

Embracing Modernity: The Conservatism of Hayek and Polanyi

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THE DOMINANT THEME of contemporary conservative thought is the rejection of modernity. We first encounter the notion of modernity in Richard Weaver's *Ideas Have Consequences*, where modernity refers to the chain reaction of ideas let loose by the medieval philosopher William of Occam and his repudiation of transcendental values, which led to the philosophical Enlightenment and resulted in modern *positivism*, *relativism*, and *utopianism*. The villains of this movement are part of a lineage that extends from Machiavelli to Marx, and from Descartes to Freud, and are all united by a comprehensive rejection of medieval classicism.¹

Although this distinction between classicism and modernity is heuristically useful for some purposes, it is entirely blind to the nuances and variations in contemporary political philosophy. As the traditionalist Thomas Molnar has noted, "political thought is not fully accounted for when it is limited to the polarity of two teams... [more likely, it] may be arranged according to many patterns, not simply in the camps of sinners

and saints."²

The fundamental thesis of this essay is that modernity—as exemplified by modern science—is in many ways consistent with conservative values and antithetical to the contemporary biases in favor of positivism, relativism, and utopianism. We will further argue that the bifurcation of political philosophy into these two opposing camps not only fails to describe a more complex situation, but even tends to destroy the very values of all those who classify themselves as conservatives.

Our last assertion is basically a pragmatic one, and we will not thoroughly discuss it here. But consider that the conservative movement, when it rejects the major threads of Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thought, is standing in total opposition to many of the most alluring ideas in the history of mankind. The most seductive of these is the idea of scientific progress. That idea, along with all its concomitant assumptions, has been among "the chief guides toward all the intellectual, moral and social progress"³ of contemporary man. Thus, to repudiate modernity may be virtually tantamount to spurning all progress, and any political program so constituted "will never, except in short periods of disillusionment, appeal to the young, and all those others who believe

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that some changes are desirable if this world is to become a better place."⁴

That the previous two quotations belong to Michael Polanyi and Friedrich Hayek, respectively, provides a first clue about the nature of their own unique breed of conservatism. Both men began their education planning a career in science: Hayek studied psychology for years before choosing economics, while Polanyi was an eminently respected research chemist until late in his fifties. For both, their preliminary work in science left them with a respect for its achievements that no traditionalist could tolerate.

Nonetheless, their respect for the dogma of modern science was far less than absolute. Both men wrote extensive critiques distinguishing between real and pseudo-values of scientific enquiry. Hayek himself was eventually awarded the Nobel Prize, ostensibly for applying the fruits of these critiques to economic methodology. Polanyi's contribution to the philosophy of science was even greater. Along with Popper, Kuhn and Lakatos, Polanyi was at the center of the great methodological debates which revolutionized our understanding of modern science.

We find the central contention of both men's critique of science in Hayek's assertion that the methods that natural scientists claimed to employ "were not always necessarily those which the scientist in fact followed in his own field."⁵ Thus, the values which traditionalists attacked may actually have described aberrations of the true methods of scientific enquiry; the real values were in fact largely consistent with conservative principles. Hayek and Polanyi supported this last claim, but since they embraced what is known in America as a libertarian form of conservatism (Hayek preferred to be called an "Old Whig"), what issues from their methodological revisionism does not result in a philosophy that is totally

acceptable to the traditionalist.

However, it is surely a mistake to classify this philosophy, which embraces modernity, in the camp of sinners. For it might be, as I will maintain, that modernity properly understood is sympathetic to most conservative values. And if this is true, it might not only persuade us that there is a consistent philosophical basis for the middle road between traditionalism and liberalism, but it would also unearth an entirely untapped reservoir of thought from which the conservative movement can draw. As the citations from Hayek's and Polanyi's writing testify, modern scientists and philosophers such as Gödel and Heisenberg, James, Whitehead, Bergson, and even Sartre have positive contributions to make to the genealogy of contemporary anti-collectivist thought.

The roots of modern science can be traced back to the Copernican Revolution of the sixteenth century. The Copernican cosmology, which de-anthropocentrized the theory of celestial motions, opened the floodgates for a modern science which aimed to replace subjective valuations with impersonal, objective standards. As E.A. Burtt has noted, the Enlightenment was the philosophical heir of the Copernican Revolution, and the names in its genealogy include Kepler, Galileo, and finally Descartes, who

with clearer consciousness of the important implications of the new methods than had been shown by his predecessors... attempted both to justify and atone for the reading of man and his interests out of nature by his famous metaphysical dualism.⁶

Descartes's method was that of logical deduction from explicit premises; his dualism postulated one geometrically specified extended world, and another consisting of unextended thinking

spirits. This view, as Hayek has written, was unprecedented and revolutionary, for when it separated science from sentient beings, it overthrew the medieval notion that men “had capacity to recognize truth, when they met it.”⁷

It is not surprising that Cartesian science evolved into the anti-metaphysical creed of nineteenth-century scientific positivism. After all, if truth could not be recognized, it must *ipso facto* be deemed irrelevant to scientific theorizing. This was precisely the conclusion of Ernst Mach and his Vienna school of positivism. This school believed science should appeal to no authority and that it should be rid of all metaphysical delusions. For the positivists, science was simply a convenient summary of experience. By the mid-twentieth century, positivism was so widely accepted that Bertrand Russell could remark that the great benefit “that science confers upon those who understand its spirit is that it enables them to live without the delusive support of subjective authority.”⁸

This elimination of subjective belief fully brought to a close the millennium of Augustinian thought. In the last century, Saint Augustine’s central epistemological credo, (“*nisi credideritis, non intelligitis*”) was turned on its head; when Hegel observed that the “subjective term is the original sin of modern philosophy,” he completely captured the spirit of the times.

If this philosophy, which modern science engendered, had remained in its own domain, it would be of little interest to us. Instead, positivism, under the aegis of August Comte and his successors, was applied to politics, law, art and all other fields of human thought. As a social philosophy, positivism relentlessly reiterated man’s physical insignificance in the universe. Positivist dogma not only rendered man physically insignificant, but also, according to

Polanyi, even robbed man of any hope of transcendence, asserting that human thoughts and values were valid only “in the sense that [they] serve the interests of a certain power.”⁹

In modern economics as well, positivism found a home. As Nobel laureate economist Milton Friedman asserted, the ultimate goal of economics must be the same as that of any other positive science: it must pursue “the development of a ‘theory’ or ‘hypothesis’ that yields valid and meaningful [*i.e.*, not truistic] predictions about phenomena not yet observed.”¹⁰

The Austrian School of Economics was among the leading methodological opponents of positive economics. This school, founded in the nineteenth century by Carl Menger and subsequently led by Ludwig von Mises and Friedrich Hayek, was characterized by an *a prioristic* and highly individualistic analysis of the demand element in an economy. Mises and the Austrians rejected positivism not only because it sought “to deny the cognitive value of a priori knowledge,”¹¹ but primarily because it contradicted their fundamental methodological axiom that human beings act freely. As Mises discerned, positivism “comprehends only what can be recognized by the experimental methods of the natural sciences. It ignores the human mind as well as human actions.”¹² Thus,

It seeks to investigate reflexes and instincts, automatisms and unconscious reactions. But it has told us nothing about reflexes that have built cathedrals, railroads and fortresses, the instincts that have produced philosophies, poems, and legal systems, the automatisms that have resulted in the growth and decline of empires, the unconscious reactions that are splitting atoms.¹³

Essentially, Mises’s claim, which Hayek even more relentlessly advanced, holds that we cannot legitimately de-

anthropomorphize an entirely anthropocentric discipline. After all, the social sciences must deal with the thoughts and actions of real people; it is difficult to imagine much good coming from the positivist social scientists who deny this elementary fact. This is precisely the claim that philosopher Alfred North Whitehead made when he wrote that "the science of political economy, as studied....after the death of Adam Smith [1790], did more harm than good...[because] it riveted on men a certain set of abstractions which were disastrous in their influence on modern mentality."¹⁴

In the mid-1940s, Hayek coined the term "scientism" to describe the process wherein these positivist scientific abstractions were misapplied to the social sciences. This slavish application of the methods appropriate to another field was entirely unacceptable to Hayek, for it

is decidedly unscientific in the true sense of the word, since it involves a mechanical and uncritical application of habits and thoughts to fields different from those in which they have been formed. The scientific view is...a very prejudiced approach which, before it has considered its subject, claims to know what is the most appropriate way of investigating.¹⁵

However, within fifteen years of the publication of Hayek's remark, Karl Popper, one of this century's pre-eminent philosophers of science, was able to convince Hayek that he had radically misunderstood the methods of the natural sciences. Under Popper's tutelage, Hayek came to believe that the social sciences were not inappropriately borrowing natural scientific methods, but rather they were merely "aping what is widely mistaken for the method of science."¹⁶

This redefinition of scientism provides an important point of convergence in the theorizing of Hayek and Polanyi. For

when Hayek agreed with Polanyi's assertion that "science has become the greatest single source of popular fallacies,"¹⁷ he went on to accept Polanyi's prescription that "a humanistic revisionism can be secured only by revising the claims of science itself."¹⁸

Hayek's scientific theorizing was highly dependent on Popper's writings, and Popper substantially disagreed with many aspects of Michael Polanyi's methodological work. Consequently, Hayek and Polanyi could never agree upon the proper method for falsifying scientific theories; nor could they agree on the type of knowledge that merits the appellation "science." Despite these differences, they share a common understanding of the possibilities and limitations of scientific investigation. Both Hayek and Polanyi rigorously sought to prove that modern science was infected with what the ancient Greeks called hubris; scientists have arrogantly failed to limit their claims to power. According to Hayek, this failure is founded partly in the scientific community's refusal to accept "that there can be no such logical procedure as 'induction' which leads with necessity from the observation of facts to the formulation of general rules, and that the latter are products of creative acts of the mind which cannot be formalized."¹⁹ Thus, Hayek fully agrees with Polanyi's assertion that "science has been carried on successfully for the last three hundred years by scientists who were assuming that they were practicing the Baconian method, which in fact can yield no scientific results whatever."²⁰

A historical case study of the Copernican revolution clearly demonstrates the shortcomings of positivistic, empirical induction in explaining the development of modern science. Copernican theory in its predictive capacity only matched the Ptolemaic system, while it created many new anomalies and blatantly de-

fied the empirical testimony of the senses. Accordingly, the method that natural scientists claimed as their own (*i.e.*, the objective accumulation and organization of simple facts into efficient theory) could never explain the development of heliocentric astronomy.

Throughout history, that method continually fails to explain the development of modern science. How, for instance can empirical induction explain both Harvey's rejection of the existence of invisible passages in the heart and Vesalius's postulating of their existence between veins and arteries? Surely E.A. Burtt was correct when he remarked that "contemporary empiricists, had they lived in the sixteenth century, would have been first to scoff out of court the new philosophy of the universe."²¹ The rejection of some of the pretensions of inductive science common to Hayek and Polanyi significantly transforms the role of scientist from passive compiler to active, creative participant. Facts alone never arrange themselves into hypotheses, sequences never define just one function, and results never arrive labeled "accidental fulfillment" or "true confirmation." All these determinations require heuristic leaps of judgment that can be made only by active thinking scientists. As Polanyi has concluded:

Any account of science which does not explicitly describe it as something we believe in, is essentially incomplete and a false pretension. It amounts to a claim that science is essentially different from and superior to all human beliefs which are not scientific statements, and this is untrue.²²

What this basically means is that natural scientific knowledge is no better (*i.e.*, more objective) than social scientific knowledge, or in Hayek's terms, "the difference between the two groups of disciplines has...been greatly narrowed."²³ The conclusion of Hayek's and

Polanyi's study of scientific methodology can therefore be summarized as follows: knowledge claims in the natural sciences are epistemologically equal to those in the social sciences, and consequently, the lessons learned from a revised, less pretentious understanding of natural science are readily applicable to the social sciences.

My comments on scientific method leave Hayek and Polanyi with one salient epistemological question: How is discovery possible? When practicing inductive science, on the one hand, the scientist needs only to allow the multitude of facts to resolve themselves into efficient theory. An anthropocentric, deductive science, by contrast, must be able to explain how a scientist makes the leap from the known to the unknown. This problem was first pointed out by Plato in the *Meno*. In this dialogue, Plato formulated the so-called eristic paradox: the puzzling dilemma that notes that the search for the solution to a problem is absurd, for either you know the solution and need not search, or you don't know the solution and then don't know what to search for.

Meno: But how will you look for something when you don't in the least know what it is? How on earth are you going to set up something you don't know as the object of your search?²⁴

At the beginning of this century, theoretical work by mathematician Kurt Gödel pointed toward a solution to this conundrum. Gödel's theorem demonstrated that the axioms of a deductive system (*i.e.*, arithmetic or geometry) could never be proven either consistent or mutually contradictory. Since the logical relations between axioms in a formal system are unknowable, so must be the meaning of the individual axioms. As Hayek has written, this failure of formalisms to account for what human minds understand leads to a "general principle applying to all

conscious and particularly all rational processes, namely the principle that among their determinants there must always be some rules which cannot be stated or even be conscious."²⁵ Polanyi concurs with Hayek's interpretation of Godel's theorem; consequently, both "reconsider human knowledge from the fact that we can know more than we can tell."²⁶

The solution to the problem of discovery is implicit in this understanding of the limits of formalization. For Meno's perplexity was that the process of discovery could not be completely formalized, but as Godel has shown, this problem is common to all knowledge. Thus, scientific discovery must also be explained by these "rules which cannot be stated": an understanding of both knowledge and discovery must be rooted in an epistemology of the "tacit dimension" of human thought.²⁷

Before discussing the origins of tacit knowledge, it might be best for us to pause a while and consider why arcane matters of epistemology are important to a political philosopher. After all, doesn't epistemology deal only with the acceptability of knowledge claims, not political action? Yet, we must remember that political action, like all other human action, is controlled by human thought; consequently, an understanding of the limits of knowledge is vital for generating an adequate political philosophy. Specifically, we will contend in the following discussion that the theory of tacit knowledge provides the necessary foundation for the unique political philosophy of Hayek and Polanyi; and further, slight variations in their understanding of this "modernistic" epistemology are directly responsible for the few political differences that arise between them.

Although Hayek refers to inarticulate knowledge as "knowledge how" (Gilbert Ryle's term), while Polanyi uses "tacit knowledge," both are describing essen-

tially the same epistemological phenomenon. The single most apparent manifestation of this kind of knowledge can be found in a child's use of language. For without any conscious knowledge of the rules of spoken language, children readily acquire the capacity to speak correctly. As Noam Chomsky has shown, children's understanding of language is based on tacit rules which they can apply but never verbalize.

What is not commonly understood is that, even in adulthood, these tacit understandings can never be eliminated. Acquiring the capacity to speak requires that certain perceptions be denoted by words, and that specific arrangements of these words be deemed corollaries of experience. Since these judgments are made before language can be spoken, they must be viewed as totally inarticulate attributions. Thus, all languages are necessarily based upon man's inarticulate predispositions, or as Polanyi has said: "...our articulate utterances can never altogether supersede but must continue to rely on [those] mute acts of intelligence [that] we once had in common with chimpanzees."²⁸

Language is not alone among human skills in its reliance upon tacit knowledge. In actuality, language is just one example of what Polanyi calls, "the well-known fact that the aim of [any] skillful performance is achieved by the observance of a set of rules which are not known as such to the person following them."²⁹ Both Hayek and Polanyi agree that it is the joint influence of tacit mental rules which makes it possible for humans to perform any skillful activity. As examples of the pervasiveness of tacit rules, both writers cite a similar catalogue of skillful performances ranging from physiognomy perception to judicial decision-making. In recognizing a facial expression, just as in rendering a legal decision, the actor is guided by an incomplete set of explicit rules which

must be supplemented by tacit understandings. This insight is brought out most clearly by the example of the bicyclist who, without knowing the laws of centrifugal force, manages to apply them and therefore maintains his balance.

This recognition that all human knowledge is based upon informalized mental skills cannot be fit comfortably within the framework of modern rationalism: it does not meet the Cartesian demand for a body of wholly explicit knowledge. Hence, tacit knowledge must be explained by a theory of mental events outside the rationalist framework. Both Hayek and Polanyi posit such theories, and although their two theories are basically alike, the one major difference separating them has rather significant implications.

Since modern science has shown that sensory qualities do not inhere in physical objects, the nature of the connection between the two has become problematic. Hayek makes the connection by claiming that the mind is essentially a mechanism of classification wherein physical events are endowed with sensory meaning. Furthermore, "the qualities which we attribute to the experienced objects are strictly speaking not properties of that object at all, but a set of relations by which our nervous system classifies them..."³⁰ In essence, Hayek is saying that the phenomenal world of sensory experience is entirely the product of neurological classifications—and to this he adds that there is no justification for postulating any sort of direct correspondence between these classifications and physical entities. Thus, according to Hayek, our knowledge does not permit us to make any ontological claims.

As Hayek sees it, classification is made possible by two structures, which he labels the "map" and the "model." The map is the static, pre-sensory mecha-

nism of classification; it is a "record of past associates of any particular stimulus with other stimuli which have acted upon the organism at the same time." The model, on the other hand, is the dynamic aspect of classification. It responds to new combinations of stimuli, and over a long period of time, its more important aspects are grafted onto the map. Simply stated, the Hayekian epistemology consists of an open-ended set of Kantian categories neurologically specified. But unlike Kant's categories, Hayek's vary throughout the development of the species.

Our inability to specify the rules which govern mental operations is a consequence of the inherent limits of any classificatory system. As Hayek writes: "If everything we can express is intelligible to others only because their mental structure is governed by the same rules as ours, it would seem that these rules themselves can never be communicated."³¹ Specifically, if the rules that guide mental structures could be communicated, it would imply that a prior set of rules exists in order to make the later rules communicable; hence, to avoid an infinite regress, we must assume that all mental operations are guided, "by a supra-conscious mechanism which operates upon the contents of consciousness but which itself cannot be conscious."

Whereas Hayek's defense of inarticulate knowledge is both mathematical and neurological, Polanyi's is essentially paradigmatic. Polanyi's epistemology begins with the incontrovertible fact that "there is only one single thing in the world we normally know only by relying on our awareness of it for attending to other things." This unique thing is, of course, our own body, and by being subsidiarily aware of things happening to it, we can successfully attend to external objects.

What emerges from Polanyi's observation is an epistemology which asserts that all conscious knowledge is based upon two levels of awareness. The higher level, known as focal awareness, consists of comprehensive entities which emerge only as a result of the knower's selective integration of the lower level, that is, his own body's subsidiary clues. All knowledge thus consists of a subsidiary and a focal pole, mediated by a knower who integrates the first into the second.

Polanyi's triadic structure of knowledge is best brought out by elucidating the way our body participates in using a tool. When driving in a nail with a hammer, we watch the effects of the strokes upon the nail, without openly considering their effect upon our hand. Yet the sensations in the hand that holds the hammer have effectively guided the strokes. The difference in awareness may be stated this way: the strokes have been the object of our attention, while the sensations have been an instrument of it. As Polanyi puts it, these sensations, "are not watching in themselves; we watch something else while keeping intently aware of them. I have a subsidiary awareness of the feeling in the palm of my hand which is merged into my focal awareness of my driving in the nail."³² In a sense, then, the tool is merged with my bodily awareness, I interiorize it so that I may use its subsidiary clues to achieve a focal awareness of a task; I interiorize it so that I may use its subsidiary clues to achieve a focal awareness of a task that is more meaningful to me.

In the above case, we are confronted with the same general principle which guides all our knowledge. Mechanical tools can be replaced by intellectual tools—consider for instance, the formalisms of language, science, or culture:

...when we learn to use language, or a probe, or a tool, and thus make ourselves

aware of these things as we are of our body, we interiorize these things and make ourselves dwell in them. Such extensions of ourselves develop new faculties in us; our whole education operates in this way; as each of us interiorizes our cultural heritage, he grows into a person seeing the world and experiencing in terms of this outlook.³³

Consequently, a person's entire interiorized cultural milieu, in addition to his physical sensations, forms the "subsidiary" roots of all his knowledge. The reason that this knowledge has tacit roots is twofold: (1) the set of particulars which constitute an individual's subsidiary awareness is far too large to be calculable, and (2) the integration of the particulars of subsidiary awareness is, as we have seen, a personal act partially rooted in subjective valuations of meaning; such valuations differ from person to person and generation to generation: they could therefore never be wholly subject to universal and timeless formalisms.

In Polanyi's epistemology, knowledge is not only rooted in tacit understandings; those understandings are part and parcel of the individual's culture. Such a postulation inevitably recalls the Marxian doctrine of a socially conditioned consciousness. This doctrine, most clearly expressed in Marx's *Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy* (1867-1895) simply states that: "it is not men's consciousness which determines their existence; but on the contrary their social existence which determines their consciousness."³⁴

Surprisingly, Hayek also seems amenable to such a theory of consciousness. As already noted, he characterizes the mind as controlled by "supra-conscious" rules (categories) which are the product of man's historical development. Thus, at any single moment, the evolved social facts of man's existence structure his

consciousness: "the growth of the human mind is part of the growth of civilization; it is the state of civilization at any given moment that determines the [mind's] scope and possibilities."³⁵

In positing a theory of knowledge which makes mental events immanent in the social evolution of the species, both Hayek and Polanyi run the risk of developing an historicist philosophy. By historicism, we refer not to what Hayek has called "the older view which justly contrasted the specific task of the historian with that of the scientist and which denied the possibility of a theoretical science of history," but rather to "the later view which, on the contrary, affirms that history is the only road which can lead to a theoretical science of social phenomena." Historicism, in this second sense, is the operational principle behind the theories of "scientific socialism" that guides the Leninist school of socialist thought. Its advocates believe that the evolution of man's consciousness is guided by laws which can be known and then subsequently used to determine the future course of his development. But, as we have seen in the epistemology of inarticulate knowledge, it is impossible to elaborate an explicit formalism which could specify, at any one instance, the particulars which constitute the comprehensive entity known as the mind. Knowing, just like any other human skill, is rooted in a tacit awareness that no explicit formula can ever capture. As Hayek writes, "the picture of man as a being who, thanks to his reason, can rise above the values of his civilization, in order to judge from outside, or from a higher point of view, is an illusion."³⁶ Both Hayek and Polanyi agree that the laws of man's evolutionary development are necessarily unspecifiable.

The rejection of historicism on these grounds almost inevitably leads to one of the so-called characteristic sins of modernity: historical or cultural relativ-

ism. The relativist recognizes that the variations in human knowledge and culture are not subject to any determinate laws; and he finds no grounds for claiming that the knowledge of any one culture or epoch is truer than another. The only escape from relativism of this sort is by appeal to ontology. If either the evolutionary process (or any one epoch in it) is accredited with the capacity to make contact with a stable reality, then all specific times and cultures could be judged according to the standard of truth. Hayek refuses to make any ontological claims. Accordingly, he is willing to go so far as to claim that

We are probably...entitled to conclude that our present values exist only as the elements of a particular cultural tradition and are significant only for some more or less long phase of evolution—whether this phase includes some of our pre-human ancestors or is confined to certain periods of human civilization. We have no more ground to ascribe to them eternal existence than to the human race itself.³⁷

Immediately following the above comment, Hayek attempts to rescind his seeming acceptance of relativism by claiming that, "while we know that all those values are relative to something, we do not know to what they are relative." However, this sort of dictum begs the question, for while it states that there are no legitimate grounds for abandoning our beliefs, it likewise asserts that there can be no legitimate reason for holding them.

Indeed, on the subject of relativism, the entire body of Hayek's work is replete with contradictions. For instance, in *The Counter-Revolution of Science*, Hayek opposed relativism on the grounds that throughout time, "all mind must run in terms of certain universal categories of thought." This postulation is totally irreconcilable with the notion of an historically conditioned consciousness that

Hayek presents in his other writings.

These ambiguities are not due to Hayek's indecisiveness, for he has repeatedly and firmly stated his opposition to historical relativism. Rather, they are the product of a more fundamental flaw in Hayek's exposition. As we have seen, Hayek posits an epistemology devoid of ontological considerations. This, I would assert, is an impossible endeavor: the logic of knowing must be based upon some logos of being; we cannot state how we know without first affirming that there is something to be known. Consequently, all knowing is necessarily a function of the living knower and the objects to be known; epistemologies are inescapably rooted in ontologies. It follows then that even though Hayek fails to elaborate an explicit ontology, his epistemology must be based upon an implicit theory of being.

Furthermore, I would claim that from his political theorizing, we can infer at least the broad outlines of this ontology. Clearly Hayek believes that one specific political program is better than others, that the past epoch of liberalism was truer than the present epoch of egalitarianism. Although culture, and therefore mind, have evolved since that former epoch, Hayek would not diminish the validity of liberal maxims. Those maxims were true, and are true now, because they capture the essence of man's being in civilization and suit the parameters of his rationality. It needs to be repeated that Hayek himself would agree with only the latter half of this characterization of his philosophy. Paradoxically for an anti-Cartesian, Hayek has accepted Descartes's fact-value dichotomy, and has assumed from it that political programs can be judged by knowable facts alone, without appeal to valuations regarding the nature of man or reality. The positing of separate worlds of facts and values is itself a valuation of the nature of reality: there is no escaping the onto-

logical basis of all epistemologies.

We can then see the reason for Hayek's trouble with the idea of relativism. Although he implicitly believes in an ontology which attributes stable values to beings, he refuses to base his epistemology upon it. Thus, in the context of his epistemology alone, Hayek is a relativist; while in the context of his overall philosophy (which is not entirely explicit), Hayek is an ardent foe of relativism. The conflict in Hayek's philosophy is entirely predicated upon his failure to accredit his capacity to perceive the truth of certain values.

Polanyi's salvation from Hayekian relativism is rooted in his teleological, goal-oriented understanding of the process of evolution. As noted earlier, Polanyi recognizes that the workings of evolution are primarily unspecifiable, and therefore he rejects the closed, mechanistic teleologies of both the Darwinians and the scientific socialists. Instead, Polanyi's teleology resembles the looser ones of Pierce, James and Bergson, where evolution is seen as the natural process in which life strives for ever higher gradients of meaning.

This teleology is not one of laws, but one of tendencies. Although the final target of evolution is indeterminate, its direction can be inferred through its homologous impact upon living things. For instance,

As far down the scale of life as worms and perhaps even the amoeba, we meet a general alertness of animals, not directed towards any specific satisfaction, but merely exploring what is there; an urge to achieve intellectual control over the situations confronting it.³⁸

Likewise, in the case of the human child, this natural urge is manifest in, among other things, his groping effort to gain greater intellectual control through the mastery of speech.

All through nature we see life's instinctive striving for more meaningful control over matter. Even in the biological mechanisms of evolution, we must concede the presence of this teleological tendency. For how else, in the face of the staggering number of random chemical possibilities, could we possibly explain the preponderance of meaningful combinations? Both Polanyi and his intellectual predecessor, Henry Bergson, have legitimately surmised that "it is difficult to avoid the notions that some sort of gradient of meaning is operative in [biological] evolution in addition to purely accidental mutation and plain natural selection, and that this gradient somehow evokes ever more meaningful organizations...of matter."³⁹

It must be noted that man cannot simply assume that all the values and institutions which have most recently evolved are the most valid, for evolution exudes only a tendency toward more meaningful arrangements. It inhibits, but does not preclude, the emergence of destructive forces. Thus, even if we accept that there is a natural tendency toward meaningful emergence in evolution, the problem of relativism remains salient until we accredit man with the capacity to validly know universal truths.

In accrediting man with this capacity, we must jointly draw upon Polanyi's ontology and epistemology. In the above paragraphs, we have described what Polanyi calls life's tendency toward more meaningful arrangements of matter. Human knowledge, as we have seen, also exhibits this tendency: subsidiary clues are interiorized to achieve a focal awareness of an entity (or action) more meaningful to the knower. It might be, as Polanyi suggests, that man's innate groping for knowledge should be viewed as a patent manifestation of these deeper ontological urges. In this context, the claims of sincere knowledge could justifiably be held only because they repre-

sent valid intimations of a more meaningful reality. Those accustomed to objective, scientific knowledge will find little appeal in this sort of epistemology. But, as previously shown, the old Cartesian epistemology could never adequately explain either the processes or the outcomes of scientific inquiry. Polanyi's view, on the other hand, which represents knowing as a call to the Pygmalion in man, fares much better.

For instance, while the search for knowledge and discovery made little sense within a rationalist-empiricist context, in Polanyi's philosophy, that search can be regarded as a groping for natural intimations of a deeper gradient of meaning. In practical terms, the ultimate success of the non-empirical discoveries in Copernicus, Vesalius, and Einstein eloquently testifies on behalf of this ontology/epistemology. These discoveries ultimately depended not upon experiment, but upon critical intimations of a more meaningful understanding. Thus, the credo of the scientist need not be much different from that of Christian believers—*fides querens intellectum*. The scientist must believe (his intimations) before he knows. The conclusion reached here is that valid knowledge can be held, but it is ineluctably rooted in belief.

Although Polanyi has shown that knowledge claims can be made with some validity, he has not yet shown that conditions exist for them to be posited with universal validity. For example, existentialists such as Sartre would claim that since the subsidiary elements of knowledge are rooted in our physical-cultural milieu, we are essentially products of our own facticity. Accordingly, all universal claims necessarily ignore that facticity by taking the individual beyond himself—they are inevitably made in bad faith.

Polanyi, of course, agrees that men are products of their own facticity: "our most deeply ingrained convictions are

determined by the idiom in which we determine our experience."³⁹ Nonetheless, he does not deny man the privilege of making universal judgments. For man is guided by acritical intimations toward a fuller understanding of the external pole of reality. In sincerely following these intimations, he is being guided by a pre-existential orientation; he is heeding an objective calling over mere subjective predilections. And, because they point to a hidden reality that can be shared with others, the product of man's calling (knowledge) can be endowed with the claim of universality.

Polanyi's ontology has elevated the acritical assent endemic in knowing to the level of responsible judgment. His claim is that it is in the nature of my calling to assert that the values which I hold are true. But what of those who entertain valuesystems which I oppose? Is my own personal commitment the only defense I have against absurd systems like astrology? Unfortunately, the answer is yes; Polanyi's reply to the astrologist is simply, "I do not entertain explanations in terms of astrology, for I do not believe them to be true."⁴⁰ As we have seen, knowing has tacit, acritical roots; evidential systems can give comfort to the knower, but they cannot give certainty. Consequently, the ontology of commitment "does not eliminate data, but (like Christianity) says that we should hold on to what we truly believe, even when realizing the absurdly remote chances of this enterprise, trusting the unfathomable intimations that call upon us to do so."⁴¹

What we need to emphasize here is that modern science not only implies an ontology of commitment but also requires such an ontology. The fundamental prerequisite to all scientific enquiry is the simple conviction that there exists a meaningful reality which is accessible to the scientist. Without such a conviction, there can be no plausible reason to

practice science.

The same may be said of social theory and the need for anontology. When claiming that the roots of knowledge are necessarily tacit, Hayek is consistently adhering to the implications of the most recent development in Heisenbergian physics and Godelian mathematics. By continuing to theorize, he necessarily accredits himself (and man) with the capacity to hold true knowledge, despite the fact that such knowledge cannot be articulately verified. Clearly, there must be an ontological basis for such an accreditation, but Hayek never enunciates it. This is the basis of Hayek's problem with relativism.

The significance of Polanyi's ontology is that it unrelentingly opposes relativism on grounds consistent with those of modern science. Although Hayek would not find this ontology totally acceptable (he would raise many of Popper's objections), it does show that there are grounds on which one can theorize even after accepting the implications of "knowledge how." In essence, then, Polanyi's ontology legitimates Hayek's epistemology and thereby liberates it from the scourges of relativism.

The philosophies of Hayek and Polanyi are even more effective when dismissing modern variants of rational utopianism. The most recent manifestation of utopianism passes under the guise of modern liberalism. This is not the English liberalism of Hume and Smith. It is, instead, a political philosophy guided by the rationalist methods of Rene Descartes. At the inception of the seventeenth century, Descartes was so shaken by the collapse of traditional truths that he laid down very clear and stringent rules for intellectual inquiry. The Cartesians claimed that a whole catalogue of certain knowledge could be held through logical deduction from clear and distinct premises. Although Descartes refrained

from applying his methods to moral and social questions, his intellectual heirs lack such self-restraint.

Intoxicated by the supposed success of Cartesian methods in the natural sciences, social planners adapted these methods to the political realm. Beginning with the dualistic idea that human reason can stand apart from civilization to judge it, they attempted to use the Cartesian method to create a new, utopian order. Further, as Hayek writes, "it is to this philosophic conception that we owe the preference which prevails to the present day for everything that is done 'consciously' or 'deliberately', and from it the terms 'irrational' or 'non-rational' derive the derogatory meaning they now have."⁴²

But rationality, as Hayek and Polanyi have taught us, is not limited to conscious processes. Conscious reason is merely a limited, articulate manifestation of a wider process that has essentially tacit roots. Human understanding is the product of many things: of our cultural milieu, of our spatial-temporal facticity, and of our "naive" intimations of value and meaning. To ignore all this and attempt to deduce a perfect society is, in Morris R. Cohen's words, to neglect "the great lesson of humility which science teaches us, that we can never be omnipotent or omniscient...: man is not and never will be the god before whom he must bow down."⁴³

It follows, then, that utopianism, seen within the framework of tacit knowledge, is a false ideal based upon a discredited, pseudo-scientific intellectualism. Just as the ideal of perfectly objective and explicit knowledge is unattainable, so too is the construction of a utopian society based upon that knowledge. The political impact of the epistemology of tacit knowledge is significant, for as Polanyi writes, only when "we have fully grasped the import of the necessary limits on our ability to construct a perfect society and

can dwell in that import, [will we] refrain from various sorts of radical actions aiming at the full establishment of justice and brotherhood."⁴⁴

In the mid-1950s, Czeslaw Milosz, the Nobel Prize dissident poet, wrote that "the successes of Communism among the intellectuals were due mainly to their desire to have value guaranteed, if not by God, at least by history."⁴⁵ The desire to have values guaranteed by intelligible processes is not unique to communism, for modern liberals and utopian socialists also have sought such guarantees by appealing to scientific method. The last two millennia have seen many such movements, each seeking refuge from the indeterminacy of Greek doubts, and each, not coincidentally, leading to uniformly destructive results.

It is no accident that the twentieth century, imbued with an unquestioned, pseudo-scientific notion of the powers of man, has been marked by a series of unparalleled human atrocities. Whereas in other historical epochs the exercise of power was limited by Greek doubts and faith in transcendental ideas, modern man has felt that "science" freed him from such restraints. Born of a mistaken idea of science, totalitarianism emerged as a powerful force in this century. Ironically, only now is it beginning to be understood that science is not a symbol of man's power but rather a symbol of his impotence before processes that he can never hope to understand or to control. One way for man to avoid the calamities of this last century is to be faithful to the true lesson of science and learn, as Hayek writes, that "it is high time...[to] take our ignorance more seriously."

It is hardly surprising that, as former scientists, both Hayek and Polanyi share conservatism's respect for human limitations. For them, human reason does not exist in a vacuum; it exists only

within the context of cultural values and institutions which are the unplanned product of our ancestors' intimations of greater meaning. To subvert all these traditions in the name of "science" would be to destroy one of the fundamental guides to our tacit powers. As Polanyi has written:

...to acknowledge tacit thought as an indispensable element of all knowing and as the ultimate mental power by which all explicit knowledge is endowed with meaning, is to deny the possibility that each succeeding generation, let alone each member of it, should critically test all the teachings in which it has been brought up.⁴⁶

It follows, then, that the epistemology of tacit knowledge is fully cognizant of the fact that conscious reason is but a single manifestation of human understanding, unsuited and unable to judge the entire body of human achievement.

Although modern science has taught that the role of conscious reason is limited, it has likewise taught that rational accomplishments can be great. The traditionalist movement, blinded by the notion that reason is the uncompromising adversary of faith, has ignored the tremendous temporal achievements of modern science. But as the theorems of Godel have shown, faith must necessarily underlie reason. Modern science has shown that the two must co-exist.

Similarly, science has shown that intellectual advance is predicated upon freedom of inquiry. Man's great striving for fuller meaning is not amenable to rational control, for the roots of that striving are indiscernible. In essence, what makes a libertarian organization, operating within the constraints of a metaphysical consensus, necessary to science is "the unspecific ability inherent in the processes of discovery, of understanding and even of verification."⁴⁷ Thus, neither science nor society should

ever be organized by a series of comprehensive plans since no explicit plan could ever be wide-ranging enough to capture the exigencies of human knowledge.

The political results of the epistemology of tacit knowledge are therefore twofold: (1) freedom is a pre-requisite for the evolution of more meaningful institutions or understandings; and, (2) freedom can be constructively exercised only within the framework of a given set of values. Modern science provides no justification for the collectivist's restraints on freedom, nor for his assault on values. Accordingly, what emerges from Hayek's and Polanyi's epistemology is a political program sensitive to the conservatives's respect for limits and to the liberal's love for freedom. It is a political program which is predicated on the belief that "no matter how liberal a free society may be, it also [must be] profoundly conservative."⁴⁸

When viewing three of the characteristic sins of "modernity"—positivism, relativism and utopianism—it is not surprising to find that the scientific and the classical traditions are in substantial agreement. Modernity properly understood is not antithetical to classicism; in fact, it either implies or strengthens many classical values. When, therefore, traditionalists classify the "modernistic" philosophy of Hayek and Polanyi among the sinners, they are, in large part, condemning a body of thought that is highly sympathetic to their own views. Thomas Molnar is right in claiming that political philosophies are best categorized according to patterns; simple bifurcations lead to the politics of confrontation when the politics of consolidation is more suitable.

1. For a detailed history of this school of conservatism, see Richard Bishirjian, *The Development of Political Theory: A Critical Analysis* (Dallas, 1978). 2. Thomas Molnar, "The Shock of Modernity," *Modern Age*, 23 (Fall 1979), 427. 3. Michael Polanyi, *Knowing and Being*, Marjorie Grene, ed., (Chicago, 1969), 41. 4. Friedrich A. Hayek, *Studies in Philosophy, Politics and Economics* (Chicago, 1967), 222. 5. Hayek, *The Counter-Revolution of Science* (Chicago, 1952), 14. 6. E.A. Burt, *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Science* (New York, 1955), 105. 7. Hayek, *Studies*, 107. 8. Bertrand Russell, *The Impact of Science on Society* (London, 1952), 110-111. 9. Polanyi, *The Logic of Liberty* (Chicago, 1951), 29. 10. Milton Friedman, *Essays in Positive Economics* (Chicago, 1951), 29. 11. Ludwig von Mises, *The Ultimate Foundations of Economic Science* (Kansas, 1978), 5. 12. *Ibid.*, 125. 13. Mises, *Theory and History* (New Haven, 1969), 246. 14. Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (New York, 1953), 200. 15. Hayek, *Counter-Revolution*, 116. 16. Karl Popper, *Objective Knowledge* (Oxford, 1972), 185. 17. Polanyi and Henry Prosch, *Meaning* (Chicago, 1975), 24. 18. Polanyi, *Knowing*, 46. 19. Hayek, *Studies*, 4. 20. Polanyi, *Science, Faith and Society* (Chicago, 1946), 76. 21. Burt, *Metaphysical*, 25. 22. Polanyi, *Logic*,

10. 23. Hayek, *Studies*, vii. 24. Plato, *Collected Dialogues*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton, 1978), 363. 25. Hayek, *Studies*, 62. 26. Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension* (New York, 1967), 4. 27. See Hayek, *Studies*, 62, "It seems probable that much of the mysterious powers of scientific creativity are due to processes of this sort." 28. Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge* (Chicago, 1962), 143. 29. *Ibid.*, 49. 30. Hayek, *The Sensory Order* (Chicago, 1962), 70. 31. Hayek, *Studies*, 60-61. 32. Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 756. 33. Polanyi, *Knowing*, 146. 34. As quoted by Werner Stark, "Sociology of Knowledge," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York, 1967), 475. 35. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (Chicago, 1952), 24. 36. Hayek, *New Studies in Philosophy, Politics, Economics and the History of Ideas* (Chicago, 1978), 20. 37. Hayek, *Studies*, 38. 38. Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 132. 39. Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 287. 40. *Ibid.*, 150. 41. *Ibid.*, 318. 42. Hayek, *Law, Legislation and Liberty*, vol. 1: *Rules and Order* (Chicago, 1973), 11. 43. Morris Cohen, *Reason and Nature* (New York, 1953), 196. 44. Polanyi and Prosch, *Meaning*, 213-214. 45. Czeslaw Milosz, *Confluence*, 5 (Harvard, 1956) 14. 46. Polanyi, *Tacit*, 60-61. 47. Marjorie Grene in Polanyi, *Knowing*, xiii. 48. Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 244.