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SOME FOOTNOTES TO POLANYIAN ETHICS

*To my fellow Polanyians all over **the world...***

1. There are several ways to approach and evaluate someone's ideas. One of them is to use one's own theory to understand the gist of what one's self is trying to say. In this paper, I adopt such a method: to understand Polanyi by means of Polanyi, a Polanyian approach to Polanyi. This method, to be faithful to him, will be personal. 1/ I commit myself to his philosophy, entrust myself to his conception of science to guide me in understanding his system properly. Of course, so-called impartial understanding is also possible, even necessary; for unless there are several different interpretations and criticisms of his views from various perspectives, philosophical discussion of his ideas will remain incomplete. Mine will be a sympathetic approach, a kind of "Verstehen" in search of clarifying several problems around his thoughts. As a particular method, it surely brings its own deficiencies and incompleteness. Yet, I am ready to take the risk of being one of his interpreters.

2. Though his philosophical theory basically rests on his theory of tacit knowledge, the main motivating force that leads Polanyi to philosophy is moral. In other words, ethical 2/ problems that recur in his articles are his *leitmotiv*. He starts and ends with ethical prob-

1/ Due to some historical, socio-economic and cultural reasons, in my culture the philosophical discussion of "being a person" in Polanyi's sense has been grievously neglected. As a person from the Islamic culture, I believe that it is possible to learn from him how to deal with science philosophically and to live with our own cultural values fiducially without being a devout Christian. Moreover, as repeatedly stated by Polanyi, a responsible personal commitment should not depend on ephemeral and parochial impulses that are subservient to politics or business. My concern about Polanyi is, in a sense, Polanyian: in spite of my subjective and cultural conditioning, I attempt to understand how to transcend these constraints by my own responsible personal commitment, and to face the difficulties of such an attempt. For I believe with Polanyi that there is no "objective" standpoint for judging truth, without a commitment to a culture (PK, 287-294). (For the abbreviation of Polanyi's work, see the bibliography. The number following the abbreviated work indicates the page number.)

2/ I make a distinction between ethics and morality such that the former is the philosophy of the latter.

lems. Nevertheless, to my knowledge, he has never published a separate article that fully deals with ethical problems. 3/ To show how the moral character of knowledge plays an important role in Polanyi's system, I will first, while trying to understand his treatment of the problems about science, endeavor to indicate the cases where moral considerations arise in his attempt to formulate his picture of science. Secondly, the theory of tacit knowledge **will** be dealt with as an extension of his conception of science.

3.1 would rather enter his system through his solicitude for science. An analysis of his deep concern about science may indicate the ethical character of his conception of knowledge. Polanyi's care for science may be called *Polanyian anxiety for science*.

Let us consider a theory created by a scientific community as a scientific product. A scientific theory when adequately established is an example of ideal knowledge. Scientific knowledge is a paragon of common-sense knowledge. The reason is simple. We trust the scientific community, because it is a paragon of society. Scientists form the body of a great and good society. 4/ A scientific community is credited with the merit that it consists of trustworthy scientists. Scientists are a paragon of knowers. So, we should have absolute trust in science, since it provides us with perfect examples of knowledge, the knower and the community of knowers. 5/ These are the backbone of our culture, which I call the *triad of science*. Scientific knowledge, scientist, and scientific community constitute the spring of human creativity in the search for order and rationality in nature. Solicitude in science means excessively attentive care for discovering reality. That is why *Polanyian anxiety* should not be misunderstood: science is our hope and our honor and it enables us to cope with the difficulties in obtaining knowledge for understanding nature and human culture. Studying the problems of the triad of science, we may succeed in comprehending the contemporary philosophical situation surrounded by historical, sociological, psychological, political and cultural problems. So, the door, Polanyi's care for science, is wide open to those who are willing to enter his system.

3/ *In a private conversation, Prof. Richard Gelwick pointed out to me that Polanyi had an intention to write a book on ethics that, unfortunately, remained unfulfilled.*

4/ PK, 375; LL, 6.

5/ *Scientific knowledge is produced by the contribution of each individual scientist who lives in a scientific community. This neverending process of producing scientific knowledge is scientific activity. Effecting the relation among the members of the triad of science, it constitutes the dynamic character of science.*

steps, Polanyi makes a number of very remarkable and appropriate comments, which hardly makes the criticism of these steps an easy task.

Let us look at Polanyi's first step. He says: 'the truth of a proposition lies in its bearing on reality'.^{3/} This statement is true in the sense that the search for truth itself, scientific knowing, is indeed realized when tacit knowledge contacts reality. The process described by Polanyi is a 'real process', whether we want to ontologize its reality or remain content with merely stating this reality. But not even a real process can become the criterion of truth or the foundation of a conception of truth. I have shown about Polanyi's two examples what problems may arise from attributing the shaping of the meaning of individual objects to the normal operation of tacit knowledge alone, without any additional reflections. Polanyi's mistake lies in deducing truth conceptual significance from the REAL BEING of the whole of tacit knowledge and the PARTIAL meaning-giving function of tacit knowledge. The criterion of a conception of truth is not what we call the non-explicit and non-explicable real processes leading to it, or that we emphasize the reality of these non-explicit and non-explicable processes, but rather is that we make it explicit. We cannot use the reality of non-explicit and non-explicable processes of tacit knowing for the criterion of truth because the real fact of the genealogy of knowledge doesn't give enough evidence to decide their truth or falsity. One cannot speak of non-explicit scientific truth, since in this case the possibility of intersubjective controllability and verifiability is lost. What we need is not truth but controllable truth, and non-explicit knowledge is not controllable.

3/ Ibid., p. 172. The two central thoughts of my essay appear in logical interrelation with each other in the direct context of this text, inasmuch as the genealogical conception of truth is interlinked with the criticism of 'antimetaphysical' philosophies: 'Modern antimetaphysical philosophies, like pragmatism, operationalism, positivism, and logical positivism, have tried to spell out the implications of asserting a proposition to be true. But...the truth of a proposition lies in its bearing on reality...' (Ibid.). My essay from the beginning treats Polanyi's conception of tacit knowledge as a genealogical conception of truth. I consider his scientific genealogical attitude expressly as a specifically POSITIVIST philosophical one. Therefore we cannot agree with those who - although based on real similarities - consider Polanyi's conception of science to be an existentialist one (see Marjorie Green, op. cit., XI), or a phenomenological one (Marjorie Grene, 'Tacit Knowing and the Pre-Reflexive Cogito', in: Intellect and Hope, pp. 31-32.). Franz Brentano's name appears remarkably often and so does the name of Henri Bergson, though less often than expected. It becomes clear, on the basis of the genealogical interpretation of knowledge, that I consider Friderich Nietzsche as the nearest reference point. This also raises several questions. One of them is the extremely significant philosophical role that Nietzsche played in Hungary at the beginning of the century (see on this Endre Kiss, A vildgenezet kora. Friderich Nietzsche abszolutomoktat relativizdld hatdta a sz&zadelbn. Budapest, 1982 - The era of Weltanschauung. Friedrich Nietzsche's influence relativizing absolutes at the beginning of this century).

Polanyi rightly refers to the fact 4/ that his critics reproach him baselessly that his theory of knowledge or, if you like, his sociology of knowledge, has a 'psychological' character. Polanyi's criticism of the conception of truth is based on the genealogy of scientific knowing. The real being of tacit knowledge does not guarantee the 'rightness' of individual integrations and the 'rightness' of the explicit scientific statements based on them. Tacit knowledge is the theory of the real history of the genesis, the genealogy, of particular knowledge.

From this perspective we can immediately and clearly show where Polanyi makes his determining mistake. The conception of truth based on tacit knowledge is genealogical. But a genealogical conception of truth should be interpreted only in a genealogical, that is in a diachronic, context. And indeed, Friedrich Nietzsche's genealogical conception of truth builds the genealogy of truth on the meaning of tacit knowledge in this diachronic context. Let us look at an example from Nietzsche's *MENSCHLICHES, ALLZUMENSCHLICHES*: "...es wird einmal gezeigt werden, wie allmaehlich (!), in den niederen Organismen dieser Hang (jeden Gegenstand an sich, in seinem eigenen Wesen als einen mit sich selbst identischen Wesen...kurz als eine Substanz zu erkennen - E.K.) entsteht, wie die bloden Maulwurfsaugen dieser Organisationen zuerst Nichts als immer das Gleiche sehen, wie dann, wenn die verschiedenen Erregungen von Lust und Unlust bemerkbarer werden, allmaehlich verschiedene Substanzen unterschieden werden, aber jede mit Einem Attribut, das heisst einer einzigen Beziehung zu einem solchen Organismus...Uns organische Wesen interessiert urspruenglich Nichts an jedem Dinge, als sein Verhaeltnis zu uns in Bezug auf Lust und Schmerz." 5/ This last sentence explains without doubt the meaning-giving process of tacit knowledge from a legitimate genealogical point of view.

The integration of tacit knowledge is at the same time a sense-giving process, ON THE BASIS that it attributes the SENSE OF ITS VITAL NEEDS to integrated perceptions. We have seen that from among Polanyi's examples we can speak of true meaning-giving only in the cases when direct vital significance could apparently be revealed. Consequently, if the genealogical conception of truth is placed into a genealogical context, the real integrating processes of tacit knowledge find their place. But this is not what Polanyi does. He wishes to use his genealogical approach not in a DIACHRONIC way but in a SYNCHRONIC way (the terminology of modern linguistics), not in a historical but in an actual context. Naturally, actual, synchronic knowing also has an actual genealogy that TAKES PLACE IN THE PRESENT. This actual genealogy, however, is irrelevant from the viewpoint of theoretical generalisation. The genealogy of actual knowing is real, one without which knowing is in fact impossible. Here Polanyi is right, but the real being of this process does not make it explicable. He not only fails to notice the obvious traps of a synchronic

4/ 'My own attempts to acknowledge tacit powers of personal judgment as the decisive organon of discovery...have been opposed by describing these agencies as psychological...in character.' (Knowingand Being,p. 173.)

5/ Friedrich Nietzsche, Saemlliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe, Band 2. 39.

application of this originally diachronic conception, but also takes a stand against the synchronic explicability of scientific statements, inasmuch the conception of truth based on explicability is determined in an illegitimate way by the constantly changing, non-determined, moreover undeterminable, character of scientific knowing. This reminds me of the Frankfurt School's accusation of ideological criticism against the VERDINGLICHUNG of positivist sciences and philosophy, against the failure of scientific objectivization. Polanyi writes: "...if the truth of a proposition lies in its bearing on reality, which makes its implications indeterminate, then such efforts (to try to spell out the implications of asserting a proposition to be true - in other words, a conception to try to spell out explications - E.K.) are foredoomed" 6/.

At this point the maintenance of the indeterminate being of the genealogical character of knowing seems to be more important for Polanyi than formulating a conception of truth based on explicit scientific statements: "...the indeterminate cannot be spelt out without making it determinate. It can be known in its indeterminate condition only tacitly..." 7/. With this, isomorphy appears tacitly on the one hand between tacit knowledge and 'the indeterminacy', and on the other hand between the possible analysis of explicit statements and the

6/ *'The Logic of Tacit Inference'*, p. 172.

7/ *Ibid.* Non-explicit knowledge was so central to Polanyi's sociology of knowledge and theory of science that Marjorie Grene starts the Introduction of one of the most important works of Polanyi with these words: 'It is one of the paradoxes of modern epistemology that we take science as the paradigm case of knowledge, yet insist upon a conception of wholly EXPLICIT truth. (Knowing and Being, IX.) Polanyi does not content himself with emphasizing the comprehensiveness of tacit knowledge either, but also calls into doubt the ontological grounds of explicit knowledge: 'The ideal of a strictly explicit knowledge is indeed self-contradictory; deprived of their tacit coefficients, all spoken words...are strictly meaningless. (Sense-Giving and Sense-Reading', in: *Knowing and Being*, 195.) From this perspective one can better see why the 'meaning' creating role of tacit knowledge was so important for Polanyi. - Another new dimension of the fight against the independent status of explicit knowledge is the actualization of the question of Fremdbewusstsein: 'No knowledge, not even that embodied in a logistic system, is explicit in the sense of being neutrally transferable from person to person without reference to its tacit base. (Edward Pols, 'Polanyi and the Problem of Metaphysical Knowledge', in: *Intellect and Hope*, p. 69.) Raymond Awn's excellent study of Polanyi also seems to accept the priority of a genealogical conception of knowledge as opposed to a 'synchronic' conception. Later it is used for nothing more than playing off Polanyi against the Weberian classical distinction of facts and values: '...for Weber, facts and values would be rigorously heterogeneous and every hierarchy of values indemonstrable...Polanyi answers that the understanding of works or persons involves appraisal.' (Raymond Aron, 'Max Weber and Michael Polanyi', in: *Intellect and Hope*, p. 361.)

'determinacy'. This sort of isomorphy does not stand up when carried through consistently, partly because it does not reflect the circumstances constantly determining tacit knowledge. Summarizing, we can say that Polanyi raises knowing based on the meaning-giving genealogy of tacit knowledge to the rank of a conception of truth. In the immanent criticism of this conception its main mistake is seen in not taking into consideration the immense differences between the synchronic and diachronic applications of this conception. This genealogical conception has its place in a genealogical context, and while genealogical elements are present in actual knowing they are irrelevant from the aspect of a possible conception of truth.

Is there a connection between Polanyi's conception of truth and his conception of metaphysics? In explaining his conception of tacit knowledge, Polanyi does not speak of metaphysics. Even more characteristic is that he often refers to his own conception as being opposed to an antimetaphysical analysis of science. 8/ I am not merely playing with words when I say that the criticism of the antimetaphysical attitude hides a pro-metaphysic position: 'The antimetaphysical analysis of science assumes that the logical foundation of empirical knowledge must be capable of definition by explicit rules. While the difficulties of this enterprise have not gone unnoticed, the reluctance to abandon it in principle still seems universal.' 9/ I think that Polanyi's following statement leaves the way open to an explicit metaphysics as well: 'My own attempt (is) to acknowledge tacit powers of personal judgment as the decisive organon of discovery and the ultimate criterion of scientific truth...' 10/ In this sentence the main thesis of our analysis perfectly appears, according to which Polanyi is not sensitive to the differentiation of synchronic and diachronic spheres. That tacit powers are the decisive organon of discovery is not at all equivalent to tacit powers being the ultimate criterion of scientific truth. And this is so not only because organon is

8/ Ibid. pp. 172-173. The criticism of antimetaphysical philosophies is inherent in the conception of tacit knowledge, but clear ONTOLOGIZATION of the conception of tacit knowledge plays an important role in rendering metaphysical conceptions possible (see Knowing and Being, p. 126.) Polanyi's fundamental explicit view of this is as follows: It appears that traditionalism, which requires us to believe before we know, and in order that we may know, is based on a deeper insight into the nature of knowledge than is a scientific rationalism that would permit us to believe only explicit statements based on tangible data and derived from these by a formal inference...BUT I AM NOT REASSERTING TRADITIONALISM FOR THE PURPOSE OF SUPPORTING DOGMA. To argue, as I do, that confidence in authority is indispensable for the transmission of any human culture is not to demand submission to religious authority. I admit that my reaffirmation of traditionalism might have a bearing on religious thought, but I want to set this aside here. Modern man's critical incisiveness must be reconciled with his unlimited moral demands...' (Michael Polanyi, 'A Society of Explorers', in: Tacit Dimension. New York, 1966, p. 62.)

9/ Ibid., p. 173.

not the same as criterion but because the decisive organon determines the historical (genealogical) formation of knowledge, while a criterion assumes actual, that is synchronic, agreements.

Finally, let me illustrate my thesis with a story about why tacit knowledge cannot rise to the rank of a universal conception of meaning and/or truth.

Two desperate Italian emigrants are rowing in the Atlantic Ocean towards America. In the boundless sea they come across a fishing boat. Having climbed onto this fishing boat they are happy to see that the boat is empty. They become even happier when they find several bottles of wine on the boat. They immediately start drinking. While drinking this literally heaven-sent wine, the idea strikes one of them to plug their ears with ear-plugs (let us notice this element, it will play a certain role in the analysis of tacit knowledge). They are becoming more and more cheerful when we suddenly see warships gathering and emplacing their guns. Again the emigrants appear in the picture, who are even more cheerful, and then once again the guns. Suddenly we understand: the empty fishing boat is dancing on the waves because the huge warships are preparing for target practice. The two cheerful emigrants go up onto the deck and start throwing empty bottles into the water. This is the moment when the first gun goes off. Thus the tacit knowledge of the two emigrants and the meaning based on this tacit knowledge shows the following picture: the empty bottles that they throw into the water burst so loudly that it can be heard, despite the ear-plugs. The two cheerful Italian emigrants come to this conclusion by the legitimate integration of tacit inference taking place through the tacit knowledge of particulars.

10/ We note here that we find the conception of tacit knowledge as a genealogical conception IN ITSELF not only interesting but also coherent. Moreover, the fact did not escape our attention that Polanyi made more than one new finding in the sociology of knowledge with the help of this conception (see the relation between the conception of tacit knowledge and the so-called 'plausibility' of scientific judgment, 'The Growth of Science in Society', in: Knowing and Being, p. 77).