

The problem of the intellectual independence of the university within a technologically oriented society, raised again recently by G.P. Grant, was one of the problems which motivated Polanyi's enquiry into the foundations of knowledge. The key elements of his resultant attempt to supersede objectivist accounts of science are isolated, and evaluated as an instance of political "theory" as discussed by Voegelin. Polanyi's final position is judged to be partially adequate to meeting the dilemmas that Grant identifies.

G.L. Price\*

### **Michael Polanyi: The University and the Technological State**

The initial impetus to Michael Polanyi's enterprise of examining the personal bases of knowledge came from his realization of the depth of his disagreement with the war-time advocates of planning in science and the lack of a clearly stated alternative to their positivist premisses. This paper is an enquiry into the significance of those original intentions of Polanyi's philosophical enterprise, as seen within the context of contemporary analysis of the relationship of the universities to the technological state. Thus, if we are forced to ask "Can and should an account of the characteristic intellectual activity of the university be given which is not equivalent to, or an effective legitimization of, the public valuation of technology as the highest good?" then I shall suggest that Polanyi's response to war-time debates on university-state relationships has continuing relevance to our problem.

G. P. Grant has recently given a diagnosis of the dilemma of the university in technological societies which is centred on describing the absorption into intellectual life of views of man as an individual who is radically distinct from the world he inhabits, and is preoccupied with exercising his will in shaping that world to purposes that he alone conceives. In parallel, Grant argues, there has been adopted a characteristically modern doubt about our ability to give any account of being: a doubt which he traces to the general abandonment of the accounts given either in classical philosophy or in revealed religion of the purpose of existence. Grant notes that the conclusion has therefore been widely drawn that we lack any account of the meaning of existence, and thus purpose and value must be seen as solely the creation of human will in an otherwise unaccountable world. It is under such conditions that accounts of moral judgement can become current which "assume that what man is doing when he is moral is choosing in his freedom to make the world according to his own values which are not derivable from knowledge of the cosmos," and accounts of objectivity can gain adherence which "confine objectivity to what is open to quantifiable experiment, and which thereby limit purpose to our own subjectivity" (UC. 25).\*\*

These two characteristic orientations are systematized and symbolized in the prevailing acceptance of the distinction between judgements of fact and judgements of value. That very distinction has been cherished as opening the way to a pluralist society in which the shared "objective" world would contain only those

---

\*Dr. G. L. Price is in the Department of Liberal Studies in Science, The University, Manchester, England.

facts known to an empiricist science, thus removing religious and metaphysical superstitions, and leaving men free to choose their own values and to express their liberty.

This is the intellectual situation, Grant argues, on which the university relies in claiming to teach the social sciences as value-free. He believes that such teaching cannot avoid subservience to the state in its commitment to the prediction and control of human nature which is essential to technological society. But there is a further outcome of that doubt which the fact-value distinction crystallized. In practice, it has proved a short further step to the assertion that,

reason being unable to tell us anything about good and bad, judgements of value are but subjective preferences. . . removing any basis for criticism of the monistic "can implies ought" in technology (UC. 24-25).

The mark of education therefore becomes the embodiment of scepticism about the highest human purposes. Meanwhile in the public realm there reigns not scepticism, but an implicit certainty that the pursuit of technological efficiency is the chief purpose for which the community exists.

I have referred at length to Grant's account of the dilemma of the university, because he uses it to point out the inbuilt tendency of the educational process to dissolve any criterion on which criticism and new orientations might be based.

The tight circle in which we live is this: our present forms of existence have sapped the ability to think about standards of excellence, and yet at the same time have imposed on us a standard in terms of which the human good is monolithically asserted. Thus the university curriculum, by the very studies it incorporates guarantees that there should be no serious criticism of itself or of the society it is shaped to serve (UC. 34).

Thus his diagnosis renders inescapable the question, "Do we have a criterion by which to establish the proper role of the intellectual life in relation to the technological state?"

What, though, are we doing if we follow Grant in asking such questions? In describing the predominant intellectual orientation of the university, we realize that the activities which are legitimated and made possible by that role are activities which the society to which we belong generally holds to be unquestionably significant and ultimately valuable. We are already assuming that we have independent grounds for judgement, in even claiming to give a general account of the absorption by the university of the predominant orientations of modern life. Indeed, Grant is aware of this problem:

The criteria by which we could judge it (sc. the curriculum) as inadequate in principle can only be reached by those who through some chance have moved outside the society by memory or thought. But so to have moved means that one's criticisms will not be taken seriously from within the society (UC.34).

It is precisely the same problem which emerged, Eric Voegelin argued,<sup>2</sup> with the realization that there are always relations of representation in which the activities that any society or institution believes to be true are symbolized and practised in the roles assigned to its representative bodies, or political institutions. To realize the existence of such relations, Voegelin pointed out, takes for granted that one could speak of a social reality and of a "theorist" who explored it. But how is such speech possible?

The symbols in which a society interprets the meaning of its existence are meant to be true; if the theorist arrives at a different interpretation, he arrives at a different truth concerning the meaning of human existence in society. . . What is the source of this truth that apparently is developed in critical opposition to society? (NSP.53)

Even to admit the realization that contrasting societies exist, each claiming universal validity for the conceptions of truth on which each one believes itself founded, raises the same problem, unless we believe that the clash of force is the only test of the rightness of each claim. If we once stop to reflect whether to accept that test, we "set ourselves up as the representatives of the truth in whose name we are questioning, even though its nature and source should be only dimly discerned" (NSP.60).

Now the intention of Voegelin's work has largely been to explicate the status and significance of those experiences which *have* formed the basis for making such judgements. He argues that the discovery of the truth that is apt to *challenge* the truth of self-enclosed systems of representation, is itself a historical event of major proportions: the event that occurs in parallel in the breaking out of the mystics and philosophies of China, India and Persia, of the prophets of Israel, and in the philosophies and tragedians in Hellas. He has written at length to explicate the significance of the new epoch of experience with reference to Bergson's concept of the closed and open society. Above all he takes entirely seriously the intention of Plato to develop not *a* philosophy of man, but to explore *the* order of the human soul. This is the activity of theory: not just to form an opinion about human existence in society, but

an attempt at formulating the meaning of existence by explicating the content of a definite class of experiences. Its argument is not arbitrary, but derives its validity from the aggregate of experiences to which it must constantly refer for empirical control (NSP.64).

Grant's analysis of the difficulty of finding a criterion by which we can judge the adequacy of the university curriculum has led me to argue that this problem is equivalent to that of finding a basis for describing the articulation of unquestioned truths and political symbols in a self-enclosed society: and I have turned to Voegelin's account of the response made by the classical discoverers of human order to just this problem. Now I want to examine the intentions of Polanyi's response to the campaign for planned science and its probable consequences for university-state relations, to see how far its intentions and achievements are equivalent to the task of the theorist. Could Polanyi be said to have been comparing the discovered truth of human order with the alternatives on which surrounding social institutions are founded and establishing the grounds on which that truth can be ultimately trusted? By seeking to answer such questions, I hope to assess the strength of his position as a contemporary basis for the tasks of defining an adequate philosophy of university-state relations.

From the first, Polanyi was aware that to ask the questions that he did, was to enter the realm where political societies, each claiming to be representative of truth, clash in conflict: he knew that the theoretical problems raised by the planning science movements were, "part of the general impact made by the Russian Revolution on the minds of men everywhere" (SFS.7), and that in discussing them he was questioning such self-interpretations. This is the path that Voegelin argues is inevitably to be trod by the theorist:

The mere raising of . . . questions (i.e. about the truth of systems of political representation) is in part the answer. In the very act of raising them the spell of monadic representation is broken; without questioning we have set up ourselves as representatives of the truth in whose name we are questioning. . . (NSP.59).

Polanyi's awareness was of precisely this implication:

We may demand a measure of freedom for almost any nonsense in a free country, but that is not what we mean by academic freedom.

Those who engage with Marxists in discussion about the freedom of science must face up to this situation. The Marxists are quite near the truth in saying that in demanding freedom we merely seek to establish our own orthodoxy. The only valid objection to this is that our fundamental beliefs are not just an orthodoxy; they are true beliefs which we are prepared to uphold (LL.28).

If then Polanyi can be understood as asserting the possibility of a fundamental account of social reality independent of the self-conception of enclosed political systems, then we must examine how far his account will withstand the questions that will inevitably be directed against it, and thus determine its adequacy for defining a criterion of judgement for the university with the technological society.

As soon as the theorist asserts the possibility of a critical interpretation of the meaning of a self-enclosed society, then the integrity of that assertion will be questioned. Is theory simply the refinement of a particular opinion? Is it any more than the clarification and logical assessment of the symbols arising within the self-interpretation of a society? If so, then is the theorist anything other than a particular frequent exponent of a subject on which any member of a society can have something to say? Is it merely one delusion among many, one of an interminable range of possible "philosophies," that is represented when the possibility is asserted of

symbols of theory which did not seem to be symbols in reality; and of concepts which referred to reality, while at the same time, their meaning was derived from reality through the mysterious critical clarification?

In meeting such challenges, how far did Polanyi adopt the same stance as the classical theorist by grounding his position in an examination of the structure of human experience as he was able to explicate it? For as we have already seen, Voegelin argued:

This is the crucial point on which the meaning of theory depends. Theory is not just any opinion about human existence in society; it rather is an attempt at formulating the meaning of existence by explicating the content of a definite class of experience. Its argument is not arbitrary, but derives its validity from the aggregate of experience to which it must permanently refer for empirical control (NSP.64).

I suggest that Polanyi was keenly aware of this necessity and that from it we can grasp the significance of his repeated explanation that only by undertaking the task of re-examining the structure of experience of knowing, could adequate foundations be found for mounting a critique of the self-interpretation of society which found its expression in the planned science movement. As Polanyi wrote later of the events that spurred him to examine the structure of knowing,

(The Soviet) acceptance of Lysenko's philosophy was based on their philosophy of science. What philosophy of science had we in the West to pit against this? How was this general acceptance among us to be justified? Was this acceptance justified? On what grounds?

Marxism has challenged me to answer these questions (SFS.9).

And what was his recourse? To examine the place of the experience of knowing in the constitution of human experience, and thus to re-explore the nature of the reality which is encountered in knowing. Therefore, the whole edifice of Polanyi's exploration must be understood to arise from his realization of the inadequacy of any critique of positivistic planning in the absence of such a foundation. Now that we know how far Polanyi was actually able to go, once he embarked on the exploration of the structures of knowing, we may be so engaged in the quite legitimate task of retracing and understanding his steps, that we may forget that for the purposes of establishing the possibility of a critique of positivistically planned society, the grounding of that critique in the experienced structure of knowing, is the lynch-pin in saving it from arbitrariness.

The enterprise of the theorist is thus grounded in the encounter with the structure of human experience: but its intention, as we have seen, is to identify those experiences which are themselves characteristic of and constitutive of the true order of man, not merely to develop something which in the retrospect of history will appear as one philosophy of man among many, for the theorist, as Voeglin argues:

The true order of man in a constitution of the soul, to be defined in terms of certain experiences which have become predominant to the point of forming a character (NSP.63).

Can Polanyi be said to have engaged in the same enterprise? My examination is limited to those war-time and immediate post-war papers in which he was simultaneously developing grounds of his exploration of knowledge and his critique of the planned science movement. And here I suggest that his arguments do indeed rest on assertions about the encountered structure of experience. In taking the experience of knowing as the focus of his argument, the core of his position is that there *is* a coherence between the structure and implications of the discovery of the world through science, and the object of that discovery. Thus, when he enquires why spontaneous self-coordination is characteristic of science, he insists that it can only be understood in terms of a common task for science; and this common task is found by considering the significance of the claim that the scientist makes discovery. Such a claim implies a potential addition to the cooperative endeavour of extending the system of science, through a common commitment to agreed standards and procedures. His characteristic conclusion is that:

The dedication of scientists to the advancement of an intellectual process beyond their control and to the upholding of values transmitted to them by tradition, represents the sense in which science does possess and pursue a coherent task. (FFS.129).

Thus he concludes that the coherence of science is implied in every affirmation of discovery. And he argues that this coherent task may be equally well expressed by saying that "scientists form a community believing in a certain spiritual reality and covenanted to the service of this reality" (FFS.129). Moreover in the internal structure of the process of exploration by the scientist Polanyi encounters a boundary between the tacit and the explicit and he deliberately draws our attention to the correspondence in his work between this boundary and the continual search by the minds of scientists for "intuitive contrast" with the as yet undiscovered parts of science. Thus not only is discovery itself "a successful contact with a hitherto hidden spiritual reality" (FAF.10), but this partly hidden reality is mirrored in the structure of knowing:

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 (SFS.10).

So if we are to seek Polanyi's position, a central examination of the structure of experience from which an account of social reality can be anchored against the accusation of arbitrariness, its central point is surely to be found in this mutual mirroring of the relation between tacit and explicit knowledge and the unfolding object of scientific enquiry. We are continually led in his thought to this central discovery that the structure of scientific enquiry implies an object which exists independently of the enquirer, but into which the enquirer is perpetually feeling his way. Indeed his whole defence of a liberal political philosophy as the proper environment for the pursuit of science is demanded by this central feature:

The liberal conception of freedom is the only method by which we can continue to discover the regions of yet undisclosed truth into which we are advancing (GT.448).

It is from this central discovery that Polanyi sets out on the task of interpreting existing social forms, and relating them to the predominant accounts of human existence which they express. Here too begins his articulation of the proper foundation of the university. The two tasks are inseparable: as Voegelin points out:

That differences of social order came into view as differences of human types at all is due to the discovery of a true order of the human psyche and to the desire of expressing the true order in the social environment of the discoverer (NSP.62).

The immediate target of Polanyi's social critique was, he believed, to be the consistent philosophical premisses of the advocates of planned science. A detailed study of that controversy is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is essential to draw attention to the central point on which he differed from Bernal and others: his discovery that the activity of knowing implies a commitment to the uncovering of a self-existent reality with which contact is gradually being made, for this discovery is taken to be a particular case of all those activities which are directed towards the independent reality of their respective ends:

There are other realities of the mind besides science and there exist transcendent obligations other than those which are particular to the scientist. There exist great traditions which embody those realities and these obligations, and which comprise all the main roots of our civilisation.

Thus the tradition of intellectual honesty, brotherhood, legal reason and tolerance are like science in providing "the premisses for an indefinite sequence of individual creative actions. . .," and correlatively these traditions

may be regarded secure to the extent to which men uphold their belief in the reality of truth, justice, charity and tolerance, and accept dedication to the service of these realities (FFS.131).

And it is to the loss of belief in such realities that Polanyi traces the origins of that sceptical nihilism on which he believed the social formulations of the planning of science movement to be based. Thus his account of the philosophical developments that have led to scepticism and nihilism depends on charting the gradual rejection of the possibility of commitment of religious belief or ethical principles of truth, justice or mercy, on the grounds that the truth of these principles cannot be empirically demonstrated (LL.97). Thus it is to the thoroughgoing adoption of this principle through the development of what Polanyi sees as a spreading process of doubt in continental rationalism and romanticism, that contemporary nihilism is traced. To the combination of this nihilism and the search for an outlet for moral aspirations is traced the attraction of the scientifically instrumental accounts which promised the means of creating a society in which the desire for justice might be fulfilled (LL.106).

Now in Polanyi's critique, the process of loss of commitment to the self-existent realities of law, of morality, or religion which leads to this moral scepticism, is seen as exemplified and paralleled in the denial by the radical planners of science that the object of science is distinct from the enquiring spirit of the discoverer. "Modern materialistic analysis, which denies that the human intellect can operate independently on its own grounds, and holds that the purpose of thought is, at bottom always practical," is attributed to the general process of destructive scepticism (LL.4). Thus Polanyi's position rests its whole contrast between the totalitarian state and the liberal-democratic on the denial by the former of the independent existence of objects to which the practice of morality, of law, of science, indeed of all cultural activities, are devoted.

Suppose society decides to abandon the pursuit of largely uncertain ends and to take its fate wholly into its own hands, directing its course entirely towards definite and specific immediate aims: then the structure of society must be changed accordingly. The application of the whole community to

the achievement of a definite immediate aim...must be entrusted to a State with powers to use every citizen for that definite aim, in accordance with a central scheme or plan, formed at headquarters. No respect for law, or even humanity and truth, must interfere with the immediate good of society which is thus defined and entrusted to the State (GT.454).

And it is this same contrast that Polanyi draws out when he turns from contemporary critique to the task of spelling out the conditions for the exemplification in society of the order that he has discovered in the exploration of experience. Although the immediate target of his argument had been the advocates of planned science, all along there was an implicit challenge to the adequacy of any university-state policies which implicitly incorporated an account of the intellectual relations of the university with society that depended on an instrumentalist account of knowledge. Since this is the point at which Polanyi's positions comes nearest in my view to defining a response to the contemporary problem of the absorption of the university curriculum into the instrumental ends of the State, we must examine its grounds carefully.

That there is a common basis for Polanyi's critique of the totalitarian tendencies of planned science and his anticipatory social criticism of the direction of UGC policy in Britain, is quite evident from his argument. Thus

The autonomy of science cannot be recognised by any government whose official philosophy officially denies transcendent reality to science. Inevitably such a government will come into conflict with the autonomy of science.

Similar dangers may arise more incidentally wherever the responsibility for the expansion of scientific institutions falls to public authorities who are not sufficiently familiar with the nature of science.

As guardians of the public interest they may feel reluctant to leave to scientific opinion full control over public funds allocated to science. Dazzled perhaps by the achievements of applied science in war-time — which had, quite rightly, been placed under the direct control of the political authorities — they may fail to recognise clearly the different nature of the quieter pursuits of pure research and not realise that these can be maintained only in complete independence (FFS.130).

On some occasions, e.g. the British Association Symposium of 1948 on "The Place of Universities in the Community," Polanyi adopted an utilitarian defence of the necessity of allowing academic freedom within the state, and only hinted at the fundamental grounds of his defence. There the central principle of his argument was that the expansion of the universities must enshrine the principle of "giving freedom and scope to the process of systematic discovery" (OU-I.777). Only thus could the continuance of research, and the avoidance of teaching a rigid and final picture of science, be achieved. But on utilitarian grounds alone his defence was readily open to attack as merely rationalizing the position of research under a particular set of social and economic conditions which the experience of war and the technological competition of cold-war was to remove from the bounds of English experience. The interest of Polanyi's position is that he did indeed recognize this. "Actually the utilitarian argument alone will never suffice," he argued,

unless society appreciates science for its own sake, it will not continue for long to activate genuine scientific research. Ultimately, universities must depend for their existence on the recognition of cultural obligations by the nation. It is our duty as academic scholars, whose task it is to uphold the values of knowledge, to demand of society that it should recognise its obligations to cultivate knowledge.

This position makes central to the intellectual relations of the university with the state the discovery that by examining the structure of knowing we find grounds for belief in the independent existence of the object of discovery. Polanyi's paper for the Society for Freedom in Science is quite adamant on this point:

. . . the usual antithesis of the individual versus the state is a false guide to the issue of freedom versus totalitarianism. The most essential freedoms are those in which it is not the individual pursuing his personal interests who claims to be respected by the State. Respect is demanded by the dedicated individual in view of the grounds to which he is dedicated. The disciplined individual demands to be respected for the sake of the spiritual reality under whose discipline he has undertaken to serve. . . The true antithesis is therefore between the State and the invisible things which guide men's creative impulses and in which men's consciences are naturally rooted (FAF.18).

Only if the universities realise that their whole intellectual enterprise depends on the existence of these "invisible realities" will they avoid relations with society which are founded on the belief that intellectual activity is either wholly inseparable from some particular interest or intention of society, or is entirely a source of technical information in response to practical needs. Now in making this argument Polanyi appeals to his general account of the adoption into modern philosophy of critical doubt and the subsequent endeavour to live without any foundations for knowledge but those of looking and seeing, and he argues that the inadequacy of those foundations must be recognized. It is here that I suggest he is arguing as a theorist, seeking to articulate in social existence a coherent account of knowing as he has encountered it within his examination of experience:

We must realise at last that scepticism cannot in itself ever discover anything, but these powers must always spring from belief. Discovery is never based solely on the evidence of our senses, but also on our presuppositions about the nature of things. And above all it implies a belief in the existence of an objective truth. . .

In order to defend themselves and to defend our civilisation against destruction by these doctrines (i.e. of radical scepticism) the universities today must first of all come to realise their true foundations. Abandoning the absurd claim of relying only on the evidence of our senses, we must claim on the contrary that we possess access to the things of the mind (UT.101).

And here Polanyi takes his stand on the results of his discovery that in the structure of knowing are implied objects of knowing which are independent and imply the allegiance of the knower:

Truth is a thing of the mind. . . No one has yet held truth between thumb and forefinger. It is an ideal, one of a number of ideals reaching out beyond human knowledge. When we declare our belief in the fair and objective pursuit of truth, and state that the universities are pledged to such a pursuit of the truth, we are accepting an ideal. We are professing allegiance to transcendent powers, and are taking our stand on transcendent grounds (UT.101).

Here I suggest is the crux of the response from Polanyi's position to the dilemma of the university as Grant poses it. It amounts to asserting the possibility of bypassing that very process of sceptical thought whose results were exemplified in the fact-value distinction; of challenging disbelief in the possibility of relating the choice in which man as free makes the world, to any ultimate criteria knowable through experience of that world. Polanyi's position amounts to a denial of any looking-and-seeing model of knowledge to which scepticism might retreat. He insists that we examine the structure of discovery, and thus has forced an acknowledgement of the inseparability of discovery, and faith in — and commitment to — an object of knowledge which is *not* encompassed by the point-in-time awareness of looking and seeing, but is approached only through processes of understanding of which we can never have total knowledge at any one time. He has examined the implications of the pursuit of discovery, and found it inexplicable without an orientation to ultimate grounds of action in commitment to truth, or honesty, or wonder. And now he insists that unless the university is to succumb to relations with the State that are distinguishable only in degree from those that characterise totalitarianism, then it must shake off the constraints of the narrowed account of experience that arose from the sceptical rebellion, and realise all along it has actually been making all those large assumptions on which discovery is based:

Assumptions (which) are today mortally challenged by a harder generation which is determined to practise in real earnest that radical scepticism to which we had too long and so innocently pretended (UT.101).

I have suggested that Polanyi tackles the problem of university state relations as a theorist, that is, by grounding the account of intellectual activity which he wishes to symbolize in the university in an exploration of the structure of experience, and particularly the experience of knowing, as he encountered and explored it. I believe this position to be of enduring importance; and I consider that it implies great challenges within the field of education in the sciences alone to present science as a structure of enquiry implying an anticipated coherence in its object. If F. R. Leavis<sup>3</sup> can argue from Polanyi's views of enquiry that English studies should engage the student in an appreciation of the role of "the as yet unrealised, the achieved discovery of which demands creative effort," then how much more should the education of the scientist make possible such an engagement?

Nevertheless I believe that the position I have outlined, however important, is vulnerable because it is incomplete, incomplete in a way that raises issues on the boundaries between scientific and religious experience. To see this, let us return to the concept of theory. Voegelin argues that the theorist's discovery of the truth of existence has two aspects. The first is the "anthropological," where the aggregate of those experiences which are constitutive of man *as man* form the basis for social evaluation and for expressing that discovered order in political society. I have argued that Polanyi's work is that of the "anthropological" aspect of his work. But there is a second aspect of the theorist's discovery, as Voegelin reminds us: the "anthropological" aspect requires a "theological" aspect as its correlate.

The validity of the standards developed by Plato and Aristotle depends on the conception of a man who can be the measure of society because God is the measure of his soul (NSP.70).

If the theorist's discovery of the structure of existence were simply a psychological discovery, then it would be permanently open to the charge that the truths it declared fundamental were derivations of the particular circumstances of the theorist. Continually the counter-argument would arise that the account of the transcendent foundations of intellectual activity is merely an affirmation characteristic of a certain political and personal situation, with no ultimate status as an account of the only possible foundation of a genuinely human university. Is it on an arbitrary idea of man, selected on no comprehensive grounds from the range of possible accounts of existence, that Polanyi's courageous position is nevertheless founded?

Voegelin argues that the possibility of theory was rooted in an account of experience which did not constitute an advance in psychological knowledge, but which recognized that in discovering the psyche as the centre of his experience, man discovered a point at which he was open to something beyond himself. The discovery of the psyche is inseparable from discovering the openness of the psyche. Here is the ultimate ground of the vision declared by the theorist

... the differentiation of the psyche is inseparable from a new truth about God. The true order of the soul can become the standard for measuring both human types and types of social order because it represents the truth about human existence on the border of transcendence. The meaning of the anthropological principle must, therefore, be qualified by the understanding that not an arbitrary idea of man as a world-immanent being becomes the instrument of social critique but the idea of man who has found his true nature through finding his true relation with God (NSP.67-8).

I think this makes it possible to see why it is necessary but not sufficient, to insist as Polanyi does that the university must find its proper foundations by remembering that its activities are ultimately grounded in belief in the transcendent object of

truth. We must *go on* to ask, "On what grounds is the independent existence of such an object to be accepted?" In short, the "transcendent" character of the object of knowing cannot be simply predicted: it must itself be a conclusion to which assent is possible after a full examination of the structure of experience: that in some sense, in encountering himself, man encounters that which is beyond himself.

At points, the position that Polanyi developed within the constraints of the planning of science debates moved within the direction of this further task. At the conclusion of *Science, Faith and Society* he writes:

I believe to have shown (sic) that the continued pursuit of a major intellectual process by men requires a state of social dedication and also that only in a dedicated society can men live an intellectually and morally acceptable life. This cannot fail to suggest that the whole purpose of society lies in enabling its members to pursue their transcendent obligations: particularly to truth, justice and charity (SFS.83).

But this conclusion is taken no further than the closing remarks:

Such an interpretations of society would seem to call for an extension in the direction towards God. If the intellectual and moral tasks of society rest in the last resort on the free consciences of every generation, and these are continually making essentially new additions to our spiritual heritage, then we may well assume that they are in continuous communication with that same source which first gave men their society, forming knowledge of abiding things. How near that source is to God I shall not try to conjecture. But I would express my belief that modern man will eventually return to God through the clarification of his cultural and social purposes. Knowledge of reality and the acceptance of obligation which guide our consciences, once firmly realised, will reveal to us God in man and society.

I suspect that this line of exploration must be completed if the vindication of the inner vision of theory as the proper task of the universities is to escape the charge of arbitrariness. In French thought of the last two centuries there has been established the possibility of doing justice to human interiority in the face of wholly externalist empiricism. Against the English tendency to dismiss metaphysical thought as meaningless hypothesis or isolated abnormal experience, there has been established the possibility of a metaphysics based on a comprehensive examination of experience. It is just such a comprehensive examination which I suggest is needed to complement Polanyi's position. A recent reviewer has drawn attention to the study by Jacques Chevalier of the work of Maine de Biran, in a way that hints at what such an examination may reveal.<sup>4</sup>

In the final analysis, Maine goes beyond an observation of the innerself in order to apprehend the final goal of all thoughts, feelings and decisions in God himself. From an outer passivity of the senses towards the external world, Maine moves to an inner passivity of the mind towards its own ideas and sensations in order to progress in knowledge of God's activity both in the self and, by transposition, in the external world. Everything for him is in the end dependent on metaphysics, for Maine 'had the justified courage to seek within himself through reflection concentrated on the inner life, the principle transcending the self which alone assures the order, unity, and constraints of human life, both for the society and for the individual'<sup>5</sup>

Could it be that the establishment of theory as the proper vocation of the university requires that theory has that same "justified courage" to seek its ultimate grounds?

---

#### \*\*Abbreviations

FAF M. Polanyi, "The Foundation of Academic Freedom," Society for Freedom in Science Occasional Pamphlet, Oxford 19.maFFS  
 M. Polanyi, "The Foundations of Freedom in Science," in , in *Physical Science and Human Values*, ed. E.P. Wignern (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1947).

- GT M. Polanyi, 'The Growth of Thought in Society', *Economics* (November 1941): 428-456.
- LL M. Polanyi, *The Logic of Liberty*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1931).
- NSP E. Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics*
- OU
- I,II M. Polanyi, 'Organisation of Universities', *Time and Tide*, 1947, I - 19 July, p. 77 and II - 26 July, pp. 801-2.
- SFS M. Polanyi, *Science, Faith and Society*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964).
- UC G. P. Grant, "The University Curriculum and the Technological Threat."
- UT M. Polanyi, 'The Universities Today', *The Adelphi* 24 (1948): 98-101.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>G. P. Grant, "The University Curriculum and the Technological Threat," in *The Sciences, the Humanities and the Technological Threat*, ed. W. R. Niblett (London: University of London Press, 1974).

<sup>2</sup>E. Voegelin, *The New Science of Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952).

<sup>3</sup>F.R. Leavis, *The Licing Priniciples: English as a Discipline of Thought*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1975), p. 44

<sup>4</sup>G. Harris, "Copleston and Chevalier on French Metaphysics," *Downside Reveiw* (January 1976): pp. 47-59.

<sup>5</sup>J. Chevalier, *Histoire de la Pensee*, vol. 4: *Maine de Biran a Bergson* (Paris: Flammarion, 1966).