

APPRAISAL

The Journal of the Society for Post-Critical and Personalist Studies

www.spcps.org.uk

Vol. 7 No. 3, March 2009

ISSN 1358-3336

Polanyi and Macmurray, Eric Voegelin, Transhumanism

Walter B. Gulick

*Who are the persons of Personal Knowledge and
Persons in Relation?*



Phil Mullins

Polanyi on agency and some links to Macmurray

Maben Poirier

Eric Voegelin's immanentism, Pt I I

Bob Doede

Transhumanism, technology and the future

APPRAISAL

published twice a year in March and October; four issues per volume.

© Copyright SPCPS 2009

Officers of the SPCPS

President: Dr C. P. Goodman

Chairman and Editor of Appraisal: Dr R.T. Allen

Assistant Editor: Colin Burch

Editorial Advisers:

Prof. Klaus Allerbeck	Faculty of Social Sciences, J-W Goethe University, Frankfurt-am-Main, Germany
Dr Giorgio Baruchello	Faculty of Law and Social Science, University of Akureyri, Iceland
Dr Angela Botez	Institute of Philosophy, Romanian Academy of Sciences, Bucharest, Romania
Dr Bob Brownhill	Formerly of the Dept of Educational Studies, University of Surrey, Guildford
Mr Gene Callaghan	Cardiff and New York
Dr Éva Gábor	Dept of Philosophy, Technical University of Budapest, Hungary
Dr David Lamb	Dept of Biomedical Science & Bioethics, University of Birmingham
Dr Tihamér Margitay	Dept of Philosophy, Technical University of Budapest, Hungary
Dr Endre Nagy	Dept of Social Policy, Janus Pannonius University, Pécs, Hungary
The Rev'd Julian Ward	Nantwich, Cheshire (formerly at Regents Theological College, U. of Manchester)
Dr Norman Wetherick	Edinburgh (formerly at the Dept of Psychology, University of Aberdeen)

Editorial Policy:

- P** *Appraisal* seeks to develop and promote constructive ways of thinking, especially from within a personalist perspective, in philosophy and other intellectual disciplines.
- P** *Appraisal* believes that philosophy should not be a narrow, academic and technical specialism, but should address itself to the general public and to the intellectual and practical issues of the present.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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 include an Abstract (no more than 100 words), and a list of Key Words.

Please send all communications regarding Appraisal (articles, subscriptions, etc.) to:

20 Ulverscroft Road, Loughborough, Leics. LE11 3PU, England.

Tel: 01509 552743; E-mail: rt.allen@ntlworld.com

Indexing: *Appraisal* is indexed in *The British Humanities Index* and *The Philosophers' Index*.

Reciprocal Arrangements:

Appraisal exchanges copies with *Polanyiana*, the journal of the Michael Polanyi Liberal Philosophical Society (Hungary), *Tradition and Discovery*, the journal of the Polanyi Society (USA), *Humanitas* (USA), *Personalism* (Poland), *Prospettiva Persona* (Italy), *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia*, *The Romanian Review of Political Sciences and International Relations* and *La Revue Roumaine de Philosophie*, and would welcome similar exchanges with other journals.

Subscriptions: Please see inside rear cover.

APPRAISAL

The Journal of the Society for Post-Critical Philosophy and Personalist Studies

Vol. 7, No. 3, March 2009

ISSN 1358-3336

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

© SPCPS 2009

CONTENTS

Editorial	1
<i>Walter B. Gulick</i>	
Who are the persons of Michael Polanyi's <i>Personal Knowledge</i> and John Macmurray's <i>Persons in Relation?</i>	3
<i>Phil Mullins</i>	
Polanyi on agency and some links to Macmurray	11
<i>Maben Walter Poirier</i>	
Eric Voegelin's immanentism: A man at odds with the transcendent, Pt II.	25
<i>Bob Doede</i>	
Transhumanism, technology and the future: Posthumanity emerging or subhumanity descending?	38
Book Reviews	
Falvio Baroncelli	
<i>Mi manda Platone—Giorgio Baruchello</i>	53
Marco Abel	
<i>Violent Affect: Literature, Cinema, and Critique after Representation—Wendy Hamblet</i>	53
Journals received	56

This issue's new contributor:

Dr Robert Doede received his PhD from King's College, London, and is now an Associate Professor of Philosophy at Trinity Western University, Langley, British Columbia. He has published primarily in the area of philosophy of mind; recently, however, he has begun publishing on technology and Transhumanism, having recognised how his training in philosophy of mind situates him well for critically engaging these broader and more culturally charged topics.

EDITORIAL

In this delayed issue we have revised versions of the two papers, given by Walter Gulick and Phil Mullins, at our joint conference with the John Macmurray Fellowship on Polanyi and Macmurray held in April at Oxford. The relative lack of numbers was compensated by the opportunities offered and taken by all the participants to contribute to an interesting, enjoyable and fruitful exchange of ideas about the convergencies and divergencies of Polanyi and Macmurray regarding agency and personhood, both central to their respective philosophies. In addition, Maben Poirer completes his examination of Voegelin in respect of transcendence, while Bob Doede, whom we welcome to *Appraisal*, critically considers the nature and ambitions of Transhumanism. On a lighter note, yet serious in its own way, we have immediately below some thoughts from Jere Moorman.

The next three issues will be mostly taken up by papers from the 10th International Conference on Persons held in August at Nottingham, starting with those relating to personal identity, then those on Polanyi and those on moral, political and other themes. There was a substantial Polanyian presence at the Conference, which would have been larger, like the attendance in general, had the economic climate been more conducive. Six members of the SPCPS attended and seven more joined. Four sessions, including one plenary, were devoted to Polanyi..

Membership and recruitment will figure prominently on the agenda for our new Committee's first meeting to be held at the end of November. Simon Smith, of the University of Southampton, has volunteered to be Assistant Editor helping with the obtaining and review of articles. We still need volunteers for the posts of Treasurer, Webmaster and Conference Organiser. The Committee will also review subscription rates for Vol. 8, 2010-11, which are likely to be increased but only for the second time in 12 years. Details of the Committee's decision upon them and other matters will be published in or with issue no. 4 (October) which am trying to get ready for December.

GO PLACIDLY AMID THE BUREAUCRATIC MAZE

Jere Moorman

- 1 Go placidly amid the strict rules of policies and procedures and remember what peace there is in ironical detachment, non-commitment and neutrality.
- 2 As far as possible be on good terms with the bureaucratic forms of your organisation.
- 3 Speak the strict rules clearly and listen to others in the organisation, even the dull and ignorant for they too have more finely tuned reflections on reflections on the rules and machinations of minute details, red tape and formal rules.
- 4 Avoid the innovative, the intuitive, the imaginative and the creative; they are vexations to the Objectivist and bureaucratic spirit.
- 5 If you concern yourself with understanding and caring about the problems and issues of real customers and employees you may become upset and bitter, for always there will be messiness of uncertainty, ambiguity and imperfection in the oral/aural speaking events between persons.
- 6 Enjoy your avoidance of the risks of error as well as the uninvolved, spectator spirit of your organisation.
- 7 Keep interested in the finer and finer dissections of minute details and the uninterpreted brute facts; it is your real opportunity to avoid personal responsibility for your knowledge claims.
- 8 Exercise the doctrine of falsification in your knowing affairs, for the world is full of unexpected evidence that might prove any claim of knowledge to be false.
- 9 But let this not blind you to what virtue there may be in determinism and rigid codification of policies, procedures and red tape; beware of persons who strive for transcendence, beauty and meaning, and those full of the innovative, creative spirit.
- 10 Be yourself but stay within the guidelines of the single level, lower boundary conditions of facts, rules and red tape.
- 11 Neither be cynical about rules; for in the face of all the stupidity and fallibility of human persons, it is rules, regulations, procedures and red tape that provides perennial protection from responsibility.
- 12 Take kindly of the counsel of bureaucracy and the status quo, gracefully surrendering youthful ideas of discovery, creativity and daring.
- 14 Conformity, not strength of spirit, will shield you in sudden hazard and misfortune. Do not stress yourself with the promptings and intimations of your intuition and imagination.
- 15 Many fears are born of the possibility of hazard and failure; so involve yourself in the intricate patterns of Objectivism, impersonal knowledge, non-participating consciousness and bureaucracy.
- 16 Beyond the discipline of irreversible rules and chronic ironic detachment from your words, be gentle with yourself.
- 17 Yours is a mind over against the brute matter of the universe, no less than the atomistic fundamental elements: You have a right to be here—even if your Objectivist epistemology asserts that you do not exist in the very world that you are seeking to know.
- 18 And whether or not it is obvious to you, the world is unfolding according to the impersonal, deterministic ideals of Laplace and Descartes.
- 19 Therefore, be at peace with Objectivism and the Bureaucracy, whatever you conceive IT to be; and whatever your labours and aspirations, in the buzzing confusion of speech acts between persons, keep peace with the rules and regulations of your department or organisation.
- 20 With all its shams, drudgeries, broken dreams and consequences of a certain untruth, Objectivism is still a beautiful framework for knowing and a haven for responsibility avoidance.
- 21 Be noncommittal in your commitments.

WHO ARE THE PERSONS OF MICHAEL POLANYI'S *PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE* AND JOHN MACMURRAY'S *PERSONS IN RELATION*?

Walter B. Gulick

Key Words:

John Macmurray, Michael Polanyi, agency, apperception, community, emergence, emotion, immediate experience, morality, person, reality, reason, relationship, responsibility, tacit knowing.

Abstract:

At first glance there seems to be much in common between Michael Polanyi and John Macmurray; they taught in Great Britain as philosophical outsiders concerned to understand personal knowledge and responsibility; they were even born and died the same years. However, through a comparison of their thought about the self in three general frameworks of concern, I show that their worldviews were often quite at variance. I compare these thinkers with respect to their ontological and epistemological beginning points, their psychological theories, and the way they support their concern for personal and social morality. I conclude that Polanyi's use of regulative structures for organising human freedom is preferable to Macmurray's rather naïve trust in loving community as a realisable goal.

The conversation we will embark upon today will focus on contemporaneous thinkers who, on the surface of it anyway, seem close enough in interests but distant enough in background to make a productive comparison likely. First, think of the similarities between the two. Each was born in the same year as the other, and remarkably, each died in the same year. Michael Polanyi's and John Macmurray's tombs would each be marked 1891-1976. They both gave Gifford Lectures during the same decade, Polanyi in 1951-52, Macmurray in 1953-54. Macmurray published his lectures in two volumes, Polanyi in one, but the titles reveal their convergent interest in the person. Polanyi's *Personal Knowledge* focuses on a person's contributions to knowledge, whereas Macmurray's *The Self as Agent* and *Persons in Relation* emphasise the social, active nature of the person. Both thinkers write as philosophers outside the dominant fashion of philosophical thinking during their careers. Nevertheless, both Polanyi and Macmurray, I will contend, offer insights to which we would be well advised to pay heed in our time.

My approach this morning will be to conduct a series of comparisons between the two philosophers'

views of the self as understood from different topical perspectives. I'll make *Personal Knowledge* and *Persons in Relation* the central texts to which I'll refer, but my intention is to examine Polanyi's and Macmurray's thought as a whole insofar as I am able to do this. The first topic to be explored will be the epistemological and ontological context of each thinker's understanding of the person. Then in order I'll examine the psychological and the ethical/political contexts that influence Polanyi's and Macmurray's interpretation of the person. Along the way I'll not just describe differences but actively enter into the discussion, stating my position in such a way as to encourage some energetic debate later on. Before embarking on my analysis, I want to acknowledge my dependence on Frank Kirkpatrick's book on Macmurray for aiding my understanding of him, even though I only cite *John Macmurray: Community beyond Political Philosophy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005) twice.

1. What is the ultimate foundational belief of each thinker? That is, what is the factor or what are the factors that Polanyi and Macmurray see as truth-makers, as essential to their epistemology and ontology?

For Macmurray, the place to start is persons in active relation to each other. Here is a key passage:

[T]he concept of a material world is abstract and derivative. The material is, in fact, the non-personal; and as a negative conception, it depends for its definition upon the positive which it negates. Our knowledge of the material presupposes, both logically and genetically, a knowledge of the personal. Logically, the Other is the correlate of the Self as Agent. . . . Thus the primary correlation, on which all knowledge rests, is the 'You and I' in active relation. (*Persons in Relation*, 79-80)

There is a certain arbitrariness in the way Macmurray argues here. One could equally say, it seems to me, that the personal is the non-material, rather than that the material is the non-personal, as Macmurray states. And if the personal is the non-material, one could say that as a negative conception the personal depends for its definition upon the positive, the material, which it negates. Consequently, our knowledge of the personal could be equally well said to depend upon a knowledge of the body and its processes, for without the body there would be no person. My complaint about

Macmurray's view, then, is not about the significance of the You and I in relation; it is about the glib way he argues for its ultimate significance as 'the primary correlation, on which all knowledge rests.'

Actually, in complaining about Macmurray's disjunctive reasoning, I've just hinted at one response Polanyi might give to Macmurray's choice of privileging one side of his dualism: the personal over against the material. Polanyi would claim that the ultimate truth maker is the inclusive nature of what is real. Reality encompasses both mind and matter, both the I-You and the I-It. It is important to see that, while Polanyi acknowledges the importance of empirical reality, he does not define reality as simply that which is tangible. His concept of reality transcends the realism-idealism duality that has generated much philosophical discussion in the past. 'To trust that a thing we know is real is . . . to feel that it has the independence and power for manifesting itself in yet unthought of ways in the future' (TD 32).

'Manifesting itself,' a Macmurray disciple might say; to whom does reality manifest itself? To persons. 'Ah, ah!', the disciple might continue, then persons in relation are the ultimate judges of what is real, which confirms Macmurray's way of beginning after all.

Well, no, or at least, not exactly. What this Macmurrayian sort of response reveals is that there is an anthropocentric bias in Polanyi's thought. That is correct. But I think Polanyi would say that this bias should not be taken as an ontological primitive. It is an implication of how a centred biological entity must necessarily gain knowledge within the hierarchical vision of reality that comprises his ontology. Polanyi distinguishes between the inert level of material things obeying the laws of physics and chemistry, and the biological level of living things, which contains centred beings of all sorts, including humans (PK 344). Each living thing does not behave simply in terms of external causal forces, but is a centre evolved to seek its own survival within its ecological niche. It is capable of 'achievements' that are increasingly sophisticated as one moves up the evolutionary chain from bacteria and other specks of life to sentient animals and then to the most complex living beings, humans. If humans are to be seen as complex centres, then their interpretation of reality must necessarily derive from that anthropocentric centredness as it engages encompassing otherness. This dynamic otherness manifests itself to our centred sorts of awareness. The egocentric predicament is inescapable. But how we humans interpret the various manifestations of

otherness is not the ultimate measure of what is real, for all scientists, obviously, must bend their thoughts to the rules of what manifests itself. Reality in its often unpredictable emergence rules, not the interpreter or even interpreters in relation.

Polanyi claims there is a gap in performance and rationality between the most advanced animals and the human animal. The human use of language is what creates superior intellectual ability in humans, including self-consciousness. The gap between human awareness and the consciousness found in other sentient beings is both epistemological and ontological in nature. Roughly speaking, Polanyi distinguishes three (or perhaps four) fundamental levels of reality. At the level of materiality there is inert being that follows the laws of physics and chemistry but has no specific centre, being applicable in the same way everywhere. This lack of a cosmic centre, I gather, is one of the features of general relativity. Everywhere is equidistant from the Big Bang, which is an origin, not an ongoing centre. Second, there is the pluralistic realm of living beings, where each individual acts as a centre, although sometimes each is complexly dependent on other centres, as in an ant colony. That is, the processes governing the behaviour of each individual are functional, related to the survival and reproduction of the individual as a centre. Each centre is not simply to be understood in terms of external forces, especially not just in terms of the laws of physics and chemistry. Biological issues related to the welfare and survival of each centre govern analysis of living things and what Polanyi terms their 'achievements,' a teleological term inappropriate to apply to mere materiality (Chapter 11 of PK is called 'The Logic of Achievement'). Finally there is the human animal, each one of whom is not only a centre seeking survival, but a responsible centre. Responsible to what or to whom? Self-consciously responsible to other persons, such as parents, friends, children, co-workers. Responsible to the cultural values that grant the person identity and purpose. Responsible morally and religiously to what is conceived of greatest value. Analysis of distinctively human achievement must be conducted in terms of morality, political success and theology. The materiality of human bodies depends upon the laws of physics and chemistry, and the physiological processes of the body depend upon biological functions, but human behaviour must be judged in terms of criteria that transcend physics, chemistry or biology.

Macmurray analyses philosophical frameworks of thought in a way that superficially seems to have much in common with Polanyi's approach. Macmurray in his very first book distinguishes

between material nature, living nature, and human nature (*Freedom in the Modern World*, 176). He goes on to speak of mechanical, organic, and personal approaches to knowledge. However, Macmurray's categories are not situated within the process of evolutionary emergence, which allows him in subsequent works to regard them as forms of thought manifest in the style of thinking of particular philosophers. Descartes uses a mechanical approach, Hegel thinks in organic terms, and Macmurray brings the personal conception to the fore. Unfortunately, Macmurray's use of his threefold scheme to interpret philosophical history leaves a lot to be desired, as the following quotation indicates:

The Cartesians tried to represent the self as a substance and, therefore, in terms of the schema of mathematical thought. The second period, which begins from Kant, having discovered the futility of this attempt, sought to interpret the self as an organism, and so in term of biological thought. (*Interpreting the Universe*, 123)

Descartes did make use of mathematics, but hardly because the self was conceived as a non-spatial substance. Rather he applied mathematical thought to extended substance; Descartes' analytical geometry was essentially an elaboration of spatial relations. Kant still thought of the forms of intuition and categories as structuring space and time into a framework into which physics fit. He is generally criticised because he takes so little account of biology, not because he inaugurates a biological approach to philosophy.

Macmurray's threefold schema of mechanical, organic, and personal may have uses for classificatory purposes, but it is not rooted in emergent reality the way Polanyi's levels are. Polanyi would find the following claim by Macmurray incoherent: 'All enquiries of a scientific kind about life, seeing that they are inquiries into the working of the organism, will rightly proceed in terms of mathematical thought' (*Interpreting the Universe*, 116). Biological processes are typically non-linear in nature and interpreted in terms of process and function, not via maths.

What implications does Polanyi's theory of evolutionary emergence have for understanding the person? There is an interesting and perhaps surprising difference in Polanyi's thought between 'the personal' element, which is involved in all thinking and is therefore a fundamental epistemological category for Polanyi, and the 'person,' which is not a fundamental ontological category for Polanyi. The notion of the person comes in degrees of emergence for him; it is

therefore a relative concept. The primates have personhood at several relatively simple levels, and humans can be aware of and identify with different levels of personhood within themselves.

In a conflict between our appetitive and our intelligent person we may side with one side or the other. . . . As we identify ourselves in turn with one level of our person or another, we feel passively subjected to the activities of the one which we do not acknowledge for the time being. . . . Each person within an individual may become a liability to another and may mould it to its commitments or be moulded by it in reverse. We may prefer to identify ourselves with the person on the higher level, but this is not invariably the case, and our choice between the levels is part of our ultimate commitment at any particular moment. (PK 320)

'Personal knowledge,' then, is not the knowledge of a unitary person, as would be the case for Macmurray. The personal knowledge of the title of Polanyi's *magnum opus* refers to the necessary contribution of one or more of the many levels of a human being's levels of personhood to cognition. Personal knowledge, consequently, carries within itself our evolutionary heritage, including the inarticulate skills that we share with other animals. These skills are primarily what Polanyi means by the 'tacit knowing' that underlies all our cognitive activity.

To sum up, although Macmurray and Polanyi each highlight the crucial significance of the personal, what they mean by these terms is remarkably different. Macmurray's notion is primarily social in nature, whereas Polanyi's view is many dimensional and less clearly delineated. The active person in mutual relation to other active individuals is Macmurray's starting point for analysis. Reality, extended in time, space, and ideality as a multidimensional context, is Polanyi's beginning point. Other persons are part of that reality for Polanyi, but so are many other forces that a person ideally engages in a mode of commitment to primary values. The different levels give a richness to Polanyi's account that allow him to speak of unconscious processes without reifying the unconscious *à la* Freud yet also to speak at a higher level of the person encountering others in the mode of Buber's I-Thou (or Macmurray's I-You).

2. What are the psychological processes that are most important to understand if we are to comprehend what makes a person a person?

Macmurray's account of the person has both formal and developmental aspects. Macmurray rejects the traditional view 'that personality is a distinguishing characteristic which is acquired in the process of

development' (*Persons in Relation*, 107). He identifies the *form* of the personal as established in the trusting, intentional relationship between a mother and a baby. From the time of birth, the baby is a person because 'his life, and even his bodily survival, depends upon intentional activity, and therefore upon knowledge [of the mother]' (*Persons in Relation*, 51). Baby animals can survive by instinct, but not the human baby.

The child then *develops* reasoning ability, habits, and modes of relationship in the course of experience. As the child grows, the notion of the other becomes more and more highly differentiated since most things resist the will of the child and are obviously other. The subject-object distinction thus arises developmentally in the child out of primeval unity. The person increasingly is compelled to act in relationship to otherness, and the power of reasoning emerges as a guide for these endeavours. 'Reason,' Macmurray states, 'is the capacity to behave consciously in terms of the nature of what is not ourselves. . . . Reason is thus our capacity for objectivity' (*Reason and Emotion*, 19). However, emotion is more basic than reason as a motivating force. 'Any enquiry must have a motive or it could not be carried on at all, and all motives belong to our emotional life' (*Reason and Emotion*, 13). And our emotions are often attached to illusory desires and wishes. Thus our emotions need to be educated. But this is not accomplished by attending to the intellect alone. 'When the intellect takes charge, the inevitable result is specialisation, the erection of particular aspects of human activity into complete conceptions of life, the substitution of the part for the whole' (*Reason and Emotion*, 77). What is required is a disciplining of the personality so that reason is integrated with emotion and persons become motivated by love rather than by fear.

Polanyi never develops a comprehensive interpretation of the psychological development of the child into adulthood comparable to Macmurray's exposition. However, Phil Mullins pulls together from various of Polanyi's writings a developmental narrative of a person's growing knowledge of self and world (see his 'Narrative, Interpretation, and Persuasion: Polanyian Notes on Selfhood,' *The Personalist Forum* 9:2 [Fall, 1992], 109-132). While differing in what is referenced and in emphasis, it is not seriously in conflict with Macmurray's developmental account. In a footnote, Mullins nicely summarises Polanyi's view of the nature of persons:

On my reading, Polanyi does not offer a static, essentialist view of persons as having a certain 'nature.' What Polanyi does suggest is that humans are centred beings with tacit powers who inevitably and always are interacting with their surroundings.

This means that selfhood is always in the making. (Ibid., 122-123)

Before leaving the topic of psychology, however, I want to show some ways in which Polanyi's thought offers a corrective to Macmurray's account. I'll then set forth an aspect of Polanyi's thought about the mental realm that is at best puzzling if not outright incoherent.

On the one hand, my worries about Macmurray's psychology are these: (1) he does not place enough importance upon perception as our basic relation to the environing world in which we dwell, (2) his description of immediate experience lumps together psychic elements that might more profitably be distinguished, and (3) he gives far too thin an account of thinking.

(1) My concern with basing one's philosophical system upon persons in dynamic relationship has already been suggested. This approach tends to attenuate the importance of our relationship to encompassing reality. Our embodied nature and our evolutionary heritage expressed in our perceptual capacities and tacit knowing seem to be unduly ignored. However, Macmurray's emphasis on emotion and persons in action are welcome antidotes to his tendency to understate the physical aspects of human existence. Polanyi's philosophy further enriches this direction of thought.

(2) Macmurray states that 'Knowledge, then, is first and foremost that immediate experience of things which is prior to all expression and understanding. Upon this primary knowledge all reflection and all thought is based' (*Interpreting the Universe*, 17). His notion of immediate experience sounds a lot like Polanyi's notion of tacit knowing. The essence of tacit knowing is that 'we know more than we can tell' (PK x), to quote perhaps Polanyi's best known saying. But there are important differences between Macmurray's immediate experience and Polanyi's tacit knowing. Tacit knowing is basically inarticulate knowledge, including learned skills of contriving actions to reach a goal, recognising perceptual signals, and mapping internally relationships of interest. These and other skills we share with animals lacking language. Macmurray's notion of immediate experience seems to refer to all conscious experience we undergo without reflecting upon it, for he says that 'immediate experience and reflective experience are different in kind' (*Interpreting the Universe*, 20). Immediate experience refers to a unified state of consciousness that is co-extensive with feeling and action, and that includes both articulate and inarticulate content.

(3) Macmurray is quite critical of the reflective thought he contrasts with immediate experience.

'The moment we reflect upon what we are doing, we stand back from life and assume the attitude of spectators. We stop living and begin to think' (*Interpreting the Universe*, 22). This theme is repeated throughout his writing – see *Persons in Relation*, 20, for instance. But surely thinking, which is normally associated with articulation in language, is richer than the sort of otherworldly reflection Macmurray caricatures as thought. Indeed, it is hard for humans to shut off the insistent need to conceive things in articulate form. If all this conceptual activity plus utilising skills, intending, moving, perceiving, and feeling are included in immediate experience, it becomes an unwieldy, undifferentiated conglomerate offering little insight into psychological processes [my point re (2)]. Moreover, the contrast to immediate experience – reflection – is an impotent weakling divorced from dynamic participation in life. Emotionally rich rationality attuned to the objective world seems to be Macmurray's worthy candidate for governance of a person, but it is hard to see how it relates to his basic immediate experience/reflection dichotomy.

Polanyi's notion of tacit knowing is far more balanced and clearly delineated than Macmurray's immediate experience. He contrasts tacit knowing with explicit knowing, which is conceptual in nature. He utilises Gestalt psychology to speak of two types of awareness, a sort that indwells subsidiary objects, and focal awareness which arises through the integration of the subsidiaries. Thus he can distinguish background sensation and feeling from foreground perception and conception. His approach has much greater explanatory power.

Macmurray might well regard the greater explanatory power of Polanyi's approach as beside the point or even as misleading. For it still is basically egocentric, and it still privileges thinking as the appropriate entry point for understanding the person. Macmurray, on the other hand, argues that it is more basic and productive to begin by regarding the self as an agent deeply involved in relationships with other persons. I would side with Polanyi's analysis if a complaint were made against his anthropocentric perspective, for reasons already expressed, and for his description of the processes involved in consciousness, for surely a philosophical perspective ought to be open to all available evidence in understanding how things work, and it is useful and intrinsically interesting to understand our mental processes. Still, Macmurray's social emphasis also needs to be included in any adequate description of personhood.

To turn, on the other hand, to Polanyi's creative interpretation of the mind, he offers it in such round

about language that I am not sure of his exact meaning. He makes this claim: '*The relation between body and mind has the same logical structure as the relation between clues and the image to which the clues are pointing*' (KB 213). Now, the character of clues is that they are all subsidiaries to a focal comprehensive entity, a whole which is their joint meaning. It can be said that the clues *have* a referential meaning in their joint function, and the comprehensive entity *is* their meaning. There is thus a dual meaning of the term 'meaning.' If the relation of the subsidiaries to their focal meaning is parallel to the relation of body to mind, then the embodied subsidiaries have a referential meaning to – what? The parallel would suggest to a focal mind. But the clues are pointing not to a mind, but to something we are mentally focused upon – a perception of a landscape, perhaps, or to a person's face as we attempt to interpret her mood, or to the meaning of an obscure sentence. Maybe all Polanyi means is that just as focal awareness is dependent upon embodied subsidiaries, so the mind is dependent on the body. But to say that the mind is dependent on the body is hardly to say anything controversial or novel.

Here is perhaps a more helpful suggestion from Polanyi. He says, 'Mind is the meaning of certain bodily mechanisms; it is lost from view when we look *at* them focally' (KB 238). My best interpretation of what he means by this gnomic statement is that a network of firing neurons is the bodily mechanism he refers to, and the neurons when firing are indwelt by a person as subsidiaries to a jointly produced meaning. If we look at these neurons, they become focal objects rather than subsidiaries, and we lose the sense of meaning that they jointly produce. But when we indwell these neurons as subsidiaries, their integration is the activity of mind. If this is what he means, why doesn't he say so in more direct language? Why doesn't he explicitly state that integration and evocation are the basic mental processes? Apparently he fears that if he states directly that mind operates through the integration or evocation of subsidiaries, that this would be a self-cancelling statement because it would treat the subsidiaries plus integration and evocation explicitly – it would be looking at them focally and thereby erasing their functions. If this is his reason, it doesn't make sense, because in the very naming of subsidiaries as subsidiaries, or integration as integration, these tacit entities are already treated explicitly. In imagination one can non-reductively regard that which is explicitly named as tacit. There are always gaps of one sort or another between what is explicitly named

and what is meant.

We have wandered from the original question about psychology. Macmurray believes that feeling or emotion (he often seems to use the terms interchangeably) are the most important psychological elements to understand. For they provide the motives that generate his all important category of action. And the emotional value that is most important to him is love of neighbour. For Polanyi, the most important psychological processes are integration and evocation, which are carried out in the from-to structure of consciousness. Integration creates meaning, while evocation retrieves it. As far as his most important values go, they will be taken up in the next section.

3. Which thinker provides stronger support to ethical thought and moral behaviour?

In the final analysis, the *raison d'être* for each thinker's work in philosophy is ethical in nature. With respect to Macmurray, the ethical dimension of his thought is front and centre. Ethics, especially through its exemplification in religion, donates meaning to art and science as negative, derivative disciplines. The ethical orientation of Polanyi's thought, being more hidden, will require some excavation. However, when the views of the two thinkers are examined with care, it is evident that they understand ethics quite differently.

Macmurray defines morality as action that is 'compatible with the community of action as a whole' (*Persons in Relation*, 178). He develops his ethical analysis by exploring three modes of apperception. In speaking of apperception, he is referring to the way persons apply filters to simplify the rich in-pouring of information that comes to our attention.

The three categories of apperception give rise to three 'ways of life', each of which has its own moral structure, and reflectively, its own conception of morality. . . . The positive apperception may be called 'communal', the two negative types 'contemplative' and 'pragmatic' respectively. The contemplative apperception is the submissive form, the pragmatic the aggressive form of negative apperception. (*Persons in Relation*, 112)

The contemplative and the pragmatic modes of apperception start analysis from the self and each confronts otherness in terms of dualistic options. 'So for the negative modes of apperception the world divides into two worlds: an actual world which does not answer to our demands, and refuses to satisfy us, and another world, an ideal world which we can imagine, which does' (*Persons in Relation*, 123). If the real world is taken to be spiritual in nature, then the material world is what must be shaped, and one

views reality in the contemplative mode that considers how to live passively and gently in a threatening world. This develops into a life of conformity, a morality of don't rock the boat. (I'd note in passing that Macmurray does not seem to be following his schema here, for the real world of the contemplative, the spiritual world, does seem to satisfy him, and it is the less real material world that is threatening.) On the other hand, if the real world is taken to be material in nature, then the spiritual world is seen as subordinate. Power is sought to achieve one's ends, but the threat of others seeking power must be blunted. Obedience to laws becomes the moral means of making sure the pragmatic seeking of gain does not lead to chaos. The rule of law 'will be expressed in terms of will, obligation and duty, as a set of rules or principles, which are the same for all, and which limit for each the use of his own power to do what he pleases' (*Persons in Relation*, 125).

The two negative modes of apperception are inferior to the communal mode of apperception, which is not egocentric but heterocentric. 'By this is meant that the centre of reference for the agent, when he seeks to act rightly, is always the personal Other. To act rightly is then to act for the sake of the Other and not of oneself' (*Persons in Relation*, 122). Since the communal mode is grounded in mutuality, the other person will be looking out for you, thus building a fabric of community, not simply a society of law. The basis of society is love of neighbour and friendship, not self-centredness. He states the ideal of the personal in lofty language:

It is a universal community of persons in which each cares for all the others and no one for himself. This ideal of the personal is also the condition of freedom – that is, of a full realisation of his capacity to act – for every person. Short of this there is unintegrated, and therefore suppressed, negative motivation; there is unresolved fear; and fear inhibits action and destroys freedom. (*Persons in Relation*, 159)

In this ideal, Macmurray seems to return to one side of his Calvinist upbringing, the side that emphasises unselfish concern for others (see Kirkpatrick, p. 5).

But another side of Calvinism, the emphasis on sin, seems curiously lacking in Macmurray's world. The term 'sin' crops up at least twice in *Persons in Relation* (75, 198), and evil is also mentioned a number of times, but Macmurray's approach to the problematic aspects of human existence tends more to blame egocentrism, fear, or error than to engage seriously inherent human tendencies toward malevolence, nihilism, envy, destructiveness, addiction, violence, or other negative traits. He sees the State as a necessary social structure to support justice and counter social problems in general. But it

is the ideal, loving community that forms the soul of society – and is the focus of most of Macmurray’s attention. It is difficult for me to see how Macmurray’s moral ideal of community escapes the criticism he launches against idealistic systems of thought such as that promulgated by Rousseau.

Moreover, in recent years the notion that one should be concerned for others and not for self has been subjected to criticism from a number of angles. In opposition to Macmurray’s point of view, Sartre proclaimed that hell is other people. More recently, David Reisman questioned the authenticity of the ‘other directed person,’ and there has been sustained worry about how those who lovingly support addicted or violent persons are themselves guilty of co-dependence maintaining the problem. And contra Macmurray, we are now aware of how dysfunctional families can be.

Concern for others and empathetic indwelling are surely important moral attributes, but on what grounds does Macmurray show that an individual’s moral behaviour will be replicated by enough others that loving communities become the norm? It will be evident that all too often I find his style of justification to be cavalier and annoying. He tends to argue by assertion and sprinkles notions of ‘positivity’ and ‘negativity’ about in ways that arbitrarily support his course of reasoning. Yet in our time of economic disintegration, individualistic consumerism, unsustainable ecological impact – you name your favourite misery – there is much in his idealistic vision of community that is attractive and worthy of support. But that support needs a firmer evidential base than he provides. It also needs a more clearly defined explanation of how Macmurray’s worthy goals might be achieved. I will argue that Polanyi’s philosophy provides many of the necessary explanatory ingredients to make Macmurray’s pie in the sky less airy and more nutritious.

Polanyi acknowledges the importance of convivial fellowship and community based traditions for human flourishing, but overall his notions of ethics and political processes are far more individualistic than Macmurray’s. In part, his wariness regarding political community grew out of his disillusionment with Hungarian politics during and after World War I. But his dismay at the role the government took in Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany had a far greater impact on his worldview. In his correspondence with his brother Karl, it is clear he anguished over the death of relatives at the hands of the Nazis and was outraged over the treatment of his niece by the Russian Communists.

Beyond those family reasons for dismissal of any

collectivist organisation of society, he found his own career threatened by well meaning attempts to control science for the good of society. The attempts to plan science followed the Soviet model which Polanyi had seen first hand to be bankrupt. The intellectual independence of Soviet scientists was undermined by Communist party hacks who tried to direct research toward party goals and were dishonest in their reporting of scientific results. Beginning in the 1930s after several visits to Russia, Polanyi became a strong anti-Communist spokesman. This was during a time when Macmurray was enamoured of Marxist thought and cautiously supportive of the Russian experiment. After World War II Polanyi took a leading role in the anti-Communist Congress for Cultural Freedom, an organisation that unfortunately turned out to be funded covertly by the CIA. The point, however, is that however much Polanyi appreciated the communal effort involved in creative science, ultimately he rested his philosophical vision on individual conscience, whether scientific or moral. I would term his moral vision ‘an ethic of personal responsibility.’

Like Macmurray, Polanyi argues for the role of both emotion and reason in morality. However, he makes it clear that inappropriate intellectual frameworks could side-track emotional commitment to moral behaviour into deviant causes. He would certainly not follow Macmurray and define reason as that which automatically leads us to objective reality. Critical reason can lead persons to world-rejecting scepticism and nihilism. Nor would he make any claim like this: ‘Reason in the emotional life determines our behaviour in terms of the real values of the world in which we live’ (*Reason and Emotion*, 49). Polanyi rather speaks of moral passions seeking fulfilment (see KB 4). When these passions are directed by a positivism that dismisses values as merely subjective whims, then the moral urge is left naked and can be usurped by totalitarian movements for which the means to reach a utopian goal may be manifestly immoral. This process, which Polanyi calls ‘moral inversion,’ accounted in his view for the world wars and the Russian Revolution. Polanyi’s sense of the possibilities of human evil is so strong that he rejects out of hand the legitimacy of any utopian ideals or revolution purported to improve society. His individualism and anti-utopianism are quite different than Macmurray’s communalism and utopian ideal of loving community.

What would be an intellectual framework that might direct moral passions persistently toward the good of self and society? Polanyi speaks of the structure of commitment as the state of mind that

centres a person and supports the personal and social good. Here's his succinct summary of that all-important framework:

Calling; personal judgment involving responsibility; self-compulsion and independence of conscience; universal standards; all these were shown to exist only in their relation to each other within a commitment. They dissolve if looked upon noncommittally. We may call this the ontology of commitment.' (PK 379)

I shall mention briefly what Polanyi means by each of these ingredients of commitment. We enter into commitment by first accepting our calling, that is, by acknowledging the external circumstances and internal capacities that define the context in which commitment may take place. The communities and traditions in which we dwell and the difficulties calling for decision must be confronted before a responsible decision can be made. We alone are responsible for that decision; no legitimate appeal can be made to external forces, innate tendencies, or the fault of others for the way we respond to a situation. In commitment our judgments take into account universal standards of excellence – what Polanyi calls the firmament of values. Of these, perhaps truth is the most important for Polanyi. His notion of truth is connected to the complex, many-faceted notion of the real we have already considered. The authority of all these standards is maintained in committed judgments consistent with the voice of conscience.

The priority of truth for Polanyi seems to clash with the priority Macmurray accords to morality. Kirkpatrick interprets Macmurray as follows:

Thinking serves the intentions of the self by informing and guiding them in terms of what it believes is true or false. Action, on the other hand, is determined by what is right or wrong. This means that the "moral" distinction is the primary standard of validity, while the epistemological distinction (true or false) is secondary and derivative. (98)

The apparent disagreement between the thinkers concerning the importance of truth versus the social good is lessened, however, when it is realised that for Polanyi truth opens one to reality, which includes recognition of moral values as entities that have the power to manifest themselves in surprising ways in the future. Nevertheless, there is a greater emphasis in Polanyi than in Macmurray on the discovery and honouring of what is real.

Now, if we attempt to analyse a situation dispassionately, might we not come to a more objective decision as Macmurray states reason accomplishes? Not according to Polanyi. Dispassionate decision-making levels different possibilities of action and opens the door for

self-indulgence rather than to commitment to the good for all as has come down to us in the religious examples we respect and the moral firmament. A person

is strong, noble and wonderful so long as he fears the voices of this firmament; but he dissolves their power over himself and his own powers gained through obeying them, if he turns back and examines what he respects in a detached manner. Then law is no more than what the courts will decide, art but an emollient of nerves, morality but a convention, tradition but an inertia, God but a psychological necessity. Then man dominates a world in which he himself does not exist. For with his obligations he has lost his voice and his hope, and has been left behind meaningless to himself. (PK 380)

Of course, all too few people appreciate the importance of such a structure of commitment, just as all too few value Macmurrayan community. Are we then condemned to a Hobbesian world of self-interested persons combating other self-interested persons in a perpetual series of conflicts? Don't we need a kind of imposed social order to promote justice and prevent chaos, as Macmurray at times seems to suggest? What we need, Polanyi argues, is a social structure that so organises the activities of individuals that their joint free actions promote the good of all. The market can underwrite such spontaneous order for our economy, but *only* if it is properly regulated. Democratic societies need coercive powers – through laws, regulations, policing, and punishment – to maintain their self-set standards. Social morality is maximised when committed individuals live in dedicated communities.

In sum, then, Macmurray and Polanyi offer us ethical options. Can communities be formed, as Macmurray postulates, where loving friendship rules? Prima facie it seems possible for such communities to be developed on a small scale when conditions are right. But given the negativities that dwell within the human heart alongside empathy and love, is it reasonable to expect persons in large heterogeneous communities to sustain attitudes of love and friendship? I wish Macmurray told me more about how this might be achieved. Polanyi's view of human nature seems more realistic to me, and so does his vision of social order. But my preference may only be based on my greater familiarity with Polanyi's thought. There may well be riches in Macmurray's thought that I have overlooked.

Professor Emeritus of Philosophy, Humanities and Religious Studies
Montana State University,
Billings, MT59101,
USA.

POLANYI ON AGENCY AND SOME LINKS TO MACMURRAY

Phil Mullins

Abstract:

This essay suggests that what Michael Polanyi termed his theory of tacit knowing in his late writing can also be fairly described as an account of agency in living forms. Such an account could be useful to modern biologists, although it seems unlikely that biologists will come to appreciate Polanyi's notions about agency since they do not understand the nature of biological inquiry as Polanyi does. Polanyi weaves inextricably together his understanding of the agency of living forms and his understanding of biological inquiry. Following my discussion of Polanyi's account of agency are brief comments comparing the ideas of Michael Polanyi and John Macmurray, a contemporary of Polanyi whose mature philosophical ideas focus on agency.

Key Words

Michael Polanyi, John Macmurray, agency, tacit knowing, Polanyi's account of biological inquiry, Polanyi's ideas about evolution.

I. Introduction

Although somewhat indirectly, Michael Polanyi's philosophical perspective articulates an account of agency. The importance of this account became clearer to me a few years ago when I was studying the ideas of cell biologist Ursula Goodenough, a prominent scientist interested in philosophy and religion, who in 2002 came to the annual Polanyi Society meeting and gave a paper. That paper, 'From Biology, to Consciousness, to Morality,' was subsequently published with a co-author, Terence Deacon, in *Tradition and Discovery*.¹ Goodenough and Deacon sketch out the suggestion that (as their Abstract states it) 'our moral frames of mind emerge from our primate pro-social capacities, transfigured and valenced by our symbolic languages, cultures, and religions' (6). This article is a short, provocative effort to outline a case from, so to speak, the biological bottom up, providing ultimately an account of what the authors call human 'moral frames of mind.' The sketch is one that relies on the authors' acceptance of notions about 'emergence' which is, of course, a key term found in Polanyi's writing about evolution. Goodenough succinctly and provocatively defines 'emergence' elsewhere as 'something more from nothing but.'² For Goodenough and Deacon in this short article,

'emergence' is a key to their larger effort to show how the human 'apparently novel mentality, and its attendant sense of self, relate to our evolutionary heritage' (6). I suspect that if Michael Polanyi had been born fifty years later he might have taken a keen interest in the kind of explorations undertaken in this article by Goodenough and her colleague. No doubt he would have had questions, but I suspect that he might have been intrigued by Goodenough's commitment to the centrality of emergence as well as her effort to show the deep kinship between human moral agents and simpler forms of life.

At the time I was studying Goodenough's project and her approach, I noted that she (and I suspect other modern biologists like her) seem to need a richer notion of what agency in living forms is. Her preoccupation with a 'bottom up' account focuses attention on transitions in living forms in evolutionary history, but somehow the category of agency seems to become an unnecessary bit of philosophical baggage. She is committed to the centrality of emergence and also to working out a rich account of the development of living forms, an account that ultimately represents human beings as creatures with extraordinary capacities. I suggest, however, that talk about agency is more than excess philosophical baggage for biologists; modern biologists, as Marjorie Grene warns, should question 'the thesis that biological explanation consists entirely in considering least parts.'³ Creative thinkers like Goodenough, I believe, should take a second look at Polanyi. Many of the things Polanyi says about tacit knowing in his late writing can be reformulated to provide a novel but rich way to think about agency in living forms. Unfortunately, biologists are not likely to be attracted to Polanyi's notions about the implications of tacit knowing unless they are, like Polanyi, first willing to think carefully about knowing in biological study. This is a double-bind. Let me formulate my thesis about a Polyanian account of agency and the impediments blocking appreciation of this account for biologists in another way: what Polanyi dubs his theory of tacit knowing is a late refinement of ideas in *PK*; it is an epistemological model but in fact both in Part IV of *PK* and in some other late writing, Polanyi moves from 'knowing to being' (the programme of Part IV of *PK* and a topic in several late essays and books). His epistemological ideas are transformed into an account of the emergence of

living forms and ultimately the rise of responsible human beings. However, the plausibility of this transformation of Polanyi's epistemological model is intimately linked with understanding science and the vocation of the scientist in a novel Polanyian way, a way not common among contemporary biologists. In this essay, I try carefully to lay out the main elements of the theory of agency that I find in Polanyi's writing, showing how his description of agency is inextricably bound up with his claims about the nature of the study of biology.

At the end of my discussion of Polanyi's account of agency, I turn to some comparisons between Polanyi and John Macmurray, a thinker contemporary with Polanyi whose late thought also focused on agency. Although I recently re-read (after thirty-five years) *The Self as Agent* and *Persons in Relation*, Macmurray's late books based on his 1953 and 1954 Gifford Lectures, I am clearly a novice student of Macmurray. Like many interested in Polanyi, I have long suspected that Macmurray's philosophical ideas are fundamentally post-critical. References linking Polanyi and Macmurray crop up in scholarly articles from time to time. In the March, 1997 'Discussion' column of *Appraisal* 1(3), the late Harold Turner suggested Macmurray and Michael Polanyi, 'both made the concept of the personal central to their thinking, and one would have expected them to complement each other. . .' (155). Turner quotes a section from Macmurray which he contends might have been written by Polanyi, since it aptly describes what Polanyi would have termed tacit knowledge.⁴ In the 'Introductory' of *Persons in Relation*, Macmurray suggests that his first Gifford volume, *The Self As Agent*, sought to 'transfer the centre of gravity in philosophy from thought to action' (11) and his second volume follows out the implications of his new centre of gravity by showing how 'the personal relation of persons is constitutive of personal existence' (12). His philosophical revolution 'sets man firmly in the world which he knows, and so restores him to his proper existence as a community of persons in relation' (12). Macmurray's effort to re-conceive and re-orient philosophy (focusing on the person as an agent interacting and shaped by a community of persons) certainly appears to parallel themes developed in Polanyi's thought. In the final section of this essay, I briefly explore three (of the many possible) areas in which one might consider the convergence and divergence of Macmurray and Polanyi's ideas. Polanyi's friend J. H. Oldham thought these thinkers in some ways were complementary but also quite different. I think Oldham was correct. I suspect if Polanyi read

Macmurray he found some Macmurray ideas very puzzling and other perspectives quite congenial.

II A. Polanyi's description of agency in terms of his claims about the critical and convivial nature of biology

Although Marjorie Grene acknowledges that her work with Polanyi began as an associate assigned to find for Polanyi heretical comments on the New Synthesis,⁵ ironically, over her long life (and her emergence as one of the chief figures in what we now call 'philosophy of biology'), she became increasingly disillusioned with Part IV of *PK*. She finally simply disavowed all of Polanyi's comments about evolution as well as her own understanding of evolution at the stage she was working with Polanyi (*PMG* 16, 61). Nevertheless, at one point in her life she was a very articulate interpreter and defender of the argument made in Part IV. Her response to a September, 1958 *Encounter* review of *PK* by Michael Oakeshott⁶ provides a concise overview of the orientation of Part IV. While Polanyi in Part III has been analyzing the scientist's calling which is in fact a specialised version of the calling of all humans, in the last section of his *magnum opus*, Polanyi

puts this act of reflection, this person striving to make sense of things, into the context of nature: into the stratified world of ever richer living things. . . The epistemologist knowing his own knowing, and the biologist knowing the ongoings of other living things, here coalesce.⁷

What specifically does Polanyi say about the 'biologist knowing the ongoings of other living things' which is really but an instance of a 'person striving to make sense of things,' an instance located in 'the context of nature' which is 'the stratified world of ever richer living things'?

Polanyi dissented from the biology of his day and aspired to re-reform the ways biologists thought about the nature of knowing in biology. Polanyi emphasised what he terms the necessarily **critical** and **convivial** aspects of biology. In *TD*, he succinctly sums up what he means by the 'critical' aspect this way: 'Since all life is defined by its capacity for success and failure, all biology is necessarily critical' (*TD* 51). Although he thinks there are hints of evaluation (i.e., 'critical' aspects) in terms of success and failure in some inanimate studies (e.g., crystallography), it is at the level of life where the knower's appreciation of function is imperative. Although it is largely a tacit presupposition, Polanyi insists there is an inevitable teleological foundation in knowing living forms (although such a foundation is itself be subject to constant revision). Recognition has embedded in it

evaluation in terms of success or failure. This claim does not sweep away the difficulties that a modern biologist might note in distinguishing living and non-living things. Instead it suggests that modern biologists should appreciate the subtle transitional range extending from the clearly non-living to the clearly living. Biologists need to attend to certain metaphysical problems that are part of biological study. Something like Polanyi's two-level hierarchical view of reality (discussed below) need to be carefully worked out.

In *PK*, Polanyi discusses the critical aspect of knowing living forms when he refers to the 'three-storied' character of perception in biology (*PK* 364). We can, for example, be aware of an animal's active-perceptive responses only in relation to a focal awareness of the animal as an individual. We must see the particulars of an animal's activity subsidiarily in a focus upon the whole animal in order to know what the animal is knowing or doing.⁸

Biology is 'critical' for Polanyi in the sense that the study of life always involves suppositions about an active centre and how that centre integrates the subsidiary elements of a whole to produce response. The biologist makes judgments about whether the centred whole succeeds or fails as it interacts over some period of time with its environment.

The more complex the life form, in Polanyi's account, the more the critical aspects of biology are deeply bound up with convivial aspects.

Each new branch of biology that was developed to cover the increasingly complex function of higher animals sets up additional standards, to which the observer expects the animal to measure up. And this intensification of criticism coincides with an increasing enrichment of relations between the critic and his object. We know an animal, as we know a person by entering into its performance, and we appreciate it as an individual, in the interests of which these performances have their meaning. Even at the lowest, purely vegetative level, we accept the interests of the animal as the standard by which our own interest in the animal is determined. All biology is, in this sense, convivial. But this conviviality rises to emotional concern as the animal approaches the human level. We then become aware of its sentience, of its intelligence, and above all of its emotional relations to ourselves. Yet, however greatly we may love an animal, there is an emotion which no animal can evoke and which is commonly directed toward our fellow men. I have said that at the highest level of personhood we meet man's moral sense, guided by the firmament of his standards (TD 51).

Polanyi here sketches a pattern of recognising deepening personhood and an intensifying identification with more complex animals. What he calls the 'increasing enrichment of relations between

the critic and his object' is directly proportional to what he calls the 'intensification of criticism.' As he notes, this identification eventually has a strong emotional valence that is infused with a progressively more complex set of expectations and an increasing sense of the individuality and perhaps the unpredictability of the living thing. The convivial aspect of knowing life resonates with a sense of solidarity emphasising the kinship among living forms. While the critical and the convivial aspects of knowing life are distinguishable elements, they are inextricably woven together and are largely subsidiarily known suppositions that biologists bring to bear in making sense of living things, according to Polanyi.

II B. Implications of the critical and convivial nature of biological study

Marjorie Grene, perhaps more directly than Polanyi, suggested what is philosophically at stake in acknowledging the critical and convivial nature of biology; here is how she succinctly puts the matter:

To know life is to comprehend comprehensive entities; to know knowing is to comprehend those particular achievements of living things which consist in their acts of comprehension. Mind is once more a natural reality, and nature once more both the medium and the object of mind's activity.⁹

Greene emphasised that Polanyi's notions about the critical and convivial nature of biology have metaphysical implications. Polanyi's view makes clear that 'neither is sheer givenness, the only way things are' (*KK*, 223); minds or proto-minds are real things and Polanyi's brand of evolutionary philosophical realism frees us from a tyrannical dualistic division between materialism and idealism. The achievements of living things count in a Polanyian world. Quoting Green again, 'the achievements of all living things, the achievements of human minds, are more than tiny superscripts on a single monotonous succession of mere facts. They are enrichments of being itself' (*KK* 223). Grene suggests, in a way that Polanyi was certainly reaching to articulate, that acknowledging the critical and convivial nature of knowing in biology is of primary importance because

only such an acknowledgement . . . will enable us to see knowledge itself as a real achievement of real beings. The recognition of scientists at work . . . is an instance of the recognition of responsible persons, a performance of the same general kind as the recognition of patterns, individuals, or persons at lower levels of existence (*KK* 223).

The rich implications of Grene's remarks become clearer if one explores somewhat further Polanyi's

discussions of living beings. I have organised my further exploration in terms of three elements: Polanyi's interest in centredness, tacit powers and achievement.

II C. Living beings as active centres with tacit powers recognisable by their achievements

Polanyi seemed to warn that biologists should never lose sight of the fact that living creatures are active centres. He suggested that many biologists of his day had lost sight of creatures as active centres; in their uncritical embrace of natural selection and population genetics, most biologists, Polanyi contended, aspired in some way to describe living forms in terms of laws governing inanimate matter. But, as I have suggested quoting Grene above, Polanyi aimed to avoid a slide into materialism while at the same time rejecting idealism. Focusing on living beings as active centres was part of his program recasting metaphysics. Being an active centre seems to be a geometric metaphor that reaches for a way to suggest that living forms have organisational integrity and complexity and are a locus from which response to stimuli flow. Polanyi also, of course, focused attention on the growth of complexity in living forms over evolutionary history. Extraordinarily complex living forms Polanyi described as hierarchically organised systems with many subsystems, each subject to dual control (about which I will say more below).

Another way to put Polanyi's point that acknowledging active centres is central to biology and to a reformed philosophy of biology is to say living forms have and live through the use of tacit powers. Centres deploy tacit powers in Polanyi's perspective; and both centres and tacit powers are vehicles used to illumine the potential and the dynamics of response in living beings. Knowing is a sophisticated type of response; in describing knowing, Polanyi suggests an active, attentive knowing subject attends from tacitly known elements to their conjoint meaning. He describes how a knower dwells in particulars and integrates them; the conjoint meaning of the particulars appears at the focus. Making meaning is a performance and in fact for Polanyi knowing is a species of action. All living beings can be said to have centres and tacit powers insofar as living forms are capable of dwelling in and integrating, of bringing together elements, although such action may not be intentional in the way a human knower can focus attention on a matter of interest. An active centre always dwells in some particular subsidiaries, bringing together or integrating those subsidiaries in a response to some concrete, particular context. Living forms can thus

be described as always at some level deploying their tacit powers.¹⁰ To say that living things have tacit powers draws attention to the fact that living things have the capacity to acquire, combine and make second nature patterns of response as they interact with the environment. Most frequently, we dub such patterns habits or skills, but such habits or skills operate at many levels in a complex living subject. Polanyi only began to explore the possibilities for discussing the deep structure of habit as an available fund or deposit of resources insofar as he acknowledged that there are forever inaccessible physiological tacit particulars that play a role in our human knowing the world. To develop the notion that living beings have tacit powers 'all the way down' I think would be a challenging project. Thinkers like Goodenough are already trying to do something similar with Peircean semiotic language, which focuses not on agency but on stimulus and response as communication.¹¹ Habits are at some levels operational strategies and as living forms become more complex, part of complexity is the development of a more complex fabric of habits, internal and external, through which life unfolds. An active centre acquires or collects what in Polanyi's account are potential subsidiaries that it masters; that is, it builds dispositions which are complex habituated strategies for response when the right occasion arises.

To say that Polanyi's analysis of knowing life focuses on active centres and their tacit powers is to say that Polanyi's analysis of knowing life points out that we presuppose that living forms make achievements and this is the key to our recognition and appreciative evaluation of them: Polanyi notes in Part IV of *PK*: '. . . we can know living beings only by appreciating their achievements' (*PK* 385). 'Achievement' is Polanyi's term pointing to the teleological nature of our knowledge of living forms. The opening chapter in Part IV of *PK* (i.e., the section moving from 'knowing to being') is titled 'The Logic of Achievement.' 'Achievement,' of course, seems in some ways an inflated term when used to describe the simple response of very simple living forms. Nevertheless, to say that understanding living forms is 'critical' and 'convivial' means that we dwell in the form seen against the context of an environmental nexus in which the form functions. Polanyi is pointing to our suppositions about living things as Gestalts having a certain capacity or potential to respond or act. A living form is, at some level, capable of co-ordinated response. The knower's indwelling of the form at least analogically simulates for the knower this disposition of the form. Hence Polanyi identifies how one who knows an animal must 'accept the interests of the animal as

the standard by which our own interest in the animal is determined' [TD, 51]. We also make judgments about the relative fittingness of the responses of the form to the environmental nexus. As we indwell, we judge the success or failure of actual response within some temporal horizon and also revise our own framework of expectations. Hence Polanyi claims 'we know an animal, as we know a person by entering into its performance, and we appreciate it as an individual, in the interests of which these performances have their meaning' [TD, 51]). In sum, 'achievement' is the mark of living forms embedded in a natural context, although this rich word, as I suggest below, has for Polanyi multiple nuances.

Polanyi characterised living forms as active centres with tacit powers and they can be recognised by their achievements. This is what it means from a Polanyian perspective to make sense of the action of a living thing or to say that any being is a living agent. Certainly the actions of some agents such as simple living forms can be described in almost altogether automatic reactive terms and terms often used for higher animals and human beings, such as 'intention,' are disproportionate to this primitive context. Action of the most primitive sort is almost (but not quite) reaction-without-a-centre. But it nevertheless seems appropriate to recognise even such largely reactive responses as proto-purposive endeavours. They are achievements and Polanyi contends that biology must recognise living forms that can deploy tacit powers as comprehensive entities making their way in a certain changing environmental context.

II D. Living beings as comprehensive entities

'Comprehensive entity' is a key term in Polanyi's move from 'knowing to being.' Grene notes that Polanyi first used 'comprehensive entity' to describe living forms in Part IV of *PK*.¹² The term in *PK* is used in a very circumscribed way and does not appear in the Index prepared by Grene and her children, although 'comprehension' has 17 entries.¹³ Most of Polanyi's thought in *PK* focuses on 'comprehension' as an active process of the knower, but in Part IV he does shift to discussing living beings as 'comprehensive entities.'¹⁴ This is a shift of perspective from a focus on how the knower responds or makes sense ('comprehending') to a perspective focusing on that living phenomenon known (or made sense of). The shift emphasises the discreteness or integrity of a living being by designating it an 'entity.' The shift also recognises that the active centre is an inclusive or comprehensive Gestalt whose elements contribute to the whole but the organisation of the whole is not to

be confused with the organisation of the elements themselves. Polanyi emphasises this point by saying that the comprehensive entity has a higher and lower level of control and the higher level operates in margins left open by the lower level. This description Polanyi uses as the backbone of his account of evolution and his account of knowing living beings. As I have noted, living beings are 'comprehensive entities' in Part IV of *PK* but almost immediately after the publication of *PK* (1958) Polanyi, somewhat confusingly, begins to use this term not only to refer to living beings but to refer to any known focal whole; he thereby applies the dynamics of dual control very widely. He sometimes calls this the 'ontological aspect' (TD, 13) or 'ontological counterpart' (TD, 34) of tacit knowing or his 'theory of ontological stratification' (KB 222).

To revert to Polanyi's early use of 'comprehensive entity,' we can say complex living comprehensive entities such as living biologists who work in the human bio-social environment are thus engaged in knowing other living comprehensive entities which are also embedded in a natural context. Biologists recognise such entities by acknowledging them as active centres with tacit powers that make achievements. For Grene and Polanyi, the recognition and study of such comprehensive entities is itself an achievement peculiar to human beings. Such achievements are real and (as Grene puts it) rather than being no more than 'tiny superscripts on a single monotonous succession of mere facts,' they are enrichments of being.¹⁵

II E. Polanyi on the problems with the accounts of evolution in his day

In the natural world, new levels of control emerge in new living comprehensive entities that appear in evolutionary history; but Polanyi believed the terms used to describe such change must be very carefully chosen. He argued that the discussion in his day of evolutionary change that was focused exclusively upon random mutation and natural selection was a discussion committing a logical error; this error led biology toward an ironically misguided outlook that ignores the agency (and that includes the tacit powers, centeredness and achievements) of living forms, while at the same time overlooking the achievements of biologists as living creatures. He presents what he regarded as a more careful and richer account of the development of and study of living comprehensive entities in his account focused on emergence. He makes a critical case against much of the biology of his day by developing his account of emergence that is summarised succinctly in one paragraph in *PK*:

. . . the theory of natural selection, by subsuming all evolutionary progress under the heading of adaptation as defined by differential reproductive advantage, necessarily overlooks the fact that the *consecutive* steps of a long-range evolutionary progress—like the rise of human consciousness—cannot be determined *merely by their adaptive advantages*, since these advantages can form part of such progress only in so far as they prove *adaptive in a peculiar way, namely on the lines of a continuous ascending evolutionary achievement*. The action of the ordering principle underlying such a persistent creative trend is necessarily overlooked or denied by the theory of natural selection, since it cannot be accounted for in terms of accidental mutation plus natural selection. Its recognition would, indeed, reduce mutation and selection to their proper status of merely *releasing and sustaining the action of evolutionary principles* by which all major evolutionary achievements are defined (PK 385).

Reduced to a sentence, Polanyi's claim is 'we can know living beings only by appreciating their achievements' and we can know the evolution of living beings 'only by appreciating the development of their achievements in the course of succeeding generations' (PK 385). Polanyi contends 'such appreciations are integral to biology' (PK 385) and their acceptance both within biology and in larger society can help to change the self-understanding and outlook of science and society.

III. Polanyi and Macmurray

Although I am no expert on John Macmurray's thought, I, like many others, have long been interested in what seem to be convergences and divergences with Polanyi's ideas. Like Polanyi, the late Macmurray has much to say about the nature of agency. My recent re-reading of Macmurray's *The Self as Agent* and *Persons in Relation* has helped me think concretely about Macmurray's ideas. In what follows, I will discuss only three of many possible points where it is interesting somewhat systematically to compare the orientations of these thinkers.

III A. Macmurray's and Polanyi's approach to philosophy

As I noted above, Harold Turner, speaking very generally, proposes that both Polanyi and Macmurray 'made the personal central to their thinking' (Turner, 155). However, the way the personal comes to be central in these thinkers and the way they philosophise is rather different.

Macmurray says in the 'Introductory' of his opening volume that he intends to challenge two presuppositions found in modern philosophy, the

'assumption that the Self is, at least primarily, a 'knowing subject' (SA 11), and the assumption that the Self is an isolated individual. His first volume tries to make a case that 'subjecthood is a derivative and negative aspect of agency' (SA 11-12). That is, Macmurray thinks philosophy needs to get off the track initiated by Descartes and pay attention to practical human activities since 'primary knowledge arises as an aspect of activities that have practical not theoretical objectives' (SA 12). His first volume offers both critical perspectives on the modern turn in philosophy (where things go awry) as well as the first step in an outline of a constructive alternative to the status quo. His constructive philosophising focuses on practical agency whose understanding he thinks gives rise to a 'new philosophical form' (SA 13. Perhaps one should say a 'new philosophical idiom'). *Persons in Relation*, the second volume growing out of his Gifford Lectures, builds on the first volume's discussion of practical activity as foundational. Here Macmurray works to show that a self is a person and 'that personal existence is constituted by the relation of persons' (SA, 12). His project is grounded in the conviction that, as he identifies in his opening chapter of the first volume, there is in philosophy a 'crisis of the personal' (SA, 17). More broadly stated, the crisis for Macmurray is in fact a 'cultural crisis' (in passing, Macmurray notes 'the stress and sickness of our age' (SA, 28) which I take to be the troubled first half of the twentieth century which launched Macmurray into philosophy, following his service in World War I⁶). That 'cultural crisis' presents to philosophy a formal problem which is 'how to 'discover or construct the intellectual form of the personal' (SA, 29). Hence the 'form of the personal' Macmurray declares as 'the emergent problem in contemporary philosophy' (SA, 21) and that is what he addresses.

What seems to me most clear about Macmurray's Gifford Lecture volumes is that the author is engaged in a carefully considered conversation with modern philosophy. He has studied modern philosophy intimately and he is announcing his conclusions. There are lengthy sections in his books which interpret the virtues and problems of key figures in modern philosophy. For example, the second and third chapters of *The Self as Agent* treat Kant.¹⁷ Macmurray presents a well-distilled, sharp criticism of the way things have gone in the recent history of philosophy; he offers a different starting point that he believes leads in a new, different direction toward a different conclusion for philosophy: '... the Self is neither a substance nor an organism, but a person' (SA, 37) he contends, and ultimately this new starting point leads philosophy to

consider new things. Finally, it leads philosophy back to an appreciation of theism. But philosophy has the 'immediate task' of discovering 'the logical form through which the unity of the personal can be coherently conceived' (SA, 37). Macmurray's philosophising, as he puts it in *The Self as Agent*, seeks to 'establish a point of view' (SA, 13). There is a logical orientation and a formality about Macmurray's philosophising that he accepts as appropriate and necessary for what he regards as his 'pioneering venture' (SA, 13).

Certainly some of the things I have above set forth as integral to Macmurray orientation and approach somewhat fit with Polanyi's comments on philosophy and his approach to philosophising. His *magnum opus* has the curious title 'Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy' and the very few things he says about 'post-critical' thought plus the many things he says about his neologism 'personal knowledge' (PK, xii) and the 'conceptual reform' called for (PK, xiii) make clear that Polanyi does consider his work a new direction for philosophy, a turn away from the critical tradition that Polanyi traces back to Descartes. If you examine Polanyi's major texts, there are critical and constructive elements interwoven in most of them, just as in Macmurray's books. Although Polanyi, like Macmurray, seeks to address a larger cultural crisis (not formulated in quite the same way), Polanyi's philosophising is not, however, a sustained and focused conversation with modern philosophy. There are comments on philosophers in Polanyi's writing, but few are very lengthy; other kinds of thinkers (e.g., Wolfgang Kohler) sometimes rate more attention than philosophers. The critical component of Polanyi's thought at least in the period of *Personal Knowledge* focuses on 'objectivism,' a somewhat general term Polanyi uses to point toward an orientation toward explicitness; that is, Polanyi contends that the long-standing tradition in philosophy, science and culture ignores the role of the inarticulate and the way in which a knower participates in or shapes and holds his or her knowledge. Although Polanyi like Macmurray might be construed as saying philosophy needs a new centre of gravity, Polanyi seems to pitch his intellectual inquiry and his effort to articulate a philosophical perspective in a different and broader way. This might, of course, be regarded as simply the result of Polanyi's training and interests as a scientist and his limited knowledge of the intimate twists and turns in the development of modern philosophy. Such an explanation, however, does not make clear that the breadth of Polanyi's orientation as a thinker in many ways grows out of his life

experience. His intellectual inquiry and his interests expand over the course of his long life.¹⁸

Gelwick notes in his introduction to Polanyi that one must simply say Polanyi was interested in the whole world.¹⁹ This is true but it is possible to chart the changing parameters of his critical and constructive thinking. In the sixties, Polanyi notes that for him philosophy was something of an 'afterthought' (TD, 3). He backed into philosophy somewhat accidentally and although he seems to have read quite a bit of philosophy and to grasp the shape of the modern tradition (plus for an important stretch of his life, he had Grene to teach him what he did not know about philosophy), he was not single-mindedly concerned about the tradition in philosophy. Grene comments that Polanyi regarded the history of philosophy as 'titbits' (PMG, 61) She clearly was annoyed by this orientation and attributed it to the fact that Polanyi was first a scientist (i.e., one preoccupied with making the great discovery) before he migrated into other fields. But I suspect that Polanyi's failure to find as captivating as Grene the problems deeply contemplated in the history of philosophy may say more about the breadth of his curiosity and his imagination than his preoccupation with his own discoveries as a philosopher.

Polanyi's interests develop as the European world churned in the first half of the twentieth century and his own life was turned upside down. While he still lived in Berlin, he was interested in what happened to the *fin de* European culture and what was happening politically in the Soviet Union and Europe, and, after he came to England, he soon became involved in the 'planned science' controversy. He develops some of his ideas about science and society and his broader social-political ideas about 'two kinds of order' and a liberal society in the thirties and forties; he very creatively draws on and recasts some of the ideas of Gestalt thinkers and also works out his understanding of science as cultivating a kind of specialised perception by relying upon apprenticeship and a dynamic tradition. His expanding critical views focus not only on inadequacies of Marxian and other standard Western accounts of science, but also on certain deadly convictions rooted deeply in Western culture in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. When he begins to work on his Gifford Lectures, he turns to what he calls in the lectures the 'restrictions of objectivism' and 'the rehabilitation of overt belief,'²⁰ He makes a case for justification of dubitable belief which is often termed in PK the 'fiduciary program.' What he manages to do in *Personal Knowledge*, the book published six years after his last series of lectures, is effectively pull together what he has been working

on for the last quarter of a century, but it is cast as an account of the nature of knowing, emphasising the inevitable commitment involved. Polanyi seamlessly links perception, ordinary knowing and the scientist's endeavours, including the work of those who make great discoveries. In the first part of this essay, I have outlined the way in which Polanyi zeros in on the biologist's effort to know other living forms. His account in Part IV of *PK* emphasises the kinship of living things in a dynamic universe. Polanyi ultimately provides a justification for the kind of inquiry about the universe that responsible humans can undertake (more broadly stated, he provides a *Lebensphilosophie*). Polanyi himself suggested that his most fruitful ideas in this middle period of his philosophising focused on 'two kinds of awareness,' a notion again influenced by Gestalt research, which he first touches on in the Gifford Lectures and develops further in *Personal Knowledge* as he begins to explore the nature of unspecifiability. In the decade after the publication of *PK*, Polanyi further refines his epistemically grounded account of life to work out a concise statement of what he calls the 'theory of tacit knowing' with its concomitant 'theory of ontological stratification.' In the final years of his life, although his health was failing, Polanyi tried to put together another comprehensive book; he made an effort to analyse the nature of meaning and conditions for the human discovery of meaning not only in science but also in art and religion.

I have elaborated at some length my understanding of how Polanyi's very broad interests develop in order to show that one sort of inquiry seems to lead to the next set of puzzles which, in turn, recasts the earlier questions in a more comprehensive context. One might fairly say that Polanyi's writing shows that he devoted himself to epistemic questions but over the course of his life such questions change. What Polanyi does, in the final analysis, is articulate an epistemically oriented perspective on human life situated in the larger context of the evolving natural order. I hesitate to dub Polanyi primarily an 'epistemologist' or a 'philosopher of science' or even to say that Polanyi was deeply in conversation with and intent upon reforming the philosophical tradition. But he does, in some ways, seem to recast what philosophy is all about; about philosophical reflection, he says,

I believe that the function of philosophic reflection consists in bringing to light, and affirming as my own, the beliefs implied in such of my thoughts and practices as I believe to be valid; that I must aim at discovering what I truly believe in and at formulating the convictions which I find myself holding; that I must conquer my self-doubt, so as to retain a firm

hold on this programme of self-identification (*PK*, 267).

III B. Macmurray and Polanyi on agency

The opening section of this essay has set forth what I take to be Polanyi's account of agency. I have argued that to grasp how Polanyi thinks about agents it is necessary to look at what he says about living things and how we understand them and how they have changed in evolutionary history. Polanyi's commitment to the critical and convivial nature of biological understanding indicates that he thinks of agents as living forms that we recognise as active centres with tacit powers which can be marshalled to produce achievements in the world. Agents are living comprehensive entities situated in a particular environment. Action is a performance that subordinates a set of particulars to a focus. It is a coalescence of particulars. It is a comprehension and an active shaping of response. Polanyi's approach to agency reflects his commitment to what he in later writing called the theory of tacit knowing as well as the theory of ontological stratification which is an inference from other features of tacit knowing. Put into a few sentences, this is a commonsensical, realist notion of agency, one that is always mindful of epistemic matters and context. Polanyi's account is a generic idea of agency—that is, it more or less applies to all things living. Human agency is a subset of this broader environmental understanding of agency.²¹ I have not treated this in my discussion above, but, given what I have discussed, it is possible roughly to outline what might be included in a Polyanian account of human agency.

Human agents are incredibly complex active centres. The intricacy of our basic biological make-up which evolved in evolutionary history is staggering. But clearly the human biological make-up is just a prelude for understanding what a human agent is from a Polyanian perspective. Human beings are social animals and we become therefore creatures of location.²² We always inhabit some particular place, some particular historical community of interpretation. We are beings-in-a-particular-human-world, to use a phrase Marjorie Grene might have liked. Among the living things, we have extraordinary gifts; perhaps the chief among them is facility with language. As language users, human groups generate enormously rich articulate cultures and thus human beings are articulate cultural creatures.²³ Because we are articulate creatures, Polanyi focuses much attention on human knowing, but for him knowing is a species of human action; it is a peculiarly human achievement.²⁴ To be a human agent is a bio-social achievement. Human beings

have a set of tacit powers that lets us make our way in a particular human world and expand that world; certainly it appears that the human range of things we can make subsidiary exceeds those of other living things. We seem to be capable of extending our physical bodies, of dwelling in the human world, in ways other environmentally-shaped creatures are not even on the brink of. This is to say that a Polanyian account of human agency acknowledges the human being's capacity for building extraordinarily complex networks of intermeshed layers of habits and skills. Through the incredible repertoire of human tacit powers come stunning human achievements. Other human beings are creatures we respect;²⁵ we also are the creature who can acknowledge true human greatness. Human tacit powers, of course, for Polanyi are deployed within a context of self-set standards. Such standards are nascent in other living forms and are nurtured in human beings by human interaction within communities; they are finally the tacitly-held framework of value accepted and applied by an individual. Thus a Polanyian account of human agency also must consider the ways in which human beings serve transcendent values as they pursue vocations requiring commitment in communities of like-minded social companions.

Macmurray's approach to agency seems to come rather directly from his appreciation for and criticism of Kant and his predecessors and successors. He aims to move away from the 'primacy of the theoretical in our philosophical tradition which institutes a formal dualism which cannot be resolved' (SA, 84). Philosophy must start with the 'primacy of the practical' (SA, 84) and that means 'we should think *from the standpoint of action*' (SA, 85). By 'action' Macmurray in fact means human personal action which he emphasises as primary and concrete and distinguishable in terms of right and wrong, while thinking is a derivative and abstract endeavour that distinguishes the true and false. Acting, defined as a 'unity of movement and knowledge' (SA, 128), is a positive mode of doing while thinking is a negative mode of doing. Macmurray seems to think of primary human practical action in terms of the fundamental human tactical experience of resistance: 'The tactical experience of resistance is the experience of something, not myself, which prevents me from doing what I am doing. Tactical perception as the experience of resistance is the direct and immediate apprehension of the Other-than myself' (SA, 109). But the other is not merely resistance but also 'the support of action' (SA, 110). Thus touch gives us awareness of the Other as existent but one can understand the Other only as an agent, a self like

the acting self. Action for Macmurray, 'is impossible unless there is presupposed a plurality of agents in relation to one another in one field of operation' (SA, 204).

After Macmurray provides a basic characterisation of the self as agent in his first volume, *Persons In Relation* goes on to expand his account by showing how the self as agent is 'constituted by its relation to the Other; that it has its being in its relationship; and that this relationship is necessarily personal' (PR, 17). As he later puts the point, 'I exist only as one element in the complex 'You and I'' (PR, 24). This discussion attempting to flesh out the notion of the self as agent as a personal figure is the section of Macmurray's Gifford Lecture volumes that seems most like Polanyi. Here he focuses in on mother and child and the way infants adapt to the environment understood in terms of the way a mother's care provides an unfolding context that slowly brings personal development. There is a 'rhythm of withdrawal and return in the tactual contact of mother and child' (PR, 76) which is the foundational laboratory for forming and reforming expectation. In Polanyian terms, Macmurray's sketch of development outlines the slow acquisition of a tacit repertoire of powers in an active centred human being; simpler powers become the basis of extension to acquire additional, more sophisticated powers. Adaptation to environment for Macmurray grows out of an infant's 'capacity to express his feelings of comfort or discomfort' (PR, 48); development is a process that depends on the intentional activity of others. The infant lives by communicating and thus is germinally rational; he or she is in a dynamic relation with other people: 'the Other acquires the character of a community of which I am a member' (PR, 77). Children learn not only to distinguish persons but eventually to distinguish persons and different things (that 'which is active without intentions') [PR, 80]. Slowly, infants learn to form their own intentions and skilfully execute them. We are engaged in a process of acquiring an ever broadening 'integrated system of skills' which 'is a system of habits' that Macmurray views as consciously learned responses to stimuli that in the human being 'takes the place of instinct in animals' (PR, 54). Play is a process that promotes cumulative skill acquisition which brings with it learning of intentions that involve knowledge, but the infant's 'original consciousness' (PR, 57) is an 'original capacity to distinguish in feeling between comfort and discomfort.' (PR, 57). The mother-child relation is the 'original unit of personal existence' (PR, 62) and from it germinates fear and love connected to relationship to the mother; these are our fundamental motivations in human behaviour

from which other more complex motives develop; but motives remain incomplete apart from the response of other persons. So, according to Macmurray, the course of human development as a personal agent is a course in which the 'discrimination of the Other into persons, organisms and material objects is primarily practical. We have to learn three different modes of action in relation to three different types of Other' (PR, 84).

In sum, Macmurray's genetic or developmental account of how the self as agent becomes a person constituted by relationship with others in a particular human world does seem to me very much to complement the account of human agency embedded in Polanyi's thought, particularly in his *PK* discussion of skills, articulation, intellectual passions, and conviviality (*PK*, chapters 2-7). Polanyi does not self-consciously develop his account of a human being (as an active centre acquiring tacit skills to be used in achievements) by examining in detail the shortcomings of the philosophical tradition. Nor does Polanyi, like Macmurray, draw sharp lines between animal behaviour and human agency. By the time of his Gifford Lectures, Polanyi is focused on themes such as the importance of belief, the role of the inarticulate and the active, impassioned, convivial nature of knowing. Polanyi's progressively deepening exploration of such themes does seem to lead to conclusions about the nature of human agency that are similar to ideas of Macmurray.

III C. Macmurray and Polanyi on science

'In the 'scientific' world there is no place for the scientists' (PR 220).

One of the things I suspect that Polanyi might have found most puzzling, if he read Macmurray as J. H. Oldham recommended, is the things Macmurray says about science.

The epigram above comes from near the end of *Persons in Relation*. Macmurray makes a case that there are three forms of reflection, art, science and religion and, particularly in the eighth chapter ('Reflection and the Future') but also in his final chapter ('The Personal Universe'), he tries to do what he calls in the eighth chapter 'consider their relation to the future and to one another' (PR 166). Religion is 'the primary mode of reflective rationality' (PR 167) and it seems to be more comprehensive than either artistic or scientific reflection. Religious reflection emerges first and the other forms of reflection, artistic and scientific, are derived from it. Religious reflection is 'concerned with the knowledge of the personal Other' which means that it is a symbolic activity which 'universalises the problem of personal relationship'

(PR 168). Religious reflection apparently has emotional depth and is concerned with the real and the unreal. This means that it addresses human fears and real religion says what you fear is likely to happen but you can cope so don't be afraid (PR 171). In its social aspect, religion unites people in common life. Religion demands personal integrity which Macmurray suggests means that it requires a certain way of life in which the inner and outer life are integrated and motives and intentions thus come together. For Macmurray, art is concerned with 'determination of the possible' and is focused on satisfaction as an 'activity of valuation' (PR 176). Science is an intellectual endeavour concerned with the 'determination of the actual' (PR, 76) and is focused on matters of fact and thus with truth and falsehood. Both the artist and scientist have an 'impersonal' relation to the world, and 'the scientist, intellectually reflective, observes, compares, generalises and records' (PR 176), says Macmurray. Macmurray does often try to qualify his claims: both art and science are activities of persons and have 'intellectual and emotional forces at work' but the 'intention' in science is 'intellectual, and therefore factual' while in art it is 'emotional and evaluative' (PR 177). Macmurray holds 'the scientist must take precautions which will eliminate the personal factor' so that 'what he observes and what he symbolises must be the same for all possible observers' (PR, 180). Thus 'science is ... completely impersonal and merely objective' (PR, 180). It 'provides knowledge of the general rules of efficiency in action without reference to the intentions to be realised through them' (PR, 184).

I do not wish to caricature Macmurray's account of science. There are other interesting things he adds that must be omitted here²⁶ and many things that at first blush seem odd Macmurray later qualifies. What is clear, however, is that Macmurray's description of science is what I call an architectonic-driven description. That is, his account of science is bound up inextricably with his account of art and religion and he intends for the three to be seen in relation. He is interested in outlining a scheme that covers the types of reflection, showing the similarities and differences between the different types.²⁷ Religion has a certain priority; one of the main agendas for his Gifford Lectures is to make a case that philosophy which is focused on the personal agent is theistic so Macmurray's interest is understandable. Architectonic-driven accounts are common in philosophy and theology; they fit with formal and systematic inquiry and clearly have a certain aesthetic appeal as well as an aspiration for thoroughness. But architectonic-driven approaches

also are in danger of sounding an empty ring.

Let me conclude by very concisely outlining Polanyi's understanding of science. Science is a communal endeavour that investigates the nature of the universe. At its best, it represents human excellence. Scientists make contact with reality and struggle to understand it more deeply; they have modestly succeeded over the course of several centuries. Science has significantly shaped the modern worldview. Scientific discovery was for Polanyi the paradigm case of human knowing. Understanding how the discoverer actively shapes his/her knowledge and makes a breakthrough is the key to science but discovery also provides the key to understanding human knowing more generally. Science is a specialised kind of inquiry which is continuous with ordinary perceptions. An apprenticeship is required to significantly take up scientific practice and acquire true scientific vision but scientific skills are grafted to already present human skills used in daily life. Science relies on individuals (once they are mature scientists) to accept the guidance of self-set standards and to strive to uncover the truth; it also relies upon the general support of those who are not scientists. Science has a dynamic tradition that scientists uphold by reforming it. Science has many overlapping neighbourhoods and is governed by responsible scientists who co-operate in maintaining scientific institutions that disseminate scientific knowledge and promote scientific inquiry.

Although abbreviated, this description of the scientist and the scientific enterprise I believe does identify the main themes in Polanyi discussions of science. I do not think Polanyi would have found much in Macmurray's description that resonated with either his experience as a scientist or his epistemically oriented description of science. I suspect that Polanyi would have found Macmurray's reflection on science to operate at a level of abstraction that passes over interesting fundamental issues in science such as accounting for the nature of scientific discovery and its connection with ordinary perception. I suspect Polanyi would have been disappointed that Macmurray seemed not much interested in the ways in which what Polanyi regarded as the inarticulate works in scientific (as well as artistic and religious) knowing. I think Polanyi might have found suggestions Macmurray makes that science is objective and focused on facts to be inadvertently contributing not to the establishment of a new centre of gravity in philosophy but to the old problematic centre of gravity.

This brings me back to the epigram noted at the beginning of this concluding section: 'In the

'scientific' world there is no place for the scientists' (PR 220). Certainly, I can see where this claim fits into Macmurray's architectonic-driven framework, but I suspect that Polanyi would find it very odd that Macmurray actually accepts this statement as representing the nature of things. Rather than being an acceptable statement representing the nature of things, for Polanyi, such a statement identifies the problem with most accounts of science. Much of Polanyi's writing is devoted to showing that in the scientific world there is a place for persons and we need a rich enough epistemically oriented account of things to appreciate that place.

Missouri Western State University
St Joseph, MO 64507, USA
mullins@missouriwestern.edu

Notes

1. 'From Biology to Consciousness to Morality,' *Tradition and Discovery* 30:3 (2003-04): 6-21. Quotations from this article are simply noted by page in the text in parentheses.
2. See Goodenough's discussion of 'emergence' on 28ff in *The Sacred Depths of Nature*. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998). For *Tradition and Discovery*, I did a review of her book as well as an analysis of her 'religious naturalism.' See my *The Sacred Depths of Nature* and Ursula Goodenough's 'Religious Naturalism,' *Tradition and Discovery* 28:3: 29-41. In Goodenough's *Tradition and Discovery* article, the authors speak of 'emergentism' defined as 'something more from nothing but' and they break 'emergentism' into three forms, first-order, second-order and third-order emergence (see 6ff).
3. *The Philosophy of Marjorie Grene*. Randall Auxier and Lewis Hahn, eds. (Carbondale: SIU Press, 2002): 16. Cited hereafter in the text as *PMG*.
4. Turner goes on to ask whether these thinkers had any knowledge of each other. I responded with a brief note published in *Appraisal* [I. (4): 202-203], indicating, as I allude to below, that about the time of the publication of *Personal Knowledge* and *The Self As Agent* (1958) and again a few years later just after the publication of *Persons In Relation*, J. H. Oldham's letters show that he encouraged Polanyi to take a look at Macmurray's books and consider ways in which their respective philosophical projects overlapped. I know of no record that indicates Polanyi read Macmurray, however.
5. Marjorie Grene, *A Philosophical Testament* (Chicago and La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1995), 91. Hereafter this book is cited in the text as *PT*.
6. Michael Oakeshott, 'The Human Coefficient,' *Encounter* vol. 11, no. 3 (1958): 77-80.
7. Marjorie Grene, 'Personal Knowledge,' *Encounter* vol. 11, no. 4 (1958): 67. The full review is only two pages (67-68). Grene apparently sent the draft of this letter to J.H. Oldham (with whom Grene collaborated to see that *PK* was reviewed) since a typescript is in the Edinburgh University Oldham archive, 10.4.

8. Polanyi makes substantial use of Wolfgang Kohler's animal studies. See my forthcoming essay 'Michael Polanyi's Use of Gestalt Psychology' in *Polanyiana*.
9. Marjorie Grene, *The Knower and the Known* (Berkeley: University of CA Press, 1966), 224. Hereafter this book is cited in the text as *KK*.
10. In his 1968 essay 'The Body Mind Relation' (included in R. T. Allen's collection *Society, Economics and Philosophy, Selected Papers (of) Michael Polanyi* [New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1997]), Polanyi notes that 'the modern mind refuses to accept the necessity for tacit assumptions and wants to keep the grounds of its beliefs clearly in focus, as one does in an explicit deduction. Our whole culture is pervaded by the resolve to avoid unspecifiable commitments and to get down ruthlessly to the hard facts of this world, and to keep our eyes firmly fixed on them' (317). I suspect that this refusal to acknowledge the tacit roots of human knowing disposes biologists to dismiss ideas about the presence and importance of tacit powers in all living forms.
11. It is interesting that Pierce's semiotic triad (sign, object, and interpretant) which can but does not necessarily require an agent has appeal to figures like Goodenough.
12. *KK* 223 but see my extensive discussion of the term in 'Comprehension and the 'Comprehensive Entity': Polanyi's Theory of Tacit Knowing and Its Metaphysical Implications' *Tradition and Discovery* 33:3 (2006-07): 26-43; see especially 29-31.
13. *PK*, 411. Grene acknowledges that she and her children prepared the 'Index' in Marjorie Grene, 'Tacit Knowing: Grounds for a Revolution in Philosophy,' *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (October, 1977), 167.
14. See *PK*, 364. This is in the above noted discussion of 'three-storied knowing.' The context does suggest that Polanyi is thinking of living beings, including biologists, who do engage in actively comprehending other actively comprehending creatures. Earlier he discusses how comprehending involves commitment which can be graded from 'primordial' (or 'vegetative') to *primitive* (in an 'active-perceptive centre') to *responsible* commitments (found in 'the consciously deliberating person' [*PK*, 363]). Hence Polanyi contends 'biology is a responsible commitment which appraises other commitments' (*PK*, 363) and opens out seamlessly into that domain extending biology called 'ultrabiology' (*PK*, 363).
15. Polanyi's broader discussion of evolution and emergence does roll together a number of processes which he sees as parallel to each other and analogous to the process of tacit knowing:
I have described this process [the emergence of a living being from inanimate constituents] as a chance fluctuation which releases the action of certain self-sustaining operational principles. This results in the formation of two levels of existence: an upper level governed by physiology, and a subsidiary, lower level defined by physics and chemistry—the operations on the upper level being predicated on the emergence of an individual, whose interests they serve. In the course of anthropogenesis, individuality develops from beginnings of a purely vegetative character to successive stages of active, perceptive, and eventually responsible, personhood. This phylogenetic emergence is continuous—just as ontogenetic emergence clearly is. Hence the higher principles governing the emergent forms of evolution presumably gain control gradually of the evolving beings, in the same way as they gradually become more pronounced and predominant in the course of man's embryonic and infantile development (*PK* 394-395).
Ontogenetic emergence seems for Polanyi to be structurally akin to anthropogenesis or phylogenetic emergence (and Polanyi also discusses 'morphogenesis'). It is easy to see how figures like Marjorie Grene, as she came to be more deeply immersed in the details of modern biological study, came to find Polanyi's rather grand parallelism in Part IV to be an odd, off-putting platform from which to work with modern biologists.
I don't think however, that Grene is on the mark when she accuses Polanyi of making an 'effort to locate *homo sapiens* as the apex of evolution' ('The Personal and the Subjective,' *Tradition and Discovery: The Polanyi Society Periodical* 22:3 (1995-96): 14). I think Polanyi's effort is to suggest that biologists run away from the affirmation that human beings are extraordinary living comprehensive entities whose special vocation it is to know life and its kinship and the changing story of evolution. This story does lead to their own emergence, but it is open to further evolutionary history that may lead beyond the *homo sapiens*. Rather than arrogance, I see Polanyi's counsel as that of humility. Although she does not say it, I suspect that Grene thinks Polanyi's interest in human origins in Part IV of *PK* may be one more of Polanyi's 'theistic hints' incorporated in a set of lectures (i.e., the Gifford Lectures) with a particular charge concerned with natural theology. Grene seems to think that Part IV of *PK* slips into 'ontological dogmatism' (15), although she allows that after *PK* when Polanyi's theory of tacit knowing is more carefully worked out, that Polanyi's discussions of the 'ontological aspect' of tacit knowing in discussions of evolution articulate a more defensible position. What Grene most values is Polanyi's emphasis upon commitment (which she says must 'retain its precarious ontological position as the stance of a given embodied person, cast ephemerally into the flow of history, and pre- and post-history, self-obliged to obey a calling that takes him (her) beyond the confines of subjective preference' (15)).
16. Interestingly, Macmurray notes the 'crisis of the personal is the crisis of liberalism, which was an effort, however ambiguous, to subordinate the functional organisation of society to the personal life of its members' (*SA*, 30). He also notes that 'the decline of religious influence and of religious practice in our civilisation' marks 'a growing insensitivity to the personal aspects of life, and a growing indifference to personal values' (*SA*, 30).

17. J.H. Oldham found these chapters particularly intriguing and suggested to Polanyi that Macmurray's reading of Kant made Kant more like Polanyi: 'They contain much material that seems to bear on our discussions. Macmurray holds that Kant's work can be understood only in relation to the faith philosophy of Hamann, Herder and the Romantics generally. This has some resemblances to your position. I would like to understand what the resemblances and differences are' (J. H. Oldham letter to Michael Polanyi, May 19, 1958, in *The Papers of Michael Polanyi*, Box 15, Folder 5).
18. Like the above paragraph in this section, J.H. Oldham's insightful comments about Macmurray's books in relation to *Personal Knowledge* reach for ways to articulate some of the philosophical kinship between Polanyi and Macmurray and yet also put a finger on some general differences. Oldham speaks of a difference in the 'angle of approach' and the commonality of 'the fundamental existential attitude to the contemporary situation' as well as the common recognition that philosophic beliefs have historical consequences: 'A book that has in it something of the same temper and that might, from a somewhat different angle of approach to (sic) re-enforce your effort is John Macmurray's *The Self As Agent*. Whatever difference there may be on particular philosophical issues, the fundamental existential attitude to the contemporary situation seems to me to be the same. The attack is directed towards the same fundamental errors. There is in both books the same recognition of the intimate connection between philosophic beliefs and social consequences' (J. H. Oldham letter to Michael Polanyi, May 19, 1958, in *The Papers of Michael Polanyi*, Box 15, Folder 5). About *Persons in Relation*, Oldham several years later wrote a similar note: 'In spite of the great differences in the angle of approach and in the method of treatment I have the feeling that his central concern is very much akin to your own. I wonder whether you have any similar feeling. I find your mode of presentation more congenial and Macmurray annoys me at times by what seem to be over-simplifications. But I admire the clarity with which he formulated the fundamental issues which he wants to raise and the force with which he drives home his argument' (J. H. Oldham letter to Michael Polanyi, June 14, 1961, in *The Papers of Michael Polanyi*, Box 15, Folder 5).
19. Richard Gelwick, *The Way of Discovery: An Introduction To the Thought of Michael Polanyi* by (New York: OUP, 1977; Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2004): 30.
20. See the Syllabus of the Gifford Lectures, First Series; this language is used in the précis of Lecture 6. Box 33, Folder 1, Papers of Michael Polanyi, Department of Special Collections, University of Chicago Library.
21. Polanyi focuses on the kinship of living things and the incremental changes in living things over evolutionary history. Human agency may be different than generic agency, but it is in the same family. Macmurray seems to think it important sharply to distinguish animal behaviour and human action whereas Polanyi tends to look for commonalities. Macmurray warns against 'failing to distinguish categories which must not be blurred. We have to distinguish absolutely between acting from knowledge, and reacting to a stimulus' (SA, 167). Macmurray says 'in any reaction, the initiative of behaviour lies with the stimulus' (SA, 30). Macmurray seems to think 'knowledge' has very specific contours which fit with and undergird specific acts. For Polanyi all knowing is a performance.
22. As I suggest below, Polanyi does not draw a sharp line between the 'biological' and the 'social.' In fact, I don't think he believes such a line can be drawn.. The term 'bio-social' is not intended to imply that these realms are distinct. Whatever the 'basic biological' is or becomes develops in an environment and that is a human and 'natural' environment.
23. Comprehensive achievements may also sometimes be described as meaning. Meaning for human beings, in Polanyi's account, ultimately becomes articulate; articulate beings have an opportunity and a mandate to explore the unknown and understand the rich universe, using our sophisticated tools. But Polanyi insists also that the fact that 'all life is endowed with originality and originality of a higher order is but a magnified form of a universal biological adaptivity' (PK 124). Articulate meaning is an extension of the use of tacit powers found in the simplest life forms. What Polanyi, of course, wants to emphasise is the growth (or perhaps increasing depth) of human meaning and the way this entails the nurture of certain kinds of human responsiveness or responsibility, as human beings take up their various callings in interpretative communities nurturing the development of self-set standards.
24. I suspect that Polanyi might have trouble agreeing with Macmurray's claim that acting and thinking are 'ideal limits of personal experience' (SA 87); acting is the positive limit and thinking is the negative limit. For Macmurray, 'action is primary and concrete, and thought is secondary, abstract and derivative' (SA 89). For Polanyi, thinking is simply a particular kind of human skilful activity which is underlain by and dependent upon all kinds of other subsidiary skills.
25. See William Kelleher's interesting recent discussion in 'Respect and Empathy in the Social Science Writings of Michael Polanyi' in *Tradition and Discovery* 35:1 (2008-09): 8-32.
26. Macmurray's account is complex. Some elements I think Polanyi might have found very intriguing and parallel his own. For example, about the conflict between science and religion, Macmurray says the following:

What brought religion and science into conflict, and presented them as alternatives systems of belief, was the attempt of religious authorities to suppress scientific research in favour of a primitive cosmology and a Graeco-Roman philosophy. This religious stupidity compelled science to fight for its right to discover the truth against a religious obscurantism which fought to secure its own power as the arbiter of truth and right in all fields. The inevitable result was

the destruction of religious reality (*PR*, 216).

27. It should be noted that Macmurray's strategy is essentially what Polanyi also uses in his final co-authored book *Meaning*, a book that has divided Polanyi scholars. Indeed, Polanyi's focus in this book is very broad: he treats the spectrum of kinds of meaning and how to restore confidence in human efforts at making/discovering meaning in many (e.g.,

science, art and religion) cultural endeavours. With some justification, some have found tensions between *PK* and *Meaning*. Perhaps there are strong 'architectonic-driven' elements in the thought of not only Polanyi and Macmurray but all comprehensive thinkers.

**ERIC VOEGELIN'S IMMANENTISM:
A MAN AT ODDS WITH THE TRANSCENDENT?
PART II, CONTINUED FROM APPRAISAL, VOL 7, NO. 2**

Maben Walter Poirier

Abstract

My objective in this paper is to present an alternative interpretation of the thought of the renowned political philosopher Eric Voegelin (1901-1985). He has been understood by many of his most devoted followers as a classically based Christian thinker, and sometimes simply as a deeply spiritual person, who was critical of modernity for its abandonment of Christian-inspired political and social standards. In this article, I demonstrate that Voegelin was not only not a Christian in any sense of the term that is acceptable, but he was not a theist or even a deist. I argue rather that Voegelin was a modern thinker and an atheist, who, curiously, unlike a number of modern thinkers who are also atheists, rejected the idea of any kind of immanent or earthly fulfilment for mankind. Of course, any kind of transcendent fulfilment was also out of the question for him. I further argue that his seeming support for Christianity in his writings stemmed from his desire to use a modified or immanentised understanding of Christianity as the basis on which to erect a civil theology that would serve as a substitute for what he viewed as the contaminated civil theologies of the left and right that issued out of the Enlightenment era, and which, according to Voegelin, have proven to be so very devastating for political order and common civility in our time.

Key Words

Voegelin, immanentism, atheism, the sacred, civil theology, modernity.

I.

Let us now turn our attention to Voegelin's theory of consciousness. It is the key to understanding Voegelin's thought in general, and particularly as it relates to the issues that I have raised above. By way of a preliminary remark, it ought to be noted that Voegelin was both strangely sympathetic to and at odds with existential phenomenology.²⁵ (He would likely have described certain features of his thinking as examples of 'experiential' phenomenology, rather than 'existential' phenomenology.) We not only have his word for this. In addition to his critical assessment of Edmund Husserl's thought in his correspondence with his long-time friend Alfred Schütz—where he makes it patently clear that while originally he thought there was much to be admired

about Husserl's thinking, he came to realise that he was in disagreement with Husserl²⁶—we also have Voegelin's very own approach to understanding what is involved in thinking philosophically to guide us, an approach which has affinities with phenomenological thinking in general.

One of these affinities relates to how Voegelin understood philosophy. On more than one occasion, Voegelin reminded us that philosophy is not concerned primarily with the exploration of the architecture of our ideas and cerebral constructs, with a view to proving or disproving their referential character to something in some ideal world, or, in more modern times, with a view to saying something about the consistency or inconsistency of these ideas and cerebral constructs with one another. To put it simply, philosophy, for Voegelin, has nothing to do with the creation of a rationalised edifice of ideas and concepts. Rather, philosophy, for him, is primarily concerned with the exploration, articulation and elucidation of our experiential life as human beings. That is to say, Voegelin thought that philosophy is rooted in man's need to make sense of the life that he lives on a daily basis and not in the ideas that man happens to have in his mind and that he thinks about as he lives and goes about his day-to-day 'un-illuminated' and 'un-illuminable' affairs. In short, philosophy is intimately connected with the life that man lives as a human being, and not with the ideas that go through his mind as he lives a banal and monotonous life or existence. As Voegelin saw it, the problem with viewing philosophy as though it were about abstractions is that the ideas that man holds in his mind are two steps removed from their experiential origins. Between the experience and the idea is the pliable word which momentarily fixes the even more pliable human experience, which is really what philosophy seeks to illuminate. And so, philosophy must be as true—as is it possible to be true—to experience, and not to some abstract edifice of concepts or ideas.²⁷ In short, it must illuminate experience and not thought and thinking. In fact, 'thinking' and 'thought' is what we call the linguistic elucidation that does not trump experience. For Voegelin, the truth is that if thinking and thought trumps experience, it is ideology and not philosophy that wins out. Of course, this type of elucidation goes way beyond the merely empirical in the modern and positivist sense of the term, and Voegelin does not tire of reminding us of this too.

Now, one of the core elements of our experiential life as human beings that needs elucidation is man's experience of alienation, which is commonly expressed in our experience of being insufficient and inadequate, and, concomitant with that, in our driving *quest* to complete ourselves, i.e., to achieve fulfilment and wholeness, to become one with that elusive 'standard' against whom we measure ourselves. This quest is expressed and reflected in man's search for, and in his experience of, a more intimate relationship with completeness, however that is understood, or with what Voegelin called *the Ground*. This quest is, of course, synonymous with the effort we, as human beings, put into almost melting into *the Ground*, and, yet, fortunately, never quite succeeding. Like philosophy itself—with which it is intimately associated—man's *quest* for *the Ground*, for Voegelin, cannot be treated as if it were an enquiry into an idea that some of us happen to have, and have chosen to entertain, but which we could just as easily not have and choose not to entertain, and we would be none the worse for wear. That is to say, this *quest* is not an experience that some amongst us opt into on a whim, and can just as easily opt out of, if the fancy strikes us. Rather, it is a *quest* that is an identifier of us all as *persons*, and, whether we like it or not, the best that we can do to suppress the experience of questing is attempt to dismiss it from our explicit awareness (Polanyi), or, as Voegelin would say, eclipse it.²⁸ This is what most, if not all, of us indeed do to some extent and in some fashion or other—possibly with the exception of the saintly amongst us who seek to 'spiritualise' every minute and every second of their day—if only in order to get on with our daily material cares. But eclipsing the questing in this way does not eliminate our experience of questing for completeness and fulfilment. It only suspends our focal awareness of it for a while and buys us time so that we can get on with more mundane matters. The experience of questing always resurfaces, most of the time in deeply rewarding ways, but sometimes also, as Voegelin never fails to inform us, in the most contorted and unrecognisable of ways, causing us to suffer mildly, and sometimes severely, from various pathologies of the spirit.²⁹ So we had better deal with it straight-forwardly, according to Voegelin, and participate fully in the quest, not because it is a quest that can be satisfied in the here-and-now, because it cannot be quenched, neither in the here-and-now nor in the beyond,³⁰ but because our questing marks us off as a human being, and leads us to live a more fully human life.

To make things more explicit still, the expression '*the Ground*' is also the name that Voegelin gives to one pole in the human bi-polar experiential complex

that is consciousness which includes both *man* and *the Ground*. As Voegelin points out umpteenth times, 'man' constitutes one pole in the experiential complex in question, and 'the Ground' with whom man is in contact searchingly and 'tensionally' the other pole.³¹ This 'Ground' is experienced by us as being beyond us, and it is this Beyondness that we know as the reference point against 'whom' we assess our actions and ourselves. It is the measure against whom we evaluate all that we do, say, and, in the end, are.³² In our daily lives, we speak of this 'Beyond,' this Measure, this Pole, in the experiential complex in a multiplicity of ways, according to Voegelin. It is Yahweh for some, God, Dieu, Deo for others. It is Allah for still many more, and, for Plato, it was the Divine Sophon. Of course, it has to be remembered that, from Voegelin's point of view, the *Ground* is, like the quest for it, also not an idea or a concept that some human beings happen to have, while other human beings do not, or could as easily not have, if they have had it in the past. Were this so, it would imply that the *Ground* is not rooted in our experiential life, but is something that we select and deselect at will. The truth is that we do not choose or refuse to choose it at will. Moreover, it would imply that man has identity and meaning as a human being independent of the tension with the *Ground*, and this too is not so, according to Voegelin. Man's identity is relational, and the pole that we call *man* has no identity in the absence of any tension with the pole we call *Ground*, any more than the pole *Ground* has any identity in the absence of any tension with the pole *man*.

It has further to be noted that this experiential complex, and the tension resulting from it, is a troubling one for man, for it propels him to change his way of living. It insistently invites him to abide by norms that are in conformity with the exigencies that the man pole experiences as set by the Ground pole in the complex. Plato draws attention to this, as Voegelin would have it, when he speaks of man's need to 'turn himself around' (*périagogé*), i.e., to change his way of life, 'to undergo conversion' in response to what he experiences as the exigencies set by the complex. (Of course, Plato does not speak of 'exigencies set by the complex.' This is Voegelin's language. But Plato, according to Voegelin, nonetheless, expresses the same experiential structure.) It is also troubling in another way, Voegelin informs us. It is troubling in the sense that it often causes many erroneously to want to hypostatise the poles of the tension, and to speak of *man* and the *Ground*, as if the *man* pole could exist independently of the *Ground* pole, and the *Ground* pole independently of the *man* pole. The truth, however, as I mentioned above and as Voegelin

himself points out repeatedly, is that neither pole, the *Ground* pole and the *man* pole, can exist independently of one another, which is what is implied by 'hypostatizing the poles.' This is what it means to speak of man as a relational being. Now, this latter remark by Voegelin is deeply revealing, since it goes some way towards demonstrating that Voegelin was a deeply modern thinker, that is to say, a thinker who did not leave open the question of the existence of the Transcendent as a reality independent of human subject's consciousness. The Transcendent, the *Ground*, can be, for Voegelin, nothing more than a function of the structure of consciousness, which is who *man* is as well. In short, the structure of consciousness brings the *Ground* (who is otherwise known as God, the Transcendent One) and *man* into being for him whom we conventionally call 'man.'³³

From here, Voegelin goes on to explain that his understanding of these matters is descriptive of the structures in consciousness of all of humanity and most especially of the great sages of the past. This, for example, is the essence of the message of the Buddha, of the Hebrew prophets, of Socrates, and even of Jesus Himself. All of these sages had no choice but to operate within the confines set by the structure in human consciousness described above, and particularly in view of the fact that they also possessed deeply articulated consciousnesses. It was from within this type of experiential or existential framework that each learned of and accepted his calling, which might be characterised as an 'encounter' of sorts with that part of their respective consciousnesses called *the Ground*.³⁴ Indeed, so transformed by his initial encounter with the pole that is *the Ground* was each of these sages that each spent whatever was left of his life after his initial encounter attempting to convey to the rest of mankind the overwhelming satisfaction that descended upon him as a result of his knowing that he was in some type of relationship with 'the Ground,' as well as the implications of his particular encounter with what he felt was ultimacy, not only for himself, but also for all mankind.

This leads Voegelin to speak about the deeply rooted *equivalences* amongst the encounter experiences, as well as amongst the recommended ways of being that flow from the Buddha, the Hebrew prophets, Socrates, and Jesus the Messiah. Indeed, so deep are these equivalences for Voegelin, that he is led to affirm that although each one of these sages may appear superficially to be saying something different from his fellow sages, the truth is that, apart from the culturally based differences, each differs in what he is saying only with respect to the degree of articulateness and differentiation

contained in his understanding of the experience of *the Ground* and its implications. In short, because they are all operating with the same structures in consciousness, if one excepts culture, only the analytical capacities of the sages vary, and, as a result, each sage says more or less analogous things. It is true that some are more differentiated in their expression of this analogousness, and, thus, more illuminating than are others, but fundamentally, they are saying the same sort of thing.³⁵

Now, so fundamental a matter has consequences, according to Voegelin, and one of these consequences relates to the whole question of the relationship of reason to revelation, or of Athens to Jerusalem, as others would have it. Despite the inclination that some may have to want to distinguish between philosophy and revelation, it is of paramount importance, Voegelin warns us, that, based on his theory of consciousness, we do not draw this distinction, for it is a completely meaningless one. Whether we are speaking of reason or revelation, both have their origins in the structures of man's consciousness, and in the attempts that all men make, and particularly that sages make, to elucidate the driving force behind their lives and their thought. In short, man is the source of both reason (philosophy) and revelation (religion). As a result, philosophy, or reason, Voegelin very explicitly tells us, is what might be referred to as the revelation of the Greeks, and revelation is what might be seen as the philosophy of the Hebrews and the Christians, and presumably the Muslim world as well. (With reference to this point, see Voegelin's article 'The Gospel and Culture' in the location mentioned in endnote 37.) In short, the difference between philosophy and religion is a stylistic one, and not a difference based on origin. It is simply not so that reason originates with man and revelation with God. Both reason and revelation originate with the being we *conventionally call* 'man,' and Aquinas, amongst others, was wrong in arguing that philosophy is the product of human reasonableness and rationality, whereas revelation is given to man by God to supplement the inadequacies of human rationality as regards matters transcendent. This simply cannot be, given that '[o]ne can not, . . . hypostatize [...] the [god pole] ... , into a god about whom we know something, short of that tension; and [one] cannot hypostatize man into an immanent entity, short of that tension in which man experiences himself as man in the tension—that is his existential reality.'³⁶ In other words, God—He Who has long been mistakenly seen as being Wholly Other, but Who is obviously not Wholly Other—cannot, and, hence, never did, reveal Himself to man; only the *Ground*, who 'has its being as a function of the

experiencing consciousness we conventionally call 'man,' can 'reveal' itself to man. Of course, this is not revelation *qua* revelation, no matter how Voegelin wants to interpret it. *It is fundamentally one dimension of the human spirit, experienced as other, speaking to another dimension of that same spirit, experienced as self.* The point here is that Voegelin's theory of consciousness gives rise to a Twentieth Century expression of 'the philosophy of the non-event'—which Massimo Borghesi speaks of in a different context—wherein revelation, understood in the traditional sense, is made out to be 'a non-event,' which robs revelation of its essence as revelation (which robbery is, of course, itself also a non-event), and reduces it to nothing more than a different style of human reasoning, where reasoning is understood not in the Enlightenment sense, but in the existential phenomenological sense.³⁷

Now, as we will see, this occasions a number of questions on a wide range of levels. Simply in terms of Voegelin's project, it causes one seriously to question the extent to which Voegelin can make sense of the life and thought of Plato, whom he held in such high regard, and with whom he is so often associated by both his followers and his opponents. For instance, from the perspective of Voegelin's theory of consciousness, Plato can not be read as if he were a philosopher who was concerned with exploring matters eternal and transcendent, which is the orthodox reading of Plato. Instead, Plato has to be read as a philosopher *qua* immanentist thinker and mundane prophet—which is a very different sort of being from who the philosopher was for the ancient Greeks—who is concerned with rationally revealing and elucidating man's immanent experiential life. But is this really who Plato was, and is it truly what he was all about? Is Voegelin getting Plato right when he suggests this? We ask these questions because we sense that Voegelin, *warranted only by a set of deeply held modern concerns mostly having to do with his understanding of and opposition to ideological thinking*, is introducing us to a major revision in the way we are to approach the study of Plato, not to mention in the way we will have to approach the reading of all other ancient, mediaeval and early modern thinkers.

Also notice here that because of his theory of consciousness, and his understanding of the relationship of reason to revelation that follows directly therefrom, Voegelin has also to argue that there can be no such thing as revelation *qua* revelation, that is to say, revelation understood in the traditional sense, i.e., God-initiated interventions into history. All that we refer to as revelation has to have

man as its origin; and so there is no substantial difference between 'immanent' revelation and rational elucidation. Allowing for stylistic differences, one is the other. As for revelation, understood in the traditional sense, it simply does not figure anywhere in Plato's, or, for that matter, in anyone else's thinking, according to Voegelin. And why does it not figure in Plato's thinking? It does not figure there because Voegelin's thinking cannot make sense of revelation understood in the traditional manner, and it is his belief that Plato would not have made sense of it either. Observe that, according to Voegelin, Plato, but not only Plato, all true sages, prophets, and thinkers since the beginning of recorded time, have reasoned in this immanentist manner, and it was solely the delusional thinking of some of the secondary religious leaders amongst us which foisted upon us dogmatic beliefs, and very specifically the dogmatic belief that there was such a thing a revelation, and that God spoke and speaks to and with mankind.

But more can be said here. We have to ask ourselves, was Plato really someone who did not believe in the independent existence of *man* and the *Ground* (the Real), i.e., did he really not believe in the independent existence of the Sophon, as Voegelin suggests? Did Socrates and Plato really think that the Divine Sophon and man were intra-personal entities constituted by the structure of human consciousness? In short, did Plato really believe that the Divine Sophon and man were nothing more than subject based, i.e., man based, experiences that had no reference points in the world beyond the structure of man's consciousness? Did Socrates really go to his death in order to defend man's right to explore his experience of the Ground, an entity which he knew to originate in the structure of man's consciousness? Does a man knowingly sacrifice his life in order to have affirmed an experience that has his consciousness as its origin? Can we really credit this? In fact, when the question is posed this way, does the answer not suggest itself? Where is the evidence for this in Plato? One cannot help wondering if Voegelin has lost control of his legendary capacity to read the human *psyché*. Would it not be more accurate to say that in a manner that is broadly in accord with the speculation of the Anglo-Hungarian physical chemist and philosopher Michael Polanyi—a modern Plato scholar with whom Voegelin is frequently compared—Plato did believe that human beings are, through contemplation, capable of making contact with the Real and with an order that transcends the self, and, hence, for Plato, there is a Reality that is symbolised by the expression 'Divine Sophon,' a Reality that may be known in and through a

contemplative human consciousness, but also a Reality that exists independently of it and is not the consequence of anything like hypostatisation, a Reality that chooses when to reveal itself to the *contemplative* person—no human can, through manipulation and technique, i.e., through his will-power, force the Real to speak³⁸—and a Reality to Whom man owes commitment and loyalty in some sense?³⁹

Voegelin's approach also obliges one to question the extent to which he can make sense of Judaism and Islam, inasmuch as both religions hold that the Divine, Who exists apart from man, reveals Himself to man through the Hebrew prophets in the case of Judaism, and via the Hebrew prophets, Jesus and Mohammed in the case of Islam. The point here is that in their dealings with Yahweh, the Hebrew prophets clearly did not understand themselves to be exploring aspects of their consciousness or experiential complex. The fact is that they would not have understood what that meant—any more than Plato would have—and, if they had, they would have been horrified by its implications. They understood themselves to be involved in an activity that led them to transcend their respective *selves*, and they knew themselves to be in some sort of contact with what they understood to be *Wholly Other*, as it existed independently of their *selves*. *Mutatis mutandis* for Islam. As regards orthodox Christianity, Voegelin's thesis is even more problematical than it is for either the Jews or the Muslims. If it is imaginable, it makes less sense of Christianity than it does of Judaism or Islam.⁴⁰

Orthodox Christianity views Jesus as Someone Who is a great deal more than a famous prophet or sage engaged in the exploration of the dimensions of His experiential complex. In fact, for the orthodox Christian, Jesus is more than who a prophet is for the Hebrews and the Muslims, and revelation involves much more than a man's intra-personal 'encounter' with the Voegelinian *Ground*. The orthodox Christian holds that God Himself, in the person of Jesus, enters into man's world, into history, and reveals Himself to mankind in history, not through some intermediary, as is the case with the Hebrews and the Muslims, but directly, in His Person, and in doing so, He both validates and redeems that history and the singularity of a human life that exists within it in a manner that goes way beyond whatever validity it may achieve as a result of man's acknowledging Him from afar as a being who is *Wholly Other*, and infinitely more than as a result of man's participation in experiential *equivalences* across cultures and across ages. Indeed, the value that a human life has for the orthodox Christian is the consequence of God's having honoured it by assuming its

corporeality, and is not the consequence of man's potential for contacting that pole in the structure of human consciousness called *the Ground*. The point here is that in the orthodox Christian context, it is nothing less than the specificities and the singularities of a human life that are redeemed as a result of God's deigning to become a man. Of course, what this means is that Voegelin's theory of consciousness, not only cannot do justice to Plato's claims and to the claims of the Jews and the Muslims—although it maybe does a slightly better job of coming to some sort of understanding of both Judaism and Islam than it does of orthodox Christianity—the fact is that it cannot begin to grasp the extraordinary character of the world of the orthodox Christian. Orthodox Christians claim that the *Wholly Other* revealed Himself to man in history in a real and singularly spectacular and totally unforeseeable, uncontrollable and humanly unsanctioned way at the time of the Incarnation—in a way that has no parallel, i.e., no equivalence, in history—and that thereby He elevated the singularity of every human being to a level that would have been incomprehensible before that time, and is almost not comprehensible after it. Henceforth, a human being is not worthy because he or she participates noetically in a subject-based, i.e., man based, experience of orderliness and meaning that is the essence of worthiness since time immemorial, but he or she is worthy because a Being no less than the Almighty Himself chose to become human and participate in man's way of being, and in His doing so, every man's way of being is both validated, honoured and redeemed. But, of course, Voegelin's theory of consciousness does not permit him to make sense of this understanding of the origin of human dignity, for it precludes from the beginning the possibility that something like this can and *might have* happened, let alone be the source of human dignity and worth. In fact, it is because of this original preclusion that Voegelin has to represent the presence of the Transcendent in time as a product of dogmatic thinking. Dogmatic thinking, for Voegelin, is not solely thinking that expresses a congealing of a person's experiential life.⁴¹ It is, first and foremost, thinking that is open to the possibility that man can be in contact with the Transcendent, which is deemed by Voegelin to be an impossibility. This is the general rubric under which all of these problems associated with dogma and dogmatism fall. In fact, a close reading of Voegelin voluminous writings will show that to the extent to which religion prescriptions can be seen to have a human and immanent origin, then they are lauded. However, if they cannot be said to have an immanent origin, or cannot be provided with one, but are clearly said to have an origin that is

Transcendent, then they are seen as dogmatic, potentially ideological and dangerous, and in the end, undeserving of our attention except at artefacts of a misguided consciousness. Needless to say, this has to have a very important bearing on the thought of one whose intention it was to illuminate the Christian experience. And so, can Voegelin accurately represent orthodox Christianity—which was one of the things he set out to do—if he insists on speaking this immanentist language? It would appear that the answer to this question is unambiguous. It is 'no.'

If I might, at this point, make a tangential and deeply relevant remark about Voegelin and dogma, now that we have a sense of the *étendu* of Voegelin's theory of consciousness; Voegelin's difficulties with dogma are somewhat more complicated than what I was able to convey earlier, in Part I. Voegelin's opposition to 'dogma' (which is a synonym for 'faith-based knowledge') is very much affiliated with what we have come to recognise as our contemporary and deeply modern hubris, that is to say, with our inability to accept the view that *God intervenes in the world of human affairs at His discretion, and not ours*. Man does not have a say in approving and controlling God's coming into the world of men. Man does not manage the *if*, the *when* and the *how* God will make his appearance amongst us. But this 'desire to manage' the *if*, the *when* and the *how* is ultimately what is behind the modern world's and Voegelin's denigration of dogma and revelation *qua* revelation. He, like many of our contemporaries, is trying to manage the *if*, the *when* and the *how* of Plato, the Jews, the Muslims and the Christians, with a view presumably to suppressing the entire issue of who is in charge so that, in the end, it entirely drops out of sight. And why might Voegelin want the question of *who is in charge* to drop out of sight? Could it be because he sees this question as being at the origin of all modern ideological thinking?

We need to remind ourselves here that modern man is driven by the will to power and the belief that it is his duty to control and take charge of all aspects of *his* world.⁴² In practice, what this means is that revelations that are unsanctioned by man, i.e., that do not originate with man, but with a seeming capriciousness on the part of a doubtfully existing Transcendent, are not welcomed affairs amongst modern men. These interventions smack too much of the irrational and uncontrollable, the bane of all modern politicians who fear disruptions. How dare this Transcendent, whose existence is questionable, challenge or contest modern man's will to control by engaging in bogus and unscheduled interventions into man's world, interventions which have the effect of disrupting man's plans? To be precise, how dare God

reveal Himself—*however that revealing is conceived*—without being invited to do so? How dare He 'crash' this party, which modern man views as *man's* party? What I am proposing here is that Voegelin's opposition to dogma and faith is not so much an opposition to dogmatism as such, although it masquerades as this, and Voegelin himself may even have thought that it was, in part, so. Rather, Voegelin's attack on dogma originates in his modern and deep-seated affinity for immanent explanations. The fact is that like most modern people, Voegelin is uncomfortable with man's creaturely being, which translates into his need to oppose the failure on the part of the Transcendent to ask for man's permission to intervene into the world of human affairs, so that ultimately it might be said of the interventions that are the Jewish and Muslim revelations, and that is the Christian Incarnation, that they were controlled and sanctioned by man. Man sets the hour, the minute, the second of his salvation. He saves himself. (Have a thought for Voegelin's interpretation of 'the saving tale' at the end of Plato's *Republic*.) In short, Jesus the Messiah's (as opposed to Jesus, the man) coming into the world was an unsanctioned event—unsanctioned by nature, by rationality and by man—and so it has to be interpreted as a non-event, i.e., Jesus is not God incarnate, he is only a man. This is why the Arians were, broadly speaking, right. This is why Voegelin identifies himself, when pressed, as a pre-Nicene Christian. However, since some amongst us insist on speaking about this non-event as if it were an event, i.e., Jesus is God and Man, then they who speak this way have to be seen as propagating dogma and charged with being unrealistic, i.e., unscientific, and hence, dogmatic. As a result, the Incarnation becomes dogma for Voegelin, something that is not real because it is not endorsed by nature's order and by man.

We now also have a much clearer understanding of why Voegelin has to fuse reason (philosophy) and revelation (religion), and why he has to argue, unlike Aquinas, that the distinction between the two is essentially stylistic, as he informs us in his article 'The Gospel and Culture' (see endnote no. 37). The fact is that, for Voegelin, revelation cannot be other than the Hebrew and Christian version of what philosophy is for the Greeks, viz., the exercise of human reason in the exploration of mankind's experiential life, because it cannot have anything to do with a Divinely initiated intervention into the world of man, and this for two reasons. One, for a reason that Voegelin does not specify, but that he appears to hold, namely, there is no God, and even if there is, He cannot act to suspend the laws of nature (see Part I, endnote no. 24). Hence, revelation,

understood in the traditional sense, revelation *qua* revelation, has never taken place *because, of necessity, it cannot take place given that there is no one to do the revealing*. Hence, it has to be the analogue of philosophy for the Hebrews, the Christians and Muslims. Two, were revelation *qua* revelation, that is, revelation as understood by the Hebrews, the Christians and the Muslim to take place, it would signify that man is off-centre (*ex-centric*) and ultimately not in complete *control* over his world; but (modern) man, of course, cannot be off-centre in this way. He cannot see himself as a creature and not as a creator. He has to see himself as someone who is at the centre of things and in total control, since this is part of the essence of what it means to be a (modern) person. Revelation, therefore, has to be a form of immanentist reasoning, and hence an expression of the structure of consciousness. And if it is not that, then it is of necessity *dogmatic* thinking, and, hence, it is not about something that is real, where 'real' is understood in the modern sense.⁴³

Turning our attention now to those things that Voegelin refers to as 'experiential equivalences'—key features of Voegelin's theory of consciousness—we will gain an insight into the essence of his philosophy of history, i.e., something that he is often said not to have had by some scholars.⁴⁴ Though very much a modern thinker in most respects—as I have sought to show in the previous pages—history, according to Voegelin, is not composed of a logical procession of periods, phases or eras which culminate in some kind of utopian or idyllic *dénouement*, or its opposite, as is the case with a great many modern thinkers. Nor does history end, for Voegelin, in any kind of faith based *dénouement* either in this world or in the world to come. The point is that in Voegelin's estimation there is no technological or other utopia in man's future, no communist phase in history where people will read a book in the morning, fish or play games in the afternoon and lounge about in the evening discussing the finer points in life, no thousand year Reich where the racially acceptable worthies will know nothing but pleasure, the racially damned having been dispatched long ago. In short, Voegelin tells us that there will be no 'city of the sun,' no heaven on earth, indeed, no heaven at all, in man's future. Rather, history is, throughout its course, a great repetitive undertaking wherein man's experientially-based revelatory insights into the human condition, that are always characteristic of a particular moment in time in terms of the character of their explicitness, have repeatedly to be discovered anew and elaborated upon by man in order for them to exhibit their freshness and their

revelatory character, otherwise they become routinised and stale. These are the highest orders of meaning with which a human being will be acquainted. As for discovering the truth in the world to come, there is not point to discussing this, since there is no life after death and there is no world to come. And what is most troubling of all is the fact that Voegelin accepts that there is no absolute standard against which to measure the truth content of what we humans characterise as 'insights' or 'losses of insight' into our condition. Rather, what there is, is a standard that is very much a relative one which has to do with the extent of articulation or differentiation of the insight at the experiential level. A more articulated experiential insight is felt by man as a gain because it draws out into explicitness and light a dimension of man's being and identity that he experiences as less present in a less well articulated experience or insight, or perhaps not at all present under highly routinised and compacted conditions of living. And yet, the fact that there is this sort of repetitiveness and uncertainty in our lives as human beings ought not to lead us to despair over our inability to attain enlightenment, for there have been, and there will always be, what we might provisionally speak of as spectacular breakthroughs into what we subjectively discern as deep meaningfulness. These breakthroughs will give us great satisfaction, for though they are wholly unpredictable in their specifics prior to their occurring, they bring deep meaning into our lives, at least, until they become routinised. Late Hellenic times presented our forebears, and continues to present us today, with just such an occasion as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle caused a breakthrough of monumental proportions to take place, indeed, a breakthrough that led to the founding of the occidental intellect from which we today still gain great benefit—and there were a number of other occasions in Jewish pre-Christian history when routinised religious thinking was momentarily replaced by deep experiential insights into the human condition which had the effect of elevating the religious discourse of the Hebrews to new heights. And, of course, the most spectacular occasion of all for the occidental world was when the message conveyed by the birth, life and death of the one called Jesus was understood to be the moral standard against which all human action and thought was henceforth to be measured. In fact, this was, according to Voegelin, the most marking occasion *to date* in the entire history of emerging meaningfulness. But, sadly, with the passage of time, all of these breakthroughs get reify and grow stale, if they have not done so already, including the Christian breakthrough, and the whole quest for

experientially-based meaning has to begin anew, argues Voegelin. A new Buddha, a new Isaiah, a new Socrates, and a new Jesus, will, if our world lasts long enough, inevitably stand before their respective contemporaries to proclaim a new and more vital meaningfulness than whatever is the then prevailing routinised orthodoxy, and presumably also more vital than whatever they happen to know of all that has come before. And these new sages will also be, in some sense, credited for a time, perhaps even a very long period of time. However, in the very long run, they too will go the way of all previous efforts of the same sort. Their messages too will become stale and clichéd, and in the end have to be reshaped in order to meet new human exigencies. And, in the final days, when time itself has been exhausted, all that mankind will have to look back upon will be a long trail of now tired practices punctuated by periods of high brilliancy, which inevitably grow musty, as time itself comes to an end. At this point in time, man will come to recognise the fatuous but inevitable character of his quest for meaning during his long journey through the ages. Indeed, it will be in this recognition that wisdom will be seen to reside, a wisdom which, with a little judiciousness, we can have now. This is what Voegelin has in mind when he speaks of 'experiential equivalences,' 'equivalences' at an experiential level which, when properly understood, give to mythic illuminations a meaningfulness of short duration.⁴⁵

A number of points of interest flow from all of this. Let us focus our attention on just one. No religion, whether it be a so-called 'revealed religion' or not, is 'the best' at exposing the true meaning of it all for mankind. All religions—revealed and unrevealed—are on a par with one another when it is a matter of exploring meaning, except for the degree of their respective articulations and refined understandings of man's experiential life. In fact, some revealed religions may be less capable than philosophy at shedding light on man's quest for meaning inasmuch as they are more inclined to succumb to dogma and dogmatic thinking—which is synonymous with the hardening of our experiential life and the end of our searching—something that no true philosophy (a philosophy that does not become an ideology) ever engages in.

Here, one cannot help but notice that Voegelin does not hold much store in the belief that Christianity, or any other revealed religion, constitutes a dispensation of sorts, that is, a dispensation that exempts mankind from having to repeat endlessly its search for meaning. There is no end to man's radical searching, not even if we believe that God Himself entered into history and ended the search by providing us with *the* answer.

The truth is that Christians are delusional in thinking that Christ provided the answer to man's questing, and thus ended this radical searching. The searching cannot be ended in this way, in part because the searching is a central element of who we are as human beings. And so, Christianity is simply not 'a new dispensation,' for no one can be dispensed from having to quest, not even the Christian.⁴⁶ In short, there is no B.C. followed by A.D. There was no ancient quest that culminated with an ancient answer coming into history from the 'outside' at the time of Christ's Incarnation, as Christians hold. Nor can there be an answer to our questing that arises from within history, as many modern thinkers would contend. This last contention is but a sick parody of Christianity. All is one, i.e., all is questing, from the beginning of time until the end of time. Mankind has and will throughout history continue to live life under the same exigencies that prevailed at the start, namely, the presence of uncertainty and the need to search, but never find in any absolute sense. These are exigencies that oblige man to engage anew in the quest for meaning when things get routinised and lose their capacity to invigorate. But in the end, it is all for nothing. It is at this point in the exploration of what Voegelin has to say that one dearly wished that Voegelin's Christian supporters were correct in their claims about Voegelin's spirituality, but for the reasons proffered here one cannot see how they can be.

2.

In summation, I want to say that I am well aware that a much more extensive treatment of the issues raised in this piece is required, and that I have only explored the surface of some the questions involved. In addition, I also want to emphasise that throughout this piece, my point has not been to argue that Voegelin is hostile to religion in the manner of the great majority of modern Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thinkers, or that he speaks disparagingly of religion in general and of Christianity in particular. Quite the contrary is true, and, I think, this is very likely the reason why so many misread him on religion and believe him to have been a deeply spiritual person. Rather, my point has been to show that despite his not being a spiritual or religious person, indeed, despite his being an atheist by the standards of any commonsensical understanding of the term *atheist*, Voegelin was remarkably well disposed towards religion and even Christianity, *but only inasmuch as religion and Christianity are both understood to be entirely immanent phenomena* and two of the most civilising and sophisticated expressions of the structure of consciousness in these brutal and murderous days. In

short, Voegelin knew and was able to make sense of the great positive contributions that religion and Christianity made to human well-being over the millennia, and, unlike the majority of contemporary atheists, he was not about to discard completely religion *as a civil theology* over the 'small' issue of whether it was about the revelation of regions transcendent or only about the exploration of regions immanent. He would rearticulate the history of religion and particularly of Christianity so as to represent it an entirely immanent enterprise—which is what it always was in any case, according to him—and thereby show that with 'minor' modifications to our mistaken traditional understanding of religion, all of which modifications would be consistent with modern thinking, religion and Christianity could continue to contribute to human happiness, political stability and peace. This, it has to be stated, was not an insignificant effort on Voegelin part, particularly when one takes into consideration the subtle shifts in meaning that Voegelin discreetly introduced into his new formulation of Christianity, and all of this was done in such a fashion as not to draw the attention of the orthodox adherents of any faith. In fact, it has to be acknowledged that this was an effort worthy of great admiration, for it could have been otherwise if the full significance of this re-thinking of Christianity had become immediately manifest. In fact, this was the sort of effort that could only be successful if it were undertaken by a person in possession of great *phronesis*. But, having said this, we must not make light of the issues at play here either. This great feat does not make of Voegelin a great religious or Christian thinker. *Rather, the case is that he ends up being a great pragmatic and prudential thinker who converts religion, and more specifically Christianity, into a civil theology, to be used in support of political objectives, namely, the realisation of political order through the deployment of a minimum amount of violence and force.*

How does this repositioning of Voegelin in the western intellectual tradition affect our understanding of Voegelin's insight into the predicament that is modernity? Nothing more than a hint at a possible answer can be offered in a paper that is already too long. It is imperative for us to understand that Voegelin is not the thinker who will reacquaint us with the proper balance between the world immanent and the world transcendent. Nor is he someone who will reintroduce us to our Christian religious heritage, that great heritage that was at the centre of the occidental world for two thousand years, . . . no, more than that, that shaped the occidental human being. In fact, the contrary is the

case. If we read Voegelin uncritically, we will come away knowing less about that heritage than we ought to, and what we will learn from him sadly will be of questionable correctness. On the other hand, if we bring appropriately critical faculties to bear in our reading of Voegelin, we will be amazed by what we discover, and our ability to see into the predicament that is modernity for ourselves, will, in no small measure, be attributable to our having had to wrestle with the thought of this great master and genius who was Voegelin.

I am well aware that these are both serious criticism and high praise for this truly great man, who, as he said in his work *The New Science of Politics*, set out to found his science of society on the self-understanding of the community that was at hand. However, as I have attempted to show, I believe he ended by doing nothing of the sort.⁴⁷ Instead, he invented a social and psychic order that never quite existed in the way that he described.

This gives rise to a very important question which demands to be answered, but which will not be answered here. It is this. What is there about the nature of modernity that renders it able to waylay and, in the end, overwhelm the thinking of one of the very important scholars of the last century? Eric Voegelin was certainly not an inattentive person. Nor was he even a person of significant ability. He was much more than that. He was and is one of the great thinkers of the modern era, who set out to demonstrate that the foundations on which a modern way of being rests are fundamentally hostile to man, and that, as a consequence, we have no choice but, in some sense, to go to war with modernity. However, when all was said and done, what happened was that this great man fell under the sway of the very modernity that he initially set out to defeat. Why? What happened? And if this can happen to Voegelin, is there hope for the rest of us?

By way of a preliminary effort to answer these last questions, we, to some degree, have to take into account the era within which Voegelin lived, and the fact that this deeply intelligent man had a front-row seat on the history of the Twentieth Century, the most violent century thus far in all of recorded history. He was well acquainted with the rise of the Soviet Union, and particularly with the actions of the 'proletariat's heroes' during the vilest days of the late 1920s and into the '30s. He had a first hand knowledge of the rise of Hitler and Nazism in the 1920s and '30s. He experienced the conquest of much of Europe and of the annexation of Austria (the *Anschluss*) to form the Greater German Reich, and he knew what that involved. He knew or had read of Hitler's plans for the conquered peoples. He very likely was aware of the Armenian genocide by

the Turks which took place in the early years of the Twentieth Century. He knew of the similar developments in the Far East, and he certainly knew of the wilful suffering and inhumanity that all of this had caused. Most importantly, Voegelin was deeply cognisant of the nature of the intellectual gymnastics, not to say, what he would eventually characterise as the 'pathological thinking,' that had brought all of this about. In short, Voegelin knew of and was shocked by the spiritual (i.e., psychic) diseases of the modern era, and he needed to make sense of these in order to help all of us overcome what he saw as the worse consequences of the general pathology that is modernity. And so, Voegelin set out in the second half of the 1940s—which was, of course, almost immediately after the Second World War—to diagnose the predicament that is at the centre of the modern era, and era which, according to mainstream thinking, ought to be the epitome of enlightenment, but which, in fact, is at times something that verges on being a form of perversity and evil on a scale never before seen. As a means of completing this diagnosis, Voegelin gave himself the task of re-conceptualising and rewriting the entire history of occidental thinking, starting at the beginning, from within his understanding of what would be an appropriate existential and phenomenological perspective. Specifically, he would reassert the primacy of the *experiential*, over the conceptual and ideational, in the lives of men, in the belief, no doubt, that this was the best way to avoid dogmatic and ideological thinking. According to him, this was something that had been sorely neglected since antiquity. He would, in addition, reacquaint us with the *experience* of the transcendent, a subject-based experience, he estimated, that had brought order and meaning into pre-modern lives. And finally, he would break the hold that dogmatic, ideological and millenarian thinking has over modern man, and thereby teach modern man that the essence of wisdom resides in man's, and particularly modern man's, acceptance of his earth-bound condition. Clearly, there was something terribly noble about all of this, for, to his very great credit, we have to recognise that he never succumbed to the mid-century temptations his few peers yielded to with alacrity. Here was undeniably a truly great and honourable man; but he was not, I contend, the person that some of his followers believe him to have been.

Dept of Political Science,
Concordia University, Montreal.
poirmw@alcor.concordia.ca

Notes

25. It should be observed here that there is a world of difference between the type of phenomenological descriptiveness associated with the thought of Aristotle, for example (although Aristotle, of course, would never have used the word "phenomenology" to speak of his descriptive approach), and the existential phenomenological descriptiveness of Voegelin. Aristotle saw no radical discontinuity between his descriptions of the order that he knew experientially and the world beyond his subject consciousness. He believed that with his descriptions, he was describing the order that transcended his subjectivity. In short, he saw no radical epistemic break between knowing what modern Kantian and post-Kantian thinkers would characterise as the phenomenal order (i.e., the world of sense and experiential knowledge) and knowing the noumenal order. Of course, this is far from being the case with modern existential phenomenology and phenomenologists. The point I am making here is that Voegelin's phenomenological approach is based in the modern era, and very explicitly on aspects of the thinking of Husserl. As such, Voegelin's descriptive approach is one that applies only to the phenomenal order, and he is of the belief, it seems, that either there is no noumenal order, or if there is a noumenal order, then it is wholly ineffable, i.e., beyond man's capacity to speak about in an intelligible way. At best, the noumenal order is a world apart from the world in which human beings live and know, and, at worse, it does not exist. As we will see in the course of our exploration of these matters, Voegelin seems to favour the latter stance, at least as regards "the Ground," although, it is true that he occasionally appears not to want to force to the surface (make explicit) the issue of whether the noumenal order is or is not.
26. See Eric Voegelin, *Anamnesis*, Translated and edited by Gerhardt Niemeyer (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 1978), pp. 14-35. See also Gregor Sebba, 'Prelude and Variations on the Theme of Eric Voegelin,' in *Eric Voegelin's Thought: A Critical Appraisal*, Edited with an Introduction by Ellis Sandoz (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1982) pp. 17-20.
27. Voegelin's relationship to subjective idealism is a complex one, and cannot be discussed at length here. Suffice it to say that while he is certainly critical of subjective idealism, it is not its subjectivism that troubles him most. It is the idealism that poses a problem for him. In truth, he is quite at home with subjectivism, provided it is experientially focussed and not ideationally focussed.
28. Note that ideological thinking in all of its forms is an attempt to eliminate the experience of questing through capturing the reality for which human beings quest. See Eric Voegelin, 'The Eclipse of Reality,' in *Phenomenology and Social Reality: Essays in Memory of Alfred Schütz*, edited by Maurice Natanson, (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970). See also my piece entitled 'Ideology: A Commentary on a Definition,' *Appraisal*, Vol.VI No. 2 (October 2006), pp. 10-29.
29. A parenthetical remark seems in order at this point.

Voegelin's repeated efforts to speak of the various 'pathologies of the spirit' that afflict human beings living in an eclipsed state are redolent with a kind of immanent subjectivism that characterises much of his thought. As Voegelin characterises and explores the diseases in question, one senses that he is concerned with the elucidation of a psychic imbalance within man. But more traditional thinkers would say that it is not solely or even primarily a subjective psychic imbalance that is the issue here. It is a great deal more than that. It is the rejection of the Real, of transcendence and the Transcendent. But Voegelin does not appear to be concerned by this. And so, the expression 'pathologies of the spirit' fails to capture or do justice to the reality of what is taking place in the modern eclipsed state. My point is that Voegelin's focus is all too much on psychology and psychologising and not enough on the reality of what is occurring.

30. In fact, believing that the quest can be satisfied in the here-and-now finds expression in what Voegelin viewed, at one point in his scholarship, as modern gnosticism, a disease of the spirit that afflicts those who believe that human alienation can be overcome in the here-and-now. As for the quest being satisfied in the Beyond, Voegelin is totally silent, and one suspects that he does not believe that there is an independently existing Beyond, any more than he believes that there is an independently existing Ground. In fact, one can do better than suspect this. One can affirm it. The Beyond is an experiential event. It is not a reality. To say that it is would be to hypostatise it.
31. Read Eric Voegelin's long essay entitled 'Structures of Consciousness' which appeared originally in Voegelin—Research New, Vol. II, No. 3, (September 1996). See alcor.concordia.ca/vorenews. Allow me to quote a short passage from the talk 'Structures in Consciousness' delivered by Eric Voegelin at a conference whose theme was 'Hermeneutics and Structuralism: Merging Horizons' held at York University, in Downsview, Ontario, in November 1978, and transcribed by Professor Zdravko Planinc of McMaster University's Department of Religion in Hamilton, Ontario. Voegelin writes: 'Let me use here a simple diagram: The tension goes toward the '[Ground], in Plato and Aristotle; and at the other end of the tension is 'man;' and there is a movement and counter-movement. And, we might say, the area of that movement [and counter-movement], that is what Plato and Aristotle would call the psyché. So the tension reveals [itself] therefore as a tension between these two poles; and the poles are not known as givens independent from the tension in which they are experienced as poles. We are again here coming into the problem of the complex. The tension (as a polar tension) [and] the poles (the god pole and the human pole) belong together. One can not, therefore, hypostatize [...] the [god pole] as the divinity, into a god about whom we know something, short of that tension; and [one] cannot hypostatize man into an immanent entity, short of that tension in which man experiences himself as man in the tension—that is his
32. Another word that Voegelin uses to characterise the experience that human beings have of being in a relationship with a Someone is 'the Beyond.' Man is at one end of the experiential complex and 'the Beyond' is experienced as being at the other end. But 'the Beyond' is really not beyond. It is within, ...within consciousness.
33. This was not a late blossoming idea for Voegelin. In *Order and History*, Volume I, *Israel and Revelation*, p. 2, while speaking of the man pole, Voegelin writes: 'There is no such thing as a 'man' who participates in 'being' as if it were an enterprise that he could as well leave alone; there is, rather, a 'something,' a part of being, capable of experiencing itself as such, and furthermore capable of using language and calling this experiencing consciousness by the name of 'man.' Almost the same might be said of the Ground pole, with the added proviso that this part of being, unlike the experiencing consciousness that calls itself by the name of 'man,' has its being as a function of the experiencing consciousness that we call 'man.'
34. Parenthetically, I should draw attention here to an interesting and critical comment that relates to the very phenomenon we are discussing written by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (the future Pope Benedict XVI). In an article on relativism that Cardinal Ratzinger authored for a meeting with the presidents of the Doctrinal Commissions of the Bishops' Conferences of

Latin America, held in Guadalajara, Mexico, in May 1996, Cardinal Ratzinger writes: 'The situation [regarding the effect of relativism on our thinking] can be clearly seen in [the writings of] the American Presbyterian John Hick. His philosophical departure point is found in the Kantian distinction between phenomenon and noumenon: We can never grasp ultimate truth in itself, but only its appearance in our way of perceiving through different 'lenses.' What we grasp is not really and properly reality in itself, but a reflection on our scale.' At first Hick tried to formulate this concept in a Christ-centered context. After a year's stay in India, he transformed it—after what he himself calls a Copernican turn of thought—into a new form of theocentrism. The identification of only one historical person, Jesus of Nazareth, with what is 'real,' the living God, is now relegated as a relapse into myth. Jesus is consciously relativized as one religious leader among others. The Absolute cannot come into history, but only models and ideal forms that remind us about what can never be grasped as such in history. Therefore, concepts such as the 'church, dogma' and 'sacraments' must lose their unconditional character. To make an absolute of such limited forms of mediation or, even more, to consider them real encounters with the universally valid truth of God who reveals himself would be the same as elevating oneself to the category of the Absolute, thereby losing the infiniteness of the totally other God. With appropriate modifications to account for a different agenda, one can hear John Hick echoing the views of Spinoza (mentioned above) and Eric Voegelin, assuming that Cardinal Ratzinger's interpretation of Hick is correct.

35. In light of Cardinal Ratzinger's remarks (see endnote 34), we cannot help but ask those who think that Voegelin was a Christian: 'Was Voegelin also a relativist?,' and the answer seems to be 'Yes, he must have been.' How could it be otherwise given Voegelin's belief that Jesus was but 'one 'religious' or 'philosophical' leader amongst others, all of whom were concerned with the same issues as He'?
36. See Voegelin's article 'Structures in Consciousness' op. cit. (See endnote 31).
37. See Massimo Borghesi, op.cit. See also 'The Gospel and Culture,' in Donald G. Miller and Dikran Y. Hadidian, ed., *Jesus and Man's Hope*, (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, 1971), pp. 59-101.
38. Voegelin almost never uses the word 'contemplation,' a word that symbolises the theoretician's reaching out, in a state of expectancy and trust, to the Real that he seeks to contact, in the belief that the Real will reveal itself if he (the theoretician) has properly disposed himself? This is not an inadvertency on Voegelin's part. Voegelin believes that contemplative theory is not possible because there is no Real that is available to us—no Real that can be in complicity with the contemplative person in response to his or her having made the appropriate changes to his or her way of being (periagogé). Contemplation is not part of Voegelin's vocabulary because periagogé for Voegelin is not what it is for Plato, or, if we think of a more contemporary thinker, what it is for Michael Polanyi. Périagogé, for Voegelin, has to do with the

resuscitation of our awareness of the bi-polar tension within human consciousness, and is not about our directing our attention towards a trans-personal Real. (One of the rare instances when Voegelin speaks of 'contemplation' is in Conversations I 'In Search of the Ground,' in *Conversations with Eric Voegelin*, The Thomas More Institute, (Montreal, 1980), where he mentions 'the contemplative life,' and then only to represent it, not as something he favours, but as a possible position that one can defend. His exact words are: 'In every society there are such opinions' (doxa) about how one might lead one's life. In other words, Voegelin is not saying that he is positively disposed towards the doxa that is 'the contemplative way of life.' He is just saying that in every society there are those who hold favourably opinions of the contemplative way of life. As to how he feels about this doxa, we are left to speculate, but his choice of the word 'opinion' (doxa) when speaking about the contemplative way of life reveals a great deal.)

39. In this connection, we find ourselves somewhat in disagreement with Professor Zdravko Planinc of McMaster University's Department of Religion, who says, in a comment on his transcription of 'Structures in Consciousness,' which appeared in *Voegelin—Research News*, Vol. II No. 3 (September 1996):

Despite these difficulties in Voegelin's philosophy of consciousness, it is nevertheless roughly Platonic in character. But it is Platonic in character only as a manifestation of Voegelin's own character, and not as a result of any close textual analyses of the dialogues....' My question here is: 'Is Voegelin's philosophy of consciousness...nonetheless roughly Platonic in character?' And my answer is: 'No it is not, unless Plato was a modern post-Kantian thinker.' Since writing the above, Professor Planinc may have modified his views. See his article entitled 'The Uses of Plato in Voegelin's Philosophy of Consciousness: Reflections Prompted by Voegelin's Lecture, 'Structures of Consciousness,' which acts as an addendum to 'Structures in Consciousness,' *Voegelin—Research News*, Vol. II No. 3 (September 1996), located at alcor.concordia.ca/vorenews/.

40. Notice here that we are not faulting Voegelin for not being a Christian or for being a philosopher. We are faulting him for not following a standard that he set for himself when he asserted that philosophy and philosophers need to do justice to the culture of the community that they seek to explain, and that they ought not to root their assertions in some abstract imaginative schema that is not related to any known existential order.

41. See the relevant section in Part I.

42. See my paper entitled 'Ideology: A Commentary on a Definition,' *Appraisal*, Vol. VI, 2 (October 2006), pp. 10-29.

43. Basing himself on his theory of consciousness, Voegelin very clearly asserts that what the main body of orthodox Christians characterise, and have characterised for millennia, as revelation, that is, revelation qua the intervention of the Transcendent into history, is not intrinsic to very early Christianity.

It is something that infiltrated the beliefs of the Christian community during the first few centuries of the Christian era, and it did so as a means of stabilising the experientially based gains that were achieved by the early Christian community, and perhaps also—although this is not as clear in Voegelin's analysis of this matter—as a way to enable the authorities in the community to gain control over the community. The effect of this was to elevate what were originally human experiential gains to pronouncements emanating from outside of the human context, which pronouncements were in turn elevated to the status of dogma, at which point all or almost all experientially based life and thinking was drained from the community. But, of course, we argue that one ought to be sceptical of Voegelin's reading here, since much of this sort of thinking emerges out of 19th Century 'higher criticism,' and has nothing to do with the early years of the Church. See Voegelin's article entitled 'The Gospel and Culture,' in *Jesus and Man's Hope*, edited by Donald G. Miller and Dikran Y. Hadidian, (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, 1971).

44. There is a good deal of confusion about whether Voegelin had or did not have a philosophy of history versus whether he had or did not have a theology of history. Some of his followers hold that he had no philosophy of history, but did have, in the manner of St. Augustine, a theology of history. As one might suspect, based on what has already been said, we very much disagree with this view. If by 'philosophy of history,' we mean a conviction that the course of time follows a logical trajectory towards an idyllic dénouement that is discernable long before we arrive at its realisation, then Voegelin very definitely does not have a philosophy of history. However, if by 'philosophy of history' we mean something as simple as the idea that during the course of time mankind will live through meaning-filled high and low points which play themselves out in a wholly unpredictable manner according to destiny and the vagaries of human agents, then Voegelin had a philosophy of history, though it may not be a logic of history. But what Voegelin most definitely does not have, from our perspective, is a theology of history, and we say this despite the fact that we realise that some of his most ardent supporters believe that he does. In fact, we would go as far as to say that Voegelin cannot have had a theology of history, for, at the very minimum, one has to accept that the Transcendent exists and intervenes in history for one to have a theology of history. A theology of history presumes revelation, and not revelation as Voegelin understands it.
45. Voegelin's interest in 'experiential equivalences' led him to explore not only those experiences mentioned in the written record, but also what he viewed as their earliest expression in Neolithic and pre-Neolithic symbolisation, i.e., cave paintings and drawings. In fact, in his quest to explore the earliest symbolic renderings of what he believed were the universal and atemporal character of these experiences, Voegelin travelled to archaeological sites in Turkey, the Holy Land, Malta, the British Isles and Ireland, the U.S., etc., and corresponded with world authorities on the

meaning of the symbols he encountered in his travels. See Barry Cooper and Jodi Bruhn, eds., *Voegelin Recollected: Conversations on a Life*, (Columbia, Missouri: The University of Missouri Press, 2008), pp. 15ff.

46. Note that there is a good deal of truth to Voegelin's claim that not even the Christian can be dispensed from the need to search. Christianity does not contest this. For Christians, the problematic element in Voegelin's argument is in his claim that there is no acceptable faith-based response to man's searching. How does Voegelin know this? From where does this certitude on Voegelin's part arise? In truth, one has to acknowledge that one has difficulty identifying the source of Voegelin's certitude about this matter, except perhaps to point to his support for the modern immanentist penchant, that is to say, the penchant to deny 'the Other,' that same Other Who is denied in Voegelin's theory of consciousness. Of course, in opposition to Voegelin, Christianity claims that the search ends with a response, and that faith focuses the orientation of the searcher and introduces him or her to dimensions of meaningfulness in this life that elude the faith-less.
47. See Eric Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1952), pp. 27-29. It seems that Voegelin's thinking undergoes a major shift between the publication of *The New Science of Politics*, which occurred in 1952, and the early to mid 1960s. In a manner that foreshadows the writings of Charles Taylor on the same subject, Voegelin informs us, in *The New Science of Politics*, that a true science of politics, and by implication, society, has to be founded on the common-sense parlance and self-understanding of the community being studied, and at no point should social science parlance sever its link with the common sense discourse and self-understanding of the community under study, although it can and should purify that parlance by elevating everyday terms to the level of theoretical terms. Voegelin even goes on to remark that this is exactly what Aristotle did when he borrowed terms from the everyday parlance of the Athenians, terms which he then purified ('theoreticised') so as to arrive at his constitutional forms, i.e., rule by the 'basileus,' rule by the 'tyranos,' the 'citizen,' etc. These were terms that were used in everyday discourse amongst the Athenians, but what Aristotle did was elevate the word 'tyranos,' for example, to the level of a theoretical term by refining its meaning ever so slightly, a refining which involved never applying the word 'tyranos' to the arbitrary rule of a single person over a people that had, at no point in its past, experienced rule by the law. What this means is that while ordinarily average Athenians would, of course, have described Xerxes as a tyrant, Aristotle, the theorist, would not. The Persians had never known rule according to the law, that is, rule according to standards that they had accepted to live by, and so they could not be the subjects of a tyrant, according to Aristotle. The point here is that in his use of the term 'tyranos' Aristotle preserved a link between his theoretical term 'tyranos' and the common sense

everyday term 'tyranos' of the Athenians, but, at the same time, when acting as a scientist, he restricts the use of the Athenian term 'tyranos' and its derivatives, to those contexts where a people who, having known what it means for them to rule themselves, fall under the sway of an arbitrary ruler.

The issue here is a complex one, which revolves around the rapport of language to political and social reality. As Charles Taylor reminds us in his very important article entitled 'Interpretation and the Sciences of Man,' (The Review of Metaphysics, XXV, No.1 [September 1971], pp. 3-51), 'language is constitutive of social and political reality.' And so, in this particular instance, the language of the ancient Athenians, when spoken amongst themselves, is not only capable of capturing a distinction that the Persian language is not able to capture, but it captures a way of being that is particular to the Athenians and that does not exist at all amongst the Persians. Simply put, the Persians do not know and do not live under the reality that is rule by a tyrant, while the Athenians do know of this reality, because they have experienced both rule by the law and rule by a tyrant. And so, although the Athenians might use the term 'tyranos' in speaking of the rule of Xerxes, they are wrong in doing so if, by the use of this term, they mean to describe the reality that the Persians experience. And the reason why they are wrong is because the reality that is tyranny and tyrannical rule for the Athenians is not present, i.e., does not exist, amongst the Persians. As a result, we can say that the Athenians live a subtler moral life and way of being than do the Persians, whose language and moral life are less refined at this period in their history when they find themselves in conflict with Athens.

Returning to Voegelin, it seems that he abandoned this very fruitful avenue opened up by Aristotle—an avenue that he clearly knew about and even recommended following in the early pages of Chapter I of *The New Science of Politics*—when he subsequently develops his theory of consciousness, inasmuch as his theory of consciousness leads him to sever completely the links between his would be theoretical language, on the one hand, and the common-sense parlance of the Greek, the Hebrew and the early Christian community, and, dare we say, other

communities as well, on the other. To put it very brutally, where does Voegelin find references to the reality that is revelation qua revelation (that is, revelation as it is understood by the Jews and the Christians, etc.) in the common sense parlance of the ancient Athenians, or where does he find references to philosophy in the Old Testament and the Gospels? More specifically, can Voegelin's 'theory of consciousness language' capture the common sense parlance about the reality that is revelation for the Jewish and Christian communities? In fact, is it not the case that Voegelin's language redefines the reality that is revelation so completely that it ends up being unrecognisable to the Jewish and the Christian communities? This seems to be the case. This gives rise to a broader question, namely, how scientifically appropriate is it to speak of 'experiential equivalences' across cultural communities and across the ages? If Aristotle and Voegelin of *The New Science of Politics* days are right, can there be anything like 'experiential equivalences' from one community to the next and across the ages? If our experiential life is constituted by the language that we use to speak this experience, can there be anything like 'equivalences'? Voegelin knew the answer to this question when he wrote the introductory paragraphs to Chapter I of *The New Science of Politics*. What happened to cause him to forget it? In fact, when speaking of 'experiential equivalences,' is not the later Voegelin engaged in reasoning akin to the reasoning of the Eighteenth Century philosophers of history? Is he not forcing history into the straight-jacket of his 'new' systemic thinking?

The other question that looms in the background and that should be raised here is: On what does Voegelin ground his later approach? We know that Voegelin sought to ground his writing prior to and including *The New Science of Politics* on a particular way of being in the world. Not unlike Michael Polanyi, who grounded scientific decision-making on tacit knowing, Voegelin, like Aristotle, grounded decision-making in the sciences in general on the way of being of the ancient Athenians. But, on what does Voegelin ground his theory of consciousness? Could it be that he grounds it to some extent on modern systemic thinking?

TRANSHUMANISM, TECHNOLOGY, AND THE FUTURE: POSTHUMANITY EMERGING OR SUB-HUMANITY DESCENDING?

Bob Doede

Abstract

I explore how the horizon of the future has shifted dramatically from Bertrand Russell's grim early 20th century prognostications based on the Second Law of Thermodynamics to the Transhumanist early 21st century predictions based on the Law of Technology's Accelerating Returns. I argue that Transhumanism combines the values of the developed world's consumer capitalism with the late 20th century realization that technology can be used to re-design the human form of life to fund its vision of technological advancement bringing us to a virtually immortal posthuman future. My conclusion is that there are good reasons to think that this technocalyptic vision rests on a very naïve view of technology, one that fails to recognize how technologies subtly but inevitably re-make their users in their own image, and that consequently the future that Transhumanism will likely bring will be a deeply subhuman one.

Key Words

Transhumanism, posthuman, Singularity, technological convergence, cyborg, technologies of human enhancement, life extension, mind uploading, Moore's law, Nick Bostrom, Ray Kurzweil, Francis Fukuyama, Martin Heidegger, Steve Talbot, Neil Postman

'A Free Man's Worship,' an essay Bertrand Russell penned in 1902, expresses eloquently and precisely the judgment of early 20th century science concerning the origin and final destiny of not just humanity but of the universe itself:

That Man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labours of ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of Man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins—all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain, that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand. Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul's habitation henceforth be safely built (Russell, 1917/1957,

p. 45-46).

One can hear the cold, ruthless second law of thermodynamics churning in the background of Russell's grim pronouncement—this was the dark 'music' he thought rationally enlightened thinkers had to be man enough to face. How starkly this projected future contrasts with the future heralded by a relatively recent and growing international movement of speculative science and technology known as Transhumanism.¹

Transhumanists agree with Russell's claim that humanity 'is the product of causes that had no prevision of the end they were achieving'—this is precisely the reason why it is incumbent upon humans to devise technologies that will enable us to have a say in our future development. As well, they entirely concur with Russell's contention that humanity's origin, growth, hopes and fears, loves and beliefs 'are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms.' Transhumanists want technologically to enhance and augment human being into a designer species that bears no unchosen physical, emotional, or psychological givens deriving from Mother Nature's mindless eons of meandering through the potentials of organic life. Moreover, the Transhumanists would beg to differ with Russell's fatalism regarding the preservation of 'individual life beyond the grave' and his bleak predictions concerning 'the whole temple of Man's achievement.' With the human genome now decoded, information technologies doubling their computational capacities every year or so, and nanotechnologies promising to provide the means whereby the consequences of pollution and human aging can be brought to a halt and even reversed, Transhumanists have other things on their minds than building their souls' habitation on the 'unyielding despair' Russell recommends. The post-human future Transhumanism predicts does not require manly bravado to face, but, in fact, appears to be everything anyone could wish for: a future where our senses, intellect, emotions will be technologically enhanced right off the human scale of function and performance, and we will either have bodies so merged with computer and robotic augmentation and power that we will be able to upgrade them into an endless future or, perhaps, even more radically, we will have completely surrendered our perishable bodies for a more durable non-biodegradable

platform so as to take up permanent residence in the virtual worlds of cyberspace (Bostrom, 2005, p. 10).

How the future has changed in just over a century! Clearly ‘the future ain’t what it used to be!’² One might reasonably wonder, therefore, how we, in one century, got from the dismal and depressing future dictated by the science of Russell’s turn of the century essay to the bright and promising future of today’s Transhumanism?

My paper’s fundamental project is to introduce the recent and still largely unknown Transhumanist movement to a broader audience and to raise a few concerns regarding the movement’s assumptions about technology and human nature and how these assumptions fund its radically optimistic vision of a posthuman future. I believe that Transhumanism’s spectacular pretensions are worthy of careful consideration because they invite us, like no other movement past or present, to rethink the question of technology and its place in shaping our self-understanding and social imaginaries. I’m convinced that it is crucially important to understand Transhumanism and to raise consciousness of its covert and overt workings in our culture because this movement embodies within its doctrines and visionary speculations the subtle and mostly unrecognized trajectories of the consumerist and therapeutic dimensions of our late capitalist culture, both the Id (narcissistic hedonist yearnings) and Super-ego (fanatical perfectionist pursuits) of western civilization.

Just a few years ago Francis Fukuyama referred to Transhumanism as ‘the world’s most dangerous idea,’ (Fukuyama, 2004) a sentiment typical of the bioconservative view shared by Leon Kass, Jeremy Rifkin, Bill McKibben, and many others. Yet most recently an article entitled ‘Ten Ideas Changing the World Now’ in *Time Magazine* listed Transhumanism (aka, Amortality) as the fifth most important idea of 2009 (Meyer, March 12, 2009). So what exactly is Transhumanism that it should elicit such apprehension and such acclamation?

1. A closer look at Transhumanism

Transhumanism may be justly described as an interdisciplinary and international movement whose project is to *transform* human nature through technological interventions so radical that *Homo sapiens* will *transition* in the relatively near future into a superior successor post-human species, one that *transcends* the fragilities and failures of our fleshly finitude. Transhumanists believe our technological ingenuity has brought us to the place that we can now begin to dissolve ‘[t]he bonds that tie us to nature’s biological ancient, accidental

design’ (Natasha Vita-More, 2004, p. 2), that through our technological prowess we are maturing out of our evolutionary adolescence and are now posed finally to take control of our own evolution.

Transhumanism is not a static or crystallized doctrine—it has already had its share of schisms and internecine skirmishes. Rather Transhumanism is better understood as a strange attractor that draws around itself an array of diverse techno-futurist views whose underlying unity rests in a common commitment to an optimistic and instrumentalist reading of technology and an informational conception of self. This recent but quickly growing movement is part science, part philosophy, but also part science-fiction, and I might add, part faith: in short, a strange brew of bits from Plato, Bacon, Hobbes, Nietzsche, Ayn Rand, Marvin Minsky, thrown into a rather thick broth of commitments deriving from Enlightenment liberal humanism and advanced consumerist and therapeutic capitalism.

To many readers who are not familiar with the Transhumanist movement, their ideas and vision of our species’ future will hardly merit serious attention and will likely be written off as a tissue of cleverly interwoven science fictions. However, whether Transhumanism’s predicted future is even probable or its doctrines conceptually coherent is not what is most significant about the movement (although I will devote some time showing why their vision of the future attains to a certain plausibility given the trajectory of technological advancement in the world today). The real significance of Transhumanism is, I believe, what its pretensions actually signal about the state of western culture today and how its rather dramatic claims are nourished through roots extending deeply into the modern west’s sensibility. It seems to me that a Transhumanist future of sorts is *in a sense* already here, having arrived before it has begun, and although we can’t see it directly, we can see it reflected in the metaphors, models, and images that subtly imbricate ourselves in the computational register that, as we’ll see, funds most of its techno-futurist aspirations.³

Despite its rather shocking features, I suspect we all can understand the Transhumanism’s quest and can feel its allure. Just spend a few minutes watching the evening news and you too will be susceptible to believing that *Homo sapiens*, despite thousands of years of seeking to realize its best intentions through education, will power, and religion, has failed miserably. We are still killing each other and in the most heinous ways, our nations are at war with each other, our cities and our highest levels of government are filled with crime, and all the while our bodies are aging mercilessly, racked with diseases, depression, psychosis, and profound

anxieties. It certainly does seem that Mother Nature, that ancient and blind watch-maker, has really fallen down on the job, and she can't seem to get back up. All the past efforts of humanist reform and religious education have failed to de-bug the product of her best efforts; the soft technologies of self-discipline, moral education, social engineering, and religious indoctrination have all but failed to produce a kinder and gentler human being. Surely something must be done. Transhumanists believe it is time to step up to the plate and take over Mother Nature's remit, convinced that they possess the techno-savvy to transform humanity into new and improved forms of being.

Some of the most vocal advocates of this doctrine are widely recognized and deeply respected scientists and academicians, whose impressive pedigree has earned immense funding for their R & D projects from the US Department of Defense and from the dot-com sector. Included in a broad definition of Transhumanism are Marvin Minsky, Toshiba Professor of Media Arts and Sciences, Professor of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science at MIT, and author of nine books, including the highly acclaimed *Society of Mind* (Simon and Schuster); Hans Moravec, founder of the Mobile Robot Laboratory of Carnegie Mellon University, the largest robotics lab in the country, presently Chief Scientist at Seegrid Corporation and author of *Mind Children: The Future of Robot and Human Intelligence* (Harvard) and *Robot: Mere Machine to Transcendent Mind* (Oxford); Nick Bostrom, a philosophy professor at Oxford and Director of its Institute for the Future of Humanity; Kevin Warwick, professor of Cybernetics at the University of Reading, strong proponent of cyborgism, and author of *March of the Machines* (U of Illinois Press); Ray Kurzweil, world renown inventor of numerous AI technologies, member of the US Patent Office's National Inventors Hall of Fame, and author of *The Age of Intelligent Machines* (MIT) and *The Age of Spiritual Machines* (Viking); Frank Tipler, Professor of Mathematics, Tulane University, and author of *The Physics of Immortality* (Doubleday)—to name just a few of its more prominent exponents.

In what follows, I want to explain how we moved from Russell's bleak prognostications about the future based on early 20th century science to the bright and enticing Transhumanist depictions of the future based on 21st century technoscience. Next I will look at the theoretical feasibility of a Transhumanist future by examining the convergent and exponential development of contemporary technology. Then I will take a quick look at the practical probabilities that our culture will actually

take up the Transhumanist trajectory by looking at some human enhancement technologies already available and a few being developed and likely to be available soon. Before I conclude with an effort to place Transhumanist aspirations in a narrative of nostalgic recovery, I will identify and challenge the rather naïve assumptions about technology and the nature of human being that underwrite Transhumanist visions of the future, arguing that their facile instrumentalist reading of technology inclines them to wildly inadequate ideas about human flourishing and blinds them to the profoundly subhuman features their Posthuman futures would possess.

2. The shifting ground of the soul's habitation

How is it that the horizon of the future has so dramatically shifted in the hundred years separating the early twentieth century from the early twenty-first century? I'm convinced that the most significant factor fuelling the buoyant eschatology of Transhumanism is that the technologies are now within sight that will enable us to surmount, or to put it more relevantly to our topic, *transcend*, the limitations and demands of our species' genome, and therefore human nature itself.

Francis Fukuyama argues that this dramatic change of outlook on the future is the result of the promise of recent biotechnological advances. He recognizes that emerging biotechnology will in all likelihood (and in the not too distant future) enable us to actually change human nature, bringing to us heavy and arduous moral responsibilities, for we are about to enter a brave new world of possibilities that will untether us from the past and its social, political, and ethical reserves of wisdom. Fukuyama's realization of the monumental significance of technology's capacity to, as it were, morph humans out of their nature, led him to repudiate the original thesis of his ground-breaking book *The End of History and the Last Man*. The central thesis of *The End of History* was that the evolutionary logic of human history has brought human history to its telos, stabilizing the global population in liberal democratic market economies. When Fukuyama wrote *The End of History* in 1992, he believed that human nature was the ultimate and final constraint on the social, political and economic future of our species because he believed the constant of an unchanging human nature would keep social, political, and economic experiments on a short leash—an understanding of things amply corroborated by the fact that in the past all utopian projects of social engineering (most recently socialist Marxism)—have come to grief by running into 'the brick wall of human nature' (Fukuyama, 1999, p. 14).

But when human nature itself becomes an object of technological manipulation and design, everything changes—not just the game and game plan, but the players themselves:

If human beings are infinitely malleable, if culture [and most determinatively, biotechnology] can overwhelm nature in shaping basic human drives and preferences ... then clearly no particular set of political and economic institutions, and certainly no liberal democratic ones, can ever be said to be, in Kojève's phrase 'completely satisfying'. ... The ultimate implication of this is that biotechnology will be able to accomplish what the radical ideologies of the past, with their unbelievably crude techniques, were unable to accomplish: to bring about a new type of human being. (Fukuyama, 1999, 14-15)

In the past, new political aims and social innovations had to mesh with the given of human nature, and this put some heavy constraints on what futures could be reasonably expected. However, with biotechnologies that enable us to re-design human nature, the sky is [not even] the limit. With the biotech means to morph ourselves as we please, we can remake human nature to mesh with any vision of the future we can imagine. What this means essentially is that we can choose what nature our species will possess in the future, and the looming question is what norms or values or ends will direct our choice. If biotech has rendered human nature entirely revisable, then it has no grain to direct or constrain our designs on it. And so whose designs will our successor posthuman artifacts likely bear? I have little doubt that in our vastly consumerist, media-saturated capitalist economy, market forces will have their way.⁴

If Fukuyama is right, then we see that the Transhumanists are vigorously pursuing changing technology's traditional 'direction of fit'. Traditionally, technology has always been used to reshape the world to better fit the limits and potentialities of our ancient and unchanging human nature. But to the Transhumanist, buoyed up with the promise of the biotech revolution, human nature is viewed as nothing more than a technical problem. They are confident that before long, we will be able to re-design human nature into a better fit with the brave new world that our technologies—which themselves are held under the sway of our deeply consumerist economies—are birthing. Perhaps the fact that our most technologically advanced countries are the least happy, most discontent and heavily medicated countries in the world is not really a coincidence. Perhaps these are rather indicators of the need to revamp human nature to better mesh with the inhumane (or post-humane) pace and social exigencies that our technologies, and the economies that feed them, have already entrenched as normal

features of our lives? As Scott Lash confesses in his *Critique of Information*: 'I operate as a man-machine interface—that is, as a technological form of natural life—because I must necessarily navigate through technological forms of social life. ... Because my forms of social life are so normally and chronically at-a-distance, I cannot navigate these distances, I cannot achieve sociality apart from my machine interface,' (Lash, 2002, p. 15).

Past utopian regimes sought to socially engineer a new way of being human. Even the more dreadful Nazi attempts to artificially standardize (via eugenics) a certain type of human being remained brutally faithful to their species and to a humanism however thinned out it might have been. Transhumanism, in contrast, has entirely given up on the long-term viability of human being, viewing it as a botched work-in-progress of the Blind Watchmaker. It is time, therefore, that we become willing accomplices to development of a successor species, a posthuman species better fit for the coming techno-future whose pre-figurations in our culture today have already begun to overwhelm our abilities to cope. Transhumanism does not withdraw in horror at this program of self-immolation, but instead calls us to recognize the nobility of our fate, viz., that of serving ourselves up as the 'transition form' to a new more promising species of post-human 'mind children' who will live forever in a technoverse aflame with information. Hans Moravec, Transhumanist extraordinaire, devotes a whole chapter in his book, *Robot: Mere Machine to Transcendent Mind*, to detailing how we parents can gracefully retire into extinction as our mind children outgrow us, create their own goals, go their own way 'with us perhaps a fond memory—but that too is the way of children' (Moravec, 1999, p. 78). Here it is instructive to note, that so far, our only self-replicating 'mind children' are computer viruses!

It is abundantly clear that technology plays a central role in leveraging Transhumanist visions of the future. Without the techno-optimism that gilds its every proposal, Transhumanism is little more than a whistling in the dark for the messianic *Übermensch*. I want to explore in some detail, therefore, how Transhumanists take their bearings on the future from the accelerating pace of technological development.

3. Technology: Convergence and Singularity

When Transhumanists look to the future, they see it as indelibly shaped by the forces of the accelerating returns of technology. In fact, Transhumanists see two contemporary trends in technology—namely, the increasing convergence of technological domains of research and development and the developed

world's eager embrace of technologies of human enhancement—as already setting the stage for the drama of participatory evolution: the point at which humans, through technological ingenuity, decommission the blind forces of natural selection and replace them with their own intelligent intentions of artificial selection. They read these two trends as clearly signaling that the West is primed for a future of the posthuman variety.

The convergent trajectory of contemporary techno-science received official governmental recognition in December of 2001, when the National Science Foundation (NSF) and the Department of Commerce in the US sponsored the first of three work shops entitled 'Converging Technologies for Improving Human Performance: Nanotechnology, Biotechnology, Information Technology, and Cognitive Science.' These workshops show-cased the opportunities and challenges that are already arising out of the techno-scientific synergies fundamental to 21st century research and technology development. The blurb on their website explains the underlying rationale for the conferences: 'The convergence of nanoscience, biotechnology, information technology and cognitive science (NBIC) offers immense opportunities for the improvement of human abilities, social outcomes, the nation's productivity and its quality of life.' The report produced by this NSF workshop contains a clever poem that gets to the heart of convergence:

If the Cognitive Scientists can think it
The Nano people can build it
The Bio people can implement it, and
The IT people can monitor and control it.

(Roco & Bainbridge, 2002, 12).

As this witty poem implies, converging technologies reference the cross-pollination of technologies that has originated in separate domains of research and development—a phenomenon that many Transhumanists read as the single most important step toward the fulfillment of their techno-cyber dreams. Recent breakthroughs in computer science, telecommunications, microelectronics, robotics, nanotech, and biotech have begun to converge, to cross-fertilize, promising to change not merely industry and business, government and warfare, but also culture, psychology, philosophy and religion. When biotechnology and microelectronics begin to converge, as, for example, in the case of introducing biocompatible technologies (e.g., nanobots and electronic implants) into the human body, the boundaries separating the natural from the artificial—the grown from the manufactured, bodies from bytes, or more specifically, humans from machines—get thinner and thinner. Such boundary

crossings are the stuff Transhumanist dreams are made of.

Not only has techno-development begun to converge, but as a direct result of this convergence, technology's rate of development has begun to grow at a doubly exponential rate, that is, its exponential development is itself beginning to develop exponentially, according to Ray Kurzweil (2005, pp. 41 & 68). Consider that it took well over 20 years to sequence the genetics of the HIV viruses, an effort that began in the 1980s; in 2002, it took only 31 days to sequence the DNA of SARS. When the project to sequence the whole of the human genome started in 1991, genetic sequencing speeds were so slow that without speed increases it would have taken thousands of years to complete. Thanks to the non-linear development of technologies, the first draft of the human genome was actually completed in twelve years (Kurzweil, 2005, pp. 73-74 and fns 43-46).

Today, we use computer technology to help us design and build new technologies. In the very near future, humans with direct brain-computer interfaces will create the next generation of brain-computer interfaces. But there will come a point in the not too distant future, Transhumanists claim, when human cognitive limitations will show themselves to be impediments to the production of the next generation of intelligent artifact, signaling a threshold crossing where our computers have become more adept at designing themselves than we are. When this occurs, intelligent artifacts will go it alone, designing and building new intelligent artifacts with smarter-than-human intelligence. The crossing of this threshold is referred to as the 'singularity.'

The singularity is the point at which machines become sufficiently intelligent to start teaching themselves how to design machines. Eliezer S. Yudkowsky asserts that 'our sole responsibility is to produce something smarter than we are; any problems beyond that are not ours to solve ...' (quoted in Kurzweil, 2005, p. 35). Vernor Vinge, the man who coined the term 'singularity' for use in contexts of artificial intelligence, notes that just as our model of physics breaks down when applied to the singularity at the center of a black hole so also will our model of historical development break down when applied to a future populated by artifacts with smarter-than-human intelligence. I. J. Good, in 1965, was the first to clearly articulate the singularity thesis as the intelligence explosion that will take place when humans can hand over to intelligent machines the task of designing intelligent machines. Good claimed 'the first ultraintelligent machine is the last invention that man need ever make' because 'shortly after, the human era will be ended,' (Good, 1965, p.

33).

The parameter shifts we see today in computer technology, for example, miniaturization, increase in processing speed, and decrease in cost, are the direct result of the technological convergences that make Transhumanists confident THE SINGULARITY IS NEAR (title of Kurzweil's recent book). Ray Kurzweil refers to a 1949 article in *Popular Mechanics* where ENIAC is described as a giant calculator bearing 18,000 vacuum tubes and 30 tons of weight. The article goes on to predict that 'computers in the future may have only 1,000 vacuum tubes and perhaps weigh 1.5 tons' (Kurzweil, 2005, p. 56)—a humorous example of what happens when predications about technological advancement are locked into the specious linear view of techno-development! As Kurzweil observes, 'technological progress in the twenty-first century will be equivalent (in the linear view) to two hundred centuries of progress (at the rate of progress in 2000)' (Kurzweil, 2005, p. 50). In the mid-sixties, Gordon Moore, inventor of integrated circuits and later to become chairman of **Intel**, articulated what today is known as Moore's Law, which, in his 1970s version of it, claimed that the number of transistors packed into a square inch integrated circuit doubles every 18 months or so. However, since this doubling of transistors over a square inch of circuit board also meant that electrons would have smaller distances to traverse, there is also an overall boost of computational power thereby yielding a doubling of computational speed every 12 months. Currently we are 'shrinking both electronic and mechanical technology by a factor of 5.6 per linear dimension per decade' (Richards, ed., 2002, p. 219).

This trajectory of miniaturization has already led to the nanotech revolution that is presently taking our most advanced industries by storm. Nanotechnology is predicated on the ability to manufacture objects and structures with atomic precision—assembling them literally atom by atom—allowing us to impose our own design specifications on the biological machinery of living cells. A key component of the Transhumanist vision of the future rests upon the nanotech development of nanobots, small robots that 'will interact with biological neurons to vastly extend human experience by creating virtual reality from within the nervous system,' and as this internally generated virtual reality becomes 'competitive with real reality in terms of resolution and believability,' many Transhumanists agree with Kurzweil's claim that 'our experiences will increasingly take place in virtual environments,' (Kurzweil, 2005, pp. 28 & 29). When nanobot production and deployment becomes a matter of course in our medical and health care

practices, we will become, as it were, brains in cocoons of simulated, designer environments, whose own desires, emotions, wills, and intelligences will be as artificial as the environments with which they 'interact'—both utterly freed from the distressing impingements of the real world. Moreover, nanobots will be important too for the reverse engineering of the human brain. They will be small enough to breach the blood-brain barrier so they can scan the salient details of our brains and then upload them 'into a suitably powerful computational substrate. This process would capture a person's entire personality, memory, skills, and history' (Kurzweil, 2005, p. 199). After all, for the Transhumanists, we are our minds, and our minds are just protein computers whose patterns of information processing, if they are preserved when transferred to silicone platforms, will preserve us—our bodies are just jelly (Moravec, 1988, 117).

Kurzweil recognizes that conventional silicon lithography circuits will reach a miniaturization limit within a decade or so, but Moore's Law will prevail as we move into a new paradigm of computational substrate. Molecular three-dimensional and nanotube computing have already arrived, and Kurzweil is optimistic about the possibilities of computing with DNA, exploiting the spin of electrons and quantum qubits for memory and computation—any of which will extend the life of Moore's Law into the indefinite future (Kurzweil, 2005, pp. 111-122).

Another consequence of converging technologies is the exponential increase of processing speed and improvements of cost performance. Graham Lawton observes that within living memory, the information storage capacity of computers has increased more than 100 million-fold: 'You probably have more processing power in your microwave than was available to the entire world in 1950,' (Lawton, 2006). Speaking of the exponential progress of information technology development, Kurzweil claims his 2009 model cell phone is a billion times more powerful per dollar than the building-size computer all the students and faculty at MIT shared when he attended there in the 1960s. And regarding the trend of miniaturization, he asserts 'What used to take up a building now fits in my pocket, and what now fits in my pocket will fit inside a blood cell in 25 years' (Kurzweil, 2009). Kurzweil notes that '[c]omputer speed (per unit cost) doubled every three years between 1910 and 1950, doubled every two years between 1950 and 1966, and is now doubling every year' (Kurzweil, 2002, p. 18). Although it took nearly ninety years to achieve the first MIPS [Multiple in Processing Speed] per thousand dollars, thanks to the law of accelerating returns, 'now we add one MIPS per thousand dollars

every five hours' (Kurzweil, 2005, p. 70). He predicts that 'By 2019, a \$1,000 computer will match the processing power of the human brain—about 20 million billion calculations per second' (Kurzweil, 2002, p. 12).

The fallout of exponential development in information technologies is also driving price reductions in biotechnology, and this, of course, bears directly on the feasibility and affordability of human enhancement technologies—about which more in a moment. In 2007, James Watson, Nobel Prize winner along with Francis Crick for discovering the molecular structure of DNA, had his genome sequenced for \$2 million dollars US. As of June 2009, *Illumina*, a genomics technology company headquartered in San Diego 'announced the launch of a \$48,000 genome-sequencing service at the Consumer Genetics Conference' (Singer, 2009).

With these empirical trends of non-linear technological advancement apparent everywhere one turns, the baby-boomer Transhumanists believe if they take good care of themselves, they may well be around for the Singularity's techno-rapture into posthumanity (Kurzweil takes 250 supplements a day and undergoes six intravenous therapies a week, Kuzweil, 2005, p. 211).⁵

4. Technology: Human Enhancement and Body-Machine Boundary Crossings

The second trend in the West that signals its Transhumanist trajectory is its eager embrace of technologies of human enhancement. As opposed to therapy, which seeks to prevent or cure disease with the sole aim of restoring normal functioning, *enhancement* is the alteration of normal personal and physical characteristics, traits, and abilities beyond the statistically normal. Our therapeutic culture has prepared the ground for Transhumanism by viewing all suffering as avoidable, an unalloyed curse, and therefore pointless, while our consumeristic culture has, by construing life as one continuous chain of purchases and regarding any limitation on consumer choice as scandalous, already set us on a slippery slope inclined to a Transhumanist future. In late capitalist economies like ours, a transformative social dynamic has been set afoot by the rise of technologies of human enhancement that is pushing us all in the direction of Transhumanist amenability. The dynamic goes something like this: first *medicalize* certain statistically normal human characteristics (e.g., shyness or waning erectile function) by showing that they are largely manifestations of genetic or hormonal factors that can be modified through pharmaceutical, genetic, or surgical interventions; use mass media campaigns both to *pathologize* these traditionally

non-pathological characteristics and to *normalize* the potential of enhanced characteristics (e.g., indefatigable confidence or three-hour erections in 70 year olds); finally *commodify* these newly normalized enhanced human traits by offering to sell them as a means of bringing us into a better fit with the demands and expectations of our deeply consumerist techno-culture.

The actual, as opposed to the ideal, trajectory of this social dynamic, however, suggests that in the near future unenhanced people will be perceived as dis-abled or perhaps in-valid people, people who stubbornly remain unimproved, inefficient, and (most significantly) socially costly, ignorantly refusing to upgrade their ancient Paleocene hunter-gatherer wetware. Perhaps not all of us will be merrily prancing hand-in-hand down the technologically paved 'yellow brick road' leading to the singularity.⁶

Among the most prevalent and popular human enhancement technologies are the psycho-pharmaceutical *cognitive* enhancers like Modafinil or Adderall, *personality* enhancers such as Prozac or Ritalin, physico-pharmaceutical *weight loss* and *sport* enhancers such as fenfluramine-phentermine (Fen-Phen), or anabolic steroids, and *sexual* enhancers like Viagra or Cialis. Although most of these drugs were initially developed to restore normal functioning to afflicted individuals, they are now available and can be used by anyone seeking an advantage or seeking to stand out from the crowd. An interesting unintended ratchet-effect (highly visible today in the case of anabolic steroids in sports) inevitably accompanies the use of enhancement drugs: as people recognize they are dis-advantaged by not using them, more and more people begin to use them, creating a new higher statistical norm, which in turn, creates a demand for the availability of a more potent enhancer—an arguably unwinnable 'arms race'. Of course, a collateral effect of this dynamic is the creating of a new 'have/have not' divide, since only by already possessing a certain degree of financial advantage will one be able to purchase these high-priced pharmaceuticals in the first place.⁷ In a competitive world that promises only to get more competitive, and in particular, in the fiercely competitive domain of the economy, where it seems we're willing to do almost anything to land the highest paying jobs or to get that next promotion, who of us can persistently resist the siren call to this arms-race that subtly tilts us in the direction of the singularity?

Longevity enhancement (life extension) technologies are already available in the precincts of regenerative medicine, if only in risky and not yet debugged form. Recent developments in stem cell

research and cloning are poised to teach us how to rewind the telomere DNA cellular clock that triggers somatic cells' demise. Telomeres shorten slightly every time the chromosomes replicate in preparation for cell division, suggesting that cells become senescent and die when the telomeres have shortened beyond a certain point. That shortening takes place because normal somatic cells, unlike germ line cells, do not make telomerase, the special enzyme needed to synthesize telomeres. But in cancer cells, telomerase synthesis is reactivated in somatic cells, explaining cancer cells' ability to divide continually and proliferate out of control. Recent research into egg cell transcription factors' capacity to regress somatic cells back to embryonic stem cells or induced pluripotent stem cells (iPS), has given hope to the regenerative medicine community that soon we will be able to reverse the aging of human somatic cells by engineering them to become more like germ cells. Kurzweil commenting on the difficulty of separating the desired from the undesirable effects (e.g., inadvertently generating cancer cells) of radical life extension interventions, lightly brushes them aside with this parting comment 'they are all solvable engineering problems,' a confidence common amongst Transhumanist deriving from their conceiving of biology as an information technology (Kurzweil, 2009).

Another approach to life extension comes from age-decelerating interventions, where the genes 'regulating the molecular mechanisms of aging could be altered or at least delay[ed]' (Glannon, 2008, p. 175). The idea here is to slow down the aging process thereby postponing, perhaps indefinitely, the degenerative diseases and handicaps that come with age. Some progress in this direction has been made in experiments with the worm *C. elegans* by manipulating the SIR2 gene to alter the function of the enzyme telomerase (Hekimi and Guarente, 2003, pp. 1351-1354). Nanotechnology, however, is the real heart of Transhumanist hope for immortality, the belief that we will soon be able to inject or swallow nano-size robots (nanobots) that will immediately go to work repairing the body's failing organs and reversing cellular degeneration (Gelles, 2009, p. 39), which brings us to medical nanotech.

With billions of dollars around the world now being devoted to nanotech R and D, there are any number of products on hand whose manufacturing involves nanotech, for example stain resistant clothes, self-cleaning windows, clear sunscreen, spray-on contraceptives, dental adhesives, smart drug delivery systems, etc. And in the very near future we are promised many human enhancement technologies, such as respirocytes. These are theoretical nanomachines (still in the R and D stage) that

function as artificial red blood cells, carrying oxygen and carbon dioxide molecules through the body. Each one can store and transfer 236 times the amount of oxygen of natural red blood cell (Wikipedia, 'Respirocyte'), and would enable an individual whose red blood cells were replaced by respirocytes to 'sprint at the level of an Olympic sprinter for 15 minutes without taking a second breath' (Mick, 2008). Robert Freitas, the mind behind respirocytes, is also exploring the white blood cell equivalent to the respirocyte, what he calls the 'microbivore' nanobot that would attack pathogens (Kurzweil, 2005, p. 254). In 2008, researchers from the Nano Medicine Center at the California Nanosystems Institute at UCLA developed a nanomachine drug delivery system, called a 'nanoimpeller', that captures and stores anticancer drugs and can be directed to release them into cancer cells (Lu, et al., 2008, pp. 421-426). On the horizon are nanobots that we will either ingest or have injected into our bodies so they can repair damaged genes, destroy bacteria, viruses, cancer cells, and strip our arteries of fatty deposits (McGee, 2008, p. 212).

Research on neural prosthetic and brain-computer interface technologies began in the 1970s at UCLA, while the first neuroprosthetic devices implanted in humans, as opposed to non-human animals, took place in the 1990s. Some of the most recent advances in semiconductor devices, bioelectronics, nanotechnology, applied neural control electronics, prosthetic devices, and techniques of implantation of biocompatible technologies give real credibility to the Transhumanist claims that, as we have grown more incestuous with our technologies, we are already launched into a trajectory of post-biological existence. Each new therapeutic triumph over sensory, motor, or cognitive defect, disease or handicap through biotechnological melding of body and electronics further acclimatizes our culture to the Transhumanist techno-cyber-future.

Today we use artificial heart valves, cardiac pacemakers, implantable pumps to supply insulin, pain medications, and to assist pulmonary function or blood circulation. First-generation neuroelectronics are already implanted in over 150,000 deaf people as straight-to-brain implants (Keim, 2009). There has been remarkable progress with optoelectronic retinal implants as well. There are over 30,000 people now using implants for deep-brain stimulation. These are pacemaker-like brain implants that not only dampen the essential tremors of Parkinson sufferers, but can also download software upgrades directly from outside the implant. Recently, a 25 year-old individual with quadriplegia was able to check e-mails, play computer games, control a television, type messages,

and turn lights on and off by thought alone because of an implanted bionic **Braingate** interface device. Moreover, the US military (DARPA) is busy developing similar implants that will allow army personnel to control robots and airplanes through their thoughts alone (Martin, 2005). There is little doubt about the enhancement potential and market for the off-label uses of these emerging technologies—biocompatible implants delivering parabolic hearing capacities, and/or microscopic, telescopic, and infra-red visual capacities, and/or expandable memory and information processing capacities, and/or the ability to access a search engine through thought alone, and/or the ability to dampen the violent or sexual reactions of paroled felons, etc.

Transhumanists take delight in the progressive breakdown of boundaries separating body and technology that these interventions and implants bring to the public in the non-controversial arena of therapeutic technologies because they make the transition to using them for enhancement and augmentation seem like a mere matter of course. Our culture's embrace of these technologies pre-positions us for easy acquiescence to the future that Transhumanism promises. Through a few decades of progressively radical bodily enhancements and augmentations, we will, says the Transhumanist, inevitably transition into a largely cyborgic body-machine configuration that will make the final morph into a wholly new computational substrate seem almost natural. To fully grasp the meaning of the Transhumanist enterprise however, we need to take a deeper look at the rather superficial and un-nuanced conception of technology that motivates and sustains their vision of the future.

5. Technology: An External Tool or Means of Becoming a Tool of Our Tools?

At the most basic level Transhumanists understand technology as the continuation of evolution by other, more efficient means. The painfully slow biological phase of evolution involved a few billion years of chance and necessity to produce *Homo sapiens*, the 'technology creating species' that, through recent technological developments, is now poised to launch into the self-designing phase of evolution (Kurzweil, 2002, p. 16). Ironically, Kurzweil's vision of the posthuman future is shamelessly based on a techno-anthropocentrism:

[I]t turns out we are central, after all. Our ability to create models—virtual realities—in our brains, combined with our modest-looking thumbs, has been sufficient to usher in another form of evolution: technology. That development enabled the persistence of the accelerating pace that started with

biological evolution. It will continue until the entire universe is at our fingertips (Kurzweil, 2005, p. 487).

Technology viewed as evolution by other means involves an expansion of human responsibilities since, as the Transhumanist believe, technologies are merely tools of human intention and design that we control. Suddenly, we are responsible for our embodiment because we can or soon will be able to change it; we are responsible for our future evolution because we can now change it: 'I regard the freeing of the human mind from its severe physical limitations of scope and duration as the necessary next step in evolution,' (Kurzweil, 2001). David Gelles in his article, 'Immortality 2.0' asserts that 'Transhumanism views sickness, aging, and death as unnecessary hindrances that we have the right and the responsibility to overcome. Our bodies, frail and unpredictable, are just another problem for these engineers to solve. The brain, our body's computer, is due for an upgrade,' (Gelles, 2009, p. 35).

Transhumanists believe in perpetual progress and therefore in questioning traditional humanistic and religious constraints on the progress that technoscience promises, assuming that only science and technology can bring the unlimited horizons of lifespan, intelligence, personal vitality, and freedom we all yearn for: 'We have decided that it is time to amend the human condition. We do not do this lightly, carelessly, or disrespectfully, but cautiously, intelligently, and in the pursuit of excellence,' (More, 1999). David Pearce (co-founder of the World Transhumanist Association) expresses boldly the new responsibility evolution has passed on to its 'technology creating' offspring: 'If we want to live in paradise, we will have to engineer it ourselves. If we want eternal life, then we'll need to rewrite our bug-ridden genetic code and become god-like. ...only hi-tech solutions can ever eradicate suffering from the living world. Compassion alone is not enough,' (Interview Cronopis, 2007).

As many of the quotations above and even a cursory reading of Transhumanist literature reveals, they harbor a deeply instrumentalist understanding of technology, and I shall argue that it is this simplistic conception of technology that underwrites and funds the plausibility of their posthuman promises. When one recognizes how deeply hermeneutical, dialectical, and self-reflexive human involvement with technology truly is, one becomes suspicious that that Transhumanist attempts to 'remotely' control the future of our species through technology may more likely be a symptom of their already being unwittingly controlled by technology as the result of the naïveté of their present embrace of it. Anyway, that's my hunch.

Like Margaret Thatcher who in 1982 claimed

'Information technology is friendly: it offers a helping hand; it should be embraced. We should think of it more like E. T. than I. T.' (Robins and Webster 1989, p. 25), Transhumanists are technophiles who are literally in love with technology and who understand it instrumentally, as a fascinating but neutral means of expansive and efficient goal procurement. In their view, the projective goals that technology is deployed to deliver are what brings non-neutrality into the picture, while the technologies used to pursue these goals are, as it were, innocent by-standers. Instrumentalist views of technology woefully underestimate the dialectical nature of technologies, harboring, as they do, a rather naïve realism that understands humans to be unchanged by their use of technologies and the human world to be massively constrained by the objective features of its micro-constituents which technology merely helps us arrange or rearrange into aggregates that conform to our preferred configurations. The world is an arena of problems and obstacles that a rational deployment of technology will solve or overcome. Technology is nothing more than an array of tools that if used rationally will do things for us, and that is the end of it.

But surely a more adequate and less naïve understanding of technology recognizes that technologies themselves are not entirely inert but interact with their users and changes them in subtle yet non-trivial ways. Technologies, by virtue of what they enable and disable in the form of life that uses them, embed certain individual and social biases, certain telic tendencies of their own functionality that incline their users in certain directions. Think for a moment about how the invention of so simple a tool as a hammer altered human perception, remembering Abraham Maslov's quip 'to a man with a hammer, everything looks like a nail.' Or how the simple technology of the wheel revolutionized not only the human body's limitations and possibilities, but the social world in which the human mind takes shape. Or how an invention originally designed to regulate the religious routines of the monastery, the mechanical clock, ultimately enabled the rise of capitalism which has progressively transformed human self-understanding in innumerable and largely unnoticed ways. In this sense, technologies are never merely means or exclusively instrumentalities or totally tools.

Although Heidegger's ruminations on technology as found in his 1955 lecture 'The Question Concerning Technology' are often obscure and at certain points contentious, I think there are some sound insights woven into this abstruse piece that can help us illuminatingly question the vision of technology upon which Transhumanist speculations

about the future rely. In this essay he challenges head-on the naïve instrumentalist conception of technology that Transhumanism assumes. The essence of modern technology, says Heidegger, is not found in an array of instrumental artifacts, but is most profoundly understood as a cast of mind or a way of representing the world that arose when early modern science brought to fruition certain objectifying and abstractive impulses of the human psyche that reduced nature to disenchanting mechanical mass in motion, an exhibition of 'a coherence of forces calculable in advance' (Heidegger, 1977, p. 21).

According to Heidegger, wherever there are technologies, there is always already a way of revealing the world that preceded them (Heidegger, 1977, p. 12). What he seems to be claiming is that technology is never an hermeneutic-free enterprise. He contends that the rise of modern science brought about a drastic shift in the way the world would thereafter be revealed, and since humans are beings who understand themselves in relation to the world's otherness, a drastic shift in human self-understanding would gradually ensue in the West.

Prior to the rise of modern science, tools, implements, and simple mechanisms were understood, with few exceptions, as rationally forged devices created and employed by humans care-fully to 'bring-forth' (Heidegger, 1977, p. 11) nature's own potentials to realize basic human goods. For example, the ship's sails or the windmill's blades would catch the wind, allowing it to be wholly itself as it served human ends. In the classical and premodern understanding of nature, human goods or ends were understood as a sub-set of nature's own ends. The whole cosmos was conceived to be ordered by objective ends that naturally and inextricably conduced to the realization of basic human goods. Nor did human will or desire have anything to do with either the origination or shape of these human goods or ends; they were not the result of human deliberation or choice, but fundamental givens of the supernatural forces that originally ordered nature and continued to hold it in being. The cosmos was revealed to these premoderns as bearing an ontological grain that to go along with brought human fulfillment and to go against brought alienation and ruination. The tools and simple technologies developed in the premodern world were understood to have arisen through the natural ends of the cosmos evoking within humans the means of their realization—Heidegger refers to this kind of revealing of nature as 'a bringing-forth in the sense of *poiesis*' (Heidegger, 1977, p. 14).

However, things changed dramatically, according to Heidegger, with the rise of modern science and

the technological way of being it entrenched in the West. After the late medieval voluntarism and nominalism effectively de-Formed the cosmos—flattened its ontological hierarchy into a uni-verse of matter in mechanical, end-less motion, and disenchanting it of intrinsic values and ends—modern techno-science arose to *order* the universe of matter in motion into serving human welfare (and, of course, human war-fare!). From this point on, if the universe will have any ends or values, they will be those imposed or projected onto it by the autonomous and alien subjectivity of human desire. Heidegger referred to the revealing through which modern technology discloses the disenchanting world-machine as *Herausfordern*, a cold, aggressive, commanding forth (Heidegger, 1977, p. 14). From within this cold hermeneutic of modern techno-science, all of reality shows itself as storable, abstract, inert stuff, standing on reserve as resources to be shaped and ordered by the contingent projections of human ends and values. Such ordering or framing (*Gestell*) of reality is the essence of modern technology, says Heidegger: as the only subjectivity within the desert landscape of a disenchanting world, humans are moved or feel summoned to so frame nature that it shows itself only as *Bestand* (Heidegger, 1977, p. 17) or standing-reserve, a stock of energy resources standing on reserve for human use and disposal.⁸ In contrast to the sailboat's use of wind to carry the vessel over the water's surface, where nature's wind, un-worked over by humans, literally breathes through our technology to realize a human end, the internal combustion engine, a prime example of what Heidegger calls 'modern technology,' thrusts the speed boat violently through the water by virtue of gasoline which is the product of humans working over the earth's limited resource of petroleum, and a product available only because it has been stored up, distributed, and regulated through a vast bureaucracy. Modern technology frames the earth and all it contains as capital, standing ready for technological transformation and human consumption.

Heidegger says 'So long as we represent technology as an instrument, we remain held fast in the will to master it,' (Heidegger, 1977, p. 32). Ominously and somewhat paradoxically, Heidegger seems to be suggesting that our attempts to master technology will bring with them a kind of slavery or addiction to technology's formatting of our world picture, making every thing, eventually even our selves, show up *sub species manipulanda*. That is, embracing the superficial instrumentalist conception of technology as neutral gadgetry, a position whose appeal is compelling in a world whose enchantments

have lost their independent standing, ensnares us in a cold hermeneutic 'in the worst possible way,' by inclining us to a 'precipitous fall ... where [we ourselves] will have to be taken as standing-reserve' (Heidegger, 1977, p. 27). In this way, Heidegger sees modern technology implying the nihilistic metaphysics of will to power. In short, if Heidegger is taken seriously, those who hold to the modern instrumentalist view of technology have themselves been *framed*, framed like the man with a hammer into seeing the world as a vast array of nails waiting to be pounded, framed like the men with advanced computational devices into seeing all of reality as computable information, or 'computronium'—as Kurzweil calls it (Kurzweil, 2007, p. 13).

Given Heidegger's rather less simplistic reading of technology, where technology is not so much about efficient gadgets and time-saving devices, but more about a way of representing nature and human nature in particular, we begin to see that it is perhaps not at all surprising that Transhumanists, being entirely instrumentalist in their uptake of technology, proudly view human being as problematic raw material to be technologically worked over into conformity with the shadowy posthuman adumbrations they claim to glimpse just the other side of the singularity. Having fallen under the spell of an instrumentalist reading of technology, the Transhumanists are largely blind to how much of their vision of a posthuman future might just be a consequence of their own imaginations having been contoured and compromised by the hidden workings of the purportedly 'neutral' technologies they have already embraced. That is, perhaps the apparent inevitability of posthumanity might reveal more about how Transhumanists have become 'tools of their tools,' as Thoreau expressed, well over a century ago, a tendency he could already discern in the social impact of industrialization's modern technologies (Thoreau, 1854/2003, p. 33).

Neil Postman (and many others) has argued that technologies not only do things for us, they also do things *to* us. Moreover, they not only do things for us and to us, they also and at the same time *undo* things; they give and take away, often giving us something we desire (ease, efficiency, convenience, etc.) and taking away something we need (friction, concrete contact with nature, a sense of our limitations, etc.). For example, as they enable us to do more without as much physical exertion, they at the same time weaken our bodies. As they advance the acquisition of information and establish new knowledge monopolies, they at the same time undermine traditional practices and wisdom. As they expand the band-width of our communication capacities, they at the same time diminish the depth

of our dialogues and subtly and unconsciously impoverish the meanings of key words we use (e.g., the meaning of ‘information’ after the computer revolution, or the meaning of ‘friend’ to an avid Facebook user). As they increase the power and entrench the authority of the rich and enfranchised, they at the same time take away power from and diminish the voice of the poor and disenfranchised. And, perhaps most importantly of all, they conceal what they take away even as they highlight what they give—and *this is why they are always more dangerous than anyone who presumes they are neutral instruments are likely to recognize*. Marshal McLuhan warned that ‘unconsciousness of the effect of any force is a disaster, especially a force that we have made ourselves,’ (McLuhan, 1962, p. 248). The admittance of any new technology into a culture does not merely add a new item to that culture; it also transforms that culture by changing those who use the technologies, revising their bodies, beliefs, languages, imaginations, communities, and this drastically alters their sense of limitations and possibilities in the world.

Postman maintains every technology ‘embeds an ideological bias,’ predisposing its users ‘to construct the world as one thing rather than another, to value one thing over another, to amplify one sense or skill or attitude more loudly over another,’ (Postman, 1993, p. 13). Technologies bring about ‘ecological change’ (Ibid., p. 18): ‘New technologies alter the character of our interests: the things we think *about*. They alter the character of our symbols: the things we think *with*. And they alter the nature of community: the arena in which [our] thoughts develop,’ (Ibid., p. 20). On this more nuanced understanding of technology, technology is understood to be a system of psychic and social forces; not merely physical forces that direct nature to procure our goals, but also symbolic forces that incline thought, language, and society in certain directions, effectively reflecting even as it revises something of what it means to be human. New technologies we accept immediately and largely imperceptibly begin to restructure human practices into conformity with the demands of their efficiencies and their ever evolving interdependencies on other and newer technologies, and consequently they will also require new social policies to accommodate and entrench these new practices, all of which will have profound impacts on the type of people we become and the type of communities we inhabit. Technologies don’t just re-arrange the world of objects in more efficient ways; they revise our expectations, our beliefs, our perceived needs, changing how we understand ourselves, what we conceive of as a life well lived,

how we relate to others, and therefore bear profound yet rarely noticed political and ethical dimensions.

Steve Talbot offers an interesting perspective on the techno-slavery that Transhumanists proffer as the means to an ultimate liberation. In his wise and deeply insightful book, *Devices of the Soul: Battling for Our Selves in an Age of Machines*, he reminds us that technology originates from us and even from within us. Every technology is an amplification of human potentials, some primarily amplify certain bodily capabilities, and others, as in the case of information technologies, amplify certain mental capabilities, habits, and routines. Think of a hammer for a moment. It’s an analogue of our fist with its properties of density and imperviousness to pain greatly amplified. Informationally driven technologies also externalize, mimic, and amplify certain low-level functionalities of our minds that are amenable to abstraction, externalization, and mechanization. A hand-held calculator, for instance, abstracts our basic skills of rule following, symbol manipulation, memorization, and externalizes these abstractions in a complex of hard- and soft-ware whose output amplifies our native calculating speed and memory capacities.

Not only do technologies amplify and reflect back to us aspects of our bodies’ and minds’ facilities and aptitudes, technologies are also dialectical to their very core. When we *create* tools and technologies, we ingeniously impose our own intentionality on the boundary conditions of matter’s physical forces to deflect them to serve our ends, bending nature, as it were, around the inclinations of our nature. But interestingly, when we then turn around and *use* the tools and technologies we have made, these technical effigies of our own minds bring with them, by virtue of their externalized material embodiment, unforeseeable personal and unintended social consequences, i.e., certain ends or biases of their own that impose the demands of their functionality and form on our intentions, subtly bending our nature and that of our communities around their artifactual nature. Consider how the introduction of the automobile has not only transformed global geopolitical relationships, the globe’s climate and landscape, and the global economy, but closer to home, changed our cities, suburbs, jobs, communities, and even our own personal senses of freedom, space, and time. Technologies give us more of what we consciously desire while taking from us what we are not even aware of needing, and along the way create new desires that we sooner or later experience as fundamental needs. To put it bluntly, technologies create addictions—perhaps some are positive, others innocuous, but there is no doubt that some are deeply de-humanizing.⁹

Our modern culture is ubiquitously woven through with computing technologies that are externalizations and amplifications of certain mechanical and automatic capacities of human intelligence, what Talbott calls 'devices' of the human mind (Talbott, 2007). The mental capacities that our information age and culture of informatics embodies in its technologies are the qualitatively, expressively, and creatively impoverished habits of mind that, as such, can be captured mechanically by opening and closing transistorized logical gates via voltage differentials to then be reduced to the ones and zeros of machine code. What this means is that we are cocooned in a world that reflects, everywhere we turn, ramped up externalized artifacts of the mechanical features of our own minds; in fact, these devices and the 'closely woven web of programmed logic' (Talbott, 2007, p. viii) they have spun into our lives, have so permeated, imbricated, and implicated themselves in our social, cultural, economic, political, and even religious environments that they are literally determining the rhythms and textures, that is, the *quality*, of our lives—explaining why, as Donna Haraway observes, we have become 'frighteningly inert' in our living (Haraway, 1991, P. 52).

If Talbott is right, and technologies, although embodied in external physical platforms, are nonetheless aspects of us, then technologies are never merely neutral gadgets. They bring into technical union external material forms that vector with their own predispositions and unpredictable biases combined with those aspects of our selves that are most susceptible to mechanical simulation, which means aspects of our lower-selves. And thus, the Transhumanist project of progressively replacing our flesh with more durable and efficient technologies can be read not so much as they propose, *viz.*, as the only road to human liberation and to entering higher and potentially immortal orders of posthuman being, but rather as the most devious yet captivating path to sub-humanization the world has yet seen for it is nothing less than an invitation to re-make our humanity in the image of our lower-selves.

It is interesting to put this observation in the context of the traditional humanist project of self-remaking. With roots stretching all the way back to Plato and Aristotle, humanism is an effort of self-discipline, self-forgiveness, and the pursuit of deep self-knowledge to bring the rationality, wisdom, and universal intent of our higher selves into harmonious integration with our lower hedonistic passions and selfish instincts—in Freudian terms, placing the Pleasure principle within the constraints of the Reality principle. The Transhumanist enterprise, if Talbott is right, reverses the trajectory

of humanism's mission of self-remaking by unwittingly pursuing a policy of engineered intellects, contrived character qualities, and virtual virtues that will technologically enframe our higher self in the designs and devices of our lower self.

6. Concluding Reflection: Transhumanism's project of Technological Self-Making in the Sweep of Modern History

Ever since the rise of modern science in the 17th century, everything non-measurable and/or non-natural has been progressively called into question—either explained away as mythical superstitions or as merely illusions generated by subjective human projections. When the hierarchical and intrinsically normative medieval cosmos was flattened into mere matter in motion, under the cold hermeneutic of emerging modern science, the cozy premodern cosmos was transformed into our modern unbounded uni-verse, having all its qualitative features reduced ultimately to quantitative agglomerations under the deterministic impress of impersonal mechanistic laws, effectively purging the cosmos of inherent values, moral norms, and objective telic trajectories. What this accomplished was, as we have discussed, the releasing of nature into a wholly instrumental register, rendering nature what Heidegger called *Bestand* or 'standing reserve'—mere inert stuff to be shaped, stored, and deflected into the service of human desires. But this ontological reduction which freed science to treat nature as merely resource, also left human experience itself in an obvious interpretive bind: how are we to account for and deal with those undeniable yet non-measurable and apparently non-natural dimensions of our first-person perspective for which there is absolutely no place in a wholly quantitative universe, and what do we do with our deep, irrepressible moral aspirations to meaning and value that are denied legitimacy under this rising scientific regime of disenchantment? These *aporia* were, however, largely ignored, repressed, or trivialized on the presumption that they would soon be vanquished by the inexorable advancement of natural sciences. Today, however, we are witnessing the return of the repressed. Those repressed moral and immortal longings and immeasurable dimensions of human being that modernity banished from the lifeworld are erupting again, all ramped up and now bearing scientific legitimation as Transhumanism's techno-scientific project of eliminating aging, illness, unsatisfied desires, and even death.

From this vantage, Transhumanism begins to look like an attempt to virtually re-cover the enchantment of reality that modernity literally conjured away. The original, premodern enchantment derived from the

Creator's expressing His character via exemplars in matter (creation's formal participation in the divine agency that brought it into being); Transhumanist enchantment will instead derive from the techno-ingenuity of humans capable of encoding their fantasies in silicon circuitry thereby eliminating the 'unchosen' dimensions of their world and their selves. In this categorical refusal of the givens of human existence, they will be launched into a thankless future, a future devoid of any grounds for thankfulness. The Transhumanist project is perhaps one of the last desperate efforts of modernist critical thought to recover the certainty and familiarity of the premodern cosmos, the repudiation of which ironically marked modernity's birth.

I think Transhumanism is all about this ancestral birthmark. Transhumanism enacts a nostalgic narrative of recovery: it wants premodern-like certainty, certainty about its beliefs and certainty about its blessed destination, but it wants it on its own terms: it wants to be the author of this certainty. Transhumanism wants to inhabit a premodern-like world that is familiar, predictable and reasonable, but it wants to be the author of this world. Having embraced modern science's objectivist ideals that leave no place for realities that cannot be quantified, rendered explicit, algorithmic and objective, it faces a disenchanting world, a dead world-machine with only quantities, no qualities, facts with no value, and mechanisms without purpose. Transhumanist aspirations arise from a hunch, long in the making, that Homo sapiens can manufacture on its own terms and through its own means not only the re-enchantment of the world with certainty and familiarity, and with virtual qualities, values, and purposes, but also that it can even give birth to an immortal self by re-engineering itself into the image of its desires and fantasies, finally exchanging its birthmark for a trademark: h+™!

Philosophy Dept.
Trinity Western University
7600 Glover Rd.
Langley, BC V2Y 1Y1
CANADA
Email: Bobd@twu.ca

Bibliography:

- Bendle, M. F., 'Teleportation, Cyborgs, and the Posthuman Ideology,' *Social Semiotics*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 2002.
- Bostrom, N., 'A History of Transhumanist Thought,' 2005: available online at www.nickbostrom.com
- Fukuyama, F., 'Transhumanism,' *Foreign Policy*, No. 144, Sept/Oct. 2004: 42-43
- 'Second Thoughts: the last man in a bottle,' *The*

- National Interest*, Summer 1999.
- The End of History and the Last Man*, New York, The Free Press, 1992.
- Gardner, J., *The Intelligent Universe: AI, ET, and the Emerging Mind of the Cosmos*, Franklin Lakes, NJ: The Career Press, 2007.
- Gelles, D., 'Immortality 2.0,' *The Futurist*, Jan-Feb 2009.
- Glannon, W., 'Decelerating and Arresting Human Aging,' in Gordijn and Chadwick (eds.), 2008.
- Good, I. J., 'Speculations Concerning the First Ultra-intelligent Machine,' in *Advances in Computers*, Franz L. Alt and Morris Rubinfeld, eds., Vol. 6, New York: Academic Press, 1965.
- Gordijn, B. and R. Chadwick, eds., *Medical Enhancement and Posthumanity*, Springer Science + Business Media, B. V. 2008.
- Grant, G., *Technology and Justice*, Concord, House of Anansi Press Limited, 1986.
- Hannemann, J., 'Search and Destroy' *U. S. Catholic Conference*, January 2006.
- Haraway, D., *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* New York: Routledge, 1991.
- Heidegger, M., *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (trans. William Lovitt). New York: Harper & Row, 1977.
- Hekimi S. and L. Guarente, 'Genetics and the Specificity of the Aging Process.' 2003, *Science* vol. 299.
- 'Interview with Nick Bostrom and David Pearce,' *Cronopis*, 2007.
- Keim, B., 'Brain-Machine Interfaces Make for Tricky Ethics,' *Wired Science*, Feb. 2, 2009.
- Kurzweil, R., 'Ray Kurzweil on How to Combat Aging,' submitted to *Technology Review's* interview with Leonard Hayflick, July 6th 2009. Available online at: <http://www.technologyreview.com/blog/guest/23802/>
- 'Forward to James Gardner's *The Intelligent Universe*,' in Gardner, 2007.
- The Singularity is Near*, Penguin Group, USA, 2005.
- 'The Evolution of the Mind in the Twenty-First Century,' in Richards, 2002.
- 'Are We Becoming an Endangered Species? Technology and Ethics in the Twenty-first Century,' 2001. Available online at: <http://www.kurzweilai.net/articles/art0358.html>
- Lash, S., *Critique of Information*, London, Sage Press, 2002.
- Lawton, G., 'The Incredibles,' *New Scientist*, May 13th 2006, Vol. 190, Issue 2551.
- Lu, J., et al., 'Light-Activated Nanoimpeller-Controlled Drug Release in Cancer Cells,' *Small*, Vol 4, Issue, 4, March 2008.
- Martin, R., 'Mind Control,' *Wired Magazine*, Issue 13, March 2005. Available online at: <http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/13.03/brain.html>
- McGee, E. M., 'Bioelectronics and Implanted Devices,' in B. Gordijn, R. Chadwick (eds.), 2008.
- McLuhan, M., *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962.
- Meyer, K., 'Amortality' *Time Magazine*, What's Next 2009: 10 Ideas Changing the World Right Now, March 12, 2009.
- Mick, J., 'Conference Examines man and Machine

- Merging: How Tech Will Make Human Brain Obsolete,' *DailyTech*, July 15, 2008. Available online at: <http://www.dailytech.com/article.aspx?newsid=12384>
- Moravec, H., *Mind Children: The Future of Robot and Human Intelligence*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1988.
- Robot: Mere Machine to Transcendent Mind*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999.
- More, M., 'Letter to Mother Nature,' 1999. Available online at: <http://www.maxmore.com/mother.htm>
- Postman, N., *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*. New York, Vintage, 1993.
- Richards, J. ed., *Are We Spiritual Machines? Ray Kurzweil vs. the Critics of Strong A. I.*, Seattle, Discovery Institute, 2002.
- Robins, K. and F. Webster, *The Technical Fix: Education, Computers and Industry*. London: Macmillan, 1989.
- Roco, M. and W. Bainbridge, 'Converging technologies for improving human performance: nanotechnology, biotechnology, information technology and cognitive science,' 2003, Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic. Available from: www.wtec.org/ConvergingTechnologies/Report/NBI_C_report.pdf.
- Russell, B., *Mysticism and Logic*, Garden City, Doubleday Anchor Books, 1917/1957.
- Singer, E., 'The Human Genome: Yours for \$48,000' *Technology Review*, June 11, 2009.
- Talbott, S., *The Future Does Not Compute: Transcending the Machines in our Midst*, Sebastopol, O'Reilly & Associates, Inc., 1995.
- 'Editor Explores Unintended, and Negative, Side of Technology,' *New York Times* Interview of Steve Talbot by Lisa Guernsey, Nov. 25, 1999.
- Devices of the Soul: Battling for Our Selves in an Age of Machines*, Sebastopol, O'Reilly & Associates, Inc., 2007.
- Thoreau, H. D., *Walden and Civil Disobedience*, New York, Barnes & Noble Books, 2003.
- Vita-More, N., 'The New [human] Genre—Primo Posthuman,' April, 2004; Paper delivered at Ciber@RT Conference, Bilbao, Spain.
- Warwick, K., *March of the Machines: The Breakthrough in Artificial Intelligence*, Champaign, University of Illinois Press, 2004.
- Wikipedia, 'Respirocyte' <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Respirocyte>
- coach) and renowned craftsman of aphorisms.
3. 'The future enters into us in order to transform itself in us long before it happens,' Rainier Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*, trans. M.D. Herter Norton, revised ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1934), 65.
 4. Ray Kurzweil admits that there is no absolute protection against the misuse of strong AI, but he is convinced that 'maintaining an open free-market system for incremental scientific and technological progress, in which each step is subject to market acceptance, will provide the most constructive environment for technology to embody widespread human values' (Kurzweil, 2005, 420).
 5. But just in case the unthinkable were to overtake them (i.e., they actually die), they, like their elderly forebears, are hedging their bets with **Alcor** cryogenic-suspension contracts—for \$120,000 one can have one's whole body cryogenically frozen or, if one is on a strict budget, one can have one's head put on ice for a mere \$50,000! After all, why worry about the body (it's just jelly!) when the *real* you supervenes upon the brain's neuronal pathways and patterns.
 6. Already since the practice of prenatal genetic screening and diagnosis (PNSD) has become routine prenatal medical care in the US, prospective parents who elect to forego it, are viewed as socially and parentally irresponsible to the point that it is not uncommon to have HMOs refusing treatment to special needs children on the grounds that the children's malady was a preexisting condition that the parents could have prevented via abortion had they not refused the services of prenatal screening (Hannemann, 2006, p. 16).
 7. According to a 2005 report from the International Energy Agency, over 1.6 billion people (about ¼ of the global population) have no access to electricity today. This does not speak well for the idea that Transhumanist enhancements will be democratically distributed, despite the fact that Transhumanist always speak in the first-person plural, as if speaking for humanity in general. They, in fact, are really speaking for a small minority of the affluent and technologically empowered classes of the US and others of the global North. In the US, there are over 46 million without medical insurance, while others spend 1 billion a year on baldness remedies! Already the pharmaceutical companies are famous for their part in the have/have not divide: 'Millions in Africa and elsewhere who are dying from AIDS in the face of the scientific failure to develop a cure or even affordable treatment, or who stagger along legless and maimed from landmine explosions and high-tech wars, might have different views about the power of technology,' (Bendle, 2002, p. 51).
 8. In a passage from George Grant's *Technology and Justice*, a text heavily indebted to Heidegger's meditations on technology, he expresses clearly what Heidegger hints at only obscurely: 'When we represent technology to ourselves as an array of neutral instruments, invented by human beings under human control, we are expressing a kind of common sense, but it is a common sense from within the very

Notes:

1. 'Transhumanism' is a term coined in the late 1950s by Julian Huxley, and denotes a movement with historical ties to the now defunct Extropy Institute started by Max More and Tom Bell in 1990—'extropy' is a neologism that is intended to mean the opposite of entropy, i.e., negentropy.
2. A quip attributed to Yogi Berra, the famous New York Yankee's catcher (later to become the New York Met's

technology we are attempting to represent. ...We are led to forget that the modern destiny permeates our representations of the world and ourselves. The coming to be of technology has required changes in what we think is good, what we think good is, how we conceive sanity and madness, justice and injustice, rationality and irrationality, beauty and ugliness. ... [Technology's] destiny ... enfolds us in its own conceptions of instrumentality, neutrality and purposiveness. It is in this sense that it has been

truthfully said: technology is the ontology of the age,' (Grant, 1986, p. 32).

9. I think this is what's behind Heidegger's referencing of 'But where danger is/ grows the saving power also' (Heidegger, 1977, p. 28 & 34) from Holderlin's 'Patmos'. Talbott puts the same idea less poetically, but perhaps more pointedly: 'The computer is our hope if we can accept it as our enemy. As our friend, it will destroy us,' (Talbott, 1999).
-

BOOK REVIEWS

Flavio Baroncelli,
Mi manda Platone,

edited Annalisa Siri and Emilio Mazza, Genoa: il melangolo, 2009.

Typically, professional philosophers no longer *read* philosophy books written by their colleagues; they *use* them. They review them. They select passages. They extract arguments. They build theories or new books upon them. They build theories or new books against them. Very rarely, and quite unexpectedly, they read them, purely and simply. As a matter of academic life, these books are not even written to be read purely and simply. On the contrary, they are written precisely for the various uses that can be expected of them within academia. Very rarely, after all, are such books *not* rhetorically challenged, lengthy, full of jargon, taxing, pretentious, of limited enjoyment and, at least to non-professionals, plainly boring.

Flavio Baroncelli's posthumous collection of short pieces by il melangolo is a splendid exception to standard philosophical literature. It is a slender book (157 pp.) that can be read purely and simply. Indeed, to the extent available to hopeless academically minded professional philosophers like myself, it can be enjoyed as a string of exquisite literary-philosophical vignettes. These short pieces, originally published in various Italian periodicals and newspapers, range from scholarly debates on Plato's role in Western culture to the pride of showing scars and tattoos on one's own body. They are divided in two parts, the former dealing with philosophical themes (15-83) and the latter dealing with ordinary life and socio-political affairs (87-149). Witty and concise, they retain the inventiveness and the curiosity that characterised Baroncelli's life, of which Armando Massarenti, Emilio Mazza, Annalisa Siri and Gürol Sagiroglu Baroncelli provide a useful account via the preface (5-8), a short biography (151-3) and an editorial note (155-7).

Some professional philosophers, like the undersigned, may attempt to make some use of Baroncelli's book, e.g. by writing a review of it. However, the review is bound to be fairly unorthodox. What can one say of a book that reads refreshingly colloquial yet deep; humbly self-depreciating but highly learned; Ironically sceptical though warmly humane; both open to the general public and pregnant nonetheless with precious insights for actual academics? Baroncelli's prose, full of abstraction-averse, real-life examples and academic-pomposity-shattering

vernacular gems, flows like the prose of his eighteenth-century role-models. Most of all, it recalls Voltaire's, whose humour and compassion it evokes when dealing with topics such as tolerance, liberty, dignity, multiculturalism, religion and scientific realism.

Perhaps, the author of this slender book would have preferred to be compared to David Hume, whom Baroncelli admired and studied. Or even to Hume's and the French *philosophes'* much older mentor, i.e. Michel de Montaigne, to whom Baroncelli devotes a delightful sketch (23-6). Still, it is Voltaire the name that springs to mind when Baroncelli combines together, with a few touches of his pen, experience, irony, linguistic analysis, moral wisdom and intellectual acumen.

Professional philosophers may fear such facility of expression. Clear and pleasant language is often seen as a threat to an argument's poignancy and visibility. Long, tedious, difficult passages abound in philosophical literature. This happens not solely because philosophers are not poets or novelist, though they may be failed ones, but also because philosophers want the full load of reasoning poured into their works to be felt and borne by the reader. Whenever reasoning seems too unhindered and beautifully rendered, professional philosophers are likely to accuse it of being either 'shallow' or 'rhetorical', if not even both. Nonetheless Baroncelli was a professional philosopher, and a good one. His arguments are sound, they stand on solid ground, *and* they are written so well and humorously – there is enough to become bitterly envious.

Certainly, the same philosophers that treat as 'shallow' and 'rhetorical' their literarily gifted colleagues are likely to accuse me of being partial. After all, I knew personally Flavio Baroncelli as teacher, mentor and friend. That is why I shall invite them to attempt to read simply his latest and, probably, last book. They should follow the advice he himself gave with regard to Plato, whom one should read 'because he is useless' (66). Hopefully, they will appreciate Baroncelli's gentle and humorous way of being a genuine, unpretentious source of enlightenment.

Giorgio Baruchello

Thinking ‘Masocritically’ about Violent Images and their Effect on Subjects

Marco Abel

Violent Affect: Literature, Cinema, and Critique after Representation

Lincoln, NE, USA, U. of Nebraska P., 2008. ISBN 978-0-8032-2481-0; 312 pp. \$25.95 pbk.

Given the wealth of scholarship devoted to the subject of violence in art and in literature, readers cannot help but approach Marco Abel’s *Violent Affect* under the strong prejudice that plentiful and valuable knowledge already exists proving the negative effects of violent imagery upon public spectators. Abel immediately disarms their confidence in this assumption by raising a simple question that challenges the assumption at a fundamental level of definitions of terms and thus places in doubt all previous investigations in this area. The simple question around which Abel frames his exploration is: *What is a violent image?*

Abel charges that the failure to problematise what a violent image is undermines the worth of the vast body of existing scholarship on images of violence in literature and cinema, and places in question the efficacy of those analyses for explaining how and why these images function. Previous scholars simply assume that violent images represent real life events. This foundational assumption occludes the actual function of violent images and causes scholars to fail to distinguish among differing kinds of violent images. It does not permit even the most basic of differentiations among violent images, for example, as violence in animated films as opposed to that depicted in photographic realist films.

The assumption that violent images simply represent real life events of violence has oriented previous studies toward analyses of the images in terms of their ability to accurately reflect the real thing, to replicate a thing or event that exists prior to the emergence of the image. Scholars have turned away from the fact of the actual violence affected by violent images to examine what these images signify or mean, what living truth they *re-present*. In sticking to their founding assumption, Abel understands previous scholars to be missing the point of the violent images, neglecting the crucial aspect of the work of the violent images—the experience evoked in the audience by submitting oneself to *their reality*.

For Abel, the failure to problematize the very subject of their study negates the conclusions reached by previous scholars in their investigations of violent images. The problem is that these (at best, questionable; at worst, faulty) conclusions have had a vast

effect upon our world. ‘Social policy is made—and institutional relevance established—on the basis of [their] findings’ (xi). Abel proposes a radically alternative approach to the study of violent images that he promises will open not only new avenues of investigation into film and literature, but will evoke new ethical insights into violence as a subjective phenomenon.

Abel insists that, to truly understand violent images, we must cast off the representationalist orientation that structures our view of violent images in themselves, and reconfigures them as representations of something else, some greater reality. This shift of orientation will not be easy or comfortable, explains Abel, because representationalism allows the scholar great existential benefit. It allows her to separate herself at a safe distance from the violence she studies *out there* in the phenomena, to strap the violence down in firm, clinical, analytic language, and to judge it objectively. Representationalism accomplishes a ‘Platonic’ mirroring gesture between image and reality that implies the scholar’s pristine innocence from her subject, allowing her a violence-free place of analysis, prior to the phenomenon of violence.

The new orientation toward violent images, proposed by Abel in *Violent Affect*, dictates that we abandon the safety of scholarly objectivity and experience the images *subjectively*, that we may study their force upon us, their ability to *violently affect* us. The subjective orientation challenges us to ask different questions about violent images. What are these images? What effect do they seek to have upon their audience? What function do they serve? How do they achieve their desired effect? The new orientation proposed by Abel forces us to get beyond the moral outrage evoked by the images and grapple with violent images in their own right, and not as representations of some greater reality; it forces us to grapple with another reality, a metaphysics that affected subjectivity witnesses in the physical and emotional effects of the images.

Abel names his new approach to violent images ‘masocriticism’ blending the notion of masochism with that of criticism. Masocriticism Abel understands as

a criticism of violence [engaged] in a rigorous practice of deferrals, of diagnosing instead of judging images, of producing a symptomatology instead of a history of syndromes, of responding through the affective, visceral side of language and images rather than through their second order level—representation’ (23).

Just as a masochist is forced to give herself over to the unforeseeable future of the affective event, allowing her body to be reconfigured through an

unmediated engagement with violence, so the ‘masocritic,’ abandoning the safe distance of scholarly investigation, must allow herself to be physically and affectively altered by the phenomenological encounter with the violent image, an encounter that will open a new future, a new event, that permits fresh insights into violence, unforeseeable from the safe vantage point of a scholarly objectivity, or filtered through a past as re-presented.

Abel’s point of departure from existing scholarly approaches is taken from insights he identifies in post-structuralist thinkers such as Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Gilles Deleuze. Post-Structuralists tend to conceptualize language and images in terms of their force—‘arepresentationally.’ Abel takes up their challenge and applies it to violent images; his experimental endeavour asks of violent images, not their meanings or whether they are justified as faithful representations of reality, but how they act upon—*affect*—their audience, how they configure the observer’s ability to respond. According to Abel’s theory of masocriticism, only a thoroughly subjective encounter with the violence of violent images in literature and cinema can have adequate pedagogical force to change the subject and her world.

After outlining his theory of masocriticism, Abel then applies it to a number of textual forms. At this point in the book, Abel invites us into his experiment, challenging us to follow us in his treatment of various films and books, and to witness for ourselves how we are ‘affected’ by the violent images we encounter. These encounters reveal and enact the ethical element of Abel’s project. The reader’s engagement with the violent images witnesses how violent images have the power to call forth in their audience a critical engagement with violence. As the images demand of the subject *who undergoes their reality* an affective response to their violence, they simultaneously evoke a response-ability with regard to all violence *per se*. The ethical aspect of the subjective

encounter reveals a compelling fact—that judgments about violence (identified as the flaw in previous scholarship) ultimately cannot be evaded. Masocriticism simply forces us to postpone moralisations in favour of a more deeply subjective moral experience.

What differentiates Marco Abel’s study of violent images from the previous vast body of scholarship on the subject is his altogether radical methodological—and indeed ontological—assumption that ‘signaletic materials of any kind are not representations of something but, instead, constitute the *reality* of representations (or the real forces at work in what are often deemed representations)’ (x). Abel’s is a deep-seated polemic address that provokes a new line of thought about its subject. The reader may enter sceptically into Abel’s radical experiment, but as Abel takes her hand and leads her one after another through her own subjective encounters with violent images—from Mary Harron’s film adaptation of Bret Easton Ellis’ *American Psycho*, to Patricia Highsmith’s fiction, to Robert DeNiro’s acting, to Don DeLillo’s essay on 9/11—she ultimately comes to realise that the experiences she has undergone have thoroughly convinced her of the value of Abel’s pedagogical method.

Abel’s masocriticism is a metaphysical experience, a magic that is worked upon the subject to remove her from her sense of reality in order to teach her lessons about violence, not accessible from within the scholarly frame of reference. Literary and cinematic criticism will be greatly offended by Marco Abel’s new theory of masocritical engagement, but it will also be affected. Further studies in the field of literary and cinematic criticism will be incapable of honest progress until they first address Abel’s fundamental challenge to the founding assumptions of their methodology.

Wendy Hamblet

JOURNALS RECEIVED

Members of the SPCPS (i.e. individual subscribers to *Appraisal*) can borrow copies from the Library.

Please contact the Librarian: David Britton, daverach@lwcldial.net

The full contents of *Revue Roumaine de Philosophie*, *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia*, *Romanian Review of Political Sciences and International Relations* and *Prospettiva Persona*, are displayed on the SPCPS website www.spcps.org.uk

Tradition and Discovery

Ed. Phil Mullins, Missouri Western State College, St Joseph, MO 64507, USA;

mullins@missouriwestern.edu;

www.missouriwestern.edu/orgs/polanyi/.

TAD is now available on line.

Vol. XXXV No. 3, 2008-9

'The Christian Encounter of Paul Tillich and Michael Polanyi', Richard Gelwick.

'Michael and Paulus: A Dynamic Uncoordinated Duo', Durwood Foster

'Polanyi's Enduring Gift to 'Theology and Science'', Robert John Russell

'A Response to the papers of Russell, Foster and Gelwick', Donald Musser

Vol. XXXIV No. 1, 2009-

'Polanyi and Some Philosophical Neighbors: Introduction to This Issue', Walter B. Gulick

'Between Articulation and Symbolization: Framing Polanyi and Langer', Robert E. Innis

'Polanyi and Langer: Toward a Reconfigured Theory of Knowing and Meaning', Walter B. Gulick

'Acknowledgment, Responsibility, and Innovation: A Response to Robert Innis and Walter Gulick', Vincent Colapietro

'From Science to Morality: A Polanyian Perspective on the Letter and Spirit of the Law', Charles Lowney

'In Memoriam: Marjorie Grene', Phil Mullins

Reviews

Philip Clayton and Jim Schaal (eds.), *Practicing Science, Living Faith: Interviews With Twelve Leading Scientists*, Reviewed by Richard Gelwick

Elizabeth Newman, *Untamed Hospitality: Welcoming God and Other Strangers*, Reviewed by Phil Mullins

Doug P. Baker, *Covenant and Community: Our Role as the Image of God*, Reviewed by Andrew Grosso

Polanyiana

Eds Marta Feher and Eva Gabor, Stoczek u. 2, H-1111 Budapest, Hungary;

polanyi@phil.philos.bme.hu; www.polanyi.bme.hu/

Alternate issues in Hungarian and English

Humanitas

National Humanities Institute, PO Box 1387, Bowie, MD 20718-1387 USA; www.nhinet.org/hum.htm

Personalism

Ed: Rev. Prof. C.S. Bartnik, ul. Bazylianowka 54 B, 20-160 Lublin, Poland. personalism@wp.pl.

www.personalism.pl. Separate English and Polish versions of each issue.

The Pluralist

Ed. Randall E. Auxier, Philosophy Dept, Southern Illinois University, Faner Hall, MC-4505, Carbondale, IL 62901. USA

www.press.uillinois.edu/journals/plur.html.

Revue Romaine de Philosophie

Editura Academiei Romane, Calea 13 Septembrie 13, Sector 5, PO Box 5-42, Bucharest, Romania; edacad@ear.ro;

www.ear.ro. Articles in English, French and German.

Latest issues: Vol. 52, 1-2, 2008; Vol. 53, 1-2, 2009.

Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia

Praca da Faculdade 1, P - 4710-297 Braga, Portugal; jvila-cha@facil.ucp.pt; www.rpf.pt.

Articles in Portuguese, Spanish, English, French, Italian, German.

Latest issues: Vol. 63, 1-3, 2007: 'Science and Philosophy', 806 pp., Vol. 64, 1. 2008: 'Spirituality and Philosophy in the Middle Ages', 600 pp.

Romanian Review of Political Sciences and International Relations, Redactia Revistei de Stiinte Politice si Relatii Internationale, Bulevardul Iuliu Maniu 103, e. VII, sector 6, Bucharest. Ispri2004@yahoo.com

Articles in English, French, German and Spanish

Latest Issue: Vol. Vi No. 1, 2009.

Prospettiva Persona: Trimestrale di Cultura, Etica e Politica

Centro Ricerche Personaliste, Via N. Palma, 37 - 64100 Teramo, Italy; www.prospettivapersona.it

Latest issue: No. 64, April-June, 2008.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

All individual subscribers become members of the SPCPS for the two years of each Volume.

All prices in £ Sterling and include postage (by airmail for Overseas)

	Vol. 7, 2008-9, 4 issues		Vols. 1-6 in .pdf
	Printed	Download from website, .pdf format	format on CD
UK			
Individuals	12.00	5.00	5.00
Institutions	20.00	-	8.00
REST OF EUROPE			
Individuals	15.00	5.00	5.50
Institutions	24.00	-	8.50
REST OF WORLD			
Individuals	18.00	5.00	6.00
Institutions	26.00	-	9.00

Please send cheques or money orders (payable to 'SPCPS') in **GBP (£)** to *Appraisal*, 20 Ulverscroft Road, Loughborough, LE11 3PU, UK, or pay on-line at www.spcps.org.uk and follow the links to Subscriptions and Shop. Copies of issues of the current Volume already published will be sent upon receipt of your subscription.

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; reprinted 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)
- LL = *The Logic of Liberty* (London, Routledge; Chicago, University of Chicago Press; 1951)
- M = *Meaning* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1975)
- PK = *Personal Knowledge* (London, Routledge; Chicago, University of Chicago Press; 1958)
- SFS = *Science, Faith and Society* (London, OUP, 1946; 2nd ed. U. of Chicago Press, 1964)
- 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).