Michael Polányi: Religious Faith and Tacit Knowing

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"The steps are laid down by the prophet who says,
'Unless ye believe, ye shall not understand.'"
– *St. Augustine of Hippo,* ***De libero Arbitrio,*** *395* C.E.

"For I do not seek to understand that I may believe,
but I believe in order to understand.
For this I believe – that unless I believe,
I should not understand."
– *St. Anselm of Canterbury,* ***Proslogion,*** *1078*

1. INTRODUCTION

The "post-critical philosophy"[1] of Michael Polányi (1891-1976) is a reaction to the traditional understanding of the relationship between human beings and the external world, and the knowledge that emerges from this relationship.[2] Pre-modernist and modernist systems of thought or rationality essentially break up the human experience into discrete units. For the ancients this break up is

[1] Polányi subtitled his major work, *Personal Knowledge,* with "Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy" in order to imply that his approach goes beyond the "critical" approach of modernist rationality. Includes the "Preface to the Torchbook Edition" (1964). New York: Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., 1964. First published in 1958; revised edition published in 1962.

[2] Cf. Jerry GILL, *The Tacit Mode: Michael Polányi's Postmodern Philosophy* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2000), pp. 13-30. Cf. also pp. 32-33.

achieved ontologically, as reflected in Plato's schematic division of reality into levels or spheres. In modern times, the division is fundamentally accomplished epistemologically, in the separation between the knower and the known, and likewise, in the severing of experience into distinct units. Furthermore, the development of western philosophy has taken an intellectualist stance as a result of this fragmentary approach to human experience. With regard to embodiment, the function of the body in knowledge acquisition either falls into the pitfalls of Humean empiricism (where the body is a passive receiver of varied stimuli), or of Cartesian rationalism (where the body is logically subsequent and substantially distinct and separate from the mind), or of body-negating spiritualism (where the soul is imprisoned in the body and liberation is achieved through ascetic practices). It is against these three vantage points: fragmentary, passive and intellectualist perspectives that Polányi searched for a way to rethink the principles of the epistemic project. Hence, he sought to achieve a holistic, non-passive and non-intellectualistic theory of epistemic experience. He went on to criticize the prevailing conception of modernist rationality, specifically in science (1.1), primarily in its ideal of total or detached objectivity (1.2). Polányi is suggesting that knowledge is inherently personal, because every knower has an active and constitutive role in the production of knowledge (1.3).

1.1 Critique of Modernist Rationality

Polányi starts with an affirmation both of the unity of the human person and of the unity in the interaction between the human person and the external world. For the purposes of this study, we shall investigate the dynamics of relationship between the knowing-subject, already construed in unity, and the object-being-known. The evolution of what has come to be known as "the theory of tacit knowing" emerged from Polányi's own reflection on the process of scientific pursuits. In every passage of time, scientific pursuits continue to evolve. There are the new discoveries that the sciences offer us and, with highly developed technologies, sciences put these discoveries into practical utility. In every phase, something new emerges out of the ordinary that redefines the character of our relationship with the external world. These new data are always products of the dynamic character of the relationship that

constitutes the interaction between the knowing-subject and the object-being-known. Yet, on the side of persons, there appeared and developed an understanding of scientific method, a framework that undermined the very character of interaction: the ideal of objectivity.

Modernist rationality is characterized by a vertical reasoning with arguments presented propositionally; and that these arguments are generally logically structured. It is difficult to pinpoint where and when exactly such a mode of approach developed in human intellectual pursuits.[3] However, the important thing is that in the 20th century, this intellectualist orientation of modernity was intensified. With modernist rationality, science appeared simply as a mirroring of reality, with total detachment from the subject's contribution to scientific pursuits. The subject's contribution to the synthesis of data into a coherent, meaningful and practical body of knowledge is undermined. How do we make the transition from what we have been calling modernist rationality to the problem of ideal objectivity? Modernist rationality is a proper domain of philosophy; and the ideal of objectivity, as it shall be developed later, is a proper domain of science. For Polányi, the problem emerged with the estranged marriage of philosophy with science in the form of logical positivism. Logical positivism, with its principle of verification, has wedded science and philosophy in order to segregate, in the whole body of human knowledge, whatever is meaningful and meaningless. Writing in 1967, Polányi remarked that "[t]he movement of logical positivism, which aimed at a strict definition of validity and meaning, reached the height of its claims and prestige about twenty years ago. Since then it has become clearer year by year that this aim was unattainable."[4] Nowadays, logical positivism has fallen into disrepute with its own central principle of verification being unverifiable, and hence, meaningless. If the philosophy

[3] A possible candidate for what we call "vertical reasoning" is Aristotle himself in his *Posterior Analytics*. I express my gratitude to Prof. Wim de Pater, professor-emeritus of the Higher Institute of Philosophy, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (Belgium), for calling my attention to this. He notes, though, that the *Posterior Analytics* is more concerned with the exposition of "scientific results" rather than the *discovery* of them.

[4] Michael POLÁNYI, *Knowing and Being*, edited by Marjorie GREENE (London: Routledge and Keagan Paul, Ltd., 1969), p. 73.

of science then has lost its theoretical backbone, what theory has replaced it? No alternative had been forwarded, to the knowledge of Polányi. From here he set out to (re-)discover a new framework of understanding the relationship between the knowing-subject and the object-being-known.[5]

1.2 Myth of Total Objectivity

The ideal of objectivity itself is an exigency in every reliable and reputable body of knowledge. Yet, to define the contours of this objectivity as being detached from the knower who perceives, integrates and articulates this very ideal in an impersonal and non-subjective manner, is an illusion, a myth. In the rise of modern science, this totalizing ideal necessitates not only that knowledge should be explicit and objective, but also the very *means* by which we arrive at this knowledge should be explicit and objective. "Everything that was to be known about the world," comments Apczynski, "could now be known through exact operations, open to

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[5] It is not exactly accurate for Polányi to contend that there is no alternative philosophical theory replacing that of logical positivism. In his comment on this, Prof. Wim de Pater argues that there are a few significant philosophers of science outside logical positivism, and that such an opinion ignores the whole of Philosophy of Science. Though Polányi did come to study some of the ideas of other philosophers of science, he seemed not content with their approach. He, however, integrated a good number of their ideas into his system. A case in point is Jules-Henri Poincaré, a 19th century mathematician and Philosopher of Science, with whose notion of "illumination," Polányi identifies his notion of "intuition." Cf. Polányi's essay "Sense and Sense-Giving" in *Knowing and Being,* p. 201, also, *Meaning,* with Harry PROSCH (Chicago: The Chicago University Press, 1975), p. 56.

Polányi stated that his own theory concerning the "kinship between perception and scientific discovery" was confirmed and corroborated by Thomas Kuhn's *On the Structures of Scientific Revolutions,* and by other people. Cf. *Meaning,* pp. 56-60. See an interesting discussion of this in C.B. Daly, "Polányi and Wittgenstein" *Intellect and Hope,* edited by T. Langford and W. Poteat (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1968), pp. 160-163.

However, Polányi was not sympathetic to Karl Popper's brand of Philosophy of Science. Especially in his last publication, Polányi made it clear that his philosophy is divergent from Popper's *The Logic of Scientific Discovery.* For an interesting critique of Popper's stance by Polányi, see the latter's long footnote in *Meaning,* pp. 224-225.

all verification."[6] The myth of total objectivity resonates in Polányi's critique of the prevailing conception of science. He comments:

> [T]he prevailing conception of science, based on the disjunction of subjectivity and objectivity, seeks – and must seek at all costs – to eliminate from science such passionate, personal, human appraisals of theories, or at least to minimize their function to that of a negligible by-play. For modern man has set up as the ideal of knowledge the conception of natural science as a set of statements which is 'objective' in the sense that its substance is entirely determined by observation, even while its presentation may be shaped by convention.[7]

The overriding concern of total objectivity is for explicitness in the means, in the mode of its verification, and even in its articulation. This myth of total objectivity "falsified our conception of truth, by exalting what we can know and prove, while covering up with ambiguous utterances all that we know and *cannot* prove, even though the latter knowledge underlies, and must ultimately set its seal to, all that we *can* prove."[8] Polányi argued that not everything that constitutes knowledge is explicit. There will always be something implicit or to use his term, "tacit." It is this tacit knowledge, that cannot be proven, that underlies and makes possible all that we can prove.

According to Polányi, there are two related instances where this "tacit" dimension of knowledge is intimated: in the analysis of problem and that of (scientific) discovery. In the last part of his Terry Lecture in 1962,[9] Polányi said that the "most striking concrete example" that may be given is the experience of seeing problems. Problem is a strange epistemological concept because to see a problem is to see something that is hidden. In science, the quality of scientific discovery is consequent to the quality of problem

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[6] JOHN V. APCZYNSKI, *Doers of the Word: Toward a Foundational Theology Based on the Thought of Michael Polányi* (Missoula, Montana: The Scholars Press, 1977), p. 10.

[7] *Personal Knowledge,* pp. 15-16.

[8] *Personal Knowledge,* p. 286.

[9] Published as chapter one of *The Tacit Dimension* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1966).

being pursued. Scientific research is good and original only if the problem that generated it is good and original. Our seeing a problem is already a vital clue to a new dimension of human knowing that emerges in the foreground of thinking.

> [T]o see a problem is to see something that is hidden. It is to have an intimation of the coherence of hitherto not comprehended particulars. The problem is good if this intimation is true; it is original if no one else can see the possibilities of the comprehension that we are anticipating.[10]

For Polányi, this understanding entails a contradiction. He referred to the paradox in Plato's dialogue *Meno.* The eristic or Meno's paradox states that an inquiry into a problem is an absurdity: either one knows what one is looking for, and hence there is no point in inquiry; or one doesn't know what one is looking for, and hence, one cannot expect to find anything.[11] For Plato, the solution to the paradox is his epistemological theory of *anamnesis;* but for Polányi, the paradox revealed to us the tacit dimension of knowing, of an intimation of something hidden awaiting our discovery of it. The paradox is present only if we contend that *all* knowledge is explicit.

How then are discoveries possible? They are possible only because, on the object-pole, there are hidden things waiting our discovery; and on the subject-pole, we experience an intimation of the presence of these hidden things. "A potential discovery may be thought to attract the mind which will reveal it – inflaming the scientist with creative desire and imparting to him intimations that guide him from clue to clue and from surmise to surmise."[12]

Even in the realm of science, discovery is not a product of a meticulous application of strict and well-defined rules and standard procedures. There are countless instances of scientific discoveries that radically altered human existence and history, yet are not products of a rigorous scientific method. Alexander Fleming's

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[10] *Tacit Dimension,* pp. 21-22.

[11] PLATO, *Meno,* 80.

[12] Michael POLÁNYI, *Science, Faith and Society.* Includes the "Background and Prospect" (1963) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), p. 14.

discovery of *penicillium* mold in 1928 is a famous example. What we call rules in these sciences, Polányi calls "rules of art."[13] The application of the rules itself is largely based on the scientist's judgments to follow the rules or not, to diverge from them or not. More often, as in cases of great scientific breakthroughs, discoveries emerge not from the painstakingly accurate application of the scientific method and the logically structured reasoning of an empirical mind, but from what Polányi calls "intuition," "guesswork" and "chance."[14] In broad terms, there is no "logic of discovery." Scientific discovery emerges from the subject's intimation of it, from the judgments she makes concerning it, and from the affirming consensus of the scientific community, validating and publishing the discovery's merit.

1.3 Knowledge as Personal

The total objectivity in knowledge made problematic the notions that logical positivism has found meaningless, viz., moral value, life, belief, reality (understood in a metaphysical sense), etc. These concepts no longer became objects of knowledge. Consider, for example, how biologists pursue their research with only a belief of what the notion of life could be. The object of their inquiry involves animate objects. This notion of "animate" is translated as an organism capable of growth, movement and reproduction. But where does "life" enter into the scene? In a positivistic view of science, the question is a non-question because of the meaninglessness it entails. Yet, all sciences pursue their projects on commitments made by scientists themselves that are not explicitly and rationally founded. Polányi himself remarked that "the ultimate justification of my scientific convictions lies always in myself. At some point I can only answer, 'For I believe so.'"[15] His magnum

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[13] In the new introduction to *Science, Faith and Society* (1946, re-issued 1963), Polányi says that "the application of rules [of art] must always rely ultimately on acts not determined by rule." *Science, Faith and Society,* p. 14. In *Personal Knowledge* (1958), Polányi otherwise calls "rules of art" maxims. He defines them as "rules, the correct application of which is part of the art which they govern." *Personal Knowledge,* pp. 30-31.

[14] Cf. chapter "Science and Reality" of *Science, Faith and Society,* pp. 21-41.

[15] *Science, Faith and Society,* p. 9.

opus, *Personal Knowledge* (1958), is his own justification of what he calls "unproven traditional beliefs."[16] The ideal of total objectivity is a problem in the foundations of science itself, and ultimately of all forms of knowing. This "sickness" is brought into effect only due to the stringent criteria maintained in pursuit of absolute clarity and total explicitness of knowledge and the means to it. The theory of tacit knowing is an enunciation of a rethinking of human knowing itself that is both simple and revolutionary.[17] It is simple because it only asks that we recognize the important role we play in the act of knowing. It is revolutionary because it asks us to reorient our self-understanding in the pursuit of knowledge, and likewise reorient our understanding of the object-being-known. For Polányi then, there is no knowledge that is impersonal, detached and totally objective. For him, every body of knowledge is tinged with the traces of human intervention that cannot be underestimated in the pursuit of objectivity. His expression "All knowledge is ultimately personal" defines it all.

2. THE THEORY OF TACIT KNOWING

The most mature, comprehensive but concise articulation of the theory of tacit knowing is in Polányi's 1966 publication of *The Tacit Dimension.*[18] However, we shall draw from a number of his other works fundamental principles on which he built his theory of

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[16] *Personal Knowledge,* p. ix.

[17] Cf. JOHN V. APCZYNSKI, *Doers of the Word,* p. 29.

[18] It is a relatively small book compared to the bulky and dense *Personal Knowledge* (first published in 1958); yet *The Tacit Dimension* offers us already a more integrated exposition of the theory under consideration. The book comprised his Terry Lectures delivered at Yale in 1962. In his introduction to this book, he refers to *The Tacit Dimension* as "an interim report on an inquiry started more than twenty years ago." This is in reference to the first publication of *Science, Faith and Society* in 1946, which was reissued in 1964 with an important new introduction ("Background and Prospect"). This is followed by the publication of *Personal Knowledge* and then of *The Study of Man,* published in 1959. Beside *Meaning,* which Polányi published in cooperation with Harry Prosch, in 1975, *The Tacit Dimension* culminates in the maturation of the theory of tacit knowing, as to how it is generally understood today. In this section, we shall not deal with all the elements introduced in all publications mentioned. We shall treat only those relative to a straightforward exposition of the theory itself.

tacit knowing. It is important for us to identify the basic theses on which the theory is founded (2.1). This will lead us to a treatment of the different dimensions of cognitive experiences at work in every act of knowing (2.2). The second dimension, which treats of bodily activity – embodiment – will direct us to an important element of the theory of tacit knowing which has vital implications on the nature of religion and the rationality of religious belief: indwelling (2.3).

2.1 Elementary Theses

In his article "The Logic of Tacit Inference," Polányi referred to the theory of tacit knowing as "a theory of non-explicit thought," an *"informal logic* of science and of knowledge in general."[19] The general contours of this theory have already been introduced in *Science, Faith and Society,* especially with the introduction of the faculty of intuition[20] as a reply to the problem of discovery in the (natural) sciences.[21] Here, we shall dwell on the four theses that form the backbone, so to speak, of the theory of tacit knowing.[22]

First, "we can know more than we can tell."[23] Contrary to the generally held notion that the measure of knowledge is the extent of our articulation of it, Polányi argued that knowledge is broad in scope and level, not limited by our ability to articulate it. This is not to argue for a psychological stance, but is intended as an epistemological given in every act of knowing. He took this thesis as a "fact" which, though "obvious enough," is not easy to explain. He illustrated this "fact" by the common experience of recognizing characteristic physiognomies of individuals, that is, the

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[19] *Knowing and Being,* p. 155.

[20] Polányi defines intuition as "the faculty for surmising with a fair degree of probability the presence of a hidden coherence in nature. It is the faculty that espies a problem, the pursuit of which the scientist may accept as his task." *Knowing and Being,* p. 201.

[21] Cf. especially chapter "Science and Reality" in *Science, Faith and Society.*

[22] Cf. Andy F. SANDERS, *Michael Polányi's Post-Critical Epistemology: A Reconstruction of Some Aspects of "Tacit Knowing"* (Amsterdam: Rodopi B.V., 1988), pp. 3-18. Sanders enumerates nine central theses, but only four concern us here.

[23] *The Tacit Dimension,* p. 4.

identification of the face of another person. To recognize a face is not reducible to the different facial features that a specific person has. We can recognize somebody even amidst millions of people, yet we cannot articulate why we recognize this person. Our "knowing" a person, by which we recognize her, is embedded in a kind of "knowing" that is epistemologically prior to our actually knowing her. Here, we see that there are two kinds of "knowing" expounded further in the next thesis.

Second, "all knowledge is either tacit or rooted in tacit knowledge."[24] Polányi articulated this as follows:

> We have seen *tacit knowledge* to comprise two kinds of awareness, *subsidiary awareness* and *focal awareness.* Now we see *tacit knowledge* opposed to *explicit knowledge;* but these two are not sharply divided. While tacit knowledge can be possessed by itself, explicit knowledge must rely on being tacitly understood and applied. Hence, all knowledge is *either tacit* or *rooted in tacit knowledge.* A *wholly* explicit knowledge is unthinkable.[25]

There are a number of issues presented by Polányi in the above quotation. We already have here introduced the two kinds of awareness to which we return in section 2.2.1. The important issue in this second thesis is that *all* knowledge is tacit or is rooted in tacit knowledge. This is a radical proposal of Polányi in the rethinking of rationality. What we have understood as knowledge is only the "surface level" of that which is a more epistemological ground (tacit knowing). The seemingly paradoxical position of tacit and explicit knowledge being opposed, yet not sharply divided, is explained by the fact that Polányi saw them as the two poles of a continuum. Much of the conceptual binaries that Polányi offered in the articulation of the act of knowing and the dimensions of cognitive experience are to be understood in this way, as opposite poles of a single continuum.

Third, "perception is a comprehension of clues in terms of a whole."[26] The phenomenon of perception is crucial in the develop-

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[24] *Knowing and Being,* p. 144.

[25] *Knowing and Being,* p. 144.

[26] *Personal Knowledge,* p. 97.

ment of the theory of tacit knowing. Recall that it is precisely in the *perception* (not to be identified with sense experience) of a problem that the problem of discovery emerged in epistemological investigations; it is "the paradigm of tacit knowing."[27] This definition highlights three important elements in the knowing process. (1) By "clues" here, Polányi refers to the object of our subsidiary awareness, or things of which we are only subsidiarily aware. (2) By "whole," he refers to the object of the other side, that of focal awareness, or things of which we are focally aware. (3) "Comprehension" is to be understood as the process of grasping, or recognizing or simply, understanding something, achieved through the integrative act of tacit knowing. The integrative act incorporates the object being known and the condition under which we come to know that which is being known. The understanding of these is crucial in the elaboration of what Polányi would call the *to-from* structure of tacit knowing; that is, we attend *to* something of which we are focally aware, but this is so only because our attending to something is also an attending *from* something of which we are only subsidiarily aware. The elements of our subsidiary awareness *direct* our knowing to that of which we are focally aware. Returning to the example of the recognition of someone's face, we recognize the face only because we are subsidiarily aware of some elements that point us to that on which we are focusing our attention. This will further be elaborated in section 2.2.1.

Fourth, the "body is the ultimate instrument of all our external knowledge, whether intellectual or practical."[28] Here, we encounter the discovery of important bodily links in the emergence of thought. Our body is the only thing in the world that we do not experience as an object, but rather as an entity from which we experience, perceive and come to understand the external world. Our body, in a way, functions as a "clue" *from* which we come to attend *to* the external world, especially through our senses. The transformation of all things external to us as a tool is possible only through this ultimate tool, that is, our body. To illustrate, a blind person uses her hand to probe into things; however, the use of a stick to "feel" her way (transformation of a tool) while walking

[27] Andy F. SANDERS, *Michael Polányi's Post-Critical Epistemology,* p. 4.

[28] *The Tacit Dimension,* p. 15.

down the street is possible only through the instrumentalization of the body itself, ultimately, of the hand. This leads us to the notion of "indwelling" which will later be identified with tacit knowing.[29] But we shall discuss this further on section 2.3.

In broad strokes, we can deduce the following characteristics of tacit knowing. Tacit knowing is *dynamic* because processes eventuate in the emergence of discovery of any knowledge, not simply as a psychological datum, but one with an epistemological import. It has a *vectoral quality,* that is, tacit knowing has a *to-from* structure; it is intentional. Tacit knowing is *totally encompassing,* that is, all forms of knowledge are primordially tacit in origin. Though knowledge remains public and social, we come to understand that tacit knowing reveals to us that all knowledge is inherently *personal* also. Tacit knowing as an epistemological phenomenon has its own structure or dimensions (2.2) that polish its contours, elaborate its internal dynamics and explicate its coherence as a system or theory.

2.2 Dimensions of Cognitive Experience

In every instance of cognitive experience, the experience by which and in which we come to know something, there are various factors required, of whatever nature and character. These factors involve elements that arise from the disposition of the subject. There are elements arising from determining factors inherent in the external world and in the process of the relation between the object-subject polarities. An assortment of elements continues to accumulate, determining in each respect the consequence of the knowing experience. The kind of rationality aforementioned that we have critiqued divides all these elements in a fragmentary way at the cost of the unity of the cognitive experience.

The word "dimension" here was deliberately used as it offers a perspective that takes into account all of the factors involved in every cognitive experience without gravitating to any one of these. When we speak of dimensions in our treatment of cognitive experience, we "allow for a greater integration and interaction among [the cognitive experience's] aspects."[30]

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[29] Cf. *The Tacit Dimension,* pp. 17ff.

[30] Jerry GILL, *The Tacit Mode,* p. 32.

In *The Tacit Dimension,* Polányi argued that the basic structure of tacit knowing involves two terms: the *proximal term* and the *distal term.*[31] Proximal term refers to *that from which* we attend to something in a subsidiary manner. In our treatment of the third thesis ("perception is a comprehension of clues in terms of a whole"), the proximal term refers to the "clue" by which, or through which, we arrive at the whole. This "whole" refers to the distal term. It is *that to which* we attend in a focal manner. These two terms are factors in the tacit relation existing in tacit knowing. These two terms are the objects of awareness, both focal and subsidiary.

2.2.1 The Awareness Dimension

In order to introduce the awareness dimension of cognitive experience, Polányi, in his *Personal Knowledge,* employed the analogy of using a hammer.[32] He said that every time we use a hammer to drive a nail, we attend to both the nail and the hammer, but in different ways. When I use a hammer, my attention is focused on the nail that I am going to hit. Yet, at the same time, I am also conscious of my holding the hammer with my right hand. I can feel the hammer, I am conscious of how firm is my grip on it. However, when I am using the hammer to drive a nail, my attention is focused *not* on the hammer itself, but on the nail that I intend to hit with it. Here, I am aware of two things, the hammer and the nail, yet my awareness of them is different. I can say that I have focal awareness of my driving the nail (distal term), and subsidiary awareness of my feeling the hammer in my hand (proximal term). These two forms of awareness are two poles in a continuum. As such, they are mutually exclusive. I cannot be focally aware of something and, at the same time, subsidiarily aware of it also. As we have seen from the vectoral character of tacit knowing, we always attend *to* something (distal term) *from* something else (proximal term). Nonetheless, the distinction between the two forms

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[31] Two terms that Polányi borrowed from the language of anatomy. Distal means being situated far from the point of attachment or origin of a certain bodily organ. Proximate would be situated close to the point of attachment of origin. Cf. *The Tacit Dimension,* p. 10.

[32] Cf. *Personal Knowledge,* pp. 55-57.

of awareness is also relative. We may shift the focus of our attention from hitting the nail to holding the hammer. Now, instead of having focal awareness of the nail, we have it in our act of holding the hammer. The result: we end up hitting, not the nail, but something else. This is also the case with learned skills like driving. When we are in front of the steering wheel of a car, our focal awareness is on our act of driving. We are only subsidiarily aware of how we hold the steering wheel, how we change gear, how we balance the fuel and clutch levers, etc. We can shift the focus of our attention from driving to those other acts that constitute what driving is; but, as in all skills, the facility of our driving is compromised. In terms of skills, when we compromise the effectiveness of our intended act (driving or hitting a nail), by shifting our focal awareness to elements that formerly occupied our subsidiary awareness, we end up with the phenomenon of clumsiness[33] (something goes wrong with our driving or we end up hitting our thumb with the hammer). This awareness continuum corresponds to the *input* of data in cognitive experience. From here, we proceed to the *output* category, the activity dimension.

2.2.2 The Activity Dimension

Human action is both purposive and cognitive in character. It is purposive in so far as we all act in order to achieve something, like studying in order to pass the exams. The act of studying reveals a purposive character in the act. Likewise, it is also cognitive, that is, in so far as we have a certain degree or level of knowledge or consciousness of what we are doing, why we are doing it, and how do we go about it. Like the awareness dimension, the activity dimension has two poles: the *conceptual* and the *bodily.* Every cognitive experience manifests a symbiotic relation between these two poles. Knowledge, whether practical or theoretical, involves the close interaction between the bodily and conceptual poles. The best instance of this is language acquisition. We are born into a specific community that is linguistically mediated. As we grow, we learn how to speak, communicate our thoughts, and express our feelings. In language, written or otherwise, a certain conceptual element abounds. Polányi expressed it this way:

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[33] Cf. *Personal Knowledge,* p. 56.

> To use language in speech, reading and writing, is to extend our bodily equipment and become intelligent human beings. We may say that when we learn to use a language, or a probe, or a tool, and thus make ourselves aware of these things as we are of our body, we *interiorize* these things and *make ourselves dwell in them.* Such extensions of ourselves develop new faculties in us; our whole education operates in this way; as each of us interiorizes our cultural heritage, he grows into a person seeing the world and experiencing life in terms of this outlook.[34]

If in the awareness dimension there is a vectoral or unidirectional thrust *(to-from* structure), likewise, in the activity dimension, there is this same kind of thrust that fundamentally starts with the bodily pole. We enter the world knowing nothing, yet through imitative acts, we start to learn skills and ideas from those around us. This imitative act or interiorization, Polányi calls "indwelling" to which we turn in section 2.3. As we have said above, the activity dimension constitutes the output of the cognitive experience. Now, along the intersection of both the activity and the awareness dimensions, another dimension emerges, the dimension of cognitivity.

2.2.3 The Dimension of Cognitivity

At the crossroad of the awareness and activity dimensions, another dimension intersects, the dimension of cognitivity. The junction of conceptual activity and focal awareness effectuates the *explicit knowing pole* of cognitivity, while the junction of bodily activity and subsidiary awareness effectuates the *tacit knowing pole* of cognitivity. Perhaps, at this point, a schematic presentation (diagram 1) may prove helpful in order to articulate schematically the intersections and mediations that follow in the dynamics of cognitive experience.[35]

The cognitive dimension then is a function of the polarity between explicit and tacit components or coefficients of human experience. Since our inquiry here is about how we come to know,

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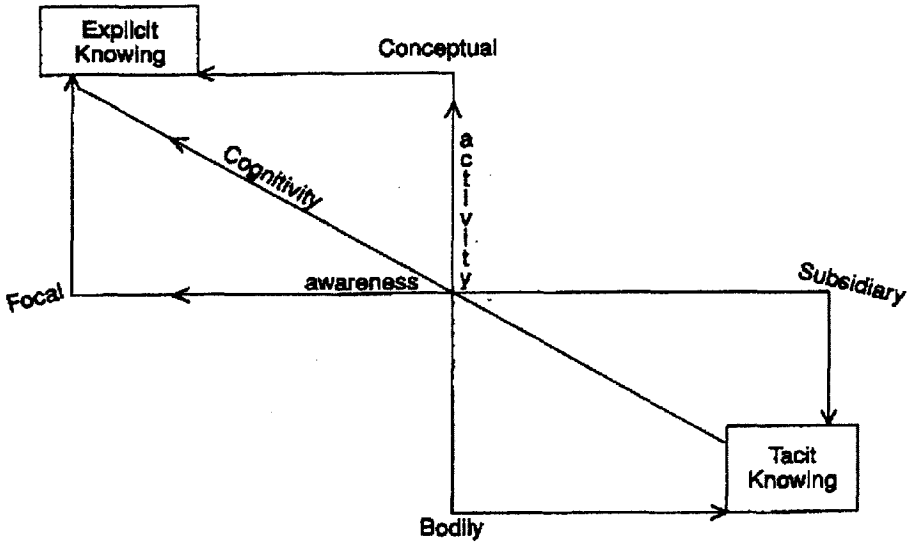
[34] *Knowing and Being,* p. 148.

[35] Cf. Jerry GILL, *The Tacit Mode,* p. 39.



[DIAGRAM 1]

the schema effectively shows that all knowledge emerges from the interaction of these two cognitive poles of explicit and tacit knowing. However, the important factor here is that tacit knowing is the ground or axis[36] on which all explicit knowledge comes to light. This is the theoretical ground of the aforementioned statement that all knowledge is either tacit or derived from tacit knowing. Polányi, however, did not dwell so much on explicit knowing, as it had received its prime in modernist rationality to which Polányi's post-critical philosophy is directed as a critique. Rather, he set out to uncover the nature of this tacit knowing which constitutes the axis of all forms of knowledge. This continuum also has a vertical or uni-directional thrust, moving from tacit knowing to explicit knowing. Tacit knowing remains the anchor to which all knowing, including explicit knowledge, is attached.

[36] Gill prefers the term "axis" rather than ground or foundation. He said that the "genius of Polányi's approach is that by placing tacit knowing at the center, at the axis of knowledge, he avoids [the] dilemma of choosing between ... equally inadequate alternatives." The first is embracing foundationalism, which, according to Gill, leads to an infinite regress; the second is the rejection of foundationalism that leads to what Gill calls "arbitrary relativism." Cf. Jerry GILL, *The Tacit Mode,* p. 57.

There were a number of challenges advanced to Polányi's theory of tacit knowing, foremost of which is the accusation of subjectivism. Though giving emphasis to the recognition of the person's active role in the production and acquisition of knowledge, Polányi's notion of "personal knowledge" does not necessarily fall into subjectivism. In his *Personal Knowledge,* Polányi succinctly announced his solution to the subjectivity problematic: "It is the act of commitment in its full structure that saves personal knowledge from being merely subjective." This is because an intellectual commitment to something "is a responsible decision, in submission to the compelling claims of what in good conscience I conceive to be true."[37] Throughout *Personal Knowledge,* this notion of commitment is reiterated, securing a more firm grounding for objectivity that apparently is undermined by the project of "going back to the subject" in cognitive experience. However, in the introduction that he wrote for *The Tacit Dimension,* Polányi said that by working out more fully the structure of tacit knowing, elaborating more clearly the dynamism of all aspects of cognitive experience, "reliance on the necessity of commitment has been reduced."[38] The elaboration of personal knowledge, in general, and the theory of tacit knowing, in particular, has secured the theory itself from the charge of subjectivism by arguing for a commitment to the truth, the essentiality of individual judgment in the cognitive experience, and the verification and validation by other people in intersubjectivity.[39]

2.3 Indwelling

We see above that tacit knowing is the junction between subsidiary awareness and bodily activity. How do we perform tacit knowing? Polányi's answer is *indwelling.* Jerry Gill offered us a brief but lucid definition of indwelling. He said, it is the "process of immersing oneself in the particulars [elements of the proximal term] of subsidiary awareness by means of embodied activity until these particulars come together as a meaningful whole in an 'integrative

[37] *Personal Knowing,* p. 65.

[38] *The Tacit Dimension,* p. x.

[39] Cf. Jerry GILL, *The Tacit Mode,* p. 52.

act.'"[40] We speak of integrative act when "the particulars of subsidiary awareness coalesce into a meaningful whole, when that which the learner has sought to indwell comes to indwell the learner as a cognitive skill."[41] Excellent examples where we achieve an integrative act through indwelling include learning how to ride a bike, drive a car or learn to swim. One cannot know or learn the necessary skills in these activities if one only gets the book, starts to read and memorize all techniques for the smooth execution of each act. We need to "enter into" or "dwell in" the acts themselves to learn them, achieve a high level of bodily coordination, and learn the appropriate techniques. It has to be clear that the distal and proximal terms in this tacit knowing are distinct. Take, for example, driving a car. The proximal terms, those particulars of which we are only subsidiarily aware, would include learning how to turn the steering wheel at the appropriate time, balance the clutch and fuel lever with our two feet, and take the necessary steps to change gear, etc. All these particulars do not add up to driving a car. Driving a car is our distal term, it is that to which we are focally aware in all these particulars we are engaging in, subsidiarily. The level of meaning is broader in our focal awareness than in our subsidiary awareness because our distal term is the culmination of our integrative act in the process of indwelling. Here, we see that the whole (distal term) is not equal to the sum of its parts (proximal term); yet, it is through our tacit knowledge, of which we are only subsidiarily aware, that we have an explicit knowledge of driving a car, which is the object of our focal awareness.

In the example of language acquisition that we mentioned earlier, a number of elements of indwelling come to the fore. Polányi argued that "when we learn to use a language, or a probe, or a tool, and thus make ourselves aware of these things as we are of our body, we *interiorize* these things and *make ourselves dwell in them.* Such extensions of ourselves develop new faculties in us; our whole education operates in this way; as each of us interiorizes our cultural heritage, he grows into a person seeing the world and experiencing life in terms of this outlook."[42] In this brief state-

[40] Jerry GILL, *The Tacit Mode,* p. 52.

[41] Jerry GILL, *The Tacit Mode,* p. 47.

[42] *Knowing and Being,* p. 148.

ment, we see two elements at work, a passive one and an active one. The activity of the knowing person is to "interiorize" language, a probe, or a tool, etc. all these elements that we aim at learning, in an effort to achieve a higher level of conceptual and practical integration. In learning to play chess, for example, an apprentice "interiorizes" the skill of the master by replaying the moves made in one of the master's games. In the case of "exploratory indwelling the novice gets the feel of the master's skill. Chess players enter into a master's thought by repeating the games he played. *We experience a man's mind as the joint meaning of his actions* by dwelling in his actions from outside."[43] In this act of imitation, the apprentice discovers, in explicit knowing, through the act of replaying the game, certain elements and skills hitherto unknown to the apprentice while still a mere observer. When the apprentice replays the game of the master, changing the former's role from an observer to a player, a new dimension of cognitive experience is achieved. We observe that a higher level of conceptual and practical integration is reached through integrative act in the process of indwelling. The second element, intimated already, is the passivity of the knower: "make ourselves dwell in them." Tacit knowing, from where all explicit knowing emerges, is the junction of subsidiary awareness and bodily activity. This is not the matrix of the conceptual activity and focal awareness. Our focal awareness and the object of our conceptual activity remain learning the skills of the chess master, not only by interiorizing the moves, but likewise dwelling in them. These two movements, active and passive, are but two sides of the same coin, two dimensions of one act, and hence, cannot be segregated. This concept of indwelling has direct ramifications in religion and religious belief to which we turn in the following section.

3. IMPLICATIONS FOR RELIGION AND RELIGIOUS BELIEF

The general framework on which Michael Polányi expounded his philosophical ideas is in epistemology. However, after working out the general contours of what he calls his "post-critical philosophy," he was challenged to reflect on its import in various aspects

[43] *Knowing and Being,* p. 152.

of intellectual inquiry, in aesthetics, politics and even in religious concerns. On the issue of religion and religious belief, it needs to be noted that Polányi's appropriation of his philosophy, which may be described as personal and naturalized,[44] proceeds also from the epistemological import of his theory of tacit knowing. The theory of tacit knowing is a rethinking of the relationship between human beings, the knowing-subject, and the external world, the object-being-known. This will naturally have radical repercussions on every mode of human existence that mediates humanity's encounter with the environment. The governing interest of tacit knowing is the fact of discovery and in every discovery, made by a person, a new vista is revealed that transforms the mode of understanding of human beings with regard to the objects-being-known, both the proximal and distal terms. There are two implications of the theory of tacit knowing in the perception of reality. First, if we start with the basic premise that we can know more than we can tell, the reality presented to us is a kind of reality that will always offer new things to discover. It will be a boundless unfolding or unearthing, the dynamism of which defines that structure of human intellect as always seeking to know more. According to Polányi,

> We meet here a new definition of reality. Real is that which is expected to reveal itself indeterminately in the future. Hence an explicit statement can bear on reality only by virtue of the tacit coefficient associated with it. This conception of reality and of the tacit knowing of reality underlies all my writings.[45]

Second, for Polányi, the structure of knowing is analogous to the structure of being.[46] Here, we notice the transition that Polányi makes from the epistemological to the ontological structure of a mediated understanding of reality. For Polányi, the mediated under-

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[44] Sanders refers to the theory of tacit knowing as "naturalized epistemology" because it considers various approaches (sociological, biological, anthropological and psychological) recognized as significant for philosophical reflection. Cf. Andy F. SANDERS, *Michael Polányi's Post-Critical Epistemology,* p. 22.

[45] *Science, Faith and Society,* p. 10. Cf. also Andy F. SANDERS, *Michael Polányi's Post-Critical Epistemology,* p. 149.

[46] Cf. Andy F. SANDERS, *Michael Polányi's Post-Critical Epistemology,* p. 237.

standing of the structure of reality is hierarchical. When we speak of a hierarchical structure of reality, we do not mean some kind of Platonic two-worlds. Rather, Polányi was trying to emphasize that through the dynamic integration of indwelling, "new vistas" emerge or are discovered, as if, we enter into a "new world," a new level of existence. Further, this is hierarchical, because Polányi treats religion as belonging to the "transnatural domain." This is the domain where we encounter one of the greatest challenges to our "integrative act," the unity of *incompatible subsidiaries* (cf. section 3.1). Returning to science, it was the contention in modernist rationality that natural and human sciences are discontinuous. Natural sciences deal with "objective" *facts* and the human sciences deal with "subjective" *values*. This is not the case in Polányi's system; they are continuous.[47]

Polányi distinguished between knowledge (generally as a body of data) and understanding (the activity by which we come to know).[48] In this regard, knowledge is grounded on understanding, and in all levels of existence, knowledge remains the same kind. However, as we ascend to higher levels of existence, a greater power of understanding is necessitated.[49] In tacit knowing, we achieve cognitivity through an act of integration in indwelling corresponding to the object of knowing. If, however, we subject ourselves to an object that is of a higher order (say, an object belonging to aesthetics or religion), a greater degree of indwelling is exigent increasing in its profundity and complexity. Corresponding to the degree of understanding, knowledge then of the sciences is said to be a hierarchical order. Sanders offered a neat summary of Polányi's treatment of this in the latter's *The Study of Man:*

> The exact sciences like logic and mathematics, require the relatively lowest degree of personal participation or indwelling. Next, in the natural sciences, the sciences of life, and

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[47] Cf. Michael POLÁNYI, *The Study of Man* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1959), pp. 37-38.

[48] We note here that Polányi diverged from the traditional notion of understanding as the product of the activity by which we come to know. For Polányi, activity is *not* the product but the activity itself. My sincerest thanks to Prof. Wim de Pater for this clarification.

[49] Cf. *The Study of Man,* pp. 72-73.

> the social sciences, indwelling increases in profundity and complexity. It reaches its most comprehensive and intimate form in history, particularly in the study of great historical figures.[50]

All the aforementioned knowing was termed natural by Polányi. If in tacit knowing, we always encounter a hidden reality, what is the ultimate knowing in the cognitive project? Here, we enter already into the domain of the "supernatural" or "transnatural." Affirming the continuity of all understanding, Polányi argued that "natural knowing expands continuously into knowledge of the supernatural."[51]

3.1 On Religion

There are three themes with respect to religion that generally interest Polányi.[52] First, the "analysis of the structure of worship as an integration of subsidiaries." In indwelling, we achieve a higher level of cognitivity by the integration of subsidiaries (proximal terms) in tacit knowing. This integration of subsidiaries is achieved in the act of "worship" in religion, Polányi remarked. Second, the "recognition of the underlying similarity of the acts of commitment that uphold both science and religion." All forms of knowledge are fiduciary frameworks because all forms of knowledge are grounded on belief. "According to the logic of commitment," says Polányi, *"truth is something that can be thought of only by believing it."* [53] Belief is primordial in all cognitive pursuits. On this regard, Polányi reechoed St. Augustine's insistence on the antecedence of belief to understanding.[54] Third, "affirmation of the

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[50] Andy F. SANDERS, *Michael Polányi's Post-Critical Epistemology,* p. 231, cf. also *The Study of Man,* 72, 80.

[51] Michael POLÁNYI, "Faith and Reason," *Journal of Religion* 41(1961): 246.

[52] Cf. Martin X. MOLESKI, SJ, *Personal Catholicism: The Theological Epistemologies of John Henry Newman and Michael Polányi* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000), p. 176.

[53] *Personal Knowledge,* p. 305.

[54] Polányi says that we need to go back to "St. Augustine to restore the balance of our cognitive powers. In the fourth century A.D., St. Augustine brought the history of Greek philosophy to a close by inaugurating for the first time a post-

meaningfulness of the concept of God as the goal of all evolutionary striving." As modernist rationality seeks verification for knowledge claims with regard to nature, according to Polányi, knowledge claims with regard to transnatural comprehensive entities are subject to validation.[55] The shift from verification to validation is in view of Polányi's project for the acceptability of religion for the "post-modern" human person. In *Meaning,* Polányi introduces the project of a shift from "observation" to "acceptance" taking cue from his analysis on the work of art.[56] Knowing in the transnatural domain entails the deep integration of incompatible subsidiaries. One wonders, how is it possible to integrate elements that are said to be "incompatible"? For Polányi, religion is characterized by what may be termed, borrowing the words of Nicolas of Cusa, a *coincidentia oppositorum.* An excellent example of this "integration of incompatible subsidiaries" would include, in the Roman Catholic tradition at least, the transubstantiation of bread and wine during the Eucharistic consecration. On the one hand, the Eucharistic elements *are* bread and wine; yet, on the other hand, they *are also* the body and blood of Jesus Christ. These two positions are incompatible, but religious believers transcend these incompatibilities, these opposites, by "going beyond" the level of natural domain, of climbing to what Polányi called the transnatural domain of reality through the integrative act of *religious indwelling.* It is still a reality but one that is transcended by the complex integration that accrues in the constellation of our religious indwelling.

The faculty of our creative imagination enables us to achieve transnatural integration (which is what religion is all about), through worship. This transnatural integration points us to the plausibility of religion explaining the world as meaningful. It is the plausibility of this idea that the world may be possibly meaningful that makes religion, as an object in transnatural knowing, acceptable. Ultimately, in the transnatural integration of incompatible subsidiaries, through a rich and complex indwelling, we come to

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critical philosophy. He taught that all knowledge was a gift of grace, for which we must strive under the guidance of antecedent belief: *nisi credideritis, non intelligitis." Personal Knowledge,* p. 266.

[55] Cf. *Personal Knowledge,* p. 202.

[56] *Meaning,* pp. 149-160.

know the object of our religious belief, which is God. According to Prosch, "all parts of worship, when we dwell in them, enable us to see God. Through our imaginative efforts to integrate rites, myths, and acts of worship, i.e., when we dwell in our subsidiaries, we see God as the focal object of our attention, as that which gives meaning to all these dwelt-in clues."[57]

Polányi saw religion as a fiduciary framework.[58] It is a cultural system that is born, nourished and survives by the indwelling of individuals holding the same belief-systems. If one seeks to understand religion, one cannot help but indwell into the life and soul of how religion itself is lived by believers. To discover religion, one is invited to indwell into the various subsidiaries that constitute religious practices (rituals, myths, ceremonies, etc.) – meaning, both in subsidiary awareness and in bodily activity – to unveil the cognitivity of tacit knowing that shall be the ground of our explicit knowledge of religious experience. Polányi's approach of religion, though, is more descriptive than normative. Not reducing religion to external practices, Polányi generally characterized religion as "a sprawling work of the imagination involving rites, ceremonies, doctrines, myths, and something called 'worship.'"[59] To argue that religion is the product of the imagination is not to suggest a Feuerbachian reading of religion as simply a human projection. Rather, Polányi's "religion" is to be understood in the context of his treatment of representational art – which belongs also to the transnatural domain – as meaningful through the creative powers of our imagination. Without imagination, a simple work of art is meaningless.[60] It is through our imagination that a higher level of integration is achieved in the act of indwelling such that we fuse or integrate incompatibles with the object of our knowing. This notion of incompatibles is significant, since it likewise applies to religion. Religious indwelling is a "fusion of incompatibles," the highest form of which is religious ecstasy.

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[57] Harry PROSCH, *Michael Polányi: A Critical Exposition* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1986), p. 173.

[58] *Personal Knowledge,* p. 266.

[59] *Meaning,* p. 152.

[60] *Meaning,* pp. 145-150.

3.2 On Religious Belief

In the theory of tacit knowing, Polányi argued that reason and faith are harmonious or complementary. Religious faith "is to be understood as that form of indwelling which has as its primary goal the breaking out toward the transcendent source of the experience of ultimacy."[61] Tacit knowing opens to us varied vistas that reveal modes and levels of a mediated hierarchical understanding of a structured reality. Of all the dimensions revealed, there will always be an ultimate one. This ultimate dimension opens to us a new vista in religious faith that invites us to another form of indwelling. In section 13, chapter 6 of *Personal Knowledge,* entitled "Dwelling in and breaking out," Polányi introduced us to his first general (and explicit) treatment of religion in all his works. In this work, however, he emphasizes more the transcendent character of religion and religious experience, especially those of mystical encounters. In the act of indwelling of the subsidiaries of deep religious experiences, a breaking out also results. We break out into an experience of something totally Other, an experience of a dimension of ultimacy. According to Prosch, it is the contention of Polányi that

> myths also can affect us only if they can detach us from our ordinary world of experience. But this they can do, he held, because the events described or portrayed are wholly other than actual human experience. To believe the myth and to live it through its rites is thus to carry us away to a transnatural integration, such as exists also in art and poetry, in which incompatibles (which remain incompatibles) are combined into a meaningful integration by a feat of our imagination.[62]

The power of myths, according to Polányi, consists "only in their power to evoke in us an experience which we hold to be genuine."[63] In this regard, we see clearly that though every human experience has a cognitive import, Polányi stresses more the

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[61] JOHN V. APCZYNSKI, *Doers of the Word,* p. 163. Cf. *Personal Knowledge,* pp. 195-202.

[62] Harry PROSCH, *Michael Polányi: A Critical Exposition,* p. 125. Cf. also *PK,* pp. 198-199.

[63] *Meaning,* p. 146.

emotive, than the cognitive.[64] Cognition is in the domain of what is observed, while passions (belief, intention, emotion)[65] are in the domain of what is accepted. The myth of total objectivity undermines meaning, not only in the sciences, but also in the transnatural pursuits of art, poetry and religion. On the transnatural level of existence, acceptance, and not simply observation, is the intervening mode of comportment that eventuates the integration of incompatible subsidiaries in a higher level of integrative act. Still, we need to explicate the cognitive import of his theory in the religious domain, in the analysis of religious assertions.

3.3 On Religious Assertions

How are we supposed to understand religious assertions in Polányi's post-critical philosophy? Though Polányi appears to put more emphasis on the experiential character of the religious dimension, the theory of tacit knowing also has a linguistic-semantic import, in the consideration of explicit knowing in religious experiences. In order to highlight the distinctness of religious assertions, it may prove helpful if we contrast religious assertions with scientific assertions, paying attention to the intentional states (beliefs, intention and emotions) involved in the act of believing and also in their content (myths, narratives, doctrines). According to Evans,[66] three things characterize scientific assertions: (1) they are logically neutral, (2) comprehensively impersonal, and (3) testable by observations. These three characteristics follow the standard methodological import of modernist rationality which Polányi himself criticizes. In contrast to this, religious assertions are (1) not

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[64] Cf. Andy F. SANDERS, *Michael Polányi's Post-Critical Epistemology,* p. 263.

[65] Part 2, chapter 6 of *Personal Knowledge* deals with "intellectual passions." Polányi here attends to the emotional subsidiaries in the act of knowing. According to him, intellectual passions have a threefold function: (1) selective function, to determine what one should attend to in knowing; (2) heuristic function, to conjoin value to a specific "vision of reality" (our ultimate interpretative framework) which guides intellectual pursuits in view of an impending discovery; (3) persuasive function, to empower us to defend our commitment to a specific interpretative framework. *Personal Knowledge,* pp. 159-160. Cf. also Martin MOLESKI, *Personal Catholicism,* pp. 78-82.

[66] Cf. Andy F. SANDERS, *Michael Polányi's Post-Critical Epistemology,* pp. 254-256.

logically neutral, but self-involving, (2) not comprehensively impersonal, and (3) not testable by observations. Religious assertions can never be logically neutral as religious beliefs always entail the expression of attitudes and personal commitments of the believer. These attitudes and commitments proceed from certain types of "depth-experiences" that are religious in character (that is, involving the "revelation" of humanity's relationship with God). Furthermore, every religious community takes on a communal dimension that exhorts the individual's participation in religious life as an articulation of meaning in the religious dimensions.

How then do we take religious assertions like "God exists"? Polányi makes the distinction between factual statement and accreditive statement. To illustrate, he made use of the statement, "Snow is white." This proposition is a factual statement, that is, it states a fact, *that* snow is white. However, Polányi argues that there is also an accreditive statement that is formulated thus: "'Snow is white' is true." To put it in formal language, a factual statement is p, where p is a proposition that states an observable fact. An accreditive statement is "p is true," that is, a statement is asserted (in this case as true) with varying degrees of confidence. An accreditive statement is non-descriptive in character. The utterance of such a statement is a believing, an expression of truth. An accreditive statement is a reassertion of a proposition "wherein the utterer explicitly endorses the [said] proposition."[67] It is an act that she performs and not a fact that she observes. For Polányi, religious assertions are not factual statements, but accreditive statements. To assert that "God exists" is more like "'God exists' is true" in which a believer is not stating an observable fact *that* there is a God and that this God exists, but that she is making an assertion (that God exists) with a certain degree of confidence, because this person holds this statement true in a personal and internal act of judgment. Here, we already intimate Polányi's rethinking of the notion of truth and reality that are constitutive of what he calls his "fiduciary program."[68]

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[67] Richard ALLEN, *Thinkers of Our Time: Polányi* (London: The Claridge Press, 1990), p. 46.

[68] According to Allen, the fiduciary program is simply the "task of removing the critical suspicion of belief." Richard ALLEN, *Thinkers of Our Time: Polányi,* p. 45.

Within the framework of commitment, to say that a sentence is true is to authorize its assertion. Truth becomes the rightness of an action; and the verification of a statement is transposed into giving reasons [validation] for deciding to accept it, though these reasons will never be wholly specifiable.[69]

Truth then lies not so much in the correspondence of a statement with the reality it represents, but in the nature of the judgment that a person makes concerning the state of affairs. Furthermore, Polányi shies away from any hint of positivism, especially with the principle of verification, and suggests that *validation* is the key concept, that is, justification by proposing reasons why a certain statement may be reasonably maintained. But to maintain a statement, to assert its "truthfulness," is to place it within the matrix of a fiduciary framework. According to Polányi, *"truth is something that can be thought of only by believing it."* [70]

3.4 Summary Observations

Polányi's reflections on religion lend themselves to various interpretations, which may sometimes be radically divergent (that is, the ambiguity of his theological position renders support to either a theistic or an atheistic interpretation).[71] Be that as it may, the aforementioned exposition flows logically from the fiduciary program of Polányi that started with the reexamination of the role and function of science and of scientific pursuits. This entailed a radical rethinking also of the rationality of religious belief. The following observations may be affirmed: (1) there is continuity in the cognitive project that proceeds from the natural to what Polányi calls transnatural; (2) belief remains the foundation of all forms of knowing. In a transcendental Kantian vein, belief is the "condition

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[69] *Personal Knowledge,* p. 320.

[70] *Personal Knowledge,* p. 305.

[71] Moleski enumerates Richard Gelwick, John Apczynski, and Avery Dulles, SJ as favoring a theistic interpretation; while he enumerates Marjorie Grene, Harry Prosch, etc. as favoring an atheistic interpretation. Cf. Martin X. MOLESKI, SJ, *Personal Catholicism,* p. 142.

of possibility" of knowing itself. (3) The myth of total objectivity undermined the pursuit of meaning, even in religion. Polányi offers a resolution by the introduction of his theory of tacit knowing that affirms the constitutive and active role of a person's judgment and assertion, responsible commitment, and indwelling through participation in all epistemic projects. (4) Polányi converts the condition of verification to the condition of validation in order to uphold the acceptability of religion against the illusory requirement of verifiability among elements within the transnatural domain. For Polányi, religion is not an archaic discredited pseudo-science, a residue of past superstition. Rather, it actually forms the guarantee of responsible knowing since it insists on the primordiality of the act of faith, over that of reason. Here, we can affirm at least two things: (a) that Polányi made a case that we need to recover the Augustinian and Anselmian *fides quaerens intellectum* model, reinterpreted in the light of scientific advancements; and (b) that Polányi's philosophy indicates science's discontent with its own rigorously methodological and stringent condition of rationality that in its search for reasonability returned to belief to ground its own knowing: *reason seeking faith.* ❑