Andy F. Sanders

DOGMATISM, FALLIBILISM AND TRUTH
A POLANYIAN PUZZLE[1]

Introduction

My aim in this paper is to address the problem of how to reconcile the apparent discrepancy between three important components of the fiduciary program that Polanyi developed in his *Personal Knowledge* (*PK*), namely (1) the invitation to dogmatism, (2) his fallibilism and (3) his thesis that truth lies in the achievement of a contact with reality. The following passages leave us little doubt as to whether these three elements are truly Polanyian.

In Part III of *PK*, the invitation to dogmatism is presented as a consequence of the idea that ``everywhere the mind follows its own self-set standards ... [as a] manner of establishing the truth'' (*PK* 268). Dogmatism is put forward as the alternative to skeptical nihilism and as part of the fiduciary program which aims at revolutionizing philosophy by (i) making us recognize ``belief once more as the source of all knowledge'', (ii) restoring to us ``once more the power for the deliberate holding of unproven beliefs'' (*ibid*.) and (iii) making us realize ``that we can voice our ultimate convictions only from within ... the whole system of acceptances that are ... prior to the holding of any particular piece of knowledge'' (*PK* 266f.).[2]

Next, what about fallibilism? To establish that it is part and parcel of Polanyi's position the following quotes may suffice: ``Since every factual assertion is conceivably mistaken, it is also conceivably corrigible'' (*PK* 314) and ``[T]he emergent noosphere ... comprises everything in which we may be totally mistaken'' (*PK* 404).

As dogmatism and fallibilism differ in their implications regarding the notions of truth and falsity, and Polanyi is adopting both, the intriguing question is whether the *prima facie* discrepancy between dogmatism and fallibilism has any serious consequences for his account of truth. This question may well make us wonder what Polanyi's account of truth is. Though he addressed himself to a wide range of questions regarding the meaning of truth, the criteria for truth and the use of the phrase ``...is true'', I believe it would be wrong to suggest that he put forward anything like a `theory of truth'. This is no criticism, for as R. Kirkham points out, the philosophical literature on the problem of truth of the past fifty years or so exhibits ``a four-dimensional confusion'' regarding the questions and issues a theory of truth should deal with.[3]

My brief exploration of what Polanyi took to be a central characteristic of truth takes its starting point in his account of the Copernican revolution, where he maintains that both the Copernicans and their adversaries agreed in what they meant by `true', namely that ``truth lies in the achievement of a contact with reality - a contact destined to reveal itself further by an indefinite range of yet unforseen consequences'' (*PK* 147). This is not to say that this is Polanyi's only characterization of truth. It can plausibly be argued that he employs both a common-sense view of truth as correspondence and a notion of truth as an ideal standard to which all veracious inquirers should feel themselves morally obligated. Closely related to the latter sense of truth is the important notion of *universal intent* as the intention of the veracious inquirer to state what she, to the best of her abilities, has come to believe as true. Such intention can only be formed in the context of a tradition of inquiry that upholds certain epistemic and moral values. The intention is universal because it presupposes that others, under similar circumstances, would have come to the same conclusion. However, as these elements of Polanyi's account of truth are not directly relevant to our problem, I will confine myself to truth in the sense of *contact with reality*.

What we are confronted with now are three theses which look like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle: how do dogmatism, fallibilism and truth as `contact with reality' fit together? At least *prima facie* the first two do not seem to match at all, whereas the idea that truth lies in the achievement of contact with reality, although not obviously at odds with fallibilism, certainly seems to strengthen dogmatism. Let us start with the latter.

Dogmatism and Foundationalism

On my reading, Polanyi issued his invitation to dogmatism because he saw it as the main alternative to objectivism and thus as an essential ingredient of his fiduciary program. The over-all aim of this program is to enable us to hold on firmly to what we believe to be true, *although* we are, or should, be well aware that our beliefs might conceivably be false (cf. *PK* 214). Notice how the implied fallibilism turns the dogmatic element in even sharper relief: the beliefs to be upheld firmly as true are not only unprovable, they might even be mistaken.

For some Polanyians the invitation to dogmatism may not be a serious problem at all, but at most an ironic remark directed at those who are still held captive by the pan-critical and objectivist ethos of modernity.[4] For instance, referring to the theory of tacit knowing, they may wish to say that as tacit knowing is *a-critical*, Polanyi's use of the term `dogmatism' is wholly innocuous because tacit knowing is not necessarily *un-critical*.

While admitting that these Polanyians have a point in stressing the distinction between a-critical and un-critical knowledge and belief, I think it is unable to remove the

epistemological and moral worries to which the invitation to dogmatism gives rise. Consider Polanyi's all too brief suggestion in the same context that in contrast to the `scientific Minotaur' to which objectivist scientism might give rise, ``a dogmatic orthodoxy can be kept in check both internally and externally'' (*PK* 268). This issue is not innocuous at all. On my reading, Polanyi is alluding here to science, kept in check internally by the rules of its practice, and to liberal democracy, within which science has its proper place and which should be its external check. It is evident, however, that there are political, ideological or religious `dogmatic orthodoxies' which are clearly *not* ``kept in check both internally and externally'' in the way science is, and which are morally and politically deeply problematic. It is not only unclear how the distinction between a-critical and un-critical knowing can sensibly be applied, it seems even dangerous to overemphasize the tacit knowing of persons affiliated to these questionable `orthodoxies' at the cost of what is, or can be made, explicit.[5] In this light, Polanyi's invitation to dogmatism is worrying even to epistemologists who are sympathetic to his endeavor. Hence my motive for exploring the issue of Polanyi's `dogmatism' by relating it to live options in contemporary epistemology.

In our culture, `dogmatism' has quite a few negative connotations. According to my dictionary, dogmatism is a general way of thinking based on principles which have not been tested by reflection. Dogmatic people assert their opinions in authoritative or even arrogant ways, whereas having a dogmatic attitude is commonly held to be one of holding to one's beliefs in a `come what may' fashion.

Construed as an epistemological thesis, dogmatism says that there are propositions which we cannot fail to believe and which are such that it follows from our believing them that they are true.[6] It then takes only a small step to see that dogmatism is a close ally if not in fact a component of either classical foundationalism or of fidesm. Foundationalism is an option because, as in dogmatism, certain basic beliefs are supposed to make up the foundation from which all other beliefs can be derived deductively or inductively. Traditionally, these beliefs are held to be either self-evident or evident to the senses and therefore indubitable, incorrigible or even infallible. Fidesm is an option as well because, as in dogmatism, certain beliefs are accepted as true without appeal to reason or even as contrary to reason. Indeed, if we read the invitation to dogmatism in the context of the fiduciary program as a whole, are we not coming quite close to something like fidesm?

Nowadays, foundationalism as a theory of justification is commonly held to be in a state of collapse. Hence it is important to see how Polanyi's position can be demarcated from it. Elsewhere I have argued extensively that Polanyi cannot be classed as a foundationalist because his theory of tacit knowing undercuts the parameters within which foundationalism is formulated.[7]To begin with, the allegedly self-evident beliefs on which foundationalists from Descartes up to the present day build their hope, and the revealed truths to which fidests cling, are all explicit. Taking the form of propositions,

propositional contents of certain psychological attitudes or creeds, the inferential relations between them and other beliefs, whether deductive or inductive, are all taken to be explicit as well. But leaving the tacit components of these beliefs and inferences out of the picture or at most lurking in the background is diametrically opposed to the theory of tacit knowing. So it seems to me that if the word `foundational' is to be used in connection with tacit knowing, it should be in the sense of the `rootedness' of the explicit in the tacit, or in the sense that the latter is the source of the former.

If Polanyi invites us to dogmatism, and his dogmatism is not the foundational brand, what kind of a dogmatist might he be? At this point I think we can go either one of two ways: a `traditionalist' or an `existentialist' one. My concern and preference is with the former, which I will now try to develop briefly as a post-foundational position which is congenial to Polanyi's. I will return to the existentialist option in the final section.

Methodological Dogmatism and the Recovery of Tradition

Drawing on developments in epistemology and philosophy of science during the second half of the century, it seems safe to say that even in science the adoption of a certain measure of dogmatism is quite rational and even necessary for progress. For instance, Imre Lakatos' conception of a scientific research program makes the so-called `hard core' of such a program unassailable by protecting it by a belt of auxiliary theories, at least for as long as there is no imminent danger of the program being superseded by a competitor. [8]

It is important to notice that this version of dogmatism is significantly different from the foundational brand. Calling it *methodological dogmatism*, it may be described positively as a thesis to the effect that in the course of inquiry we may hold on to our beliefs and theories as long as this is reasonable and no better alternative is available. Involved is a heuristic principle of tenacity which says that we should not give up our theories or stories in the face of adverse evidence too soon because doing so would deprive us of the opportunity to find out their strength, fruitfulness and significance.[9]

Would giving up on the ideal of secure foundations for our knowledge not lead to skepticism or relativism? I think the answer should be in the negative. The very idea that there are only two options, either certainty and secure foundations (dogmatism) or no substantial knowledge at all (skepticism), is itself part of the Enlightenment project. As soon as the foundation metaphor and all that goes with it is jettisoned, skepticism loses much of its force, its point in denying the possibility of completely justified and totally secure foundations is well lost. Indeed, the founding metaphor had better be replaced by others. Quine's metaphor of the web of beliefs, and Neurath's picture of the ship that can only be rebuilt on the open sea because we cannot dismantle it in dry dock, are better

ways of expressing our current epistemic predicament.[10] Polanyi's `root' metaphor is not at odds with those of `web' or `boat', except that it focusses on contexts of discovery rather than of justification (cf., e.g., *PK* 266). That is to say, the a-critical beliefs and stances we happen to have and that partly make up the tacit component do not justify (explicit) knowledge, rather, they are its source.

A further characteristic of methodological dogmatism is that it does not focus on questions of how beliefs stand up to experience in isolation, but rather on how the totality of the beliefs that make up a theory or worldview do. Like the traditionalist, Polanyi adheres to the Quineian thesis that ``any statement can be held true come what may, if we make drastic enough adjustments elsewhere in the system ... Conversely, by the same token, no statement is immune from revision''.[11] This is not to say that all beliefs are on a par because some may be more central and in that sense more distinguished than others which are more peripheral. The latter are nearer to experience and so it is by the revision of these peripheral beliefs that changes are distributed throughout the system.

Enlarging the perspective a bit further, methodological dogmatism also emphasizes the crucial importance of the tradition(s) in which people participate. People are born and educated into communal traditions and practices which provide for them the starting points from which their inquiries are to be undertaken. But as starting points are no foundations (in the foundationalist sense), people may nevertheless be wholly rational in relying confidently on their traditions. The distinction made by the Swedish philosopher of religion Mikael Stenmark between `full acceptance' and `dogmatic acceptance' bears out this point nicely. Dogmatic acceptance disregards ``future counter-evidence of what is believed'', whereas full acceptance ``is compatible with an openness to criticism''.[12] That does not mean, of course, that full acceptance of a belief should lead to consciously testing it in order to check whether any counter-evidence might be found. In fact, the inquirer may even be quite confident that no such evidence will turn up. Full acceptance of a belief is rational, says Stenmark, ``unless there are good reasons to cease from accepting it, or, at least, cease from accepting it fully, and there is no better alternative available.''[13]

Finally, methodological dogmatism I think nicely fits into the broader perspective of Polanyi's view of inquiry. On this view, the veracious inquirer cannot but work from within the fiduciary framework that is provided by her tradition. Polanyian *traditionalism* is thus characterized quite well by this well-known quotation:

> [t]acit assent and intellectual passions, the sharing of an idiom and of a cultural heritage, affiliation to a like-minded community: such are the impulses which shape our vision of the nature of things on which we rely for our mastery of things. No intelligence, however critical or original, can operate outside such a fiduciary framework. (PK 266)

Reading Polanyi's notion of a fiduciary framework as a living tradition, points to a recovery of traditionalism. It says that persons possess a fund of pre-theoretical acceptances, stances, capacities and anticipations which are not merely taken for granted but relied upon in processes of belief formation, in learning, inquiry and action. Hence tacit knowledge is a-critical in the sense that what we know tacitly cannot be analyzed or criticized while we rely on it in problem solving and understanding.

So far my explication of methodological dogmatism as an essential ingredient of traditionalism. Traditionalists fully acknowledge that we are crucially dependent on the traditions and practices in which we participate. The standards, values and ideals inherent in them constitute the only point of view available to us. However, this is by no means to say that we should not try to understand, and learn from, other traditions. In contrast to foundational dogmatists, traditionalists agree with Polanyi in acknowledging that we lack an Archimedean point, a God's eyes point of view, indeed, lack some eternal, unchangeable foundation from where we could judge, evaluate or compare traditions as a whole vis-à-vis the available evidence. Although we are finite and fallible humans, what we do have are the vast resources of the tradition(s) on which we may rely confidently. Let us now see how fallibilism and traditionalism are related.

Traditionalism and Fallibilism

Fallibilism may be characterized as an epistemological thesis which says that our human cognitive powers are fallible in the sense that we are liable to hold false beliefs. It is also a methodological recommendation, namely that we should always be willing to revise our beliefs in the light of new evidence and experience.[14]Thus, fallibilism is diametrically opposed to foundational dogmatism on the issue of criticism: it takes the adoption of the critical stance and the attitude of openness to criticism as a virtue. Its point is the simple idea that, as C.S. Peirce put it, ``the first step towards *finding out* is to acknowledge you do not satisfactorily know already ...'' (1.13-14, c.1897).

Another feature of fallibilism is that it comes in degrees. For example, it can be characterized as the thesis that we are nowhere entirely immune from the possibility of error.[15] But it can also be given a more radical interpretation. According to Lehrer, ``[m]en often believe what is false, and, when what they believe happens to be true, there was a chance that they might have erred''. [16] Still, from this it certainly does not follow that our beliefs are on the whole or largely false, let alone that we may not be justified or confident in holding a belief.

At this point certain worries regarding fallibilism might crop up. For instance, is it coherent to uphold wholeheartedly the truth of a certain belief while at the same time

admitting that it may be false? Would it not be inconsistent or at least incoherent to say: ``I am convinced that *p*, though I admit that *p* might be false''? The answer depends on a lot of factors, for instance, on the place my belief has within the whole of my beliefs (for instance, central or peripheral, the strength of the support relations to more central beliefs), on how `conviction' is defined, the force of the evidence, and so forth. If being convinced *means* that a person S will remain committed to what S is convinced of, *no matter* the counter evidence, S will be irrational. But when the counter evidence is very strong and S's belief only peripheral, she should probably discard it. Other cases may well be more difficult but the decision shall always have to be made responsibly.

The same goes for certainty. Would saying ``I am certain that *p*, yet I may be mistaken'' involve a contradiction? Saying this would only be incoherent, it seems to me, if it is assumed that being certain or sure *means* being certain that no evidence shall ever be acquired that will make it rational to revoke one's confidence. But to assume this is being in the grip of a foundationalist epistemology. Why think that this assumption is an uncontrovertible truth? I can be certain, to the best of my knowledge, that *p*, but it is easy to imagine situations in which I might start to wonder whether *p* or even to doubt that *p*. Similarly, being confident of something or trusting a person, does not mean that it is impossible that my confidence may not be undermined or that my trust may not have been misplaced. Admitting this does not imply that my confidence or trust is only provisional or tentative.

A good example to illustrate that being convinced or confident or certain is not necessarily at odds with accepting the possibility of a defeater turning up, is given by Stenmark. Considering his belief that his wife loves him, he points out that

> A full acceptance of that belief does allow that it is nevertheless possible
> that she does not love me and that if there are special reasons to doubt this, I
> would start an inquiry. Does this mean that I am less convinced of my wife's
> love? By no means, since realizing that I could be wrong does not mean that
> I am less convinced that I am right![17]

So far my proposal for a Polanyian traditionalism which I believe consistently integrates both fallibilism and (methodological) dogmatism. As such it offers a viable alternative to both (foundational) dogmatism and skepticism, while it does not necessarily lead to forms of radical relativism. Admittedly, it shares with skepticism the thesis of the possibility of error, and it concedes to foundationalism that we may be holding true beliefs. However, fallibilism denies the thesis that to know is to know that one knows; we may be mistaken in determining which of our beliefs are in fact true.

Let us now see whether this fallibilism is consistent with the notion of truth as contact with reality.

Contact with Reality and the Presence of Truth

In my view Polanyi's concern with the question of truth is not just theoretical or technical, except perhaps for his interesting analysis of the meaning of the phrase ``... is true". At the heart of his endeavor is the attempt to specify the conditions under which veracious inquirers might still be justified in making a claim to the truth. Recognizing that classical foundationalism was bankrupt and that its ideal of secure foundations had evaporated, Polanyi saw radical skepticism and nihilism looming large. His way out of the dilemma between foundationalism and skepticism was to devise a new and thoroughly *naturalized* epistemology which places the quest for understanding in an evolutionary, biological, psychological and socio-cultural perspective. He achieved this by reintroducing the human knower and her subjectivity and by developing his theory of tacit knowing. Polanyian epistemology is no longer the discipline that aims at formulating universal laws or *a priori* rules. Consequently, the watertight separation between the (diachronic) context of discovery and the (synchronic) context of justification can no longer be maintained and empirical considerations become relevant, though presumably not decisive, for the solution of normative problems.[18] Though claims to knowledge can no longer be justified by appeal to a priori standards, they can be subjected to responsible and competent personal judgment, both individually and collectively, by those who are actively engaged in the practice of the discipline in question. Here, the theory of tacit knowing shows us how deeply our beliefs and theories are rooted in the tacit component: the patterns of action, conceptions and the linguistic, social and scientific know how on which every inquirer relies but of which she is only tacitly aware. It is in this light that Polanyi's thesis that truth is a matter of contact with reality is to be considered.

First, the conceptual connection between `truth' and `reality' is a very close one. As Meek rightly points out, for Polanyi 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. [19]

Next, the personal component is brought into the picture. Contact with reality is a matter of personal appraisal which as such occurs at the level of tacit awareness.[20] Notice that this does not imply that truth as contact with reality is a completely tacit affair. It cannot be wholly tacit because Polanyi specifies the criteria or characteristics of making such a contact. According to Meek, his basic criteria are what she calls *the reality criterion* (RC) and *the integrative criterion* (IC).[21] On Meek's construal, the reality criterion runs as follows:

(RC)   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.

The integrative criterion simply says that

(IC)   contact with reality has been successfully made if the epistemic
achievement in question consists of ``the comprehension of the
coherence of largely unspecifiable particulars''.

According to Meek, the reality criterion and especially the integrative criterion are basic
because three further Polanyian criteria of reality, *coherence, rationality* and *intellectual
beauty* can be derived from them.[22] All three are a result of the integrative act of tacit
knowing: experiences of coherence are linked with appearance, pattern and order (the
phenomenal aspect of tacit knowing) whereas the experience of rationality is connected
with meaningfulness (its semantic aspect). Intellectual beauty attaches to theories and is
experienced in virtue of their coherence and rationality or as an accompaniment of the
IMF Effect.

Meek rightly warns us that successful contact reveals ``*merely* an aspect of reality''.[23]
Reality, according to Polanyi, is inexhaustive, and so contact with reality is always
aspectual and inexhaustive as well. Consequently, the awareness of the presence of truth
in achieving contact does not mean the attaining of nothing but the truth, let alone the
whole truth. As Meek rightly points out, on Polanyi's construal intimations of truth can be
mixed with error.[24]

So far the main elements of Meek's account of Polanyian truth in the contact sense. A few
remarks by way of comment are in order. First, on Meek's construal the reality criterion
pertains not only to discovery in the natural sciences, but to other forms of epistemic
achievement as well. My problem here is one of scope. Polanyi develops the contact sense
of truth largely in the context of the history and philosophy of science. This fits well with
his own faith in science and with his scientific realism, but what to make of contact with
reality in the humanities, in metaphysics, in religion or in other large-scale world-views?
Here, the idea of a reality independent of the inquirer is controversial even among
Polanyians.[25] It is not easy to see how the reality criterion or the derivative criteria of
coherence, rationality and intellectual beauty could sensibly be applied in, say, theology or

philosophy. This issue is too large to tackle here but the least we can say is that the notion of truth in the contact sense still needs substantial elaboration before it can be applied outside the natural sciences.

Next, it goes without saying that tacit awareness of the presence of truth should not be equated with (focal) awareness of a true proposition or a true belief because the latter is by definition explicit. This does not imply, of course, that one could not tacitly be aware of a proposition, for instance when we temporarily forget something or are not focally aware of a familiar thought. Nor does it imply that none of the particulars involved can be presented or represented in some articulate form, propositional or otherwise. This point is essential, for otherwise we simply could not be aware of or notice the intimations and feelings (the IMF-effect) that accompany the achievement of contact: making contact with reality would be wholly ineffable.

It seems we are now in a position to answer the question of the fit between the contact sense of truth and fallibilism. As tacit knowing is fallible, what we hold as true is always partial and fallible. Contact with reality is neither a matter of truth becoming manifest nor does it guarantee truth. For this reason I think that Meek's reality criterion is too strongly put: whether the contact is *successful* does not depend on the IFM-effect but on whether the intimations of its future manifestations will turn out to be veridical. There is always the risk of error and any contact with reality may well be mingled with it. Since this does not imply that we may not have any true beliefs, Polanyi's contact sense of truth squares well with his fallibilism. What remains to be seen is whether it fares equally well with what I have alluded to earlier as the existential interpretation of the fiduciary program.

Contact With Reality and Existential Truth

So far, much of this should be read as an attempt to develop Polanyi's fiduciary program into an epistemologically tenable traditionalism. To some, though, my attempt may not be going far enough because the personal and existential aspects of tacit knowing and truth are not, or insufficiently, accounted for. I would surmise that a `traditionalist' and an `existentialist' interpretation of the fiduciary program are both viable readings of Polanyi. They might be complementary but there may also be reasons for preferring the one to the other. What would the notion of truth in the contact sense look like on an existentialist reading?

A good example of such an interpretation is the one Dale Cannon recently put forward. Defining tacit knowing as ``*an enacted relationship* in which the knower connects with the known, a *contact with* reality'', Cannon suggests that it is ``a knowing by first person acquaintance ... possessable only by way of a presence to and a rapport with what is known'' and significantly like `belief in'. In contrast, explicit knowledge is a knowing by

representation, comparable to `belief that'. Against this background, he asserts that for Polanyi truth is more than propositional truth; it is, says Cannon,

> the achievement of a connection in the first person (for oneself) with, or rapport with, objective reality (qua recognizable in common to responsible inquirers), a fidelity that adheres to it, acknowledges it, and makes it known, appearances and others' unbelief to the contrary notwithstanding.[26]

This surely has a real Polanyian ring to it and I agree that there is more to truth than propositional truth. However, I have certain misgivings with Cannon's rendering of the contact sense of truth in terms of belief, commitment and reality.

First, it seems to me that `belief in' (first-person acquaintance) and `belief that' are much more intertwined than Cannon's neat distinctions between `tacit' (belief in) and `explicit' (belief that) suggest. In fact, the formation of `belief in' (say, in my dentist or in the theory of tacit knowing) includes `belief that'. Though the latter is much less personal than `belief in', it still is indispensable for coming to believe or for reflecting on what that belief means.

My next objection is that by overly emphasizing first-person knowledge by acquaintance, Cannon runs the risk of collapsing personal truth into subjective truth. I will not deny that first-person knowledge is crucial for upholding beliefs and I would agree that truth originates in the realm of the tacit and that the acquisition of knowledge starts by first person acquaintance and personal acceptances which are predominantly a-critical. But surely that is only part of the picture. We come to believe a host of things as true which we do not know by first-person acquaintance but by relying on the authority, testimony and opinions of others with whom we need not even be personally acquainted. As we do hold a host of beliefs as true in this manner, it seems rather one-sided to classify them all as `enacted relationships'.

Similar considerations apply to knowing how: we develop a great number of capacities which become wired into our mindbodies so deeply that we are normally not even aware of using them. However, it would be distorting the theory of tacit knowing to suggest that what is involved in the exercise of skills (intellectual, artistic, athletic, technical, etc.) cannot or should not be made explicit. If that were the case, motion studies, training exercises and the like, with an eye to improving skills would be senseless. Tacit knowledge, as Polanyi tells us in *The Tacit Dimension*, can partly be made explicit, analyzed and criticized by directing our attention to relevant particulars (cf. TD 19). Denying or covering up the possibility of making the tacit (partly) explicit seems to me an unwarranted over-emphasizing of kinds of tacit knowledge that are inarticulable in principle (e.g., subliminal clues). Of course this by no means implies that tacit knowledge could, let alone should, be made explicit, analyzed or criticized in toto.

All this bears on Cannon's understanding of the contact sense of truth as an `enacted relationship' which seems to make truth as contact with reality wholly and exclusively a matter of tacit knowing. As I see it, this would make it totally mysterious how we are able to become aware of contact in the first place. Again, as it is supposed to be noticeable by the IFM-effect, surely part of what the intimations and feelings involved are about can be made explicit.

Closely related to this difficulty is that it is not clear how on Cannon's construal the possibility of error can have its proper place. If truth is only a matter of my making tacitly a connection with reality, what about error or falsity? Suppose I think I have made such a connection and that I notice the accompanying IFM-effect, but my belief is, in fact, false. How can I ever detect my error if it is all a matter of tacit goings on? What if I just go on upholding my belief in the face of overwhelming counter-evidence and with a better alternative in the offing? Assuming that Cannon would agree that uncritical dogmatism should be rejected, it is clear that he can do so only on the assumption that the tacit can at least partly be brought into the picture by making it explicit. But tacit knowing can only be made explicit if it is in some way and in some degree (re)presentational. This by no means contradicts Polanyi's insight that tacit knowing is the source from which and through which contact with reality is made. Nor is it to say that tacit knowing is wholly (re)presentational or propositional.

These objections against the existentialist reading of the invitation to dogmatism show, I think, that tacit knowing and truth cannot satisfactorily be accounted for only in terms of first-person acquaintance.

In conclusion, if Polanyi's invitation to dogmatism is reinterpreted as a plea for traditionalism with both fallibilism and a principle of tenacity involved, and if true belief in virtue of contact with reality is not wholly relegated to the tacit realm, the three components of the fiduciary program fit quite well. In contrast, an existential reading of the invitation is in danger of overly emphasizing tacit knowing at the cost of the explicit.

References
1. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Annual Meeting of the Polanyi Society held in San Francisco, November 22, 1997. I wish to thank all those who participated in the discussion for their comments and criticisms, especially Dale Cannon.
2. In view of this it is not really surprising that Polanyi was worried that his program would collapse into subjectivism: ``for by limiting himself to the expression of his own beliefs, the philosopher may be taken to talk only about himself'' (*PK* 299). Note also that at the end of Part IV, dogmatism gets an almost missionary ring to it in the statement that so-called `field-centres', at the highest stage of development ``actuate those men who seek

the truth and declare it to all comers - at all costs" (*PK* 404).

3. Cf. R.L. Kirkham, *Theories of Truth. A Critical Introduction,* Cambridge/London 1992, 2

4. This was suggested by Dale Cannon in his response to my original paper at the 1997 Annual Meeting of the Polanyi Society.

5. I wholly agree with Ronald Hall's warning not to derogate the explicit: ``Without ... a high value on the explicit, force and violence will replace rationality; without a high evaluation of words, the basis of civil agreement will be gone", cf. R.L. Hall, `The Primacy of the Explicit: On Keeping Romanticism At Bay', *Tradition & Discovery* 24 (1997-98), nr.2, 38.

6. Cf. S. Haack, `Fallibilism and Necessity', *Synthese* 41 (1979), 52.

7. Cf. A.F. Sanders, *Michael Polanyi's Post-Critical Epistemology. A Reconstruction of* Some Aspects of Tacit Knowing, Amsterdam 1988, 190ff.

8. Cf. I. Lakatos, The Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes, Cambridge Univ. Pr., Cambridge 1978, 47ff.

9. Of course, foundational and methodological dogmatism are not totally different. The connection between them, I suggest, is one of implication or inclusion. For it seems entirely plausible to assume that the former includes the latter but that the reverse need not hold: one can be a methodological dogmatist without being a foundational dogmatist.

10. For the web metaphor, cf. W.V.O. Quine & J. Ullian, *The Web of Belief*, New York, 2nd ed. 1978; for the boat metaphor, cf. O. Neurath, `Protocol Sentences', in (ed.) A.J. Ayer, *Logical Positivism,* New York 1959, 199-208

11. W.V.O. Quine, *From a Logical Point of View: Logico-Philosophical Essays*, New York 1963, 43. A similar version of this thesis was put forward by Polanyi in the context of his `invitation to dogmatism' as a way out of objectivism, cf. my *Michael Polanyi's Post-critical Epistemology,* 195f.

12. M. Stenmark, *Rationality in Science, Religion and Everyday Life. A Critical Evaluation of Four Models of Rationality,* Notre Dame, Ind., 1995, 295

13. *Ibid.*, 293f.

14. Cf. S. Haack, `Fallibilism and Necessity', *Synthese* 41 (1979), 41.

15. Cf. J. Dancy, *Introduction to Contemporary Epistemology*, Oxford 1985, 58

16. K. Lehrer, *Knowledge*, Oxford 1974, 237.

17. Stenmark, *Rationality in Science*, 297; cf. also 322f.

18. Endre Kiss seems to overlook this larger perspective when he criticizes Polanyi for ``not [being] sensitive to the differentiation of synchronic and diachronic spheres", cf. E. Kiss, `Tacit Knowledge as a Conception of Truth', *Polanyiana* 1-2 (1992), 84-89.

19. E.L. Meek, *Contact With Reality. An Examination of Realism in the Work of Michael Polanyi*, PhD. Temple University 1983, 192f.

20. Cf. *ibid*., 192, 201

21. *Ibid*., 101f.

22. Cf. Meek, *Contact with Reality*, 105, 113-120

23. *Ibid*., 91

24. Cf. *ibid.*, 195, 206

25. Cf. the debate between Richard Gelwick, Harry Prosch, Bill Scott and others in the special Polanyi issue of *Zygon* 17 (1982).

26. Cf. D. Cannon, `Sanders' Analytical Rebuttal to Polanyi's Critics, With Some Musings on Polanyi's Idea of Truth', *Tradition & Discovery* 23 (1996-97), nr.3, 22f.

[Back to Contents](#)