

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON  
Department of History

Semester I, 1981-82

History 703

HISTORY AND THEORY

Yü-sheng Lin

(Nature and Function of Historical Knowledge and Epistemology of Intellectual History)

This course is primarily concerned with (1) the nature and function of historical knowledge, and (2) the epistemology of intellectual history (i.e., the study of the origins, nature, methods, justifications, and limits of the discipline of intellectual history). We will first inquire into the problem of unity and diversity in historical studies, of historical causation, and of historical objectivity by examining Maurice Mandelbaum's Anatomy of Historical Knowledge. (Mandelbaum is a practicing historian as well as a professional philosopher. This book is notable for its engagement with real historical inquiry, not some logician's mock-up of it.) I would then like to provide in terms of the epistemology of Michael Polanyi a substantive account of the autonomy of thought (the raison d'etre for intellectual history), without denying the influence of extra-intellectual (social, political, economic, and psychological) forces on the formation of ideas, and then lay a groundwork for analyzing the interaction between presuppositions and ideas in historical process (a major craft in the historiography of intellectual history).

Polanyi's epistemology is a major breakthrough in contemporary philosophy; it transcends the objectivist cult of logical positivism as well as the subjectivist assertion of existentialism. Thought as an independent, self-governing force is nowhere more rigorously and subtly defended in contemporary literature of philosophy that I know than in the writings of Polanyi. They have also suggested a new way to tackle the difficult problem of analyzing cultural and intellectual presuppositions in history.

Polanyi's philosophy, while understandable by any intelligent reader without deep philosophical background, must be given careful reading and analysis in order to be fruitful for our concerns. I would like to devote about 5 weeks to a study of his major works and then to use the framework we will have gained to analyze the major theoretical and methodological problems of the discipline of intellectual history by examining, critically, other assigned readings.

WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS AND EXAMINATIONS:

Each student is required to submit two short (double-spaced typewritten 5-10 page) analytical reports on any issue or issues discussed by the required readings. There will be no examinations.

GRADING SYSTEM: reports -- 50%; discussion in class -- 50%.

REQUIRED READINGS of Michael Polanyi:

1. Meaning (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975)
2. Personal Knowledge (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958, 1962), pp. 3-17, 18-20, 30-31, 33-37, 43-48, 49-65, 120-31, 134-45, 160-74, 187-202, 203-224, 243-45, 249-68, 269-98, 299-405.
3. Knowing and Being, ed., Marjorie Grene (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), pp. 3-46, 123-239.

Recommended writings by Polanyi and works of Polanyi and of allied themes and issues with which consultations can be made:

1. Michael Polanyi's other works:

Science, Faith, and Society (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946)

The Logic of Liberty (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951)

The Study of Man (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959)

The Tacit Dimension (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966)

Scientific Thought and Social Reality: Essays by Michael Polanyi, ed., Fred Schwartz (New York: International Universities Press, 1974)

2. Other works on Polanyi and of allied themes and issues:

Thomas A. Langford and William H. Poteat, eds., Intellect and Hope: Essays in the Thought of Michael Polanyi (Durham: Duke University Press, 1968)

The Logic of Personal Knowledge: Essays Presented to Michael Polanyi on His Seventieth Birthday (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1961)

Marjorie Grene, The Knower and the Known (New York: Basic Books, 1966)

\_\_\_\_\_, ed., Anatomy of Knowledge (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969)

\_\_\_\_\_, ed., Toward a Unity of Knowledge (New York: International Universities Press, 1969)

\_\_\_\_\_, ed., Interpretations of Life and Mind (New York: Humanities Press, 1971)

Thomas S. Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, 2nd, enlarged ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970)

\_\_\_\_\_, The Essential Tension (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977)

Arthur Koestler and J. R. Smythies, eds., Beyond Reductionism (London: Hutchinson, 1969)

Richard Gelwick, The Way of Discovery: An Introduction to the Thought of Michael Polanyi (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977)

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## Topics and Readings

## I. Introduction: A Formal (Logical) Analysis of the Fallacy of Reductionist Mode of Explanation

Readings: Michael Scriven, "Explanation, Prediction, and Laws" in Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science, vol. 3, Herbert Feigl and Grover Maxwell, eds., pp. 170-230. The major part of this paper is reprinted in Baruch A. Brody, ed., Readings in the Philosophy of Science (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970), pp. 88-104.

Reading Guide: Why does Scriven think that he is entitled to say that his approach can be indicated as "claiming that problems of structural logic can only be solved by reference to concepts previously condemned by many logicians as 'psychological, not logical,' e.g., understanding, belief, and judgment"? Pay special attention to the distinction that Scriven makes between explanations and grounds for explanations. This paper can be profitably read in connection with Michael Polanyi, "The Logic of Tacit Inference" in his Knowing and Being, pp. 138-58.

II. The Nature and Function of Historical Knowledge Readings: Maurice Mandelbaum, The Anatomy of Historical Knowledge

It should be noted that, in the midst of the so-called "crisis in history," many other disciplines (notably, philosophy of science, literary criticism, and political theory) have -- to use the words of Stephen Toulmin -- "rediscovered history." Recommended but not required: Stephen Toulmin, "On Rediscovering History," Encounter (Jan., 1971) and "From Form to Function: Philosophy and History of Science in the 1950s and Now," Daedalus (Summer, 1977), 143-62; Paul de Man, "Literary History and Literary Modernity" and Geoffrey Hartman, "Toward Literary History," Daedalus (spring, 1970). Paul de Man, Blindness and Insight (New York, 1971).

## III. Polanyi's Theory of Knowledge

Reading Guide: During one's reading of the assigned works by Michael Polanyi, listed on p. 1 of this syllabus, one should particularly note the following:

- (1) The historical background of the eclipse of the belief in the autonomy of thought and of the respect for intellectual freedom (freedom of the intellect) (Meaning, pp. 3-21, Knowing and Being, 3-46, Personal Knowledge, 3-17. [Note Polanyi's definition of "objectivity."])
- (2) "Focal awareness" and "subsidiary awareness," and their relationship. The difference between "subsidiary awareness" and subconscious or pre-conscious awareness. The functional, semantic, and phenomenal aspects of "tacit knowing,"

(Personal Knowledge, pp. 49-65, Meaning, pp. 22-45, Knowing and Being, pp. 123-224)

(3) The nature of conceptual system and fiduciary rootedness of all rationality (Personal Knowledge, pp. 269-98.)

(4) Commitment and originality (Personal Knowledge, pp. 299-324).

Collateral Reading: Hilary Putnam, Meaning and the Moral Sciences (Boston, 1978), Lecture VI, pp. 66-77.

#### IV. The Application of Polanyi's Epistemology to the Study of Intellectual History

Readings: Thomas S. Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, 2nd, enlarged ed., 1970

For criticisms of Kuhn, see J. W. N. Watkins, "Against 'Normal Science,'" S. E. Toulmin, "Does the Distinction between Normal and Revolutionary Science Hold Water?" K. R. Popper, "Normal Science and its Dangers" in Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave, ed., Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge (Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 25-37, 39-47, 51-58.

For Kuhn's ramifications of his thesis and reply to his critics, see his "Logic of Discovery or Psychology or Research?" and "Reflections on My Critics" in Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave, 1970, pp. 1-23, 231-78.

For Kuhn's further ramifications of his thesis, see his The Essential Tension (University of Chicago Press, 1977), esp. pp. 225-39, 293-351.

Reading Guide: Kuhn's more widely known thesis of the growth of scientific thought in terms of "paradigms" is, as Kuhn explicitly acknowledges, derived from Polanyi's conception of "tacit knowing." Hence, it is a concrete example of the utility of Polanyi's epistemology in the study of "presuppositions" in intellectual history. Please note the theoretical justifications of the study of the roles played by "presuppositions" and Kuhn's ways of locating and defining such "roles."

#### V. The Positivist Residues in Contemporary Anthropological Literature on Religion and Culture

Readings: Clifford Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures (Basic Books, 1973), pp. 3-125, 193-233, 412-53.

Reading Guide: Geertz is one of the most creative contemporary social scientist who has made a genuine effort to bridge the gap between the understandings of man by the social sciences and by the humanities. His analysis of religion as a cultural system represents a major advance in the anthropological study of religion. However, in his insistence on a "scientific" understanding of cultural phenomena, can you detect positivistic residues (presuppositions) which led him to expunge culture from man?

For a humanist analysis of the nature of religion, see Paul Tillich, Dynamics of Faith (Harper Torchbooks, 1958).

VI. The Distinctions between the History of Ideas, Intellectual History, and the History of Philosophy

Readings: Maurice Mandelbaum, "The History of Ideas, Intellectual History, and the History of Philosophy," History and Theory, Beiheft 5 (1965), pp. 33-66.

VII. Varieties of Intellectual History -- I

Readings: Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (Charles Scribner's, 1958)

Ephraim Fischhoff, "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism: The History of a Controversy," in S. N. Eisenstadt, ed., The Protestant Ethic and Modernization (Basic Books, 1968), pp. 67-86.

S. N. Eisenstadt, "The Protestant Ethic Thesis in an Analytical and Comparative Framework," in Ibid., pp. 3-45.

Ehud Sprinzak, "Weber's Thesis as an Historical Explanation," History and Theory, vol. 2 (1972), pp. 294-320.

Reading Guide: Weber's book remains a center of great controversy. But it is a stimulating thesis, complex, subtle, and yet sometimes quite raw. Pay special attention to Weber's complex and analytic argument of the implications of the irrational Calvinist faith in predestination for the breakthrough to rational enterprise of modern capitalist organization. How did capitalism result, in part, from a change of religious presuppositions?

VIII. Varieties of Intellectual History -- II

Readings: Arthur O. Lovejoy, The Great Chain of Being (Harper Torchbooks, 1960)

Reading Guide: Lovejoy became the founder of the rather insulated discipline of the history of ideas, which must, strictly speaking, be distinguished here from the broadly conceived discipline of intellectual history. Nevertheless, out of his philosophical bent on insisting not to take ideas at their face value and his analytic acumen and great erudition, he was able to see the continuity of "unit-ideas" through the vicissitudes of the long history of Western speculations on cosmos and man's place in it. Please note his technique in analyzing intellectual presuppositions as "unit-ideas" and its relevancy to intellectual history as well as the limitation of his approach.

IX. Varieties of Intellectual History - III

Readings: Ernst Cassirer, The Philosophy of the Enlightenment (Beacon Press, 1955)

Reading Guide: This is another classic in intellectual history. Cassirer's approach was to elucidate "the inner formative forces" in the era of the Enlightenment. Compare his technique with that of Lovejoy in their treatments of respective presuppositions with which they were concerned.

Supplemental Readings on the Nature and Function of Historical Knowledge:

Hayden White, Metahistory: the Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), esp. 1-42.