²¹.

The perspective of Blaga turns out to be a completely different one²². When dealing with pragmatism, Blaga also comments the frequent invoked metaphysics 'no practical utility'. It appears that metaphysics is merely a 'free play' of the intellect and this is what some people (the 'utilitarians') are taking for granted. The Romanian philosopher

rejects such an idea; it is an assumption advanced from a point of view which does not keep up with the human deep spiritual exactingness:

Metaphysics were really a simple 'free play' if human being would live only in the horizon of the concrete world, at the distance of senses and with the scope of auto-conservation. But, to define human being this way, it means a constraint to the exodus on all fours to pre-pre-history. The real situation does not allow such reduction, because man lives very stressed also in another horizon, the horizon of the mystery. Man feels an irrepressible need of revealing it by inventions of all kind; by metaphysical inventions, among others. The horizon of mystery belongs to the structure – sometimes more clear, sometimes more obscure, but fundamental – of human consciousness; the thirst of revealing mysteries through metaphysical inventions is a needful corollary of this human structure. We shall reject the epithet of 'free play', through which some spectators refused by spirit qualify metaphysical preoccupations. In the view for which we are pleading, metaphysical preoccupations appear rather as symptoms of a tragic seriousness, inherent to mankind²³.

What one could understand after reading these sentences? After all, there seems to be very little room here for pragmatism, if any. Of course, anybody is free to comment and interpret Blaga as he/she may wish, but we believe that one must pay attention in the first place to what an author has said expressly about his own metaphysics. And it becomes quite obvious that Blaga did not and could not present himself as a pragmatist; on the contrary, he is rather a *non-pragmatist* who tries to deal with pragmatism and criticises it.

Blaga went on his way, which is that of metaphysics as a system based on creative thinking. His critical arguments are pointed not only in the direction of pragmatism, but toward many philosophies from ancient and modern times. On each occasion, he assesses a certain philosophy having in mind the pattern of his metaphysics (the two types of existence and knowledge). What he prefers to criticise is modern and contemporary philosophy, in the particular hypostasis of 'deflation' (i.e. the reduction of philosophical problems). Exaggerated rationalism, positivism and pragmatism determine anti-metaphysical reactions, because they stop or occult the relationship between human life and the transcendent. For pragmatism, there is no mystery; or, to say otherwise, the mystery is already solved before occurring – it is somehow 'dissolved' into practical action. For Blaga, the mystery is something unavoidable and essential to a particular type of existence and knowledge/cognition: it is neither a limit of the theoretical act of knowledge nor a 'thing in itself', but an origin and an incentive of human being in search of its revelation.²⁴

We have the conviction that Blaga could be read and understood according to *this* central aspect of his metaphysics. What is still topical and can be improved from his system – no matter what current or paradigm one embraces – in order to make contributions to the further development of philosophy in the 21st century, it remains to be subject for an opened discussion in the future. A possible direction for a pertinent comparative analysis of Blaga's philosophical system and pragmatism could be, in our opinion, that of critics made by both Blaga and Peirce to Kant's metaphysics (the problem of categories). Eventually, the intention of barely labelling Blaga's metaphysics with the name of 'pragmatism' does not seem sustainable. More is needed than an adjective in order to encompass somebody's philosophical works. In this respect, Blaga philosophical writings remain of interest nowadays but not because they could be considered 'pragmatist', either inspired by some American pragmatist thinkers or by any other philosophy in the history. On the contrary, there are solid reasons to consider that Blaga's metaphysics still imposes itself today to interpreters' attention because of its outstanding originality and creativity as a *system* as well as through its exceptional conceptual architecture, which show clearly perceptible Romanian characteristics.

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Notes

1. See Michael S. Jones, *A Philosophy of Culture Approach to Inter-religious Understanding*, in *Meridian Blaga 6*, II, *Philosophy*, Casa Cartii de Stiinta (Science Books Publishing House), Cluj-Napoca, 2006, p. 156. However, some steps ahead in this respect were made by the doctoral thesis of Sean Cotter (Michigan State University, September 2004), *Living through translation: Blaga and T.S. Eliot* as well as the UNESCO edition (eds. Brenda Walker and Stelian Apostolescu), *Complete Poetical Works of Lucian Blaga* (2001). With great interest is expected to be published soon in USA the book of M.S. Jones about Blaga (300 pages).
2. See M. Flonta, *Cum recunoastem Pasarea Minervei. Reflectii asupra perceptiei filosofiei in cultura romaneasca (How do we recognise the Owl of Minerva? Reflections on the Perception of Philosophy in Romanian Culture)*, Editura Fundatiei Culturale Romane (Romanian Cultural Foundation Publishing House), Bucharest, 1998, p. 129.
3. See L. Blaga, *Despre constiinta filosofica (On Philosophical Consciousness)*, 'Facla' Publishing House, Timisoara, 1974, p. 20
4. See, for instance, *Das Wesen der Philosophie and Weltanschauungslehre*. Also, M. Flonta, *op.cit.*, p. 38-58.
5. M. Flonta, *op.cit.*, p. 48-49.
6. The most specific is in his *Trilogia cunoasterii (Trilogy of Knowledge)*, third part, *Cenzura transcendentă (Transcendent Censorship)*.
7. See F. Diaconu, M. Diaconu, *Dictionar de termeni filosofici ai lui Lucian Blaga (Dictionary of Philosophical Terms of Lucian Blaga)*, Editura Univers Enciclopedic (Encyclopedic Universe Publishing House), Bucharest, 2000, p. 63, 166.
8. See L. Blaga, *Cenzura transcendentă (Transcendent Censorship)*, Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 2003, p.34, 35.
9. M. Flonta, *op.cit.*, p. 55, 56
10. See T. Vidam, *Lucian Blaga si filosofia vietii (Lucian Blaga and Lebensphilosophie)*, in ***, *Meridian Blaga 6*, II, *Philosophy*, Casa Cartii de Stiinta (Book of Science Publishing House), Cluj-Napoca, 2006, p. 246-257
11. See Michael S. Jones, *Lucian Blaga: An American Pragmatist in Europe*, in *Meridian Blaga 5*, II, *Philosophy*, Casa Cartii de Stiinta (Science Books Publishing House), Cluj-Napoca, 2006, p. 268.
12. *Ibidem*, p. 281: 'The two essential features of American Pragmatism are its repudiation of epistemological strategies that aim at apodictic certainty and its proposal of a pragmatic criterion of truthfulness. Any philosopher who does not share these two features is not a Pragmatist. Likewise, any philosopher who does embrace them can be regarded, at least in his or her epistemology, as a Pragmatist. Blaga rejects the goal of apodictic certainty on a number of grounds. He also advocates a pragmatic criterion of truthfulness. Therefore Blaga is (can be considered) a Pragmatist'.
13. *Ibidem*, p. 270.
14. *Ibidem*, p. 272.
15. *Ibidem*, p. 275.
16. *Ibidem*, p. 276-278.
17. *Ibidem*, p. 279-280. 18. *Ibidem*, p. 281: 'There may be times when science proceeds via the gradual accumulation and analysis of data, and when one scientific theory overturns a previously accepted one by means of this process. However, it is a very often the case that scientific data is open to more than one very plausible interpretation. In the latter case, a criterion other than correspondence is needed to determine which theory is most valid. In such a situation a scientific theory is not accepted as true because it corresponds to reality and rival theories do not; that would be question-begging. In this situation a theory is accepted as true because it is seen that it works'.
19. See L. Blaga, *Despre constiinta filosofica (On Philosophical Consciousness)*, chapter *Eficiente (Efficiencies)*, p. 143-151.
20. *Ibidem*, p. 144.

Continued on p. 43

ON THE POLITICS OF THE SUBJECT: OPENINGS AND LIMITS OF A CONSTRUCTIVIST-DISDISCOURSE THEORY APPROACH

Henrieta Șerban

Abstract.

Discourse theory can be understood as symbolic interactionism and also as an avenue to a democratic politics of identity. The relationship between the universal and the particular is here very much at stake. The politics of the subject relies both on a certain identity and on the opportunities brought about by universal values. It depends upon keeping a certain level of antagonism as on leading an active life. These are the openings of a constructivist and discourse theory approach. The limits like in the specific idealist position concerning human beings and in the intricacies of the relationship between the particular and the universal.

Key Words

Democratic politics, discourse theory, identities, particular, politics of identity, politics of subject, subject, symbolic interaction, universal, values.

I. The main characteristics of the approach of constructivist-discourse theory

Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe laid the foundations of the discourse theory approach in 1985, with their book *Hegemony and socialist strategy: towards a radical democratic politics*, which can be considered a contributing part both for social constructivism (or in the field of phenomenological philosophy and sociology), as for symbolic interactionism. These fields share the interest in the subject as an identity in the making. Ernesto Laclau especially has continued this perspective in many of his following works (for example, the most interesting studies 'Subject of Politics, Politics of the Subject' (1995), or 'Why Do Empty Signifiers Matter to Politics?' (1994)). The politics of the subject receives a strong post-structuralist influence. Laclau and Mouffe do not ignore social reality, but they assign to it a contingent and indeterminate role. In their view, any given social and political constellation of factors is the result of the complex sociability of different subjects and not a necessity of some sort. In this approach, there is a strong rejection of essentialism and foundationalism, which is *not* entirely accompanied by a global rejection of social foundations. This is the reason why a critique of theoretical and analytical approaches like these as nihilist cannot be sustained. (Mouffe, 1999a: 754) The subject becomes subjectified through discursive

interactions. From the same perspective, all the social and political phenomena and all the objects attain their meaning in such discursive interactions. According to Laclau we can interpret discursive interactions as having a structuring role. Through them, 'meaning is constantly negotiated and constructed' (Laclau, 1988: 254) A discourse is a result of articulatory practice that combines and recombines the elements of discourse. (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985: 105) And people as social phenomena can function as elements of discourse, as can also mere objects. The politics of the subject is a radical democratic politics of identity. The identity of the individual agent as the identity of collective agents within society is to be seen as the result of a practice of establishing relations among elements whose identity could be changed in the articulatory process. Within such a process the 'position' of the subject is also important. The subject take stands for or against matters in their discursive interactions. Thus, they both assume and defend a certain position which often happens to be a very political one (and a very important one, for the identity of the subject). A subject position is a position within the discursive field, within the social field and within the political field, at once. The positioning of subjects within a discursive structure is a political positioning, with implications for the particular, personal identity, but also for the democratisation of a society. The discursive positioning becomes therefore a trace for identifying social and political actors within a particular discourse. In the same quasi-spatial perspective over the field of discourse, Laclau and Mouffe talk about the 'nodal points' (named in an analogy with the 'points de caption' of Jacques Lacan), that give a certain degree of fixity to the discourse. Therefore, at the political and social level, the subject of politics can benefit from a degree of fixity in what concerns her identity, in terms of positioning and recognition. She can be recognised as the one defending certain political stands against the hegemonic ones. At the same time, active engagement in discursive interactions is compulsory as constructive mechanism for reaching a personal particular identity. Discourse theory contributes to philosophy proposing identity as a merger of a constellation of identities, where there can be an overwhelming presence of some identities in the detriment of others. The subject never becomes completely subjectified. There is always a distance

between a momentary obtained identity and the subject as the entity formed by the constellation of conflicting identities. This generates on one hand a weakness and on the other hand a great power to improve and adapt in what concerns discursive interactions. There is always possible to subvert some defining element within the discursive construction that sustains a certain identity. Subjectification is contingent and it opens the realm of particularity for the human being. Yet, while in discourse theory, neither discourse nor identities are stable or given – a discourse is never outside the impact of antagonistic elements, it enjoys a certain degree of stability. While there is always a constellation of floating signifiers, there is also a definite profile of a particular field of discursivity. While there is no ‘saturation of meaning’, there is an unmistakable meaning of discourse and of the social and political stances of the subject. (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 112). The generosity of meaning does not undermine the possibility of meaning.

2 The Politics of the Subject

Creating and defending identity are central processes for a politics of the subject, both placing a strong emphasis on the concept of hegemony.

In discourse theory, hegemonic articulations can be compared to social imaginaries in their role – to create chains of signifiers in a logic of difference – in clarifying identities. But the role of hegemony is not to be considered central. Within this theory there are, again, hegemonic nodal points to be acknowledged, as sites for a concentration of certain social relations, or as focal points. (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985: 139)

The politics of the subject is plural, or, if we wish, a plurality. The subject holding an identity constructed against subordination, and rooted in gender, race, class, sexuality, environment leads to plural personal and discursive interactions and policies. *The politics of such subject sustains a radical pluralist position.* According to Laclau and Mouffe such subjects build a new democratic radical political project, a ‘New Political Left’, not renouncing liberal-democratic ideology. Such subjects adjust daily, in a discursive manner, the universals of the liberal-democratic ideology, deepening and expanding it to their particulars. By actively and discursively manifesting their identities the active subjects of politics succeed in transcending the civil society/political society and public/private dichotomies and at the same time they bring the ‘democratic revolution’ into new fields of society. (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985: 177).

The democratic struggles are discursive in nature. Their result is that they offer the elements for the construction of a new hegemonic imaginary which consists of the equivalent articulation of the

different democratic struggles. And one of the best of these new elements is the characteristic of resistance to the ‘totalitarian myth of the Ideal City’ (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985: 190).

The universal is deposed from a symbolic position of ‘point of access to the truth’ (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985: 190). The social and the political maintain therefore their open character. The authors explain: ‘Every project for radical democracy includes, as we have said, the socialist dimension – that is to say, the abolition of capitalist relations of production; but it rejects the idea that from this abolition there necessarily follows the elimination of other inequalities’ (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985: 192). The lesson is that the universal is valuable for democracy when it can be meaningfully particularised by the active political actor.

2.1. The openings for the politics of the subject (triggered by discourse theory)

1. At the same time, discourse theory is to a large extent a plea for acquiring the ‘polyphony of voices’, of discourses and actions undertaken by the active subjects. Thus, for example, anti-racism, anti-sexism and a nuanced anti-capitalism, as different (radical) democratic political struggles take on an important, but unprivileged space, in society as in the process of creating the particular politics of the subject (Mouffe, 1997: 18).

2. The notion of Antagonism according to Laclau and Mouffe is defined as a typical confrontation between social agents that prevent all actors to dispose of some fully constituted identities. They say: ‘the presence of the Other prevents me from being totally myself’ (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985: 125). Social and political antagonism, in their interpretation at once construct identities and destabilise them. Antagonistic identities rely on one another as a constitutive outside, while they threaten each other’s existence. Discursively, these antagonism are constructed, through the creation of the chains of equivalence: ‘For instance, if I say that, from the point of view of the interests of the working class, liberals, conservatives, and radicals are all the same, I have transformed three elements that were different into substitutes within a chain of equivalence.’ (Laclau, 1988: 256) The authors also explain that there is a logic of difference discursively involved due to the discursive hegemonic practices that tend to weaken the social antagonisms re-signifying these as marginal. After David Howarth (1998: 279) the interpretation of the chains of difference by Laclau and Mouffe, should be the following: ‘the hegemonic practices are an exemplary form of political articulation which involves linking together different identities into a common project’ (that is, a social imaginary, a ‘horizon’) (Laclau, 1990: 64).

3. Not everything is discourse. But everything is discursively specified within a discursive order.

An earthquake or the falling of a brick is an event that certainly exists, in the sense that it occurs here and now, independently of my will. But whether their specificity as objects is constructed in terms of 'natural phenomena' or 'expressions of the wrath of God' depends upon the structuring of a discursive field. What is denied is not that such objects exist externally to thought, but the rather different assertions that they could constitute themselves as objects outside any discursive condition of emergence. (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985: 108)

4. Arendt's 'vita activa' is loaded with all the meanings acquired in its long history. *Vita activa* held a secondary role to *vita contemplativa*, as it deals with the human affairs, rather than with the divine 'affairs' (the ideas). Arendt brings a new stand into political philosophy with her attempts to revitalise *vita activa*. More interestingly, the author does not follow the Marxist or Nietzschean steps of just inverting the old hierarchy. Instead, Arendt succeeds in recognising and including the presence of contemplation in the *vita activa*, as a need for contemplation in order actively to fulfil one's life. A certain view, a certain perspective is necessary in order to rightfully decide 'where' to stand, what to change and what to 'keep'. The lesson that the universal is valuable for democracy when it can be meaningfully particularised by the active political actor can be learnt only from this perspective, opened by H. Arendt.

2.2. The Limits of Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory

1. Is the identity of all phenomena discursively articulated? The critique says that by positively answering this question, they take an idealist stance. But the authors are constantly turning towards the analysis of the discursive components of reality. Their interest in 'democracy' and 'socialism', or in anti-racism, anti-sexism and a nuanced anti-capitalism, they interpret the material component of reality involved in the discursive struggles. In their analyses these authors consider the material elements, as part of the interpretative process, as a necessary starting point. Yet, the ends of discourse theory are also material, in the sense that the aims of all discourse struggles is, to some extent, the improvement of material life. Only the discursive 'middle' in this special democratic revolution tends to be more 'ideal' in nature.

2. Is there a primacy of the political over the social? Indeed, Laclau and Mouffe interpret discourse and identity as political entities. This critique is partly answered by their suggestion of a continuous transformation that indicates a more mutual relationship between the social and the political. Thus, in a first

stage, the social relations are formed by political struggle and then, they lose their political nature, when they get the mask of norms and values that are experienced as self-evident. In a third stage, they rediscover their political nature when they are contested (Torfing 1999: 70). A stronger argument is the difference underlined by Mouffe between 'the political' and 'politics', where politics is seen as a dimension of the social (Mouffe, 1997: 3).

3. Universalism-particularism. Laclau and Mouffe insist on a nuanced analysis of the relation between the universal and the particular. In their view, particularism as such is theoretically unsustainable: the universal exists, but it is an 'empty place which can be partially filled in a variety of ways' (Laclau, 1996a: 59, and Torfing, 1999: 171). In a given social and political referential system, the universal will always assume a specific, particular form. Or, as Laclau explains in another study: 'And universal values can be seen as a strong assertion of the 'ethnia of the West' (as in the later Husserl), but also as a way of fostering – at least tendentially – an attitude of respect and tolerance *vis-à-vis* cultural diversity'. (Laclau, 1995:147) In this sense, and in accord with discourse theory, rather a 'weak identity' is required by a 'politics of the authenticity of the subject'.

The role of the democratic struggles implied by the politics of the subject is to test the universal through the interests of the particular, of the subject, to check and explain the benefits and the limits of its applicability. But this is possible only due to the opening explored by discourse theory. It is Laclau who has noticed and sustained the aspect that while the universal is defined against any particularity, it cannot exist without the particular. Only the particular provides the necessary building bricks in the process of universalisation. (Laclau, 1996a: 34)

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COMMENT ON *MICHAEL POLANYI: SCIENTIST AND PHILOSOPHER* BY W.T. SCOTT AND M.X. MOLESKI

Norman Wetherick

I never met Polanyi nor heard him speak. I did once (in the early 1970's) invite him to address a meeting of psychologists and he accepted (any topic, at any length). Unfortunately he withdrew (or was withdrawn) at the last minute. I had become interested in his work in the mid-1960s by reading *Personal Knowledge* (1958) for the first time and without much understanding. I was keen to meet a man who was clearly a major intellect and shared my dissatisfaction with philosophy as it then was. My luck was out – I was not aware that he had already entered his final decline though he was to live on for several more years. When his last book appeared (*Meaning*, Polanyi and Prosch, 1975) I was asked to review it and did so at some length (*Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, 9, 1978, pp. 60-62). I had edited a special number of that journal, devoted to Polanyi, in the previous year. I published three further papers in 1997 and 1998 by which time I had got to know his work better. I have just re-read the 1978 review and was pleasantly surprised to find that I can still stand by it.

I am (or was) a psychologist and my subject has not attracted many major intellects, so far only Freud and Piaget. What I have written about Polanyi has been mainly concerned to show how much psychology might have benefited but did not.

My luck was in as regards the authors of his biography, Prof. W.T. Scott and Fr. Martin Moleski. I met Prof. Scott in Aberdeen and was able to be of some small assistance to him; I met Fr. Moleski in Edinburgh. I don't think I was of any assistance to him but I enjoyed his company as much as he appears to have enjoyed mine. Their book has vastly increased my understanding of Polanyi in two principal respects. I had always argued that the value of his philosophy of science sprang from the fact that he alone among writers on the subject was also a front-rank physical scientist with laboratory experience; someone who had got his hands dirty, though, apparently, he was clumsy with apparatus and his assistants tried to keep him away from it. This book (two-thirds of which covers his early, scientific career) enables me to put flesh on the bones of that hypothesis. His later career, as philosopher and social theorist, I described as a case of 'a good man fallen among theologians'. This is not quite fair to theologians. Fairness to theologians does not come easily to me but perhaps I should have said 'a good man who threw himself in among theologians'. He refused to deny them the right to commit themselves

to the truth of their propositions in the same sense that scientists commit themselves to theirs. He might have said that while scientists are (or should be) able to specify what evidence would be sufficient to persuade them that a proposition they regard as true is actually false, theologians never are. Unfortunately, human nature being what it is, some scientists are equally at fault in this respect.

Polanyi's scientific career began early. In 1914 some of his work was approved by Einstein no less but for most of the first world war he was required to serve as a medical officer in the Austro-Hungarian army, part of the time at forward casualty stations. (He must have had a closer acquaintance with human suffering than most of us ever acquire.) As soon as he could he returned to research, and at an exciting time. Much was by then known of the internal structure of the atom. Much was also known about which chemical substances combined with which and in what circumstances. Everyone agreed that the former phenomena must account for the latter but little was known of how this came about. That was the problem to which Polanyi addressed himself: in Budapest till Horthy revived anti-semitism in Hungary (1920), in Berlin till Hitler did the same in Germany (1933), and in Manchester till his final turn to philosophy in 1948. Working with primitive home-made apparatus, constructed *ad hoc* for each investigation, he had laid foundations for the eventual explanation of many different chemical phenomena but usually switched to a new problem whenever the way to the solution of the one he was working on seemed obvious to him, thus enabling someone else to take the final steps and get the credit for the breakthrough. He advanced and defended a theory of the adsorption of gases onto a rough surface which was rejected by his contemporaries but turned out later to be fundamentally correct. (At Manchester he was not allowed to teach his own theory.) He also postulated and defended the existence of a new kind of physical force to explain his results which turned out, after advances in quantum theory, to be non-existent and unnecessary.

While Professor of Physical Chemistry at Manchester he did no experiments himself but won the respect of his assistants and students by his ability to propose an experiment and, when the result was brought to him, say at once what bearing it had on the theoretical issues under investigation and what ought to be done next, or occasionally that the result was wrong and the experiment must be done again.

Most of his own time appears to have been devoted to economics at this stage.

Polanyi experienced science in all its aspects, success and failure. He grasped the fact that all that can be done is to commit oneself to the truth of any proposition that one believes to be true, in the knowledge that it may be false.

The commitment is motivationally necessary to ensure continued progress; the 'in pectore' reservation follows from the way the world is. The world gives every appearance of being a nexus of interacting causal forces but for an event A to function as factors have to be present (absent). We can never know how large this subset is. A factor may be essential to the prediction but since, in our experience, it has always been present, its relevance has never been realised. Or a factor may have to be absent which has never in our previous experience, been present – this is the real problem of induction.

It follows that 'If A then B' can never be known to be a universal scientific law and, strictly speaking, no conclusion can ever be drawn about the A now before us; i.e. whether it predicts B or not. But we do not usually speak as strictly as that but we commit ourselves to the proposition or not as the case may be, we treat it as a universal. For a thousand years the principal users of logic were theologians, not scientists, and they insisted on the absolute truth of their propositions – on the 'Truth'. Scientists were persuaded that they must claim as much for theirs and thence was born strict empiricism. Theoretical propositions must, they thought, come after observation of the facts in order to be 'true', not before it. All the sciences, except my own, have seen the futility of this requirement. Polanyi saw it, brought the consequences out into the open and drew the appropriate conclusions.

Throughout his life Polanyi yearned for the comfort of sincere religious belief but could never bring himself to accept it intellectually. He was born a Jew, received at one point into the Roman Catholic Church (but never afterwards attended a service) and once expressed a willingness to subscribe to 'any form of Protestant worship'! At the end of his life his view was that one should worship God 'in order to make Him exist, not because he does exist'. Such a view is only likely to be acceptable among highly sophisticated individuals. Most religious believers worship God because they think he does exist and insists upon it (and might send them to Hell if they don't). Many of them draw genuine comfort from their beliefs but it is necessary to ask why this is the case, a psychological question. For

some, Pascal's wager is the answer – best be on the safe side. But there is a more fundamental reason. In organisms, the knowledge-acquiring mechanism (i.e. the central nervous system) is so constituted that to decide on any course of action it is necessary to take account of the evidence favouring all the alternative courses open to the decider and known by him to be so. To decide on one is to commit oneself in Polanyi's terms. This is as true of the rat in the maze as of the scientist in the laboratory. As we have seen, it is equivalent to accepting a universal proposition, 'All situations A make a prediction that requires a response B from me'. The ideal scientist keeps in mind (in his laboratory) the possibility that he may be wrong but even he/she will often accept the full implications of the universal in everyday life. For the majority this is the basis of the comfort afforded by religious belief. The accepted authority prescribes which propositions are to be accepted and acted upon: there is no need to consider the issues for oneself; no need for any 'in pectore' reservations and indeed entertaining such reservations may be dangerous. In members of the human species (only in them) it is possible to override any previously accepted system of propositions and some individuals do so but not many. It requires effort and may involve risk.

Virtually all human conflicts are based on religious differences. When all parties hold that their fundamental beliefs are the 'Truth', some of them may feel obliged to offer others the opportunity to convert, and to kill them if they won't. Christians appear to have stopped behaving like this but only in the last few hundred years. Muslims still do but they of course started six hundred years later. Such phenomena are not only to be seen in old-established religions; analogous behaviours may be seen in Moonies, Scientologists, etc. They are a consequence of the way our mind/brain works, an essential and inevitable part of the human condition. I cannot share Polanyi's optimism that the unsatisfactory parts of human nature may be eliminated without sacrificing at the same time the human capacity to advance scientific knowledge of the world and construct and appreciate works of Art, Literature, Music etc. These capacities are what distinguish us from what used to be called the 'brute creation'. We should be thankful for them and live as best we can with the attendant disadvantages. To change human nature is the ambition of all religions; they have all failed and will continue to fail.

Edinburgh

BOOK REVIEWS

The Worldview of Personalism: Origins and Early Developments

Jan Olof Bengtsson

Oxford, OUP, *Oxford Theological Monographs*, 2006; 310 pp., ISBN 0-19-9297193-3; £60 (hbk).

This study is a revised and expanded version of the author's D.Phil. thesis. The author has contributed articles to *Appraisal* and attended our conference in 2003 while at Oxford. He now teaches philosophy at the University of Lund.

'Personalism' is generally held to mean those philosophies which take the person and personal categories to be the clue to reality. Hence not just any one who thinks about what it is to be a person would be allowed to qualify as a 'personalist'.

The argument of this study appears at first sight to be rather a narrow and 'merely' historical one: that the American school of personalism had an incomplete understanding of its own origins, which it traced back to Lotze, then to 'a typical theistic personalism' originated by Leibniz, Berkeley and Kant, and thence to the great names of European philosophy in general such as Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, Augustine, Aquinas and Descartes. That account has been repeated, more or less, by other English-speaking historians of personalism who have also taken the American school to be the paradigm of personalism, because, in the English-speaking world, it has been the only one to use that term. (I suspect that to many, even most, philosophers in Britain and the Commonwealth, as distinct from the USA, 'personalism' would convey no meaning at all.)

But in fact the argument is much more complex and important. The American school of personalism was founded at Boston University towards the end of the 19th C. by Borden Parker Bowne. It continued there via E.S. Brightman, A.C. Knudson and Peter Bertocci. It has also flourished in California, down to the present day, from George Howison (an independent personalist) and R.T. Fleming to Walter Muelder and Carol Sue Robb.¹

In the 20th C. the American school itself had contacts with that of Mounier in France, which on the Continent, and probably in Roman Catholic circles elsewhere, would be understood to be what was indicated by 'personalism', as witnessed by the events and publications in 2005 in honour of the centenary of his birth. Bengtsson also mentions the French personalists of the 19th C. – Maine de Biran, Hamelin and Renouvier, and 20th C. personalisms and personalists such as the phenomenological personalism of Max Scheler,² John Paul II (who combined Scheler and Thomism) and others of the

Polish school (which draws from the American one as well as its own Roman Catholic traditions), the dialogical personalism of Buber and others, the Christian personalisms of Laberthonnière and Nédoncelle in France,³ and John Macmurray.

Although the American school is taken as the paradigm, and Knudson's account of its origins and sources is studied in some detail in Ch. 1, this study thereafter refers only in passing to it, and instead examines the British school of 'personal idealism', contemporary with Bowne and Howison, which reacted against the impersonalism and immanentism of the Absolute Idealists such as Edward Caird, Royce, Bradley and Bosanquet. For that too traced its proximate origins to Lotze, though it was more aware of other sources in the late 18th C. and the early part of the 19th.

The argument is that, though Lotze (1817-81)⁴ was the proximate source for both the American personalists and the British personal idealists, Lotze himself to a considerable extent continued the 'speculative theism', founded by I.G. Fichte (1797-1879, son of J.G. Fichte), H. Ulrici (1806-84) and C.H. Weisse (1801-66), which, with 'Right Hegelianism' (a more personalist and theist version in contrast to the secularist and radical 'Left' Hegelianism), then dominated philosophy in the German universities. And 'speculative theism' itself had grown out of the *Pantheismusstreit* of the 1780s, led by F.H. Jacobi (1743-1819), the hero of this study, and continued by F.W.J. Schelling (1775-1854) in his later work, both of whom reacted against the submergence of the individual person in the impersonal monisms of Spinoza and then of J.G. Fichte and Hegel.

Bengtsson argues that Jacobi, Schelling, and the 'speculative theists', are not merely the missing links in a chain that starts with Plato, continues to Leibniz, Berkeley and Kant, then to Lotze, and thus to Bowne, as Knudson assumed, and also to the British personal idealists. Rather, Jacobi and Schelling, drawing upon some elements of the Enlightenment and Romanticism, while rejecting others, and drawing upon also upon the Scottish school of Common Sense (as did, notes Bengtsson, Andrew Seth Pringle-Pattison, 1856-1931, the leading 'personal idealist' in Britain), developed and added to traditional Christian theism, particularly in a more explicitly personal, even 'dynamic', doctrine of God and in deepening the idea of a finite person, more in the tradition of Augustine and the Franciscans, rather than that of Aquinas. Hence 'personalism', first used for this rejection of the new pantheism, came to be a coherent and comprehensive worldview, within implications in all aspects of

philosophy, theology, other intellectual disciplines, and culture and life generally.

This particular stream of personalism was therefore defined by its rejection of the new pantheisms and monisms. It is the substantive reality and value of the individual person that is throughout at issue, as opposed to his merely 'adjectival' reality and value in relation to the all-inclusive 'substance', *Geist* or Absolute. With that goes also the personality of God, a real and living being with whom the finite personal can enter into those personal relation that constitute a person – a theme to be further developed in the 'dialogical' personalisms of the 20th C., such as Buber's (and Macmurray's). Hence this tradition of personalism, stemming from Jacobi and Schelling, and branching out to Britain and America, and earlier to Sweden, is distinguished by continuing both the negative and positive aspects of the original *Pantheismusstreit*: opposition to any all-inclusive Whole or Absolute because it would have to be impersonal, and refining and developing what is distinctive of both finite persons and God. It is always a theistic personalism, even though for Howison God was more of a superior finite person than the transcendent Creator, while Bowne, Brightman and Bertocci at Boston, and Hastings Rashdall at Oxford, also argued that in one or another way God is finite as well as infinite. This explains why, for example, the wholly non-theist and pluralist personalism of McTaggart (at Cambridge) stands outside this tradition, and certainly his principal work, *The Nature of Existence*, appears to owe nothing to the tradition stemming from Jacobi.

The book is organised into an Introduction which sets out the argument, a first chapter which examines in detail how historians have treated the origins of American personalism and the meanings of 'personalism'. These will be found to be the most difficult parts of the book, firstly because many readers may know little or nothing about the persons under discussion, and secondly because the author takes pains to trace the exact agreements and disagreements among them, to note changes in doctrine and attitude (especially important in the case of Schelling), to be as precise as possible in the application of labels, and to take into consideration convergences and divergences in respect of broader movements in thought and culture generally. All the consequent detail is important properly to bring into focus a continuous stream of personalist thinking, distinct in important respects both from what had gone before and from other contemporary streams of thought with which it did overlap to varying extents.

Next come three chapters which form the substance of the book, and each of which examines the selected philosophers in relation to a particular theme:

Ch. 2: 'Personal 'reason' and impersonal 'understanding''

Under this heading, the author deals with: (a) the rejection of merely abstract thinking which could never grasp concrete reality, and explanation in terms only of logical or physical necessity which must eliminate persons and their freedom; and (b) the appeal to immediate self-conscious experience, which is not that merely of an abstract 'I' or 'I and not-I', but of oneself, a concrete individual person, in relation to a concrete world that pre-eminently includes other persons and, above all, God; and (c) also to whole of personal experience, especially moral and religious experience, and not simply the 'demands of the intellect'.

Ch. 3: 'The personal absolute'

Here the particular themes are: (a) the rejection of any impersonal substance, principle, subject or *Geist* as the ground or the whole of reality, and also of the conception of the Absolute as the only but notably abstract personal being, as by Edward Caird and the early Royce; (b) the argument that only some form of theism can do justice to what is disclosed in personal experience, so that either God is the Absolute, the unconditioned creator of all else, or God plus (other) finite selves, are, in effect the Absolute; (c) the conception of the personality of God, rather than upon personality *in* God, as in previous theology; (d), as against Deism, insistence upon the immanence of God in the world and especially in finite persons, and also, as against pantheism and monist Absolutism, upon the transcendence of God, though sometimes there may be less stress upon the latter.

Ch. 4 'Personal unity-in-diversity'

This chapter deals with reality as a 'dynamic unity of persons in relation', with emphasis, against monism and pantheism, on the ontological plurality of finite persons in respect of each other and of God, upon their freedom and self-actualisation, and thus upon a more individualised and value-orientated ethics.⁵

In each of these chapters the author begins with Jacobi and Schelling, and then turns to the 'speculative theists'. But because they have already been studied by others in some detail, Bengtsson merely mentions the salient contributions of I.G. Fichte, Ulrici and Weisse, and deals instead with the parallel school of 'idealism of personality' or 'philosophy of personality' at Uppsala in Sweden – Biberg, Grubbe, Atterbom, Geijer and Boström, none of whose works appear to have been translated into English, and who were also influenced by the Scottish school of 'Common Sense'. That section always closes with Lotze. Again, because the American school has been studied by others, the author deals instead with the rather neglected British 'personal idealists',⁶ as represented by A.S. Pringle-Pattison,

C.P. Upton, J.R. Illingworth, and C.C.J. Webb, while Coleridge, Mansell and Martineau are noted as precursors, and such as James Seth (brother of Pringle-Pattison) and W.R. Sorely as additional contributors.

These chapters display an admirable mastery and orderly deployment of a great mass of detailed study of each individual philosopher in relation to what he opposed, his own positive arguments and conclusions, and his relations to others within this tradition.

The book closes with a chapter on the meaning of early personalism, which reviews the development of the argument of the book, and amplifies it by other observations, such as connections between German personalism and the more conservative British version of the Enlightenment as opposed to the radical French version. It was also, he suggests, the only intellectual movement, produced by the neo-humanism and idealism of the 19th C. that was opposed to the closed secularism of that time and ours which has dominated the historical assessment of that period, with the result that personalism has been overlooked. Yet, he claims, this tradition of personalism retains a meaning and value today as a positive alternative to the dialectics of extreme individualism and collectivism, in Romantic, rationalist and other forms, which pander to and prey upon the isolated, modern 'empty self', without anything beyond itself to guide it and so left only to its own devices and desires. Some of this was foreseen by Jacobi, and he termed it 'nihilism'. But, cut off from the earlier tradition, both European and American personalists often succumbed to modern secularist radicalism. The thinkers of that earlier tradition, Bengtsson concludes,

sought a way to keep the faith in both God and reason that retained an objective conception of truth, goodness, and beauty while at the same time doing justice to the dynamic historical character of personal life and the dialogical reciprocity between persons. In doing so, they revealed needed alternative potentials of the modern Western mind. There are good reasons to give them a fair hearing again (p. 283).

In the substantive chapters of the book the author has made the case for that recommendation, and this volume will repay close reading on that account.

Yet I would like to add an appendix to this. In one respect the British 'personal idealists', and perhaps others, fought only half their battle. Hegel had been welcomed in Britain from about 1850 onwards because he seemed to offer an alternative, not only to arid Deism and deistic tendencies in orthodox theology, but also to sensationalism and materialism, what today we would call scientific reductionism. In his *Hegelianism and Personality*, Pringle-Pattison eloquently expressed that

attraction, and then argued that the Absolute Idealism that was being developed from the study of Hegel also threatened the reality and value of the individual person. They began a new *Pantheismstreit*, in which the 'personal idealists' became pre-occupied with arguing against Absolute Idealism and thus they neglected materialist impersonalism. In this they were perhaps also victims of the whole idealist strategy from Kant onwards, namely, to counter materialism by claiming that applied, even properly applied, only to a 'phenomenal' world, and that mind, spirit, persons, values, right and good, were secure in a truly real 'noumenal' world.⁷ But that strategy left what ordinary people take to be real world to the 'materialists', and so allowed them to pose as the champions of the natural sciences that deal with it and thence to appropriate the growing prestige of those sciences. Hence in the early 1920s British personal idealism faded away with Absolute Idealism, and it was not until 1945 that Michael Polanyi independently began to challenge materialist and reductivist impersonalism on its own chosen ground of natural science.

R.T. Allen

Notes:

1. See further Bengtsson's Critical Notice, 'Personalism: A Living Philosophy?' in *Appraisal*, Vol. 5, No. 1. March 2004.
2. One of two quibbles that I have is Bengtsson's reference to pantheist tendencies in Scheler. In his great period, from c. 1911 to c. 1923, Scheler was resolute in detecting and condemning any tendency to submerge the person into an impersonal whole. But in his last book, *Man's Place in Nature* (1928), he did lapse from his Christian theism and personalism (specifically Augustinian in orientation, and taking St Francis as the model of a Christian love of Nature) into a secularist cosmology, with a dualism of 'life' and 'spirit', the latter man's defining level of existence, and in which the Ground of Being comprehends and realises itself in man who thereby co-operates in bring God into existence. This may be said to be an emergent pantheism.
The other quibble is that the author several times mentions the Baden Neo-Kantians and their philosophy of values, but without giving their names, leaving readers such as myself either completely in the dark or having to guess who they might be.
3. But, surprisingly, not that of Gabriel Marcel.
4. Lotze was often cited by British philosophers a hundred or so years ago, but then he completely disappeared.
5. Here we meet the question of whether personalism *per se* includes the 'idealistic' (better 'mentalist' as James Ward suggested) thesis that *all* reality is spiritual, mental or personal, as Knudson is quoted as assuming, and thus that all experience of physical things is merely phenomenal. Undoubtedly there are 'idealist' elements in a number of the philosophers discussed in this book, and the British opponents of monist Absolutism were at the time called 'personal idealists' and

have been since. Hastings Rashdall and W.R. Boyce-Gibson certainly were 'idealists', and Pringle-Pattison had been something of a monist idealist. But I have found nothing in his *Hegelianism and Personality* and subsequent publications to indicate that he remained idealist in any way, nor in Webb and Sorely that they were ever idealists. Likewise in the American school, Howison, like Rashdall, was a full-blooded 'Berkeleyan idealist' (but was Berkeley?) and Bowne held the physical world to be 'phenomenal' in some way, but, despite Knudson, there is no suggestion of this in Brightman and Bertocci. Pringle-Pattison did continue to call himself an idealist in a wider sense, i.e. as denying materialism, and the word has been often used in that wide sense, both then and now, a sense which I hold to be seriously confusing because it lumps together far too many otherwise diverse and divergent philosophers and philosophies, though I know, from conversions with him, that Bengtsson doesn't.

6. Indeed, the whole course of British philosophy between, say, J.S. Mill and 1945, has often been neglected and distorted, certainly so in the partisan tracts produced by Linguistic Analysis, in which Russell and Moore appeared as the heroes who slew Bradley, the big, bad wolf of Idealism (Bosanquet sometimes getting a supporting role), and so prepared the way for Logical Atomism, Logical Positivism, and then the final enlightenment in Linguistic Analysis that *all* philosophy is illusion (the three successive avatars of Wittgenstein). The role of the 'personal idealists' in the criticism of Absolute Idealism was totally ignored, as was the whole metaphysical philosophy of that period, in which most philosophers were philosophical theists of one sort or another, including those, like Cook Wilson who concerned themselves primarily with logic and epistemology, while even Moore did not deny the validity of metaphysics nor its having some bearing upon ethics.
7. Bengtsson informs us that Jacoby noted that the coincidence of the new pantheism with materialism. Kant, of course, thought that psychology should employ strictly Newtonian principles and methods. A.E. Taylor, who at Oxford had been very close to Bradley, reported that Bradley held Associationism to be valid in empirical psychology. The language and modes of thinking of Bosanquet's *The Moral Psychology of the Self*, and of some essays collected in *Science and Philosophy*, is exactly that of the Associationist and Sensationalist psychology. But I have found no contemporary criticism in these respects of Bosanquet nor of any other impersonalist idealists.

Empires of Belief

Stuart Sim

Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, ISBN-10 0 7486 2326 4 (hardback), ISBN-13 978 0 7486 2326 6;

Stuart Sim's new book is subtitled 'Why We Need More Scepticism and Doubt in the Twenty-First Century', a topic covered broadly by the end of his introduction to this not exactly heavyweight work.

The genre is apologetics: the book is a popularised appeal for what the author stands for as, in his own phrase, a 'representative sceptic', who wants folk to share his *Weltanschauung*. While it's going too far to speak of Uncle Stuart, the book can tend in that direction.

A more accurate subtitle might be *Teach Yourself Scepticism/ How to be a Sceptic*, and there's even a pseud's *vade mecum* aspect, in Chapter 1 proper, 'Scepticism: A Brief Philosophical History'. Professor Sim hops from Pyrrho to Aenesidemus, skips to Sextus Empiricus, jumps to Montaigne, then, having landed briefly on Descartes' *de omnibus dubitandum est*, he settles into a section entitled 'David Hume: The Sceptic's Sceptic', all apparently conceived for a readership unlikely to be acquainted with the original texts, or immune to name-dropping and hearsay.

All those thinkers brought briefly on-stage in this historical theatre of 'sceptics' have 'arguments' which Professor Sim commends. Some might call some of these 'arguments' dogmas, and prefer philosophy, argumentation rather than ammunition. It would have been good to read a denunciation of the crass simplifications, failures and refusals to recognise a need for discussions of meanings within currently established British cultural institutions, but this might not flatter intended readers.

Certainly in respect of medicine, Professor Sim's wish to extend an *a priori* and one-sided 'sceptical' attitude toward science is insufficiently mitigated. Some poorly informed individuals, sceptical of their doctors but not of their own capacity to reach sound conclusions on the basis of television popularisations, have been known to attempt physical violence against medics by no means guilty of the paid professional's sin of mistaking oversimplified rules of thumb for absolute certain truths. Reminders of difficulties, notably of human limitation and the fact of ignorance might not have allowed Professor Sim the same options of literary development he has here.

The section entitled 'Scepticism in Islamic Philosophy' includes the statement, 'From our point of view it is unfortunate that Al-Ghazali's scepticism ultimately was overcome by his religious belief'. *Our* point of view? Such cosy touches can suggest that Professor Sim's main project is the management of *idées reçues*, and put into a curious perspective his attempted reminder to the faithful that satire and scepticism have long been intrinsic to Islam. Though he might not have the mentality of a coloniser, he is here writing as explicitly not a man of the Book.

He's not reluctant to parade reading, telling the reader of Al-Ghazali's influence on Nicholas of Autrecourt, to whom attention recurs after fleeting references to 'Scepticism in Other Philosophical Traditions', and a fairly cranky page-and-a-bit on Berkeley. (Apparently where Dr. Johnson supposed

he had refuted Berkeley's immaterialist hypothesis by kicking a stone on the ground, Professor Sim supposes he can vindicate a serviceable immaterialist hypothesis by the opposite procedure of not finding a God up above). The names of Stroud, Nozick and Hookaway get mentioned in 'Scepticism in Contemporary Philosophy', which putative bringing up-to-date still finds us only at page 40 of a very spaciouly set-out text.

Professor Sim's account of 'The Enlightenment' is alas down there with Harold Nicolson's – franco-centric and with a narrow emphasis on hostility to religion: rubbish, as some decades of scholarship should now have made plain. Where John Robertson writes of the Enlightenment being mistaken for the 'Aunt Sally of the Postmodernists', Sim is of the approvingly ignorant whose pseudo-Enlightenment was once the panacea of the Theophobes. Adapting Blake, he seems to be saying, 'Rock on, rock on, Voltaire, Rousseau'. His statement that the Enlightenment is now recognised as having been anything but confined to France is a paltry one, especially since he has no more to offer on this than reference to seventeenth-century English influence on French *philosophes*, and a mis-citation of David Hume, whom no competent scholar would describe as having been that leading figure of the Scottish Enlightenment Sim presumes. Certainly Hume's views on the question of religion were not generally characteristic of the Scottish Enlightenment, and his sufficiently documented active social life with the leading liberal clergy of mid-eighteenth century Edinburgh, extensive political writings and late pre-occupation with cookery, provide evidence that not only in speaking of Hume having retired disenchanted from the common life, Professor Sim will speak whereof he knows not. He does not of course mention Hume's not at all secularising influence on religious German thinkers, Hamann and Herder, and subsequent scepticism about secularism, but, like Sim's *Weltanschauung*, Sim's Hume projects uncritical ideology of a distinct English type.

Chapter 3, 'Super-Scepticism: The Postmodern World', advocates the same tidbit-picking approach earlier commended with regard to the *oeuvre* of the Hindu Nagarjuna. Whereas Sim's supposed super-sceptic Hume was in effect a super-Newtonian insistent on evidence and observation, students raised on postmodernist 'theory' ('postmodern' is a ridiculous coinage) generally don't read carefully (cf. Valentine Cunningham, *Reading after Theory*) and tend to sleep beside the bed of Procrustes rather than pay due heed to evidence. Avowedly Postmodernist work is at least as much a machinery of dogmatism as a producer of tags useful against credulousness. Just as Professor Sim prefaces his advocacy of postmodernist extracts with a sketch of serious venerable philosophic objections to postmodernist

doctrines, so do postmodernist doctrinaires commonly note these old objections, in effect as a bluff suggesting that there are good reasons to ignore them as they then proceed to do. Sim's claim that it's easier to argue with a relativist than with a dogmatist implies a disjunction between the two terms which simply does not apply. Isn't relativism itself a dogmatism founded on prescribing theoretic doctrines at odds with facts and presuppositions of actual practice, not least in academic elaboration of such doctrines?

Nietzsche, Adorno, Poststructuralism, Barthes, Deleuze, Baudrillard, Lyotard . . . David Irving: Sim breezes through with extended reference to Heidegger's association with Nazism and even a catechetical proscription of Holocaust Denial as not an object of worthy scepticism.

By p. 75 there's been 'Science and Technology as Belief Systems', with a crude mis-statement of the relationship of Einstein to Newton, mention of GM, and a preface to the pages of journalism on 'Creationist Scepticism', which is, of course, for Sim and his 'us' a bad thing. After Darwin, there's bad scepticism about Global Warming, and good scepticism about campaigns rather nastier than that supported by a condom manufacturer (now again secure) which long ago in the guise of a 'concerned lady' tried to enlist Roman Catholic journalists to broadcast scepticism about the medical safety of the contraceptive pill. Yet what of damage done to intellectual life by dogmatisms and scepticisms prescribed in service of career systems within departments of the sometime humanities? Stuart Sim is indeed Professor of Literary Theory.

'Lyotard and the Rise of the Inhuman' is rather more to the point, but is Lyotard needed as an expresser of wariness of the dangers of creating, not merely GM foods, but GM-eaters biologically indistinguishable from other human beings? Does Professor Sim favour personally argued objections to genetic engineering of future human beings, awareness and development of positive values by the moral individual, or the marshalling of batteries of citations from books as the basis of an excessively hypothetical and name-dropping apologia for a *Weltanschauung*?

'Towards a Sceptical Politics' is more interesting and more seriously involved, referring to the work of Chantal Mouffe, among others: better because crankier. It's a kind of Pilgrim's Progress of the individual looking for a position which might justify a description of himself as an authentic sceptic in political matters. This does have advantages in addressing issues from unusual angles. Professor Sim may note this review's omission of any summary of his preliminary establishment of distinctions between different species of scepticism, academic scepticism, Pyrrhonian and so forth, but

the real issue is how far his book is ultimately the advocacy of a pose.

The chapter on 'Reasonable Doubt' takes us to Jerry Springer, *The Opera*, eighteenth-century satire – wot no Orwell? – and a play reported widely as a Sikh woman's play dramatising something of her claim that, not unlike in many other societies, some Sikh males perform acts of abuse which aren't reported because of fears, not wholly unreasonable, that the reports would give their whole society a bad name. The demonstrations by Sikhs which induced public authorities to take the play off weren't however the sheer attack on artistic freedom Professor Sim might suppose: they were also something of an attack against potential misrepresentation. Perhaps the point had been made when the play was taken off? To be really sceptical while not wearing that uniform of the sceptic whose pose Professor Sim commends, one can ask how far the freedom of speech he advocates might increase the currency of distortions.

His 'literary' reference does, of course, include television satire from *That Was the Week That Was*, through *Have I Got News for You*, and John Stewart's weekly presentation on CNN, not in the spirit of those comedies but in the same style of moralising apologetics as the rest of his book. I've no space for discussion of his reference to Islamic universities, and other matter he was able to point to in this appallingly fluent exercise in journalistic compilation whose publisher presumably hopes for a financially profitable sale.

Robert Calder

Mark T. Mitchell

Michael Polanyi: The Art of Knowing

Wilmington, ISI Books, 2006, 195 pp., 1-932236-90-2 (hbk.), £13.12/\$25

Michael Polanyi: The Art of Knowing (ISI Books, 2006) by Mark T. Mitchell holds only 195 pages and cites key works on Polanyi, so the book's aim is not so much to break new ground, but rather to provide an introduction to the life and thought of Polanyi, as well as to situate him among other leading intellectuals valued by the publisher's think tank, the Intercollegiate Studies Institute in Wilmington, Delaware. *Michael Polanyi: The Art of Knowing* is the sixth instalment in ISI Books' Library of Modern Thinkers, which has the mission to provide 'critical yet accessible' works on 'important intellectual thinkers'. The first five volumes of the series were about Robert Nisbet, Ludwig Von Mises, Wilhelm Ropke, Eric Voegelin, and Bertrand de Jouvenel. Forthcoming subjects in the series include Michael Oakeshott, Christopher Lasch, and

Richard Weaver. This set of thinkers, some more closely related to Polanyi's work than others, should give a sense of the kind of individuals and ideas of interest to the Intercollegiate Studies Institute.

Readers of *Appraisal* will likely find familiar information about Polanyi throughout Mitchell's book. He frequently cites central works of Polanyi scholarship, including *Michael Polanyi: Scientist and Philosopher* by William Taussig Scott and Martin X. Moleski, and *Michael Polanyi* by E.P. Wigner and R.A. Hodgkin. But those readers should recognise *Michael Polanyi: The Art of Knowing* as an accessible, short book that offers an interdisciplinary overview. It could even be the tract for taking the message to the masses. Mitchell, an assistant professor of government at Patrick Henry College in Virginia, has successfully struck a middle note that will neither come across as too elementary to academics nor stand too inscrutable to curious lay people. The book might be called a primer, at the risk of offending Mitchell, who has woven pertinent threads of research throughout, including excerpts of letters Polanyi wrote to William F. Buckley, founder of *National Review*, and to Daniel Patrick Moynihan, the late senator from New York and one-time compatriot of neo-conservatism in the movement's early days. Furthermore, as the closing chapter brings Polanyi into conversation with three other twentieth-century thinkers, Mitchell's introductory elements become integrated in the political and intellectual controversies of our time.

The book opens with a chapter on Polanyi's life and times, including his breakthroughs in the field of chemistry and the role of intuition in his work, which would influence his thinking about tacit knowing. The book then follows with chapters on some of the non-scientific themes Polanyi addressed: 'Economics, Science, and Politics'; 'The Tacit Dimension: A New Paradigm for Knowing'; 'Meaning, Morality, and Religion'; and 'Engaging Polanyi in the Twentieth Century and Beyond'.

Regardless of varying backgrounds, scholars unfamiliar with Polanyi should be able to find historical and intellectual links between their fields and Polanyi's life and work. For example, in the chapter 'Life and Times of Polanyi' (p. 13-14), Polanyi recalls a conversation he had with Nikolai Bukharin, the Communist Party's leading theoretician, that was held at a dynamic intersection of philosophy, science, economics, and history. The conversation addressed the way a national system could impact the distinction between pure science and applied science. Polanyi recalled Bukharin's insistence that the

distinction between pure and applied science made in capitalist countries was due only to the inner conflict of a type of society which deprived scientists of the consciousness of their social functions, thus creating in

them the illusion of pure science. Accordingly, Bukharin said, the distinction between pure and applied science was inapplicable in the USSR. In his view this implied no limitation on the freedom of research; scientists could follow their interests freely in the USSR, but owing to the complete internal harmony of Socialist society they would, in actual fact, inevitably be led to lines of research which would benefit the current Five Years' Plan.

Mitchell goes on to write, 'As a practising researcher, Polanyi recognised immediately that conflating pure and applied science would, if actually carried out, be fatal to pure science'.

The chapter 'Economics, Science, and Politics' provides another interdisciplinary handle to Polanyi's work. Mitchell shows how Polanyi related T.S. Eliot's famous essay, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent,' to his work as a scientist. In *KB*, Polanyi quoted a segment from Eliot's essay as a way to acknowledge that individuality operates within tradition, whether that tradition is poetry or scientific work:

We dwell with satisfaction upon the poet's difference from his predecessors, especially his immediate predecessors; we endeavour to find something that can be isolated in order to be enjoyed. Whereas if we approach a poet without this prejudice, we shall often find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously.

While providing interdisciplinary handles to scholars, Mitchell, as a good teacher will do, explains keys to Polanyi's thought in a fashion that a layman could grasp. For example, Mitchell uses the metaphor of a pendulum to explain how Polanyi's post-critical philosophy related history of ideas (p. 62).

...Polanyi employs the phrase 'restoring the balance' when referring to his post-critical philosophy. The notion of balance is an important one. The historical progression that he describes elicits the picture of a pendulum. It was rejected by Augustine, whose ideas forced the pendulum far in the opposite direction. Modern rationalism, in turn, rejected Augustine and returned the pendulum hard in the direction of rationalism. The idea of balance, on the other hand, implies a proper relationship between reason and belief.

How better to express the wild swings in our civilisation as it has sought to know? The modern rationalism, or 'objectivism' or 'scientism' Mitchell sometimes calls it, should not be jettisoned, but merely brought into conversation with the part of each person that believes in order to know.

The last chapter is invigorating and valuable because Mitchell brings the proceeding introduction into conversation with twentieth-century thinkers whose impact is still fresh. The heart of 'Engaging

Polanyi in the Twentieth Century and Beyond' consists of short descriptions of three of Polanyi's philosophical contemporaries: Michael Oakeshott, Eric Voegelin, and Alasdair MacIntyre – the first two of which have appeared or will appear in the *Library of Modern Thinkers*. In addition to demonstrating the common ground between Polanyi and these thinkers, Mitchell openly discusses the disagreements they had with Polanyi's work. Oakeshott thought that 'once absolute objectivity is denied ... the danger of a slide into subjectivism becomes acute', Mitchell writes (p. 142). However, in his essay 'Rationalism in Politics', Oakeshott wrote about the distinction between technical knowledge, which deals with precise formulation, and practical knowledge, which can neither be formulated nor reflective. In a footnote to his essay, Oakeshott commended Polanyi's *Science, Faith and Society* as having 'excellent observations' on the subjects in his essay.

Voegelin and Polanyi had similar assessments of the world, but different methodologies in getting to the separate views, and different solutions to the problems they witnessed, Mitchell writes (p. 148).

For his part, Voegelin identifies scientism as part of a broader category of noetic pathology (sick consciousness) he terms Gnostic. While Polanyi argues that the moral and political chaos of moral inversion results from an errant view of knowledge, Voegelin argues that Gnosticism is the product of an unbalanced consciousness. Thus, for Polanyi, a proper view of knowledge will open the door to a restoration of balance. For Voegelin, on the other hand, a properly balanced consciousness will, among other things, result in a proper approach to knowing.

According to Mitchell, MacIntyre's views were very similar to Polanyi's on key points, but the former critique the latter with some frequency during the 1970s. MacIntyre described Polanyi's views as essentially irrational, stemming from a fideism, yet as Mitchell points out (p. 155), MacIntyre himself was accused of irrationalism. However, 'Polanyi and MacIntyre both recognise that their respective approaches to recovering that which has been lost entail a renewed possibility for meaningful moral and theological discussion,' Mitchell writes.

Mitchell's clarity should help newcomers to Polanyi. His teaching makes the meaning of his subject simple to understand, as he does in closing (p. 169):

Polanyi points a way out of the dark forest of rational scepticism and systematic doubt. He shows us how we might once again speak meaningfully of the good, the true and the beautiful. And he shows us how we might recover an understanding of the importance of the places we inhabit and the persons with whom we live.

Colin Burch

Additional comment on Aurel Kolnai: Sexual Ethics, reviewed in Vol. 6 No. 2, October 2006

Firstly, my apologies to Alan Ford for omitting his name at the end of the review in the previous issue.

Although Kolnai had written in 1924 on sexual ethics, the doctoral thesis to which Alan Ford referred was in fact Kolnai's *Ethical Value and Reality* (pub. 1927, Eng. trans. F. N. Dunlop in *Early Ethical Writings of Aurel Kolnai*, Ashgate, 2002, and reviewed in *Appraisal*, Vol. 4, No. 3, Oct. 2003). The thesis of that work is that ethical values and principles are to be realised in reality and so reality must, in some way or another and to some extent, also be receptive to, incorporate and manifest them.

This English translation of Kolnai's *Sexual Ethics* includes the translator's Introduction which sets the work in the context of Kolnai's life and work, especially his relations to psychoanalysis, in which he had previously been involved, and to phenomenology, especially the work of Max Scheler. Even more than Scheler, Kolnai was interested in the employment of phenomenology, and the primacy of the subject-matter, and not in Husserl's endless refinements of its methods. Indeed, though looking for principles and structures, it was the 'intuitive-empirical' application of phenomenology that he held to be fruitful, and thus he implicitly distanced

himself somewhat from Scheler's interest in 'essences' and *a priori* structures which led Scheler to make some premature and unfounded statements about universal connections among the phenomena under investigation. Hence Kolnai's *Ethical Value and Reality* sought to make Scheler's version of phenomenology yet more concrete and also practicable. And Kolnai's approach, in politics as well as ethics, was always opposed to what he later called 'Constructivism', the fabrication of an abstract scheme *de novo* which is then to be imposed upon reality. Thus one finds in this book, as elsewhere in his work, a patient, careful and sensitive understanding and examination of the complexities of human sexuality which reveals what is general good and bad, right and wrong, desirable and undesirable within it, along with recognition of special cases, exceptions and necessary modifications. It is as valuable as an example of how to think philosophically about human life as it is for its particular insights and conclusions.

The publication of this volume brings almost to completion Dr Dunlop's long pursued project to present Kolnai's philosophical writings to the English-speaking world, one that has a great deal to learn from him in many ways.

R.T. Allen

CONTINUATIONS

From p. 12

30. Manucci M., *The Free Society. Reflections on the thinking of Michael Polanyi*. Research thesis, University of Perugia, Perugia 2003, p.13.
31. 'The determinants of social action' in SEP, pp 185-186; M, pp. 208-210.
32. Why are two computer companies that are made up of people with the same training and the same qualifications different on the market? The answer, in Polanyian terms, is simple: because the people make the difference, with different life experiences, with unique qualities and unique potential. This unrepeatable nature of a person is reflected in the dynamic and involving process of creating new knowledge, which requires an active participation and association of the person with what he creates, and so always refers to personal ideals and values: this action of creation cannot be reduced to a passive elaboration of data, but on the contrary, to the active creation of knowledge.
33. See Catsells, M., *La nascita della società in rete*, Bocconi University, Milan; Id., *L'età dell'informazione: economia, società, cultura*, Bocconi University, Milan 2004.

From p. 268

21. *Ibidem*, p. 93: '... the scientist philosophies would discover themselves their whole lack of dimension. When comparing them with the dimensional wholeness by which the great philosophies get an imposing bold relief, the philosophical conceptions of "scientist" orientation will prove themselves the most often as flat.'
22. See, for instance, I. Isac, *Lucian Blaga – metaphysics and beyond*, in *Appraisal*, Vol. 6, No. 1, March 2006, p. 26.
23. L. Blaga, *On the Philosophical Consciousness*, p. 146.
24. See T. Vidam, *Lucian Blaga si filosofia europeana a secolului XX (Lucian Blaga and European Philosophy of the XXth Century)*, Casa Cartii de Stiinta (Science Books Publishing House), Cluj-Napoca, 2005, p. 31.

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References to books by Michael Polanyi:

Because of the particular interest in the work of Michael Polanyi, and in order to avoid unnecessary repetition, please make references to his books by means of the following abbreviations followed by the page number:

- CF = *The Contempt of Freedom* (London, Watts, 1940; New York, Arno Press, 1975)
- FEFT = *Full Employment and Free Trade* (London, C.U.P., 1945; 2nd ed. 1948)
- KB = *Knowing and Being* (London, Routledge; Chicago, University of Chicago Press; 1969)
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- SOM = *The Study of Man* (London, Routledge; Chicago, University of Chicago Press; 1959)
- TD = *The Tacit Dimension* (London, Routledge; New York, Doubleday; 1966; reprinted Gloucester, Mass., Peter Smith, 1983)

Also:

- SEP = *Society, Economics and Philosophy: Selected articles by Michael Polanyi*, ed. R.T. Allen (New Brunswick, NJ, Transaction Publishers, 1997).