Criticism, Contact with Reality and Truth

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ABSTRACT Key Words: Michael Polanyi, tacit knowledge, dogmatism, criticism, Background, J.Searle, truth, contact with reality.
Partly in reply to D. Cannon's critique of my analytical reconstruction of Polanyi's post-critical theory of knowledge, I argue that there are good reasons for not appropriating Polanyi's programme of self-identication and the confessional rhetoric which may be derived from it. Arguing that "post-critical"should not be identified with an uncritical dogmatism, I then go on to suggest that the theory of tacit knowing had best be elaborated further by drawingon the work of J. Searle and M. Johnson. Finally, I make use of E. Meek's account of the notion of "contact with reality"to highlight the Polanyian criteria of truth.

I. Introduction

Dale Cannon's musings on my account of Polanyi's theory of personal knowledge are challenging not only because they made me reconsider certain choices I made in expounding and reconstructing that theory, but also because he claims that my appropriation of post-critical epistemology in terms of analytical philosophy is in several respects misguided. As a consequence, my reconstruction is obscuring fundamental Polanyian insights. As I understand them, Cannon's objections to it can be summarized as follows:

(1) It remains tributary to the critical (analytical) tradition by differentiating the content of Polanyi's epistemology from his style.

(2) It fails to capture the significance of Polanyi's proposal for "a post-critical rhetoric for epistemology."

(3) It misconstrues tacit knowing as representational and thus reduces it to a form of propositional knowing that (or believing that).

(4) It fails to do justice to Polanyi's notion of existential or relational truth and thus leaves the relationship between propositional and relational truth unexplained.

Surely, these are no small charges. Obviously, my account leaves out certain aspects of the theory of personal knowledge. For example, I do not fully discuss ideas which are not directly relevant to my aim, namely, "to clarify and develop aspects of [Polanyi's] work *in connection with* some contemporary positions within analytical philosophy."[1] As Polanyi's own aims and motives are not the primary subject of my book, my concern is, rather, "with what he says, than with why he is saying it."[2] It is this restriction which I think gives rise to most of Cannon's misgivings. As will turn out, however, his critique is not only concerned with what is insufficiently accentuated or left out, but directed at actual elements of my account as well.

Part of my aim in this paper is to locate the source of our apparent disagreement. I suspect it arises from quite different conceptions of the task of philosophy and thus from different interpretations of Polanyi's endeavour, or, at least, from emphasizing quite different strands in it. Since Cannon's objections, for obvious reasons, are not worked out fully, I will strengthen them whenever this seems called for, even if this makes them more robust and severe than they may be intended.

Discussing the objections in the order given, I will argue against the first charge that critique has a vital role even in post-critical philosophy. Regarding charge (2), I will argue, first, that Polanyi's post-critical rhetoric can be developed in two directions, an existentialist and traditionalist one and, second, that I opt for Polanyi's traditionalism for epistemological reasons. Objection (3), I believe, is based on a misunderstanding of my position. In the last section, I will deal with (4) and Cannon's interesting and challenging proposal to conceive of Polanyian truth as relational and existential. I will not merely defend my own account of Polanyi's conception of truth, but I will also develop and strengthen it further.

II. Tacit Knowing and Criticism

Cannon's critique seems to be motivated at least in part by certain misgivings about the adequacy of my analytical approach. This is not really surprising, for many strands of early analytical philosophy can be associated with the objectivist positions Polanyi was criticizing in the fifties and sixties. However, I believe that much of analytical philosophy (broadly so called) has moved away from logical postivist assumptions under the influence of (the later) Wittgenstein, Searle, Putnam, MacIntyre and others. In contrast, Cannon is clearly doubtful of analytical philosophy as a means of appropriating Polanyian insights. In his view, my reconstruction of the theory of personal knowledge not only leaves our "critical intellectual sensibility intact', but it also ignores Polanyi's fundamental challenge to the assumption underlying this sensibility, namely that "(in principle) one can unproblematically and neutrally specify *a propositional content* of any thought or intention which is then subject to critical reflection" (p. 22).

In connection with this double claim two complex issues can be raised. First, I take it that a neutral specification of a person's thoughts is problematic because these thoughts cannot be isolated from the context or the manner in which that person, so to speak, "has"this thought, the meaning it has for her. Second, Cannon also suggests that I have obscured two fundamental properties of tacit knowing, its being both unspecifiable and a-critical. Leaving the first issue for further discussion in the next section, the point underlying the second one seems to be that my approach includes a kind of pan-criticism: "because everything must be subject to critical reflection in the modern cartesian mode, *everything* is to be construed as a propositional content"(p. 22). According to Cannon, I remain trapped, willy nilly perhaps, in precisely the objectivist modes of thought Polanyi's post-critical enterprise is directed against. What to say to this?

To begin with, I would like to emphasize that I nowhere uphold, explicitly or implicitly, a comprehensive criticism which says that everything must be subject to critical reflection. Cannon's conception of analytical philosophy as aiming only at criticism seems overly narrow. In contrast, I see its goal as conceptual clarification and innovation, not in the hope of reaching allegedly "clear and distinct ideas"or some other sort of epistemic "foundation," but in order to resolve questions, perplexities and obscurities in our thinking.

What is wrong with a critical sensibility? As I try to give full credit to the essential characteristics of tacit knowing as both unspecifiable and a-critical and as I find myself agreeing with nearly everything Canon has to say about the nature of tacit knowing, it seems that we are holding quite different views of the viability of critical analysis. Obviously, the possibility of such analysis depends on the specifiability of particulars. If tacit knowing were completely unspecifiable at all times, criticism of tacitly functioning particulars would be impossible. But of course, according to the theory of tacit knowing at least some things known tacitly within a certain context at a particular point in time can, at least in part, be specified (though not, of course, at the same time).

Cannon appears to acknowledge this when he rejects the view that tacit knowing "might not issue forth in, or in part be represented by, some propositional content, or be itself a making sense of and an upholding of some propositional content"(p. 22). Nevertheless, I think that he is to a certain extent playing down the importance of critical reflection and examination in mastering skills, in understanding and in discovery in general.[3] Consider his example of reliance on a scientific theory. On Cannon's construal of the role of tacit knowing in scientific inquiry, we start by considering a theory critically, but come to rely upon it a-critically once we have recognized it as true. The theory is then relied upon "so as to put is into contact with ... reality"(p. 22). Accordingly, Cannon distinguishes between the mediating capacity of a theory (when relied upon confidently) and its representational capacity (when focally attended to as an explicit content).

As such the distinction is sound and I also agree that we cannot use, apply, or rely on, a theory and critically examine it at the same time. However, Cannon comes close to saying that tacit awareness and focal attention are not only mutually exclusive at a particular time, but also all, or almost all, of the time. It seems as if he is saying that once you have come to believe in a theory as true, paying attention to its particulars will easily destroy your confident reliance on it.

But what of the host of theories in the history of science which turned out to be mistaken, no matter how much they were relied on or how strongly they were believed in? Of course, no inquiry or believing is without risk, as Polanyi points out. But when we are told by philosophers of science, Polanyi himself included, that all our theories, even the best ones, are engulfed in a sea of anomalies, surely the element of risk (and error) should not be thought of lightly. It is not enough just to say that now foundationalism has collapsed for us, fallible humans, there is no other alternative than to go from where we are. The problem is not that there is no alternative but rather that there is a plurality of alternative theories, views and ideas, many of which are at odds with our own.

This problem only deepens when we consider the religious or secular world-views to which we are committed. Scientists may strongly believe in a scientific theory or think they are simply working on it, they may stake their careers on that theory or they may be more cautious. But where human flourishing and human destiny is concerned, the stakes may even be higher. A religious example in this connection is Johannes Climacus who, acknowledging that "[w]ithout risk, no faith," admonishes himself that in order to keep the faith "I must ... see to it that in the objective uncertainty I am "out on 70,000 fathoms of water" and still have faith."[4] Another example, involving a different kind of risk, would be Polanyi who, professing that all that we believe to be true and good may be totally mistaken (*PK* 404), nevertheless maintains "that we may firmly believe what we might conceivably doubt; and may hold to be true what might conceivably be false"(*PK* 312). Further examples could easily be multiplied. My point is that precisely because so much depends on what we are committed to, faith, whether religious or secular, and criticism should be seen as interdependent. In the words of Basil Mitchell: "Without faith in an established tradition criticism has nothing to fasten on; without criticism

the tradition ceases in the end to have any purchase on reality."[5]

The epistemological issue here can be put in the form of a familiar dilemma. To put it crudely: should we minimize (the risk of) error or should we maximize truth? Of course, we would like to do both. But by minimizing error we run the danger of keeping truth out as well, whereas maximizing truth may well lead to taking all sorts of error on board. Foundationalist philosophers chose the first horn by trying to find a collection of incorrigible, indubitable, preferably even infallible basic beliefs on which the edifice of knowledge could be erected. In spite of all their attempts to minimize error, however, truth became progressively harder to come by.

As to the other horn of the dilemma, it seems quite natural to interpret Polanyi's *invitation to dogmatism* (*PK* 268) as an attempt to break it. In a sense, it can be seen as an attempt to maximize truth while at the same time allowing for the possibility of complete error. Since the invitation plays a central role in the fiduciary programme, the question of how we should understand it is of vital importance. I will come back to this issue in the next section, but as far as the role of criticism is concerned, I think it would be misconceiving the invitation to think that it implies that criticism as such is the high road to self-doubt, scepticism, nihilism, and what not. On my account of post-critical philosophy, critical analysis is of vital importance both after the acceptance of some theory as true and while relying on it with an eye to seek for more truth or to improve our bodily and intellectual skills in general (provided that its results can be reintegrated into the original focal whole).[6]

As Cannon does not deny the importance of critical reflection as such, have I not been been labouring the obvious? But then, again, what is wrong with a critical posture? Could the point of his objection be the extent to which my account remains focussed on certain particulars of the theory of tacit knowing? On this reading, his charge would be that I do not maintain the proper balance between analysis (attending to the particulars) and integration (attending from the particulars). Concentrating too much on particulars, the overall significance of the theory of tacit knowing gets obscured because it precludes the meaningful reintegration of those particulars. If so, an analytical approach and its concomitant "critical"and detached posture, might even be a case of what Polanyi calls "destructive analysis"(cf. *PK* 50ff.). This leads us to objection (2) which accuses me of failing to capture the true significance of Polanyi's post-critical rhetoric.

III. A New Epistemological Rhetoric?

According to Cannon, Polanyi's post-critical insights require that "our very way of doing epistemology be changed"and that "[t]hings cannot simply go on as they have in the past"(p. 21). But what does he mean by that? Fortunately, we have a clue to what he is getting at refers to a passage where I defend Polanyi against Alan Musgrave's claim that Polanyi's epistemology leads to solipsism. In that context, I suggest that Musgrave is misinterpreting certain peculiarities of Polanyi's style and I then go on to put the fiduciary formulation of the task of philosophy "into a more neutral mode of speech."[7]

Recall that according to Cannon it is not possible to specify the content of a person's belief neutrally. Extracting the content of a belief out of its proper context without reintegrating it, deprives it of its meaning. Applying this to my reconstruction of Polanyi, it may then be suggested that this is precisely what I am doing: making a split between the content of his ideas and their significance (as expressed in a particular rhetorical style).

Assuming that the significance of the theory of personal knowledge lies at least partly in its aims, we find them expressed in a frequently quoted series of passages. In many of them, liberation from objectivism and restoration of meaning and confidence are central. For example, liberation from objectivism is achieved by realizing "that we can voice our ultimate convictions only from within ... the whole system of acceptances that are logically prior to any particular assertion of our own ..."(*PK* 267). Accordingly, philosophy for Polanyi now becomes a *programme of self-identification*: "discovering what I truly believe in and ... formulating the convictions I find myself holding."[8] In complete self-referential coherence, he then reports as his central convictions "that I must conquer my self-doubt"(*ibid*.) and "that I am called upon to search for the truth and state my findings"(*PK* 299). But then his programme of self-identification may become our programme as well. So the aim is also "to restore to us once more the power for the deliberate holding of unproven beliefs"(*PK* 268).

Langford and Poteat have interpreted these self-referential (personal) and summoning expressions in *Personal Knowledge* as a deliberately employed "confessional rhetoric"in the line of St. Augustine. According to them, "*this* form of confession is precisely the medium for seeking to appreciate how and who one is in order that one may more fully be so."[9] Assuming that this somewhat resembles the new epistemological rhetoric Cannon is alluding to, what to think of it?

To begin with, I admit that I did not appropriate either Polanyi's confessional rhetoric or the programme of self-identification. With the help of hindsight, let me try to explain why. In the first place, I took my audience to be mainly analytical non-Polanyians, that is, philosophers who at the time were at most dimly aware of Polanyi's work, if not deeply suspicious of the curious mixture of its analytical, phenomenological, pragmatic and existential aspects (and possibly also of his status as a non-professional *philosophe*). Telling this audience in a straightforward way that epistemology after Polanyi cannot be done in the traditional ways any more, seemed to me a rhetorical strategy doomed to failure. In presenting Polanyi's ideas to them in current analytical idiom and styles of reasoning, I tried to convey their intelligibility and plausibility in an indirect way.[10]

Further, it is obvious that the programme of self-identification does not fit well in the context of a reconstructive enterprise in epistemology. Analytical philosophy is neither a philosophy of life, nor does it "speak from the heart." It has no programme for human flourishing and the most it can do by way of intellectual therapy is conceptual clarification and innovation. Nevertheless, even in retrospect, I still find myself reluctant to side with Langford, Poteat and, possibly, also Cannon, in taking the programme of self-identification as the central tenet of Polanyi's post-critical philosophy. Notice, though, that this is not to deny that it is one of its tenets and that its further elaboration may be a perfectly legitimate post-critical undertaking.

Next, and more important, my reluctance is fueled by straightforward epistemological concerns as well. First, there is the serious issue of Polanyi's invitation to dogmatism. Should we take it as a plea for existentialist faith and unconditional commitment, as a summons to a post-foundational traditionalism or, perhaps, as a neo-Wittgensteinian call for participation in groundless epistemic practices? On the first reading, it seems to me that straightforward dogmatism in combination with the program of personal self-identification will lead to a position which I find untenable. What I have in mind are policies and attitudes of sticking to one's beliefs, theories and world-views in a "come what may"fashion, either by appeal to revealed or manifest truths (as in fideism) or to allegedly basic beliefs (as in full-blown or crypto-foundationalism). True is only what is (or may yet become) true-for-me or true-for-us; what is true-for-them, for "the others," is of no concern, or, worse, a threat to my or our intellectual existence. One of the central theses of

my book is that this kind of dogmatism is untenable and irreconcilable both with Polanyi's fallibilism and with the possibility of criticism. Hence my proposal to read Polanyi's invitation as a methodological maxim, similar to C.S. Peirce's principle of tenacity, to stick to our traditions in the face of adverse evidence as long as this is reasonably possible or no better alternative is available.[11] Methodological dogmatism, as I call it, plays a central role in the traditionalist position which I then proceed to develop in Polanyi's wake.

A correlated worry is that the programme of self-identification coupled to the requirement to express only our own ultimate convictions "from within our convictions," may give epistemology an unduly "egocentric"twist. Polanyi recognizes this danger when he says that as soon as his fiduciary programme is formulated "it appears to menace itself with destruction ... for by limiting himself to the expression of his own beliefs, the philosopher may be taken to talk only about himself "(*PK* 299). To prevent the destruction, the theory of commitment is developed around the notions of responsible belief and universal intent.[12]

As Cannon rightly points out (p. 21), I am somewhat uncomfortable with the doctrine of commitment. I still believe that this doctrine can only fulfill its task properly if not only the personal, but also the cultural roots of tacit knowing are taken into account. The latter not as something additional to the personal, but rather as constitutive of it. For example, the standards in respect to which we as veracious inquirers hold ourselves responsible, must be self-set in order to function as such - otherwise they couldn't even be *my* (or *our*) standards. But they are not free floating and not just there to be picked out at will. Rather, they are embedded in the traditions, the histories and practices to which we have become affiliated, in which we participate and on which we are desperately dependent.

In sum, for an analytical philosopher, embarking on a confessional rhetoric in the line of an unqualified dogmatism, would amount to a major intellectual shift in allegiance. As a philosopher of religion, trained in the analytical tradition, working on the intersection of "reason"and "faith', I am only too well aware of, and perhaps too self-conscious about, the tensions between the two realms and the pitfalls awaiting those who think they can work comfortably in both of them at the same time.[13]

IV. The Irreducibility of Tacit Knowing

According to Cannon, "tacit awareness is not itself subject to critical reflection precisely because it is not representational (hence not propositional)"(p. 22). Having dealt already with the issue of criticism, we now turn to the claim that tacit knowing is not representational (and thus not propositional), but relational or existential. The relationality of tacit knowing is elucidated by a distinction between tacit knowing as fiduciary or personal *belief in*, and explicit (propositional) knowledge as objective or a-personal *belief that*.[14] Cannon rightly points out that although belief in includes belief that, it is more. Consequently, belief in (tacit knowing) cannot be reduced to mere assent to some propositional content on pains of distorting its essential characteristics.

I agree completely with Cannon on this point and I am therefore rather puzzled by the charge. I can only conclude that he is misreading my position entirely. First, from the fact that I am using abstract entities like propositions for the purpose of a presentation and elucidation of the theory of tacit knowing, it does not follow that particulars are in the nature of representations *if and when they are attended from or functioning as subsidiaries*. They may well be figurative, auditive, tactile etc., but I present tacit knowing in propositional terms for the purpose of elucidating the *theory* of tacit knowing. What better way is there to introduce and convey the epistemological status of tacit knowing

to analytical philosophers? Thus, propositional (re)presentation is primarily a useful means for clarification, not some covert ontological thesis about the nature of tacitly held particulars.

Further, it should be noticed that the theory of tacit knowing is itself located at a different level of description than particular instances of tacit knowing. Why think that a propositional representation of the *theory* of personal knowledge as such is mistaken or confused? Whereas on my account tacit knowing remains phenomenologically and psychologically ubiquitous and irreducible, surely the philosophical *theory* of tacit knowing is not itself tacit but explicit and thus susceptible to analysis, critical examination, defense, elaboration, and so forth.

Finally, and most importantly, I do give the non-propositional or quasi-propositional elements in all forms of knowing their due place. For example, in my reconstruction of the tacit component as involved in utterances of statements of fact, I emphasize the role of (and degrees of) emotions and feelings in order to clarify what Polanyi means by his all too brief remarks on the nature of assertions and truth. Later, in a broader context, I employ John Searle's thesis of the Background in order to lend further substance to Polanyi's conception of the tacit component as not only inherently personal and embodied but as socio-cultural or communal as well.[15] The central features of our Background capacities and stances can be listed thus: they are are pre-intentional, nonrepresentational and they permeate a person's intentional Network. Hence, without the Background no intentionality, no directedness of consciousness and, I should add, no focal awareness and no explicit knowledge of any significance. Far from saying, explicitly or by implication, that tacit knowing is as such propositional, I am in fact construing it as a vast fund of pre-intentional, non-propositional stances and capacities.[16] This is precisely why I criticize Searle for suggesting that Polanyi's theory implies that rules which govern skills function unconsciously as representations.[17] This would reduce personal knowing how to a knowledge by description which, like reducing belief in to belief that, is indeed totally alien to Polanyi's endeavour.

Of course, nailing my colours rather tightly to Searle's mast might be a source of further misgivings. For instance, his thesis of the Background has been criticized by Mark Johnson who argues that it remains objectivist and that a viable theory of meaning should go beyond Searle's.[18] Although expressing firm agreement on the substantial points that all meaning is a matter of intentionality and that all meaning is context-dependent, Johnson criticizes Searle for taking the Background as preintentional and thus not as itself part of meaning. Consequently, imaginative phenomena or structures, like categorization, image schemata, metaphorical projection, metonymy, polysemy and semantic change, which Johnson sees as essential to meaning, come to fall outside the scope of adequate theory of meaning and understanding.[19]

In retrospect, had I been acquainted with Johnson's work in time, I would certainly have used it to amplify my account of the tacit component and to amend the notion of the Background. For Searle's earlier speech act theoretical account of meaning is indeed restricted to linguistic meaning, to be analysed in terms of propositional contents in certain intentional or psychological modes. In particular, I would have made ample use of Johnson's notion of non-propositional meaning, which is richer than Searle's theory as put forward in *Intentionality* (1983).

It should be pointed out, though, that Searle recently further elaborated his thesis of the Background in reply to various criticisms, especially in his *The Rediscovery of the Mind* (1992). In this book, he develops a theory of consciousness which comprises quite a few Polanyian concerns, such as the rejection of materialism, the irreducibility of consciousness, the view of consciousness as a natural biological feature, and commitment to truth of propositions without having any intentional states with those propositions as content. He still takes the Background as non- or

preintentional but he now assigns the Background a much broader role: it is now said not only to "enable"linguistic and perceptual interpretation, but also to "structure"consciousness (by moulding extended sequences of experiences into "narrative shapes"and "motivational dispositions') and to "facilitate"certain kinds of readiness of the person and to "dispose"one to certain sorts of behaviour.[20] Whether this brings Searle closer to Johnson or not would have to be the topic for a separate paper, but I think Johnson is mistaken when he suggests that Searle's demarcation between the intentionality of the Network and the preintentionality of the Background is fueled by foundationalist motives.[21] Characterizing the Background as "a bedrock of mental capacities ... that form the preconditions for the functioning of Intentional states," Searle is using "bedrock"in the familiar Wittgensteinian sense which, of course, is anything but foundationalist.[22]

Where does all this lead us in respect to Cannon's charge that I am reducing tacit knowing to a form of propositional knowledge? Again, whether or not there is more to the tacit component than can be covered by the Searlean Background, the latter is undeniably non-propositional, bodily rooted, and both person and culture relative. Surely this is enough for my epistemological aim, namely to show in terms intelligible to analytical philosophers that what is tacitly known is not irremediably private but also intersubjectively shared. So far my reply to Cannon's third objection. Let us now see where this brings us in respect to the interpretation of Polanyi's account of truth.

V. Truth as Contact with Reality

Particularly important seems Cannon's proposal to interpret Polanyi's conception of truth primarily as "relational"in the sense of "relating to reality by making contact with it"(cf. p.23). According to Cannon, "relational"in this connection is opposed to, or at least more than, merely propositional truth on which he thinks my account is mainly focussed. Polanyian truth, according to Cannon, "is *the achievement of connection in the first person (for oneself) with ... objective reality (qua recognizable in common to responsible inquirers)*" . . . (p. 23). Propositional truth is subordinate to, and grounded in, this deeper, existential or relational sense of truth.

One way of replying to this would be to point out that an assessment of Polanyi's ideas of truth largely depends on what an account of truth is supposed to achieve. Normally, it attempts to answer questions like: "What is (the nature or meaning of) truth?"(especially the correspondence and the semantic theories), "What are the criteria of truth (or falsehood)?"(notably coherence and pragmatist accounts) and "How do we use the words 'true' (or 'false')?"(as in the relatively recent non-descriptive or performative account).

Polanyi's account of truth answers in varying degrees of detail each of these issues. In view of his robust realism, I think it is quite plausible to assume that he remains committed to the common-sense notion of truth as correspondence or fit with reality, a thesis with which Cannon seems to agree. Polanyi also offers an analysis of "what we can mean by saying that a factual statement is true"(*PK* 254) as part of his attempt to reinterpret the ideal of an impersonally detached truth in order "to allow for the inherently personal character of the act by which truth is declared"(*PK* 71). As I try to show in detail, his analysis comes close to P. Strawson's so-called non-descriptive or performative theory of truth, according to which to say that a statement is true is not to ascribe a further property to it, but to endorse, or to express commitment to, its content. Finally, Polanyi also develops an interesting account of how in scientific inquiry truths can be recognized on a tacit level.

I am not sure how to fit Cannon's notion of existential truth in this traditional way of questioning, but I guess

that I am not misrepresenting him by assuming that the notion of "contact" is closely connected to the issue of the criteria of truth and that the qualification "existential" concerns the meaning of truth.

As regards the criterial or contact sense of truth, I agree with Cannon that it is central to Polanyi's ideas on truth and that propositional truth is derived from it. My own reconstruction of the criterial sense of truth, of intuitive contact with reality, and of the relations between truth, reality and beauty, is mainly confined to the context in which he develops it, namely the philosophy of science.[23] An extensive account of the notions of truth and contact with reality was already in the offing, namely Esther L. Meek's dissertation on Polanyi's realism.[24] Since Cannon refers to her work, let us have a closer look at her account of the experience of contact with reality.

According to Meek, for Polanyi "truth is a matter of contact with reality and as such is personally appraised."[25] The conceptual connection between "truth" and "reality" is very close indeed for, as Meek points out, the criteria of truth just are the criteria of reality:

> contact with reality is a *sine qua non*: without there having been contact with reality, there can be no truth. Truth has to do with reality, with the way things actually are. That is why the criteria of reality function as criteria of truth: they indicate successful contact, and contact is essential to truth.[26]

Arguing convincingly that if truth lies in contact with reality "it is the tacit component alone which enables the knower to decide what is true"[27], Meek then goes on to clarify the nature of the criteria of reality. According to her, the two basic Polanyian criteria of reality, and thus of truth, are what she calls *the reality criterion* and *the integrative criterion*. According to the reality criterion,

> we recognize successful contact with reality in the course of a discovery or other epistemic achievement because of the presence of intimations of indeterminate future manifestations (the IFM Effect), the feeling that the resulting conclusion will go on being confirmed in as yet inconceivable and surprising ways.[28]

The IFM Effect accompanies contact with reality and thus indicates the presence of truth to the dicoverer. Whereas the intimations that make up the IFM Effect have a "prospective indeterminacy," the integrative criterion consists of "retrospectively indeterminate clues." According to the integrative criterion, "contact with reality has been succesfully made if the epistemic achievement in question consists of "the comprehension of the coherence of largely unspecifiable particulars."[29]

In Meek's view, the reality criterion and especially the integrative criterion are basic because three further Polanyian criteria of reality, *coherence*, *rationality* and *intellectual beauty*, "develop out of [them]."[30] All three result from the integrative act of tacit knowing: experiences of coherence are linked with appearance, pattern and order (the phenomenal aspect of tacit knowing) and the experience of rationality is connected with meaningfulness (the semantic aspect). Intellectual beauty attaches to theories and is experienced in virtue of the coherence and rationality of those theories or as an accompaniment of the IMF Effect they exert.[31]

However, Meek warns us that successful contact reveals "*merely* an aspect of reality."[32] Reality, according to Polanyi, is inexhaustive, and so contact with reality is always aspectual and inexhaustive as well. Consequently, to

attain truth is never to attain the whole truth and nothing but the truth, as Meek rightly emphasizes.[33] In this way truth as contact with reality is reconciled with Polanyi's fallibilism.

As an account of Polanyi's criterial sense of truth, Meek's account of how, according to Polanyi, truth can be recognized, seems to me perfectly sound and also an important complement to my own account.

VI. Truth as Correspondence

Regarding our second issue, the meaning of truth, I already noted that Cannon and I agree that Polanyi upholds the common-sense notion of truth as correspondence. On my account, part of this is expressed in Polanyi's thesis that the structure of tacit comprehension parallels the structure of what is comprehended (cf. *TD* 33f.). According to Cannon, however, I am confusing the epistemological question of correspondence with reality with what he takes to be "the ontological question of the correspondence between the structure of tacit comprehension ... and the structure of the comprehensive entity which is its object" (p. 20). I certainly do not deny that Polanyi's thesis can be construed as an ontological one but, surely, the epistemological question is just the other side of the same coin.

Consider the following example which is built on an interesting proposal by Meek. She suggests that for Polanyi the notion of contact replaces the notion of correspondence. On her construal, in the process of discovery, tacit foreknowing precedes the discovery. When the explicit knowledge of discovery arrives, "we recognize it as matching or corresponding with the tacit conclusions already reached. Thus discovery comes to us with the conviction of its being true."[34]

Here is the example. When looking at a car in my vicinity, I am more or less aware of the characteristic features of that car, its being yellow, its having a certain shape, wheels, windows, and so forth. The car is in a certain sense "more"than that particular aggregate of features. Normally, when I have a visual experience like that, there is a yellow car in my vicinity. I can express my experience to you by saying "Look, a yellow Alfa Romeo Spider!." So far the ontology. What about the parallel structure? Obviously, I am not having something yellow, four-wheeled, etc. in my head or body. What I have in my mindbody is a visual representation of the car, jointly made up of all the particulars which happen to be relevant to that particular experience and of which I am more or less, or perhaps not at all, aware. As the car is "more"than its component parts, my visual representation is "more"than these subsidiaries. So far the parallel structure.

Now it seems to me that if there is not some sort of connection or "contact"between my awareness of the subsidiaries that make up my visual experience and the actual features of the car, my having that particular visual experience would become a complete mystery. Nothing depends here on the availability of intersubjective checking procedures, let alone on "independent access to reality," that is, access independent of our common conceptions of cars, colours, etc. On the contrary, it is precisely in and through the use of these conceptions that "contact with reality"is achieved. Thus, I uphold my claim that the ontological thesis of corresponding structures has epistemological import as well, and that the sense of correspondence meant by Polanyi is not one of mirroring (isomorphy or one-one correspondence), but a more lose one (homomorphy or analogy).

I am not sure whether this is what Cannon has in mind with his notion of existential truth, which, I take it, covers more than "what is true for me"or "what it means that something is true for me." This is important because it may be the way in which we learn to use the word "true', but it cannot be the whole story and so the traditional questions

reappear.

In retrospect, my analytical approach to Polanyi's theory of personal knowing leaves out certain aspects of his philosophy, in particular the programme of self-identification and the confessional rhetoric deriving from it. However, I show that there are solid epistemological reasons for caution and that "post-critical"should not be identified with an uncritical dogmatism. I also indicate how the current accounts of the nature and structure of tacit knowing could be elaborated further by drawing on, and extending, the work of Searle and Johnson. Finally, I make use of Meek's account of the notion of "contact with reality"to expound Polanyi's criterial sense of truth. In the light of this, I would not be surprised if Dale Cannon's misgivings are still largely intact. Still, what this exchange of views between proponents of quite different philosophical styles shows, I hope, is that the views of others do make a difference.

Notes

[1] I take "analytical philosophy"in the broadest possible sense, including most of Anglo-Saxon epistemology , philosophy of science (say, Popper, Kuhn, Lakatos, Laudan, Van Fraassen), philosophy of language (e.g., Wittgenstein, Searle, Putnam) and philosophy of religion (e.g., Ramsey, Mitchell, Hick, Mavrodes, Plantinga, Wolterstorff, Phillips).

[2] A.F. Sanders, *Michael Polanyi's Post-Critical Epistemology*, Amsterdam/Atlanta 1988, i

[3] Further evidence for this is his claim that according to Polanyi belief in (or tacit knowing by acquaintance), including trust, endorsement, accreditation, reliance, are all a-critical (p. 22). Notice, however, that Polanyi emphatically says that a competent judgement issuing in trust, endorsement and the like, is a mental act which cannot be improved *at the moment* of its making, since the person making it is already doing his best in making it (cf. *PK* 314). But this is certainly not to say that a competent judgement cannot be improved *after* it has been made.

[4] S. Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postcript to* Philosophical Fragments, (eds.) H.V. Hong & E.H. Hong, Princeton, N.J., 1992, 204

[5] B. Mitchell, *Faith and Criticism*, Oxford 1994, 88

[6] Consider, for example, Polanyi's remarks that "an alteration of analysis and integration leads progressively to an ever deeper understanding of a comprehensive entity', "[a] skill too is improved by alternate dismemberment and integration" (*KB* 125) and "all manner of discovery proceeds by a see-saw of analysis and integration"(*KB* 129). Certainly, we are also warned that the performance of a skill can be paralysed if we focus our attention at its particulars (during that performance) or that "unbridled lucidity can destroy our understanding of complex matters"(*TD* 18, cf. *PK* 56). But just as the meticulous dismembering of a text can kill its appreciation, it "can also supply material for a much deeper understanding of it"(*TD* 19).

[7] Sanders, *Michael Polanyi's Post-Critical Philosophy*, 169

[8] The famous passage about the aim of *Personal Knowledge*: "to achieve a frame of mind in which I may hold firmly to what I believe to be true, even though I know that it might conceivably be false"(*PK* 214) clearly belongs to

this context as well. In a similar vein (regarding heuristic acts which involve a conversion) is "[i]t is a decision, originating in our own personal judgement ... to modify our intellectual existence, so as to become more satisfying to ourselves ... as a token of what should be universally satisfying"(*PK* 106).

[9]T.A. Langford & W.H. Poteat, "Upon First Sitting Down to Read *Personal Knowledge*', in: (eds.) T.A. Langford and W.H. Poteat, *Intellect and Hope. Essays in the Thought of Michael Polanyi*, Durham, N.C., 1968, 18

[10]In a sense, Polanyi can be seen to do the same. He employs the jargon of analytical philosophy, for instance, in his accounts of the nature of assertions of fact (cf. *PK* 27ff.), of assertions of fact (cf. *PK* 253ff.), of belief (cf. *PK* 272ff.) and of truth-claims (cf. *PK* 305, 315). He also speaks of believing *p*, the sentence *p*, the function of the word "true', and so on. Also, his account of truth is couched largely in the terminology used by analytical philosophers who were prominent at the time *Personal Knowledge* was taking shape (as, e.g., M. Black, B. Russell and A. Tarski). As a personal note I should perhaps add that, as an analytical philosopher of religion by training, the hard and time-consuming effort of elaborating and reconstructing Polanyi's epistemology was also part of an attempt to make it intelligible and plausible to myself.

[11]See on this issue also my "*Tacit Knowing* Between Modernism and Postmodernism: A Problem of Coherence', *Tradition & Discovery* 18 (1991/92), nr.2, 15 - 21

[12]There is some reason to doubt whether the doctrine of commitment (at least in the form in which it is presented in *Personal Knowledge*) is successful in avoiding this danger. Consider the way in which Polanyi answers the question whether a particular fact is true: "... my answer will be made with universal intent, saying what I believe to be the truth, and what the consensus ought therefore to be. This is the only sense in which I can speak of the truth, and though I am the only person who can speak of it in this sense, this is what I mean by the truth"(*PK* 316). This may not be solipsism, as Polanyi claims, but it certainly comes dangerously close to it. Why would he be the only person who can speak of the truth in that sense? Unless this sense is a purely private one, surely, we all can speak of it in that sense if we judge it to be the right sense.

[13]A recent example of a "confessional rhetoric"employed by leading American analytical philosophers of religion, is the remarkable collection *God and the Philosophers. The Reconciliation of Faith and Reason*, (ed.) T.V. Morris, New York/Oxford 1994.

[14]I suppose that Cannon uses the distinction between belief in and belief that precisely because it is part and parcel of the analytical tradition; see, for instance, H.H. Price, *Belief*, London 1969. Other well-known analytical distinctions which bring out the same point are those between *knowledge by description* and *knowledge by acquaintance* (Bertrand Russell) and between *knowing that* and *knowing how* (G. Ryle).

[15]The Background is defined as "a set of nonrepresentational mental capacities that enable all representing to take place." The "deep"Background includes at least all of those capacities that are common to all normal human beings in virtue of their biological makeup (like, e.g., walking, eating, grasping, percieving, recognizing) and preintentional stances towards the solidity of things, the independent existence of other people etc., whereas the "local"Background includes such things as opening doors, drinking beer from bottles and preintentional stances we take towards natural objects like cars, refrigerators etc. The Network is defined as the holistic complex of intentional

states such as beliefs, desires, intentions, hopes, fears, anxieties, anticipations, feelings of frustration and satisfaction. Any particular intentional state can only have the conditions of satisfaction that it does because it is located in a Network. Cf. J.R. Searle, *Intentionality. An Essay in the Philosophy of Mind*, Cambridge 1983, 141ff.

[16]Cf. Sanders, *Michael Polanyi's Post-Critical Epistemology*, 171-181

[17]Cf. *ibid*., 176; see also Searle, *Intentionality*, 150ff.

[18]M. Johnson, *The Body in the Mind. The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason*, Chicago/ London 1987, 187-190. I would like to thank Dr. Walter B. Gulick and Dr. Phil Mullins for pointing out to me the relevance of Johnson's book for the theory of tacit knowing. Notice that Johnson seems to connect the Searlean Background with Polanyian tacit knowing when he writes: "I am claiming that the so-called Background is merely that part of meaning that is not focused on in a given intentional act. It is that which is presuposed and is unquestioned as part of the context in which we grasp and express what we mean. It is background, relative to the foreground on which we are now focussing; but it is still part of the web of connections that constitute meaning"(189).

[19]*Ibid*. 191f.

[20]Cf. J.R. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*, New York/London 1995, 130ff.: Searle too has incorporated elements of the theory of tacit knowing into his account of the structure of consciousness. Cf. his *The Rediscovery of the Mind*, Cambridge, MA/London 1992, on the Gestalt structure of conscious experience (132f.) and on the center-periphery distinction in attention (137f.).

[21]Cf. Johnson, *The Body in the Mind*, 187f.

[22]Cf. Searle, *Intentionality*, 143

[23]Obviously, this restriction is not unimportant because it does not go without saying that the criteria of truth in scientific inquiry are the criteria of truth for all kinds of intellectual inquiry. Cf. Sanders, *Michael Polanyi's Post-Critical Epistemology*, 133-136, 145-150

[24]Cf. E.L. Meek, *Contact with Reality. An Examination of Realism in the Work of Michael Polanyi*, Ph.D. Temple University, October 1983. Unfortunately this dissertation was never published. It can be obtained through Universities Microfilms International, Ann Arbor, MI. 1985, 85-09387

[25]Meek, *Contact with Reality*, 192, 201

[26]*Ibid*., 192f.

[27]*Ibid*., 193

[28]*Ibid*., 101

[29]*Ibid*., 102

[30]Meek, *Contact with Reality*, 105, 113-120; they are not "qualitatively distinguishable"from them (113).

[31]Recently, J.W. McAllister advanced an extensive account of the role of beauty as an aesthetic criterion in science, especially in the assessment of theories and in times of revolution: *Beauty and Revolution in Science*, Ithaca/ London 1996. McAllister defends the view that the aesthetic preferences of scientific communities are reached by inductive projections over the empirical performance of the theories they adhere to and that these preferences, as in the applied arts, are shaped in part "by habituation to the forms associated with success"(p.5). It would be interesting to compare, and evaluate, Polanyi's adamant statement that "no scientific theory is beautiful if it is false"(*PK* 195) with McAllister's quotations of Schrödinger, Sciama and Einstein as scientists who ascribed beauty to theories but were at the same time dubious about there thruth (p.69).

[32]Meek, *Contact with Reality*, 91

[33]Cf. *Ibid*., 195, 206

[34]*Ibid*., 196

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