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'Newbigin, Polanyi and the Adventure of Knowing'

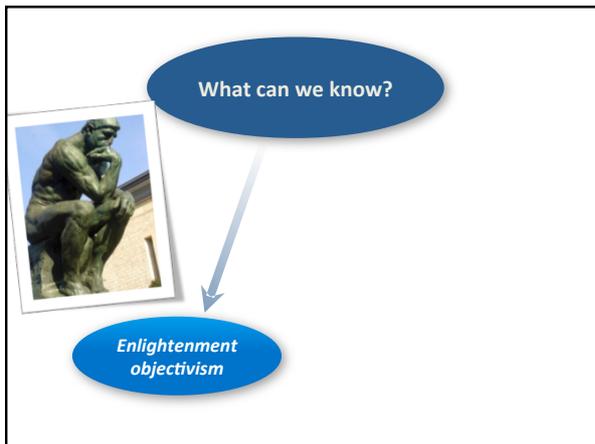
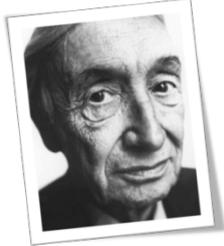
Revd Dr Paul Weston
11 July 2016



Terry Eagleton
(b.1943)

Life for Dawkins would seem to divide neatly down the middle between things you can prove beyond all doubt, and blind faith. He fails to see that all the most interesting stuff goes on in neither of these places.

Reason, Faith, and Revolution: Reflections on the God Debate (Yale, 2009), p.6-7.

A.J. Ayer
(1910–1989)

I believe in science. That is, I believe that a theory about the way the world works is not acceptable unless it is confirmed by the facts, and I believe that the only way to discover what the facts are is by empirical observation.

'What I believe' (1966)



Esther Meek
(b. 1953)

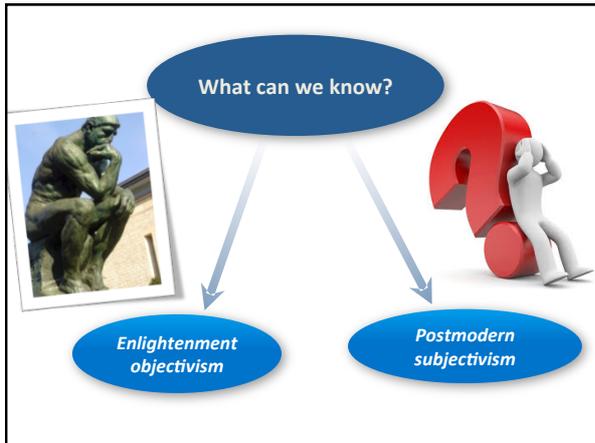
'Centuries of Western philosophy have led to our thinking that for knowledge to be objective and certain, the personal responsibility of the knower must be minimized to the point of elimination. We have glorified an impersonalism and called it objectivity.'

Longing to Know: The Philosophy of Knowledge for Ordinary People (Brazos Press, 2003), p.147.



'Simply put: On a model that required certainty, certainty ended up dying. . . .'

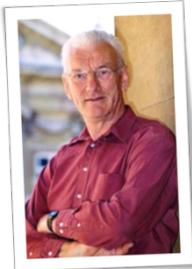
Longing to Know, p.181.



Don Cupitt
(b.1934)

There isn't any longer any Archimedean point from which the world can be understood as it really is. Indeed, the notion of what is really, objectively, factually and literally just true . . . has ceased to be useful.

Postmodernity is a flux of images and fictions . . . truth is human, socially produced, historically developed, plural and changing.

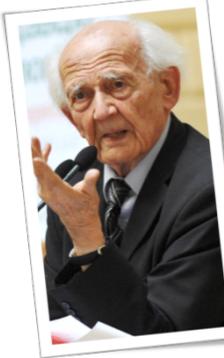


Creation out of Nothing
(1991)

Zygmunt Bauman
(b.1925)

'Nothing can be known for sure, and anything which is known can be known in a different way – one way of knowing is as good, or as bad (and certainly as volatile and precarious) as any other. . . .

(T)hus there is little in the world which one could consider solid and reliable, nothing reminiscent of a tough canvas in which one could weave one's own life itinerary.'



Postmodernity and its Discontents (1997), p.24

'Revelation' (Student Essay, 1936)

'In a preliminary consideration of the subject we may fairly say that the central importance ascribed to revelation in Christianity depends upon two beliefs about the nature of the world and of man.



'Revelation' (Student Essay, 1936)

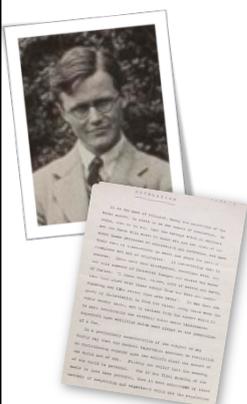
'Firstly the belief that the meaning of the world is personal. For if the final meaning of the world is less than personal, then it [is] best understood by those methods of scepticism and experiment which are the requisites of scientific enquiry, but which would be the complete destruction of any personal understanding.



'Revelation' (Student Essay, 1936)

'Secondly the belief that the meaning of man's life is in fellowship: if it were otherwise, we should not . . . understand the immensely significant fact that the revelation which is the key to our highest blessedness does not descend to us straight from heaven, but has to reach us passed from hand to hand of our fellow men along the chain of a historic community.





'Revelation' (Student Essay, 1936)

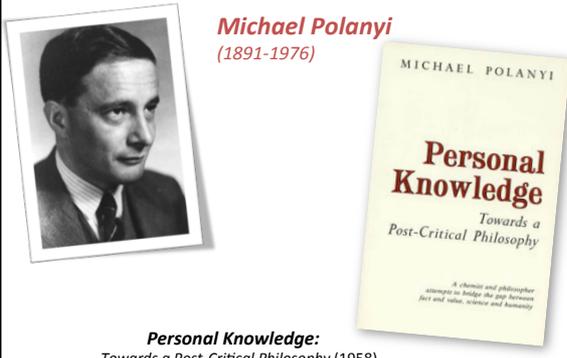
... both of these beliefs are essential elements in the Christian view of revelation: the first without the second would make way for an individualistic mysticism very remote from the genius of Christianity; ... the second without the first – a belief in human solidarity apart from a personal interpretation of the world – is perfectly compatible with that tyranny of second-hand information which is the characteristic of the age called scientific.



'Revelation' (Student Essay, 1936)

'For we know a person only as he chooses to reveal himself, and only as our own spirit is sensitive and trustful to respond to his revelation, and if the meaning of the world is personal then revelation is the only path by which it can be made known to us.'

'God has shined in our hearts – says St Paul – "to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4.6).'

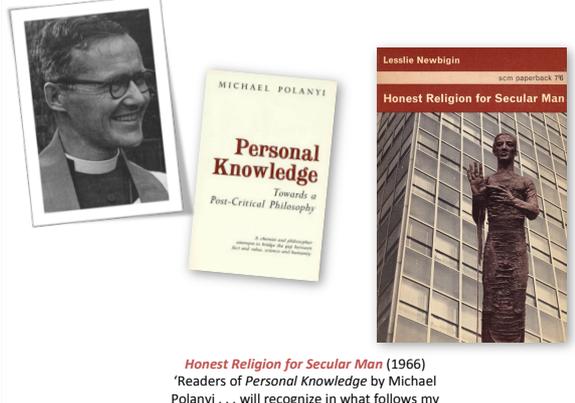


Michael Polanyi
(1891-1976)

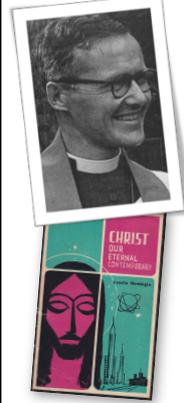
Personal Knowledge
Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy

A chemist and philosopher attempts to bridge the gap between fact and value, science and humanity.

Personal Knowledge:
Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy (1958)



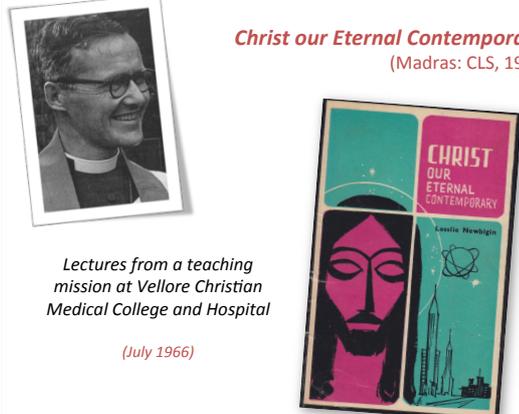
Honest Religion for Secular Man (1966)
'Readers of *Personal Knowledge* by Michael Polanyi ... will recognize in what follows my debt to this book.' (p.81)



What is involved in the process of knowing?

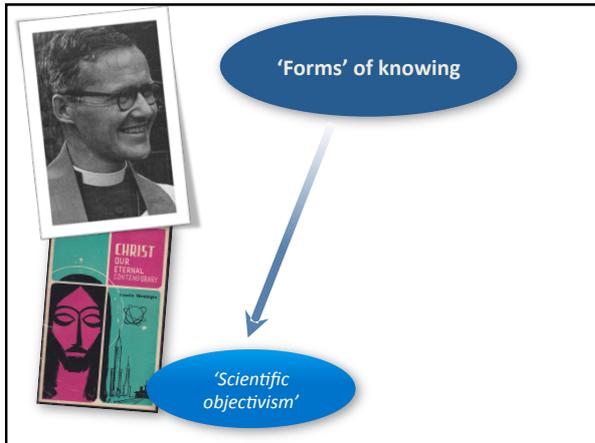
- 'The first one is the obvious one, that knowing is a skill.'
- 'Secondly, learning is a skill which is exercised only in a community.'
- 'Thirdly, all knowing involves commitment and therefore an element of risk.'

pp.7-9



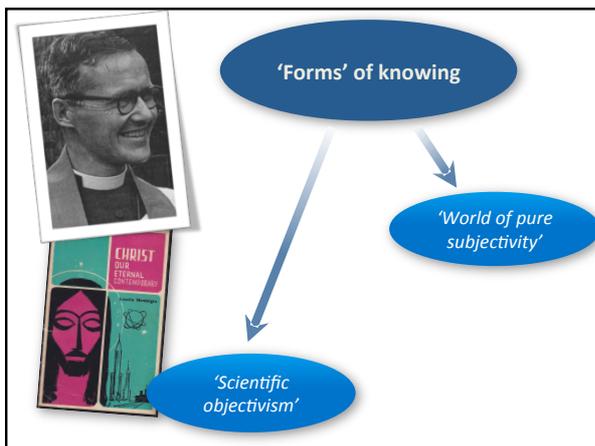
Christ our Eternal Contemporary
(Madras: CLS, 1968)

Lectures from a teaching mission at Vellore Christian Medical College and Hospital
(July 1966)



'We are living in a time when the ideal of knowledge is a knowledge of the physical world which can in principle be reduced to mathematical formulae which can be, if necessary, stored in an electronic computer. That is the ideal of knowledge, and other knowledge is accepted as reliable in so far as it approaches that ideal.'

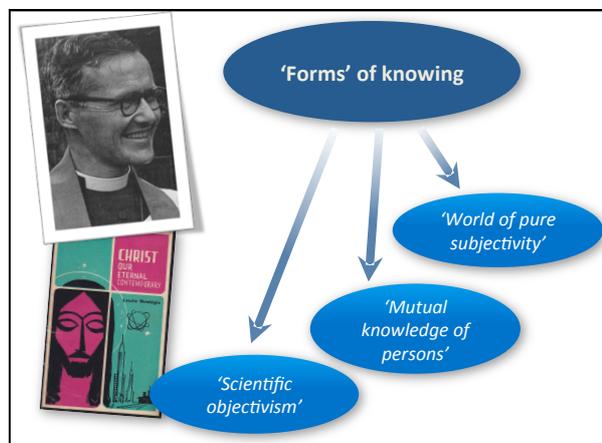
Christ Our Eternal Contemporary (1968), p.13.

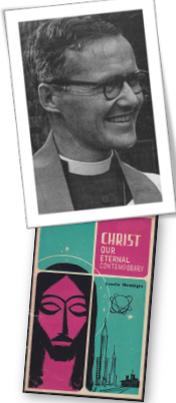


'If you ask the great tradition of Hindu spirituality the question "How do you know?" the answer ultimately would be . . . something along these lines, "If you will discipline yourself, if you will discipline your senses to the point where you are withdrawn from all the contacts of the sensible world into a world of pure subjectivity, you will know that there the ultimate reality is to be found – that *athma* and *brahma* are one; you will know". . .

And this concept of knowledge which has been so tremendously influential in the thought of this country [India], finds its assurance, its force of certitude, ultimately in that mystical experience of the unity of the conscious self.'

Christ Our Eternal Contemporary (1968), p.13.





‘The basic ideal of knowledge in the Bible is the mutual knowledge of persons. . . . Here if you ask the question “How do you know?”, the answer is found in the experience of personal relationship, in the adventure of trust and commitment to another person. You do not know another person except when both of you are willing to enter upon that adventure of trust and commitment . . . all knowledge involves commitment and risk . . . here, in the knowledge of another person, a new dimension of knowledge opens up.’

pp.13-14

How do you know?

‘If you ask the question “How do you know?” about that kind of knowledge, the answer will always run along some such lines as these: “I know because of what he did; I know because of what he said; because he opened up his mind to me and because his word and his deeds were consistent with each other and because they revealed the same kind of person, because over a long period what he has said and what he has done have both opened up the same kind of person to me. Because of that I know him and know that I can trust him”.’

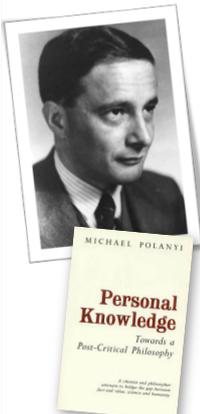
p.16

How do you know?

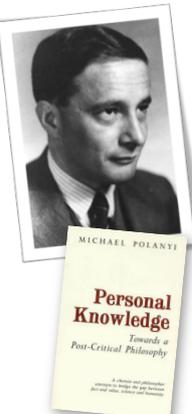
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p.16

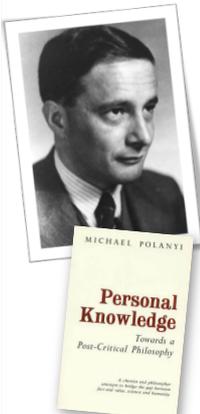
Michael Polanyi
(1891-1976)



‘The avowed purpose of the exact sciences is to establish complete intellectual control over experience in terms of precise rules which can be formally set out and empirically tested.’



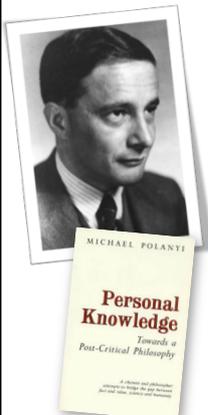
‘Could that ideal be fully achieved, all truth and error could henceforth be ascribed to an exact theory of the universe, while we who accept this theory would be relieved of any occasion for exercising our personal judgement.’



‘The purpose of this book is to . . . justify my persistence . . . in rattling all the skeletons in the cupboard of the current scientific outlook.’

‘to show that complete objectivity as usually attributed to the exact sciences is a delusion and is in fact a false ideal.’

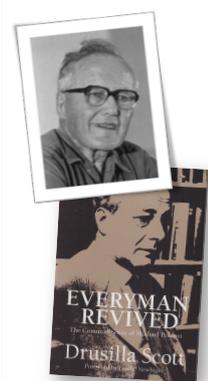
Personal Knowledge (1958), p.18



'The enquiring scientist's intimations of a hidden reality are personal. . . . Yet they are not a subjective state of mind, but convictions held with universal intent.'

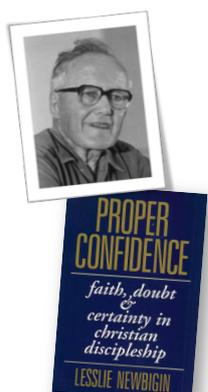
p.311

Leslie Newbigin

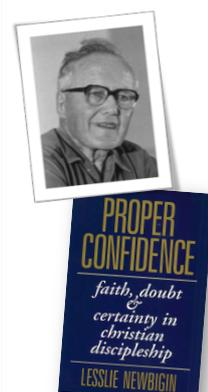


'Polanyi unmasks the illusion that science is a separate kind of knowledge, sharply distinguished from the vast areas of our everyday knowing which we do not call "scientific".'

'Foreword'
Drusilla Scott, *Everyman Revived: The Common Sense of Michael Polanyi* (1995), p.iv



. . . the proper form of apologetics is the preaching of the gospel itself and the demonstration – which is not merely or primarily a matter of words – that it does provide the best foundation for a way of grasping and dealing with the mystery of our existence in this universe. Needless to say, this demonstration can never be more than partial and tentative. It is, according to the gospel, only on the day of judgment that the demonstration will be complete and decisive.



Until then, my commitment to the truth of the gospel is a commitment of faith. If I am further pressed to justify this commitment (as I have often been), my only response has to be a personal confession. The story is not my construction. In ways that I cannot fully understand but always through the witness of those who went before me in the company of those called to be witnesses, I have been laid hold of and charged with the responsibility of telling this story.

Proper Confidence (1995), p.94



Esther Meek
(b. 1953)

'We're no longer wearing an epistemological straitjacket; we're wearing an epistemological leotard.'

Longing to Know (2003), p.55.



'This is the true pattern of knowledge. It is a commitment. It is a commitment in response to Him who has committed Himself to us, and it is therefore an adventure upon which I will joyfully stake all that I have.'

Christ Our Eternal Contemporary (1968), p.22.